

## U.S. Bombing Raids Said to Bar Drive Timed to Nixon's Journey

By CRAIG R. WHITNEY  
Special to The New York Times

SAIGON, Feb. 21—American and South Vietnamese officials who predicted a major Communist offensive here during President Nixon's visit to Peking are now saying that it was prevented by timely allied bombing.

Aside from a flurry of small rocket attacks last night and this morning on air bases near Saigon and in the Central Highlands, and despite four attacks in the Mekong Delta over the weekend that inflicted heavy casualties on South Vietnamese defenders, no countrywide offensive has taken place despite insistent predictions of one for two months.

A high-ranking official said, "Their plans have often been disrupted in the past by bombing, and it may be they've been delayed by what we did last week."

As predictions of an imminent offensive grew more insistent at the beginning of the month, an intensive bombing campaign was mounted against Communist base areas in the highlands and below the demilitarized zone. Last Wednesday and Thursday American planes bombed artillery sites in North Vietnam. Five crewmen were captured after three planes were shot down.

Most officials here have stopped short of saying that an offensive will definitely not come, and Gen. Creighton W. Abrams's headquarters has not called off the "gray alert" imposed on all American soldiers in Vietnam at the beginning of last week.

### Bombing Is Continuing

The bombing of base areas and supply trails in Laos and Cambodia is continuing, with B-52's and smaller planes in action.

Since the beginning of the speculation about a major offensive—first it was said that the enemy would strike last week over Tet, the Lunar New Year holiday, as he did in 1968; then it was predicted that the strike would come over the weekend, just before Mr. Nixon arrived in Peking—official leaks have made North Vietnamese and Vietcong capabilities on the battlefield sound greater than those put forward by the enemy himself.

Reliable accounts of intelligence reports now appear to indicate that what the Communists intend to do this year is narrower in scope than what American officials, anxious not to have any surprises that might mar the China visit, were warning that it might be.

Intelligence briefings at all levels were freely offered this month to correspondents who sought them, more readily in Washington than in Saigon. All pointed to high levels of infiltration by Communist troops into South Vietnam and to major build-ups in what allied intelligence calls Base Area 609, in the Central Highlands west of Kontum, and just above and in the northern half of the demilitarized zone, which lies between North and South Vietnam. Those build-ups were the principal targets of the bombing raids—more than a thousand B-52 and fighter-bomber strikes.

### Intentions Less Than Clear

Intelligence is better on enemy abilities than it is on enemy intentions, however, and officials were admittedly tentative in ascribing to the unpredictable North Vietnamese and Vietcong the motive of embarrassing President Nixon

while he was visiting their allies in Peking.

Closer reading of the reports produced by the intelligence apparatus indicates that the essence of what Communist command centers were instructing their followers was to do what they could, where they could, and thus concentrate their attacks in the countryside and against weak rural militia outposts rather than against main-force South Vietnamese units.

Any uneasiness will not be fully dissipated until the end of the week. But as a South Vietnamese army spokesman said at a briefing, "enemy activity is at its normal level for this time of the year."

## Attack Still Expected

By FOX BUTTERFIELD  
Special to The New York Times

PLEIKU, South Vietnam, Feb. 21—The South Vietnamese commander in the Central Highlands said today that the expected Tet offensive in the highlands has been delayed for at least several weeks by a combination of intensive American air strikes and the capture of some guerrillas with important assignments.

Lieut. Gen. Ngo Dzu, commander of Military Region II, which includes the highlands, said that he had "not been able to sleep for the past three nights because we had reliable information that the North Vietnamese were going to attack."

But, General Dzu remarked, special South Vietnamese long-range patrols had found that the heavy American air raids in the highlands just before Tet had had a "fantastic effect" in destroying Communist supply lines.

Speaking to newsmen in his hilltop headquarters in Pleiku, General Dzu added that the North Vietnamese had continued building a maze of roads and moving large quantities of supplies into Kontum Province opposite Kontum City and the key outpost of Beihet.

"We are watching them carefully and there is no evidence that they have given up the idea of major attacks in Kontum," he said.

### Many New Roads Seen

American and South Vietnamese intelligence has detected two new North Vietnamese divisions, the 320th and the 304B, moving into Base Area 609 in the last two weeks, but General Dzu said that the Communists had not yet moved troops across the border. He added that they could move the troops into Kontum within 24 to 48 hours.

The area, where the borders of South Vietnam, Laos and Cambodia meet, and western Kontum Province are a vast wilderness.

From the air, however, many new roads and paths lead from the border. American officers say that they have all been built in recent weeks.

The planned offensive was also delayed, General Dzu said, because in several areas Communist saboteurs had either been captured or killed. The biggest setback to the enemy came in Quinhon, in coastal Binh Dinh Province, where 40 were picked up by the South Vietnamese police, he added, thwarting plans for a general uprising in Binh Dinh, long a Vietcong stronghold.

"Often it is small things like this that count more than massing lots of troops in stopping the enemy," General Dzu asserted.