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politics 1 (normass/deepe)

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SAIGON, AUGUST 2--More than ever before, the politics of the Vietnam war has overshadowed the war itself.

President Lyndon Johnson's tough-line political appraisal of the battlefield situation here indicates he made a very crucial choice in selecting some facts to reveal ~~a~~ publicly at his impromptu press conference earlier this week, while simultaneously covering up equally significant and substantive evidence.

His public statement that ~~there is evidence~~ ^{indicates} Hanoi is making massive preparations for a new offensive in the South--undoubtedly true--obscures the equally significant current ~~siu~~ situation that Hanoi, as of late July, had withdrawn from South Vietnam a "large proportion" of its North Vietnamese main force units--possibly up to fifty per cent of its big-unit formations. This military de-escalation--which produced the July lull in the big-unit war--is openly discussed here in official, private and diplomatic circles. The July lull ~~is~~ ^{was} as apparent as crystal-balling preparations for an August offensive.

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politics 2 (normass/deepe)

The President's sharp warning that the Americans might take "additional military measures if measures" if such a new offensive is launched is simply the counter-point to an equally real option of his making concessions to Hanoi in return for the July lull--an option he chose to discard at this time.

The President's statement that North Vietnamese infiltrators are flowing into South Vietnam at a record level of 300 30,000 men in July fizzes over the battlefield situation that Allied units have been unable to find them. At an unprecedented rate in the war, Allied forces are launching small-unit patrols, long-range patrols and reconnaissance operations to find these big-unit formations--but without success. In the two northernmost provinces along the demilitarized zone, for example, four Allied divisions are literally scouring the jungles and valleys to find either old North Vietnamese units or new arrivals--but without ~~major~~ ^{APPREHENSIVE} contact. Senior commanders there believe several of the North Vietnamese divisions have withdrawn across the demarcation line. One basic difference is that a southward flow of 30,000 men from North Viet Vietnam--information probably based on ^{ELECTRONIC SENSORS AND} aerial reconnaissance--is quite different from confirming their presence of these men in the South by ground ^{contacts} ~~traps~~ the presence of these infiltrators in the South, as distinct from Laos or Cambodia.

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politics 3 (normase/deepe)

From this remote vantage point, it appears the President has stiffened his demands for peace at the Paris conference table. The press reports received here indicates that Washington officials have not publicly denied that Hanoi has withdrawn some troops and de-escalated the war. But, Washington has re-defined its demands for de-escalation, or "serious restraint" on the part of Hanoi in return for stopping the bombing over North Vietnam.

One key remark open to this interpretation here was made this week by Secretary of State Dean Rusk when he told a news conference that what is important is "not what happened yesterday but what will happen tomorrow, next week, next month." In short, serious restraint by Hanoi is not so much a current de-escalation of the battlefield war, but assurance of not future re-escalation as well.

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politics 4 (normass/deepe)

While the Washington officialdom has not publicly denied there has been a withdrawal of North Vietnamese forces from the South, they have tended to obfuscate this point. This has been done in two ways--refusing to ^{and officially} specify publicly how substantial the withdrawal has been and second to camouflage the ~~groundwa~~ ground-war lull with frequent predictions of another Communist offensive.

In the past, these ~~political~~ official pronouncements of the battlefield situation ~~has~~ have been far out of step with the realities on the ground. One frustrating, and ~~myst~~ mystifying ease of this occurred for correspondents covering the Vietnam visit of Secretary of Defense Clark Clifford in mid-July. Upon departing Washington, he ^{at the same time} ~~again~~ predicted a Communist offensive, but authoritative sources here were noting that the Viet Cong High Command had held a major policy-making session in early July--and that it would be at least six weeks before they would be able to organize and instruct their troops for the ~~offen~~ another ~~offic~~ offensive. Also, in Washington, the Secretary mentioned a sizeable buildup ² of forces of eight or possibly more Communist divisions in the five northern provinces, but ground commanders ^{there} ~~these~~ ^{Correspondents} said the North Vietnamese had vanished. Upon arriving in the ~~headquarters~~ ^{city} of the northern headqua rters, of Danang, the Secretary backtracked, said that North Vietnamese had withdrawn "some" of their divisions a out of the South. ^{But} He again predicted an offensive, which caught the headlines, and ~~monte me~~ ^{he} spoke of a Communist build-up of forces towards Saigon--just at the time field commanders in the Saigon area had specifically been telling correspondents the Communists were withdrawing from the capital.

