

Beverly Deepe
101 Cong Ly
Saigon

Page 1--War

SAIGON--Ten months ago, a Western diplomat described the anti-Communist war in Vietnam as "a ship with all the sails flapping, but not going anywhere." This week, ~~in~~ the same diplomat lamented, "Now the ship is sinking."

The prevailing mood of pessimism ~~in Saigon~~ ^{is based on} ~~the~~ ^{current} instability and uncertainty of the Saigon on the one hand ~~and~~ the expectations of a political-military offensive ~~by~~ the pro-Communist Viet Cong guerrillas on the other hand.

This is a sum-up of the views of political-military sources ^{way} ~~in~~ now look at the tangled situations

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101 Cong Ly; Saigon

War--1

*Tabernat
Lend*

Saigon--Reliable military sources report pro-Communist Viet Cong guerrillas are moving heavily-equipped battalions to concentrate their military strength in a "strangulating arc" ~~in the provinces~~ of provinces around Saigon.

(See map.)

Sources believe the purpose of troop movements of classified number of battalions is not for direct military attacks on Saigon, but for the establishment of the proper "political climate" in this capital city already rent with political uncertainties ~~on the Vietnamese government side.~~

"This political climate is not ~~necessary~~ necessarily neutralism as the Communists wanted six months ago," one reliable Western military source explained. "They do not need that now. They're now strong enough to expect absolute accommodation to whatever ^{they} ~~the Viet Cong~~ wish to dictate."

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A mysterious, momentary period of relative inactivity by the Viet Cong has given the Vietnamese government forces a brief breathing time for ^{S.I. 9/17} ~~both~~ progress in military operations and ^{the} ~~the~~ the sister program of pacifying with social-economic-political means the civilian population. However, government ~~for~~ ^{ces} forces are bracing themselves for the time when ~~these~~ ^{these} tactics of "ominous lull" are abandoned by the pro-Communists for ~~reignmen~~ ^{regimen} regimental-controlled operations against district towns and provincial capitals.

"The Viet Cong will try to use regimental sized units," one high-ranking Vietnamese officer (informatively ~~on~~ ^{only}---General Nguyen Khanh, prime minister) conceded. "They are quite capable of doing this and are willing to do so. But they will never have to force to hold. We (the government forces) can go anywhere we like to."

Military ^{Two} sources say that the Viet Cong have already in the past three months conducted well-coordinated operations of three-battalion strenght.

~~Report~~ In one of these last month, two battalions simultaneously attacked five outposts, but the third was positioned to ambush reinforcements. The ambush ~~seriously~~ inflicted serious casualties on an elite Ranger company.

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{ Pickup 2A on other article }

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Some military sources

^ American military sources attribute the "ominous lull" of the Viet Cong to the success of more than 6,000 small-unit patrols, many of them at night. Other American sources note that Viet Cong activities always flow in cycles; with periods of rest and training alternated between military offensives. Some Vietnamese officers, who fought with the Communist guerrillas during the French Indo-China War, believe that the Viet Cong are writing their semi-annual reports to superior headquarters and resting after securing their loot during the rice harvest season.

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During the summer months, 1961,

1. Pro-Communist Viet Cong guerrillas are now moving

~~well~~ well-equipped battalions to concentrate their strength in a "strangling arc" in the provinces around Saigon, according to reliable military sources.

(See map.)

The troop movement from the lower Mekong Delta region, known as IV Corps—which the Viet Cong already assume they dominate—to more than half dozen provinces around Saigon, increases the guerrilla's capability for regiment-controlled attacks against all district towns and many provincial towns around Saigon.

"The Viet Cong will try to use regimental-sized units," one high-ranking Vietnamese officer predicted. (Informatively only—General Nguyen Khanh, prime minister). "They are quite capable of doing this and are willing to do so. But they will have never the force to hold a position. We (the government) can go anywhere we like to."

Some military sources believe that the Viet Cong have already in the past three months ~~conducted~~ conducted a well-coordinated operations of three-battalion strength. In one of these last month, two battalions simultaneously attacked five outposts, but the third was positioned to ambush reinforcements, which inflicted heavy casualties on an elite Ranger company.

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2. This acknowledged threat of Viet Cong ~~regimental-sized~~ ^{UNITED IN} ~~regimental-sized~~ operations brings ~~the~~ the crucial--and final--Third Phase which lead to the disastrous defeat of the French of guerrilla warfare, ~~which lead to the disastrous defeat of the French~~ at Dien Bien Phu ~~which ended the Indo-China War~~ which ended the Indo-China War in 1954.

