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forces 1 (normass/deepe)

SAIGON, JULY 24--A multi-million-dollar venture for American taxpayers, the re-equipping of the Vietnamese armed forces is skeptically regarded here as unlikely to produce sensational improvements in its fighting effectiveness.

While the cost-accounting for re-equipping the Vietnamese forces is still being computerized, the incoming inventory is known to include these new and expensive items: two squadrons of F-5 light jet "Freedom Fighters" to supplement the present one; five companies of the "Huey" helicopter, either the ~~UH1C~~ UH1D model, now used by Americans in Vietnam, or the newer ~~UH1H~~ UH1E model, which American companies have yet to receive; and three battalions of HAWK surface-to-air defense missiles to protect Vietnam cities from sneak air attacks.

Currently, American forces operate a classified number of these HAWK sites, but the Vietnamese have yet to be allocated them. Training of Vietnamese personnel to man, maintain and utilize the missiles is expected to require two years ~~school~~ schooling in the United States.

Vietnamese sources report the Vietnamese High Command wants to train

EXPERIENCED artillery servicemen during a shorter time period, but the American command is reported to want to train civilians Vietnamese from scratch civilian

Vietnamese with proficiencies in mathematics and science sciences.

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forces 2 (normass/deepe)

However, ^{many} may sources here believe ~~is~~ at least two half-truths, if not myths, have been propagated about this complex issue, probably designed to sugarcoat the Vietnam war for the American electorate. These two ~~half-truths~~ are: that more and better equipment will ~~solve~~ solve the essential problems of the Vietnamese armed forces; in fact, the far more critical necessity is leadership; and second, that ~~once~~ ^{reduction} the Vietnamese armed forces will improve enough to permit of American fighting troops, as distinct from logistical troops. ^(X)

On the first point, one knowledgeable American source explained:

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forces 3 (normass/deeps)

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"It's wrong to harp on the message that the Vietnamese ~~xxx~~ have been out-gunned. The problem is that they've been out-led by the Communists; and so few recognize this problem. We can say that on a selective basis, the Vietnamese may have been out-gunned, that the M-1 can't outfire the (Communists) AK-47. But, that's only for a short time in a given locale. But, within minutes, if look at the firepower that the government troops can call in to help ~~tye~~ them--artillery, American helicopters, ~~tact~~ aircraft.

"The fact is we must improve the Vietnamese ~~regimen~~ Army's regimental and division leadership. We are only talking about 150 officers--not improving the whole lot of 800,000. It would take only 150 good men to take care of the Vietnamese and make it a fighting army--and I know 150 good Vietnamese officers myself who could do it. But, so few ~~Americ~~ focus on ~~ta~~ that; if we put together the collective knowledge of the American and Vietnamese staffs, they would see we have a manageable and solvable problem."

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forces 4 (normass/deepe)

The Vietnamese High Command has recently setup a study committee headed by Major General Cao Hào Hôn repeat Cao Hào Hôn to review the re-organization of the Vietnamese armed forces. But, this problem has been the basis of countless studies by both the American and Vietnamese commands in the past--the proper decisions have yet to be taken and enforced.

Currently, the lower-rank young, lower-ranking Vietnamese officers ^{Reported by} have become such a cauldron of disgruntlement and disillusionment ^{with} the the corruption and incompetency of ^{their} the senior leaders that some sources fear and a leftist, possibly Communist-inspired coup d'etat ~~attempt~~ could possibly be launched attempted by them. Within recent weeks, a handful of ~~mid-~~ middle-level Vietnamese officers, including some who work at the Vietnamese High Command, have been arrested for collaboration and contacts with the Communists.

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forces: 5 (normass/deepe)

On the second point, that the Vietnamese armed forces can shoulder enough of the fighting so as to replace American fighting troops--this is regarded here as a possibility only in the 1970's, unless there's very very little fight ~~the bottom~~ fighting in the interim.

