

NYTimes FEB 16 1972  
**Bombing Is Linked to High Infiltration Rate**

By CRAIG R. WHITNEY  
Special to The New York Times

SAIGON, South Vietnam, Feb. 15—High-ranking sources report that the decision to bomb Communist base areas at the border of Laos and South Vietnam was based on intelligence reports showing that more North Vietnamese troops were moving south this month than in any previous month.

The sources said that American intelligence estimates of troop infiltrations from North Vietnam and along the Ho Chi Minh Trail toward Communist base areas below the demilitarized zone and in the Central Highlands indicated that 30,000 enemy soldiers would have infiltrated into South Vietnam by the end of February.

American intelligence officials have also reportedly predicted that by the end of April 70,000 to 80,000 North Vietnamese soldiers will have moved south—more than in all of last year—bringing the enemy's estimated main-force strength in South Vietnam to 120,000 to 130,000.

The intelligence data are not considered conclusive. Some predictions have not been borne out by reports from the field, but some American officials here believe that the reports reflect a clear determination by the North Vietnamese to undertake a major military effort in the South.

#### Two Dates Were Suggested

Secretary of State William P. Rogers and the Army Chief of Staff, Gen. William C. Westmoreland, have predicted an offensive timed for the Tet Lunar New Year, which began today, or for President Nixon's visit to Peking, which begins Monday.

The intensive American bombing, halted temporarily today for the Tet cease-fire, began Thursday with the sudden deployment of the aircraft carrier Constellation to join two others in the Gulf of Tonkin and with the reinforcement of the Strategic Air Command's Pacific B-52 fleet.

The bombing campaign, which directed almost a thousand fighter-bomber strikes and 75 B-52 missions principally against two North Vietnamese base areas near the Ashau Valley and west of Kontum, in the highlands, was equally intensive just across the border in Laos. Before the raids were halted at 6 P.M. in South Vietnam for the 24-hour allied Tet truce, the Air Force and Navy jets had flown 242 strikes.

The bombing was initiated, according to observers here, because the Nixon Administration wanted to take no chances on the embarrassment of a major offensive while the President was in Peking if it could prevent one by bombing.

#### Not Just 'Tourist Trip'

An exceptionally well-informed analyst said: "We have discounted a major effort during Tet and think it will come later. We don't really think they will do it before Nixon's visit and think they would not be terribly interested in giving Nixon talking points in Peking by staging a big offensive while he is there."

"We think the final plan has not yet been determined," the source added, "but that in the meantime the enemy is getting his troops in position. They aren't sending these guys down here on a tourist trip."

Senior officials say that American intelligence officers have not found major evidence of Communist infiltration into the Saigon region from base areas in Cambodia. This is true, they say, even though South Vietnamese forces withdrew from Cambodia last month to free airborne strategic reserves for possible deployment to the Central Highlands, where a principal enemy action is expected.

While the best estimate of the American intelligence community is reliably reported to be that a major countrywide offensive will not get under way immediately, local Vietcong units are said to have been issued impressive orders that give them wide latitude but urge a three-phase political, military and diplomatic offensive this year.

However, the intelligence data appear to indicate that some attack will be made soon on South Vietnamese bases, border camps and cities in the Central Highlands, probably west of Kontum and Dakto around Fire Bases 5 and 6 and the Benhet ranger camp.

Those positions, which were

also attacked heavily last March and April, are close to a major North Vietnamese base area known as No. 609, in the jungles and hills of the region where Laos, South Vietnam and Cambodia come together. The base area and infiltration routes out of it were a principal target of the bombing.

The North Vietnamese 28th, 66th and 95B regiments are believed to be in the base area and nearby in Kontum Province, along with nine independent battalions. The 3,700-man 320th North Vietnamese Division is also believed to have arrived in the base area recently.

#### Enemy Forces Listed

Three days ago three North Vietnamese prisoners captured in Kontum told interrogators they were from the 304B Division. It is believed here that they are part of a regimental-size force of about 1,500 men that is named after the more famous and older 304th Division.

That unit is believed to be on the move into the western part of the demilitarized zone in preparation for possible attack on the South Vietnamese artillery bases called Sarge and Fuller, which were attacked last June when the weather was dry there.

The North Vietnamese 308th Division has also moved south from the central provinces of North Vietnam closer to the demilitarized zone, the American sources say, probably to act as a reserve for the 304th and also to guard against a South Vietnamese attack across the zone up the coastal plain into the north.

The North Vietnamese are also reported to be building up their anti-aircraft defenses in the southern part of their country, not only with anti-aircraft guns but also with more surface-to-air missiles than have been there. The enemy has also begun moving some 130-mm. artillery pieces closer to the DMZ, according to American sources; with their

17-mile range they outdistance all but the most powerful Vietnamese artillery.

"They obviously contemplate doing something for which they expect a heavy bombing reaction," an official said.

Advance reconnaissance elements of another division, 324B, are believed to have begun moving south along a new road built by the communists in the western mountains of the two northern provinces of South Vietnam and to be moving into a base area, No. 611. The second of the two zones hit by the intensive bombing, it is in western Thua-thien Province, southwest of the imperial capital of Hue. Three North Vietnamese regiments already in that area are thought to be trying to move closer to Hue.

Despite all the reports of North Vietnamese troop movements, the only significant upsurge in fighting occurred last week in Binh Dinh Province, where Communist forces, including three North Vietnamese

regiments, launched a series of shelling and ground attacks.

Far to the south, in the Mekong Delta, which has been relatively calm for three years, a North Vietnamese regiment has been reported infiltrating into Dinh Tuong Province west of Mytho.

A more immediate target is the base at Longtieng, in northern Laos, supported by the Central Intelligence Agency. It was nearly overrun by three North Vietnamese divisions last month and most senior officers here expect them to put heavy pressure on the Laotian and Meo defenders again soon.

Officials here also expect renewed attacks in Cambodia, which has been relatively quiet since December.

"If I were in the enemy's shoes, I think I would have to make some big effort before standing down for extended negotiations on a final settlement, and this is probably what he is getting ready to do now," an official said. "But I don't expect that final push now."