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weapons 1 (normass/deepe)

SAIGON, January 23--Reported Communist air attacks in Laos and South Vietnam, would dramatize, if true, a twist-up in the weapons escalation spiral in a rapidly expanding theatre of bitter combat.

The weapons escalation, ~~sig~~ signified by/x the reported Communist air activity, appeared calculated for super-sonic psychological impact.

~~The~~ Militarily, the air incidents accentuated the trends of the war here without changing them; the air attacks changed the form (or maybe altitude) of the war, but not its character.

The nutshell trends in the South indicate the war is and has been becoming increasingly sophisticated and conventionalized. On the personnel side, it is becoming increasingly more North Vietnamese, rather than South Vietnamese. On the weapons-supply side, increasingly more Communist-bloc rather than Vietnamese. (Even for rice, North Vietnam is becoming increasingly dependent on Soviet and Chinese imports, sources here report).

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weapons 2 (normass/deepe)

Militarily, the alleged incidents involving sub-sonic MIG's and antiquated bi-planes are considered comic here in the face of the preponderance of ^{offensive} ~~offense~~ and defensive American airpower. Even a sneak, kamikaze air attack on a major American installation or Vietnamese city might have high psychological value, but little military consequence.

Politically, the air incidents surface a pivotal fact, but doesn't change it--that the boundary lines of South East Asian countries are increasingly non-existent in ^{WAR} ~~the~~ day-to-day ~~real~~ realities. The North Vietnamese have been violating the ground borders of Laos for years--a fact largely invisible or else ~~conveniently~~ conveniently ignored outside of Asia; now they are ~~not~~ only violating the Laotian border at a higher altitude and faster ~~speed~~ speed--which graphically magnifies the intrusion for the non-Asian world. Ironically, this comes at a time when North Vietnam is refusing to ~~officially~~ ~~admit~~ officially any such intrusions, as ~~the~~ U. N. Secretary-General U ~~Thun~~ Thant recently mentioned. American fighter-bombers have also been violating Laotian airspace ~~for~~ ~~raids~~ since 1964--with the consent of the Laotian government--and clandestine South Vietnamese Special Forces teams, with American advisors and helicopters have violated the border on the ground.

In South Vietnam, the ~~Communist~~ Communist air incidents erased the 17th ~~para~~ parallel above-the-jungles ^{TOPS} as North Vietnamese ground troops have been doing ~~below~~ below it since mid-1964.

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weapons 3 (normass/deepe)

Whether the Communist air attacks over its neighbors is related in ~~any way~~ to peace-talk probing is a matter of wide conjecture here.

Militarily, however, ~~the~~ anti-Communist sources here are far more worried about two other factors associated with the incidents. ~~First is whether~~ The first is whether the air incidents are an "harbinger" of an escalation into across-the-boundary Communist missile-power. Officials here have long feared North Vietnamese-based offensive ⁷ surface-to-surface missiles descending on either American-Vietnamese bases or cities in the South. The Communist capability of setting up ~~ground-to~~ ground-to-ground missiles in War Zone C with the range of blasting Saigon is ^a the topic not simply of ~~public speculation~~ ^{for} wild imaginations but ^{DR} official reports as well. And when a Soviet-made missile sunk an Israeli ship in the Middle East last year, the U. S. 7th Fleet off North Vietnam ~~shudder~~ shuddered at the prospects of a repeat performance in Asia.

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weapons 4 (normass/deepe)

"The Communist option of ~~weak~~ weapons escalation ~~decision~~ probably doesn't look very interesting to them," one reliable source explained last week. "They can use surface-to-surface ^{MISSILES,} weapons, but ~~the~~ ^{Have} the Americans have lots of fancy new weapons too. ~~The North~~ must remember that a little PT boat incident lead to the bombing of the North. If they throw a few missiles at Danang, the U. S. will hit ² ~~Haiphong~~ Haiphong. Weapons escalation might be a big mistake for the North."

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weapons 5 (normass/deepe)

The second factor even more worrisome to the ~~also~~ officialdom here is the ~~day-to-day~~ ^{grave} reality that the Communists are importing into the South more and more of better and better infantry weapons and infantry support weapons. In the early 1960's, the wholly Southern Viet Cong movement sustained their momentum by capturing ~~American-~~ American-issued weapons from government defenders; these captured weapons were supplemental to their old cached stocks of antiquated, rusty French weapons discarded after the anti-colonialist war. American surveys ~~at~~ at the time estimated only two per cent of the Viet Cong weaponry was supplied by other Communist nations, including the North.

