

LBJ Relies on Wrong Advisers

By Drew Pearson

When President Johnson last July gave the green light to upping U.S. military forces in Vietnam from 75,000 to 125,000 men, he remarked to a close personal friend: "I have got the feeling that we are headed for trouble."



With American forces in Vietnam now 180,000 and moreland asking for 200,000 more—a total of 380,000—it looks as if the President's intuition was accurate.

One important point which American military leaders now emphasize privately is that they told the President last July that much heavier troop commitments would be necessary and that Gen. Westmoreland's current request is not new to him.

This is true. Furthermore, the President left himself a loophole when on July 28 he announced the troop buildup and said that he would further increase American strength if such action was dictated by the course of the war.

The public, however, didn't pay much attention to the loophole.

Only a short time ago this was an operation run by American military advisers, and the American public has not fol-

lowed very clearly the steps by which it was escalated.

Reading Public Misled

There is a good reason for this. If you read the day-to-day communiques issued by Saigon, it has appeared that we have won every battle. We haven't. Again if you read some of the statements issued by Secretary of Defense Robert S. McNamara or Secretary of State Dean Rusk, it would appear that long ago we were on the way to victory. We weren't.

But when Rusk and McNamara issued a joint statement in Honolulu Nov. 20, 1963, promising that U.S. troops would begin leaving South Vietnam Dec. 3, 1964, the American people had every reason to believe them.

Again when McNamara, in January, 1964, told the House Armed Services Committee that he hoped "the major part of the U.S. military task could be completed by the end of 1965," Congress had no reason to disbelieve him.

It also believed him when he came back from Vietnam last month and announced: "We have stopped losing the war." However, the real fact is we have not stopped losing, and the request of Gen. Westmoreland for double the present number of troops is clear evidence of that fact.

The public may also wonder whether the American press has been at fault in the

failure to report the tragic little-by-little escalation of the war. Last summer, Arthur Sylvester, efficient Assistant Secretary of Defense in charge of public relations, decided the American people were not truly aroused about the war and arranged to have approximately 100 newsmen, TV photographers, commentators and feature writers sent to the war front at Government expense.

Sylvester argued that newsmen arriving on the scene would not feel obligated to the Government that paid their expenses but would write the truth. On the whole they did. However, they covered the glamor, the drama, the day-to-day happenings, did not dig below the surface to report the long-term significance, the fact that we were getting deeper and deeper into a situation which neither the Japanese, during their World War II occupation, nor the French after ten years of fighting, could solve.

LBJ Leaned Too Heavily

The tragedy of this war is that probably the President of the United States was just as misled—at least at first—as the American people. He took the word of his military advisers. He made a mistake, of course, both in picking his advisers and in relying on them so heavily.

The President's chief weakness as Chief Executive is

that he has had little experience in foreign affairs. When he was in Congress he was a member of the House Naval Affairs Committee, then the Senate Armed Services Committee, and chairman of the Senate Preparedness Committee. All his contacts were with military men, so it's only natural he should rely on them.

Other military advisers have differed drastically with the group now advising the President. In 1954, when President Eisenhower was urged by Vice President Nixon to get involved in this same area of Indo-China, Ike's military advisers said no. Gen. Matthew Ridgway, then Army Chief of Staff, was so vigorous he almost threatened to resign. Gen. Nathan Twining, Chief of the Air Force, was almost equally opposed. Adm. Arthur Radford, Chief of Naval Operations, advocated airplane strikes from carriers stationed offshore, but was very much against any land operation.

Eisenhower took their advice.

But the present Joint Chiefs of Staff have urged Johnson to do just the opposite. Johnson's military advisers have given him the wrong advice time after time. In any successful business firm, those who give the wrong advice are demoted. Perhaps it is time for LBJ to get a new set of advisers.