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politics 5 (normass/deepe)

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This obfuscation of what the high-level pronouncements out of step with direct reports of field commanders lead one veteram journalist to conclude, "Something's fishy here. It's all too easy to get dates for the next offensive and the latest ~~infect~~ infiltration figures. The officials are setting up their own straw men; if the offensive comes off, they can say, unlike at Tet, they CAN say that we told you so. If the offensive does not come off, it shows the ~~quality of~~ effectiveness of the B-52 raids and the aggressiveness of the ground troops."

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politics 6 (normass/deepe)

This delicate mixture of what might be called low-key news management and high-intensity psychological warfare has been a marked feature in relations between the officialdom and the Saigon press corps here since the May offensive. At that time, the military decision political decision was made to inform the press about the impending offensive--revealed by a Communist defector--rather than let the Saigoneese and world suffer another traumatic shock, as what happened in during the Tet offensive when the Allied command here was as surprised as everyone else. The les

military The lesson learned from Tet was whatever military success the Allies gain is lost in the psychological upheaval of even knowing the Communists can attack the cities at will. Hence, with constant predictions of an offensive, some of the psy psychological sting is sapped from the Communist attacks. But, there are also other advantages. It keeps the Allied troops, especially the Vietnamese, on their toes and the recurring frequency on which they are order into 100 per cent alert status ~~not repeat not that an offensive is necessarily coming, but that~~ indicates they did not know spe their commanders do not know specifically when the offensive is coming. In addition, as one American officer explained, "If the American command officials keep predicting an offensive every day, then they just might be right sometime."

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politics 7 (normass/deepe)

The coolest head in the military crowd, from this vantage point, is General Creighton Abrams, who refuses to make any predictions. He reportedly remembers the ~~fatality~~ ^{at all.} problems of prediction ~~that his~~ predecessor, General William Westmoreland, ~~incurred~~ ^{in 1968} but General Westmoreland is still predicting another offensive now in Washington, is still predicting another Vietnam offensive. Communist offensive.

Now, just at ~~this time~~ ^{at all.} the time when President Johnson makes another prediction of a new Communist offensive, ~~immediately~~ ^{in fact,} the ~~highest levels~~ ^{highest levels} military circles and the Saigon diplomatic set are beginning to speculate there may not be another offensive until the end of the year. There are two schools of thought on this: the prevailing one, with the ~~abundance~~ ^{predominance} of military evidence, is that there will be another Communist offensive, probably sometime in August, and probably directed at district and provincial capital capitals or Saigon. This, according to this line of reasoning maintains Hanoi's ~~reasoning~~ ^{reasoning} is the attacks would enhance their bargaining position and further ~~deteriorate~~ ^{deteriorate} the war effort with the American electorate, ^{with THE WAR.}

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politics 8 (normass/deepe)

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Now, a second school is beginning to ~~sapo~~ sprout here--and in the highest military circles--that ~~there~~ the possibility exists ~~there~~ the Communists will not launch another offensive ~~until~~ *until* January next year.

"I can tell you there is not repeat not going to be another Communist offensive until January next year--when the new American President takes office," the exponent of this view explained. "Because politically, the last thing Hanoi wants is to create a Pearl Harbor mentality in the United States. And second, militarily, they are not in a position to have another ~~aj~~ major offensive. The withdrawal of their units from the South *is* making a political ~~nee v. serves~~ *is* for them making a political virtue out of a military necessity. There's nothing on we (the Allies) can foresee at this time that would cause Hanoi to launch an offensive at this time."

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politics 9 (normans/deepe)

These games of second-guessing Ho Chi Minh has not ~~automatically~~ influenced the readiness of the Allied commands ~~is~~ here to meet any situation thrust upon them. "We hope we've kept all bets covered," ~~one~~ one source explained.

But, while the second-guessing here, one embarrassing fact for the ~~the Allied command~~ has emerged. For the Communists to have their ground units prepared and ready for an offensive is like having American B-52 strategic bombers constantly alerted and ready to fly anywhere at anytime. The significant thing is not the military readiness—~~though~~ but the political green light to use them. In this case, the major Communist policy decision regarding the new offensive was thought to have been made at two significant policy meetings, one held in early July by the Communist Politburo in the South and the second held by the Central Committee of the National Liberation Front in mid-July. But, thus far, none of the multitudes of Allied intelligence agents have been able to discover the closed-door-substance of these decisions—and whether the Communists have ~~just~~ turned on the political green ~~light~~ light for the next offensive.

(Hank: Thanks for your query. I hope this sheds some light on the matter. I'll try to cable another military story tomorrow. I've airmailed you another piece. The press corps here was severely ridiculed for over-writing predictions of a July offensive and so my idea is to be very cautious until it happens. And when it happens, I suspect you'll be able to see the flames in Boston. Right now, there's all too much hysteria here and too much official propaganda to do otherwise. Regards Rev).

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