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# U.S. Puzzled by Saigon Strategy

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The general military situation in South Vietnam, as U.S. military analysts see it, is one of steady Communist gains in the northern, central and southern fronts with the exception of a battle developing in the Khanh Hoa area 200 miles northeast of Saigon.

At this stage, South Vietnam's strategy of trading territory for time to concentrate on the protection of Saigon has not proved effective. Two brigades of airborne troops have had to be detached from the covering force around the capital to help check a strong thrust from the Khanh Hoa area toward Nha Trang on the coast.

There are reports that the Communists were surprised by the speed of their initial advances, a source said, but that they are now meeting stronger opposition in the center and southern areas.

The comparative inactivity of the South Vietnamese forces in the south, where their enemies are continuing

to probe the capital's outlying defenses, continues to puzzle American sources. They recognize that major counterattacks cannot be mounted overnight and that a shortage of spare parts inhibits mobility. But they argue that one successful countermove, would upset North Vietnamese timing and help civilian and military morale.

The communist forces in the Xuan Loc area appear to be feeling their way south-eastward toward the capital and southwestward toward the coast.

The North Vietnamese, he said, may be trying to create a siege situation comparable to that around Phnom Penh, isolating the capital and subjecting it to artillery and rocket fire.

The Communists continue to exploit methodically their early successes in the Tay Ninh area northwest of Saigon. Government outposts in the area have been overrun in a sector between 45 and 55 miles from the capital.

The Communist tactics of driving back small South Vietnamese units has prevented the Saigon high command from accurately assessing the forces in this area.

American military men,

however, continue to regard North Vietnamese forces in this area as the most dangerous threat to the capital. Some enemy forces, they pointed out, have penetrated as far as Bien Hoa just over 20 miles from Saigon.

Reports continue to reach the Defense Department of low morale among South Vietnamese soldiers evacuated from the central highlands. If a major attack on Saigon is to be launched by the Communists in the next five weeks, success or failure for the south will rest on the fighting qualities of these troops.

The South Vietnamese forces fighting in the north are now regarded as almost completely isolated from those in the south.

Near Hue, the Communists are making steady if unspectacular gains after first severing all the city's communications by land. The last government outpost on Route 1 was overrun late Saturday.

The South Vietnamese have admitted other defeats in the north. Communist tanks and infantry overran a position held by a Ranger force of about 1000 men and the Second Division headquarters at Hue is under heavy artillery fire.

The notion that a spirited and protracted defense by Saigon forces in the north will "buy time" for the defense of the Saigon area and divert troops from that sector was discounted by one source. He estimated that the North Vietnamese had sufficient forces of all types and would not need reinforcements from the north.

The Communists' offensive in the south moreover, does not appear to depend on successes in the north. Hanoi, American analysts believe, sees the two operations as independent parts of a single over-all plan.

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