

Matter of Fact By Joseph Alsop

A Reserve Callup?

SAIGON—After the grim meeting in Vienna, President Kennedy came home to order an immediate call-up of the Nation's Reserves. This was his answer to Nikita Khrushchev's threat to take Berlin by naked force.



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Those were the days before the reform and modernization of the armed services, and in consequence the call-up was carried out rigidly and without proper selectivity. For a time, people in quite superfluous Reserve units were hauled out of civilian life, only to cool their heels with nothing real to do.

Perhaps this is the reason for President Johnson's reported habit of privately criticizing, even mocking, his predecessor's callup decision. The criticism is of course wholly unjustified. If President Kennedy had not had the wisdom and courage to call the reserves that summer, Khrushchev might well have acted on his Vienna threats.

It was a time, in fact, when American will and resolution had to be demonstrated by deeds, not words. Khrushchev did not believe Mr. Kennedy's words, but he well understood Mr. Kennedy's deeds. And the lesson by deeds thereupon transmuted the Vienna threats into mere empty bluster.

IT MAY BE, of course, that President Johnson's reported criticism of the Kennedy callup is in some sense defensive. The question of calling up the Reserves, in order to gain a needed margin for the war in Vietnam, was put before

President Johnson last summer. And after a highly publicized review of the matter, he refused to do what President Kennedy had so swiftly done four years earlier.

At that time, it must be added, the President's decision was justified by the military facts, if not by the political factors. The additional units required at that time by General Westmoreland could be provided, and were provided, without a callup.

At that time, in fact, the main argument for calling up the Reserves was the same old need to prove by deeds that the United States really meant business. In other words, the aim, then, was simply to convince the North Vietnamese Communists that it would be futile to raise the ante, when the chips on the table already included the entire armed might of the United States.

No one can tell now, whether or not a callup in the summer of 1965 would have affected Hanoi as the callup in the summer of 1961 affected Moscow. The opportunity, if it existed, was missed. Hanoi raised the ante.

How far Hanoi has raised the ante must be examined in detail in another report. For present purposes, it is enough to say that South Vietnam has now been invaded by a considerable part of the regular North Vietnamese army. This has, in turn, changed the whole balance of the war, to the point where the force levels already authorized for General Westmoreland are wholly inadequate. Truly adequate force levels can no longer be attained in time, in fact, unless the Reserves are quickly called up.

Such was the situation, it can be confidently stated,

that confronted President Johnson more than a month ago when he decided to launch his famous peace offensive. He made this decision, it can be further stated, in the face of explicit and authoritative warnings that as far as the war was concerned, the peace offensive was likely to produce negative results in both North and South Vietnam.

These warnings have been all too amply justified. Communist morale, which had been badly shaken, has been quite obviously bolstered by the seeming proof of American irresolution and weakness of will. South Vietnamese morale, and even in some degree the morale of the Americans in Vietnam, had been perceptibly depressed.

NONE THE LESS, the peace offensive will have served a very useful purpose, if it turns out to have been the planned prelude to doing what now needs to be done. The test is whether the pause in the northern bombing is terminated by the President.

The test is whether the Reserves are to be called up in the near future. This is a grave decision for the President to take, though not much graver, to be sure, than the decision his predecessor took with such happy results.

There is no one of any consequence out here, however, who does not believe that the decision is necessary and even urgent. Unfortunately, there are all too many people here who fear that the President will try to get by with half-measures and even quarter-measures. "Anyway until after the election," as they always say. But surely these people will be proved wrong in the end. Surely Lyndon B. Johnson is not that kind of Pres-