"Let's face it," one long-time ober observer here explained. "Even if all the North Vietnamese units withdrew from the South, the government's army still could not repeat not even defeat the weakened (Southern-born) Viet Cong without ~~American~~tro the help of American troopers."

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forces 6 (normass/deepe)

Some Vietnamese strategic reserve units have consistently maintained excellent aggressiveness and battlefield performance for several reasons. The Vietnamese airborne and Marine officers volunteered for their service and have worked with each other ~~as a team~~ for years—sometimes for decades, unlike American units which has a shifting personnel policy. In fact, one young American radio operator near Dak To recently explained to this correspondent he would felt safer with on an operation with the Vietnamese airborne than he did with the American airborne ~~paratrooper~~ ³ paratrooper units because "they Vietnamese airborne ~~are good at~~ sneak around ² like the North Vietnamese, they think like the Comm can think like the Communists do tactically and they charge the Communists when there's contact instead of just calling in artillery like the Americans do."

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forces 7 (normass/deepe)

Of the ten regular Army divisions, the Vietnamese First Infantry Division has for the past several years consistently been rated the best. ~~Thei~~ Its area of responsibility covers the two northern provinces, from Hue city north to the demilitarized zone. Americans both in Saigon and advisers serving with the unit speak of it genu honestly in glowing terms. Some of its elements are positioned in "listening post" static positions, surrounded by electri electronic sensors and minefields, others serve on search-and-destroy operations ~~in conjunction~~ with Alli American Marines. But, as the one American adviser with the unit recently explained, part of the confidence and high morale from these First Division units along the DMZ is maintained by the quick and lethal reaction of American-supplied firepower once the unit is in trouble. American Marine fighters and artillery react as quickly to the Vietnamese call for help as they do for their own Marine uni ground units. The adviser noted that if the division had to rely on Vietnamese artillery and Air force support, it would be in a difficult position along the DMZ. And, in Vietnam, it will be long remembered that the First Division was responsible for the security of Hue when overwhelming NUMBERS OF Communists flooded into the city undetected--some of them marching into the four abreast in company formation as it began seizing control of the former imperial capital.

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forces 8 (normass/deepe)

~~The matter of an~~ ^{FAN} American troop reduction in Vietnam has been a matter of controversy within the ~~American~~ ^{LOR} official American community here ~~for~~ ^{for} some time. Some argued before the Communist Tet offensive that the American forces, now totalling 536,000, could be drastically reduced—by at least 100,000—without seriously ~~imparin~~ ^{impairing} the combat effectiveness of front-line units. The reduction of forces would have "sliced off the fat" of the huge logistical and headquarters staffs in the rear areas, which feast on their own paper-world of bureaucratic ritualism. ^S These rear-echelon had become so numerous "tha t the logistical tail of the American effort is wagging the dog, instead of the reverse," as one source explained.. "There's six troops in the rear to support one on the front lines—and that's too much." This controversy came into the public spotlight late last year when Robert McNamara, then Secretary of Defense, ~~use~~ ^{urged} that some of the rear-echelon troops be ~~canf~~ ^{can} converted into combat-bound line companies, ~~si~~ ^{si} instead of simply increasing the levels of the American buildup. But, his viewpoint was largely ignored here by the American command.

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forces 9 (normass/deepe)

Currently, however, reliable military sources believe the
AM American and Vietnamese commands are facing a critical shortage
of fighting troops to combat the Communist offensive which began
in January and is expected to accelerate. REPORT ONLY

The Vietnamese High Command has also set up a study committee,
headed by Lt. General Vinh Loc, to draw a detailed contingency
plan in case there is a ceasefire, detailing how/ AND WHERE the Communist
and Allied forces would be regrouped, and how the Vietnamese troops
should conduct the war in case there is a reduction in American
troop strength. However, informed sources report that no repeat
no joint American-Vietnamese committee has been established to
TROOP coordinate an American phase-out o troop phase-out.

(I'll try to airmail Saigon mood seepager this weekend. Regards

Bev.)

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