

Stroke 94.

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military 1 (normass/deepe)

(This is the first of a two-part series on the military situation in the Vietnam war. This article discusses the Allied ~~pa~~ posture; the second discusses the war from ~~the~~ the Communist viewpoint).

SAIGON, AUGUST 5—The Vietnam war, which has dangled relatively motionless and indecisively since mid-June, is ~~begin~~ being breathlessly watched here for a violent, strategic shift of direction or escalation of intensity.

Currently, the Allied side of the military conflict has become frozen into a posture of the strategic defensive. It is a non-static and vigorous defensive posture with the relative balance of pure military power clearly on its side.

On the other side of the war, the Communists continue to unroll their ~~own~~ unique split-level war—but at extravagantly varying speeds. The Communists' main-force war, which had previously unveiled the spectacular violence of the conflict, has flipflopped from a posture of the strategic-counteroffensive into a ~~movement, probably momentary,~~ <sup>stance</sup> of the strategic retreat. Informed sources here report up to possibly fifty per cent of the North Vietnamese units, the backbone of the Communist big-unit war, have been withdrawn out of South Vietnam, into their traditional sanctuaries across the borders.

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military 2 (normass/deepe)

Thus, the big-unit war has shifted into a peculiar moment without precedent since the American build-up of forces began in 1965—neither the Communists nor the Allies are on the strategic offensive. No one here is certain ~~long~~ how long his military aberration will continue, although President Lyndon Johnson last week predicted a new Communist offensive.

However, the bottom portion of the Communists' split-level war appears to continue ~~on~~ the strategic offensive. This portion of the Communist war, sometimes called the insurgency side of the struggle, has consistently been moving forward with an imperceptible, if not invisible, mixture of continuous, low-level irregular warfare fought by local guerrillas and heavy doses of socio-economic, political action and intense propaganda.

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military 4 (normass/deepe)

The Allied military posture took a gigantic swerve from the strategic offensive to the strategic defensive in late January this year in reaction to the Communists' country-wide, momentary thrust into the cities. Since then, the Allied strategy has simply been a matter of shaking down and settling into this anchoring position of reaction--of waiting for the next Communist thrust.

The evacuation of the Marine combat base at Khe Sanh was not this spring was not so much a change of Allied strategy, but only a fragment of the broad sweep of this ~~this~~ evolving strategy. The Allied posture is currently frozen into this pattern, which is expected here to continue at least through the American Presidential elections in November, and perhaps even through the end of 1968.

"The orders to General (Creighton) Abrams are clear," one informed source explained bluntly. "Don't let the Reds pull off anything be big before the American election."

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military 5 (normass/deepe)

The current Allied situation was summed up by one knowledgeable military source: "The Allies are in a position in which the only action they can effectively undertake is reaction. The Allied reaction is good; the Allied initiative is non-existent."

The Allied strategic defensive—an active defensive—has meant a significant geographic re-deployment of Allied, mostly American, companies and battalions from the remote border areas of South Vietnam—where the offensive objective had been to destroy the Communist main-force—to the populated areas where the defensive objective is to destroy the Communists once they assault.

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military 6 (normass/deepe)

There are, however, two exceptions to this urban-centered troop deployments: the first exception is along the dm demilitarized zone, where the Third Marine Division (reinforced) is based horizontally along the border with North Vietnam; the second excep exception is a vertical deployment along the western Cambodian-Laotian frontier, where for two years the U. S. Army 4th Infantry Division has attempted to act as an "anti-invasion" blocking force. Both of these two long-term deployments have, however, been essentially defensive--and the most static of the dfe defensive--since any forward offensive move would have meant military militarily crossing into Laos, Cambodia or North Vietnam, which was politically prohibited by Allied policymakers (except for small-scale clandestine operations across into these countries).

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military 6 (normass/deepe)

The most clear-cut evidence of this strategic somersault is witnessed around ~~the~~ Saigon, where the equivalent of ~~nearly~~ <sup>roughly 40</sup> more than eight Allied divisions are committed to the capital and the broad complex of military installations surrounding it. More than half of the American combat battalions in Vietnam are committed directly or indirectly to the defense of Saigon and its periphery. ~~At~~ Two-thirds of the Vietnamese strategic reserve—ten airborne and Marine battalions—are now committed inside the Saigon city limits or its suburbs. A year ago, these Allied units were sweeping the remote jungled ~~at~~ Communist stronghold areas ~~at the~~ near Vietnam's border frontiers.

The defense of Saigon is based on troop deployments in three concentric, ~~although irregular~~ <sup>roughly</sup> circular rings. The first ring runs from the Saigon city limits and extends outwards roughly six miles—which is the range of Communist rockets. ~~Roughly 25~~ <sup>Nearly</sup> 25 per cent of the Allied troop strength defending Saigon is concentrated in this layer of territorial defense. Beyond this ring, ranging from nine to ~~two~~ twelve miles outward, lies the heaviest concentration of Allied troops—five American brigades, ~~on the~~ one ~~Aussie~~ Australian ~~task~~ task force, one Thai regiment, and seven ~~reiments~~ <sup>regiments</sup> of Vietnamese regulars, all backed up by armor, artillery, small naval craft, helicopters and paramilitary units. This second ring contains roughly fifty per cent of ~~these~~ Allied troops engaged in defending Saigon.