In the Third Phase, described in the military writings of Mao Tse-Tung, small guerrilla bands with ~~the~~ support of the population consolidate into conventional warfare units, but they operate along a mobile frontline, to produce what Mao calls "decision or destruction of the enemy." For the first time in the war, government officials have been picking up Viet Cong propaganda appealing for popular support during ~~the~~ "this decisive phase of the war."

However, military sources here do ~~not~~ believe the ~~poor~~ ^{poor} pro-Communist units will attempt a showdown battle in one ~~large~~ place, but will attempt in many places.

"We're not going to have a Dien Bien Phu," one military officer explained, "but many ~~simultaneous~~ ^{a hundred} small-or-scale Dien Bien Phus."

~~Scholars~~ Scholars of guerrilla warfare say that there is little hope of destroying a revolutionary guerrilla movement after it has survived the first phase (organization and consolidation) and has acquired the sympathetic support of significant numbers of the people. (See notes of Samuel B. Briggith in Mao Tse-Tung on Guerrilla Warfare; page 27).

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3. However, despite this concentrated military threat, observers believe the Viet Cong are not interested in military victories, but in producing the "proper political climate" in this capital city already rent with political uncertainty.

"This political climate is not necessarily neutralism as the Communists wanted six months ago," one reliable Western military source explained. "They do not need that now. They're now strong enough to expect absolute accommodation to whatever they wish to dictate."

Simultaneous with this consistent, spectacular military offensive, which is expected during the monsoon season lasting until October, the ~~infiltration of the~~ "invisible" political subversion of the pro-Communist elements is becoming increasingly evident in Saigon and other urban centers. The prime focus is on current Catholic-Buddhist tensions. Many persons believe both the Catholic and Buddhist organizations are either infiltrated or influenced by the Viet Cong; almost everyone acknowledges that even if this is not true, the Viet Cong more than anyone any other element benefits from these dissensions.

"We know these religious tensions are part of the Viet Cong strategy," a high-ranking Vietnamese security officer lamented. "But we can not prove who their agents are."

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Other reliable sources note that 18 ~~ex~~ of the more than 30 Vietnamese-language newspapers in Saigon have Viet Cong agents on their staffs. But the security source explained, "the government dare not arrest these people because they are close associates of powerful economic interests and high-ranking government officials."

"Behind all this anti-government talk is the Buddhists, Catholics, political parties," one militant Vietnamese anti-Communist explained. "And behind them are the Viet Cong. And behind the Viet Cong are the French," who during the past ~~10~~ ten months have proposed a neutralist settlement for South Viet Nam and ~~which~~ allied themselves with the Communists in proposed Laotian and Cambodian ~~and~~ conferences.

5. While the Viet Cong political agitation has resulted in dissensions and uncertainties in ~~the~~ Saigon, the inherent weaknesses within the Saigon government has done likewise.

"There's a Crisis in leadership and a crisis in confidence in the Vietnamese government," a university professor explained. A growing fear persists among the Indian and Chinese business community; middle-class parents are attempting to get their children out of the country; young ~~middle~~ married couples try to secure false French citizenship papers or to smuggle themselves over the Cambodian border. Exit permits are becoming increasingly prized. Of 22 young ~~Vietnamese~~ English-speaking Vietnamese working in a translating pool, eight are trying to leave Viet Nam. Vietnamese now in exile in Paris and the United States are ~~select~~ reluctant to return upon the request of the government.

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Speculation of a pending government reshuffle along the lines of ~~de~~ de Gaulle's France has not become entangled with ~~the~~ rumors the persistent threat of a violent military coup d'etat against prime minister General Nguyen Khanh. But even the ~~land~~ intellectuals in Saigon are in disagreement as to whom should be named as a new strongman to replace the energetic goateed general, who has been caught in a cris crossfire between ~~his~~ the Catholic-Buddhist tensions, between various factions of Vietnam's ~~flm~~ flimsy political parties; between in-fighting within his own military junta.

In fact, about the only point of agreement at all is, as one Vietnamese intellectual explained, "the Vietnamese government is at the end of something and the beginning of something new. ~~But~~ nobody knows what's going to happen."

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(Note: Source for most of the first two pages of this is Col. Serong, head of the Australian Training team here. He's on Gen. Harkins staff and everytime I've interviewed him, he turned out to be right. He forecasted the collapse of the strategic hamlet program months before it happened; he's seen Communist tactics in Burma and Malaya and is generally considered an excellent source.)