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withdraw 1 (normase/deepe)

SAIGON, JULY 16--In a ~~potentil~~ potentially major development, Hanoi has withdrawn an estimated one-quarter to one-third of its North Vietnamese main-force troops from South Vietnam, informed sources report.

Using the arithmetic of official American military estimates, the North Vietnamese troops, once considered to number 80,000 in the South, has been reduced in number by between ~~two~~ twenty thousand to twenty seven thousand. The balance in the South would vary between 53,000 <sup>to</sup> 60,000.

These forces ~~withdrawing from the South~~ moving across South Vietnam's border-lines have reportedly taken up their traditional base sanctuaries in Laos, Cambodia and North Vietnam. This is considered here to mean they could be ordered back for battles in the South--even in the capital of Saigon--on short notice. The troop withdrawal from the South is considered at least in part a factor contributing to the current <sup>FIND</sup> three-week <sup>LULL</sup> lull in military actions, reductions in casualties ~~and~~ ~~casualties~~ the most pronounced and ~~also~~ prolonged <sup>LULL</sup> yet during 1968.

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withdrew 2 (normass/deepe)

The significance of pulling the North Vietnamese troops across the boundary border-lines of the South into nearby base areas is open to speculation here.

1. Is this ~~an announcement~~ the ~~unannounced~~ unannounced, tacit Communist military ~~de~~ de-escalation of the war which American negotiators in Paris have been asking for in return for stopping the bombing "and other acts of war" against North Vietnam? The North Vietnamese ~~de~~ delegation in Paris has repeatedly said Hanoi would not repeat not reciprocate, but the American delegation has urged a tacit, unofficial ~~de~~ de-escalation.

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In short, is this a move towards peace? Is this a strategic and permanent military withdrawal to ~~facilitate progress at~~ get the P preliminary Paris peace talks?

2. Or, is the withdrawal a traditional tactical military convenience, or ~~ness~~ necessity, of a very temporary duration, so that North Vietnamese troops can rest, re-group, reindoctrinate and reinforce as they have many times in the past—to escape the increasingly massive pressure of American ~~airstrikes~~, fighter-strikes, ~~the increasing number~~ of B-52 raids and the mobility of ~~name~~ hundreds of a small-unit and long-range patrols?

In short, is this a strictly military move for military advantages leading, not towards peace, but towards even more bitter and ~~bloody~~ bloody fighting?

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withdraw 4 (normass/deepe)

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3. Or does the withdrawal mean both, but in varying time frames? Is Hanoi using applying the classical carrot-and-stick tactic, deliberately de-escalation in July to intiate American concessions in Paris and an end to the bombing of the North, while simultaneously preparing for a major offensive in August?

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withdraw 4 (normass/deepe)

Officially, American and senior American and Vietnamese officers in Saigon—but not necessarily in the field commands—believe the Communists are winding up for a monstrous military offensive.

But, <sup>other</sup> other Allied sources note that the highest Viet Cong political and military command—called COSVN, or Central Office for South Vietnam—has held in early July a high-level session, of several days duration, thought to be discussing and deciding major polit policy actions for the future. Currently, around Saigon subordinate ~~command~~ Comm Viet Cong military commands immediately a joint meeting subordina te to COSVN are holding meetings ~~in the southern Cambodian region~~ near the Cambodian border, intelligence sources report. COSVN runs the Communist side of the war in the southern one-third of South Vietnam, while ~~the~~ a North Vietnamese command runs the war in the Northern two-thirds of the repuo South.

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Intelligence sources admit that to date the Allied command here are still in the dark about any major policy decision COSVN may have made. They expect it will take days, if not weeks, for the COSVN decisions and orders to percolate down to their subordinate echelons and have them ~~prepared~~ prepared to implement the decision. Generally, the ~~time-~~ <sup>4-5 days</sup> time-lag of several months passes before the Allied command can capture documents or prisoners, or welcome a defector, who would confirm the secrets of such a high-level ~~session~~ <sup>High-level</sup> session.

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withdraw 8 (normass/deepo)

For several weeks now, field commanders around Saigon have been saying they did not foresee a major Communist offensive around the capital during July; they noted that Communist main-Viet Southern-born Viet Cong units, mixed with some Northerners, were withdrawing from the immediate Saigon perimeter into "intermediate base areas," half way between Cambodia and the capital. ~~capitol.~~

Currently, American field commanders around Saigon--and informed Vietnamese sources--believe no major Viet Cong offensive is in the wind anywhere in the country during the two remaining weeks of July. Small-scale terrorism, minor ~~scir scir~~ skirmishes, and sporadic rocket fire into the urban centers are still a possibility.

The new target date for any major Communist offensive is pretty well accepted to be in August, considered by some to coincide ~~x~~ and designed to influence the American Republic and Democratic conventions next month. There is considerable debate among the American community here whether a major Communist thrust--either with big-unit formations or high ~~pas~~ psychological impact ~~acti~~ actions, such as rocketing--would benefit a soft-line American Presidential candidate, or a hard-liner, and how it may affect the drafting of the party platforms on the Vietnam issue. [Some Vietnamese sources believe the Communists may use August 19th as a pivot date for an offensive to mark the ~~23-~~ <sup>more reuter</sup> twenty third anniversary of their "general uprising" in which power was seized ~~h~~ and taken into the hands of the population from the defeated Japanese ~~off~~ occupation forces here at the end of World War II.

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The general mood here is that the Communists still can and inevitably will pull something in August, with American sources speaking more about about a "general offensive" involving big-unit actions, but with Vietnamese talking more about a "general uprising" involving high-level political actions but low-level, guerrilla-styled military actions in the urban centers.

(Hank: tomorrow I'm going on press trip, returning in the evening.

Regards Bev).

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