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weapons 6 (normass/deepe)

In mid-1964, the ~~patten~~ pattern changed and weapons escalation began. The North Vietnamese ~~units, infilits infiltrating~~ ^{began to infiltrate} into the South as units, rather than individual cadre, and brought with them the best infantry weapons system of the Communist bloc--the AK family of weapons, including ~~rifles~~ assault rifles, submachineguns and machineguns, which is now used to arm the ~~frontline~~ borderline units of the Soviet army. Through the years this flow of weapons has moved southwards, from the northern provinces, to the ~~pe~~ provinces around Saigon--and now are found in the ~~set~~ southern parts of the Mekong Delta. Also, this flow of weapons moved organizationally downwards--from the North Vietnamese units, then to the Southern-born Viet Cong main force units, then to the Viet Cong regional units--and now even to their ~~village militia~~ guerrilla militia. The Communist weapons supply is now so excellent that senior American officers admit their enemy does not even attempt to capture the best of American weapons.

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weapons 7 (normass/deepe)

By 1966, their arsenal in the South began including the lethal ~~122 mm.~~ 122 mm. fin-stabilized rocket launcher and then the ~~140 mm.~~ 140 mm. rocket launcher, all mobile and destructive enough to inflame the ~~America-~~ American-protected Danang airbase several times. By 1967, long-range .152 mm. howitzers were used across the Demilitarized Zone to pester the American Marine positions at Con Thien, Gio Linh and Khe Sanh. ~~Even~~ in the Mekong Delta, the local guerrilla forces have virtually imposed a weapons stalemate ~~upon~~ upon America's new "little boat" Navy patrolling the major rivers. ~~Even~~ the mortar and rocketfire from the heavily armed ~~U.S.~~ U.S. Navy is not ~~equal~~ ^{THE AMERICAN} powerful enough to wipe out the mud-baked Communist bunkers, ~~a~~ ^{VESSELS} direct hit by ~~only~~ .155 mm. howitzer shells ~~is~~ ^{Con} need to ~~route~~ ^{only} route the Communist forces, and the ~~re~~ frequently used airstrikes are generally not close-in enough to hit the bunkerlines. ~~But~~ But, the local guerrillas, armed with the new Soviet-made B-40 and B-41 bazooka-styled rockets, can pierce the armor of the American Navy boats with "heat-rounds" but still are unable to sink the ~~boats~~ ^{boats}. Hence, the ballistics war in the Delta is indecisively in-balance at this time.

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weapons 8 (nromass/deepe)

~~the alleged~~ ^{H,} alleged MIG-17 air attack
on the outpost-installation of Khe Sang, across the DMZ in South Vietnam,
remains "shrouded in mystery," as one official explained. The American
military command here suggests the plane was an ~~American~~ American
F-4 Phantom which mistakenly rocketed the South Vietnamese Special Forces
camp. The Vietnamese Joint Operations Center, which runs the ~~the~~ Vietnamese
side of the war on a minute-to-minute basis, at first called the plane a
Communist MIG and then shifted to the term "~~unidentified~~ ^{to} unidentified
aircraft," probably for "diplomatic reasons," one source ~~suggested~~ ^{suggested}.
^{HOWEVER,} Other Vietnamese military sources referred to ~~remnants~~ remnants
of a Communist cannon ~~cartridge~~ ^{CASING,} which they said ~~resulted~~ resulted from the
a strafing attack on the camp, and indicated a heavier calibre weapon
than American planes fire.

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weapons 9 (normass/deepe)

The reported aerial incident across the DMZ is probably less significant, because of the vagueness surrounding it, than the air attacks in Laos, which have been confirmed by the Laotian government and by the ~~military~~ American military command here. Laos is often the "trial balloon" battleground when either the East or the West wants to escalate the war, while minimizing the risks attached to doing so in the "short fuse" Vietnamese ~~st~~ situation. For example, the American bombing raids began in December, 1964, in the Laotian panhandle served ~~as a warning to~~ first as a warning to—and then a prelude to—the bombing of North Vietnam ~~in December, 1964~~ several months later in February, 1965.

The American ~~escalation~~ combat escalation ~~has~~ began then began—first ~~in the air~~ in the air—and ~~then~~ then on the ground in the South. The Communist~~s~~ escalation began on the ground and now ~~is~~ ^{APPEARS} maybe shifting to the air as well.

(Hank: this will end my filing until after ^{Friday} returning from Seventh Fleet. Regards Bev).

-- End Reuter