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military 7 (normass/deepe)

Beyond this, stretching towards the Cambodian border on the west and the South China Sea on the east, is committed a thinner grouping of troops--three light American brigades and two Vietnamese regiments. In these remote, thinly populated areas, where American divisions once swept through the Communist-infested bases, there is a pronounced shift to smaller unit patrols. Their objective is not <sup>to</sup> engage the Communist units as before--but simply to find the Communists and then call in Allied <sup>a</sup> airstrikes and artillery barrages on them.

Not long ago, a senior Vietnamese officer was ~~asch~~ astonished to see an ~~AM~~ American map showing the Allied troop units around Saigon. Each Allied unit was ~~was~~ symbolized on the map with a thumbtack. "It will be ~~impossil~~ impossible to move more troops around Saigon," he mused. "We don't have enough room on the maps for more thumbtacks."

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military 8 (normass/deepe)

One knowledgeable military analyst explained that before the Communist Tet upheaval, General (William C.) Westmoreland (former American commander) had placed the Allies on the strategic offensive. After Tet, General Westmoreland pulled the Allied troops back towards the urban centers and off the jungle operations. This was not a strategic decision <sup>He Had</sup> chose to make; it was a strategic necessity imposed upon him by the Communists.

"Since Abrams took over the Westmoreland," he the source explained "he has not made any substantive changes in strategy; he has only formalized and finalized those changes that the Communists forced Westmoreland to initiate."

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military 9 (normass/deopo)

"Aside from this, what Abrams thinks and says he is doing is not being reflected on the ground. For example, he has given the order to stop search-and-destroy operations. The field commanders are not flagrantly and deliberately disobeying this. But, in some cases, they are still conducting search-and-destroy operations, but on a smaller scale--and calling them different names. In other cases, the field commanders are not conducting search and destroy operations; but they are not conducting clear-and-hold operations either. They're somewhere in between both of these."

However, this geographic ~~shifting~~ <sup>redeployment</sup> of Allied troops has produced some ~~optimism~~ <sup>optimism</sup> in those military circles that formerly criticized General Westmoreland's over-emphasis on ~~fighting the Communist~~ searching for the Communist big-units along the frontiers. Specifically, Westmoreland was criticized for his ratio of having two American battalions ~~committed~~ committed to fighting Communist big-unit formations versus only one American battalion committed to securing of populated areas.

"Now, interestingly and by accident, Abrams has inherited a reversal of that ratio," the source continued. "There are now two American battalions fighting in the populated areas <sup>for EVERY</sup> ~~versus~~ one fighting the main-force war. The Allies have now been forced to bring their troops back to the urban centers--the emphasis which Westmoreland should have had originally."

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military 10 (normass $\frac{1}{2}$  deepe)

Now, General Abrams has been locked into this defensive strategy around the populated centers by the time blockade of the American elections and the threat of a future Communist offensive. Furthermore, he is being forced to de-emphasize again the big-unit offensive sweeps because of another important, but little-noticed development. These sources believe this occurred when Abrams took over command from Westmoreland.

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military 11 (normass $\frac{1}{2}$ deepe)

"Then, I suppose that President Johnson told Abrams he could not have any more American troops," one military source exo explained. "At this stage, neither Johnson nor Abrams understood the implications of this. But, the ~~in~~ implications in Vietnam were plain. Never before did the ~~Amer~~ Americans have a strategic reserve inside Vietnam--because they never needed it. If more American troops were urgently needed, they were either in the pipeline or out-of-country ready to be shipped in. A strategic reserve should be ~~25~~ roughly 25 per cent of the ~~existing American~~ deployable forces.

"Now, Abrams, if he is to have a strategic reserve, must subtract these troops from his existing deployment in Vietnam, and this must come from his American forces fighting the main-force war. Thus, Abrams is being forced to reshape the Allied strategy even more--and he is being forced to re-shape it only one way--<sup>By</sup> ~~but de-emphasizing~~ de-emphasizing once again the main-force war. ~~He~~ His other battalions in the populated areas have established the military posture suitable for pacification of the rural areas--although pacification itself is weak weak. <sup>NOT BEING EFFECTIVE.</sup>

He Concluded: THIS CHANGE  
"That's where stand now! ~~^~~ This will be intellectually and professionally resisted by Abrams and the American military command--but it is inevitable."

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military 12 (normass/deepe)

Hence,

But, while the massive Am Allied war machine is pro in the defensivel posture of securing the urban centers against a large-scale assault by Communist big-unit formations. But, it is not yet geared towards providing the samll rural villages are not being secured from within against the Communist political i nfrastrucutre and guerrill irregular guerrillas existing in those hamlets. This taks task positive task of res establishing Vietnamese government authority and somehow controlling or winning support from the peastry is essentially the task of the GVN's pacification, or rural development program. Thus far, this pacification program has failed to establish any strategic momentum--and there is no evidence it will do so in the foreseeable future.