



It's Make or Break For U.S. and Hanoi

Joseph Alsop

THE ENEMY offensive in Vietnam is a make-or-break affair in two quite different ways. It will certainly make or break President Nixon's Vietnamization program. But it can easily make or break the Hanoi government as well.

Everything, then, depends on the outcome. As usual, however, the underlying pattern of what is happening is not coming through at all clearly.

The signs that the Hanoi war-planners are going for broke are plain for all to see. They began this dry season by sending south about 80,000 new troops. This was twice last year's total. For North Vietnam, it is also a manpower-investment equivalent to 800,000 Americans.

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THE SOUTHWARD troop movement was afflicted by heavy losses on the road; by severe supply problems; and by vigorous pre-emption by the South Vietnamese Army and the U.S. and South Vietnamese Air Forces.

Hanoi has sent into action in Quang Tri and the other northern provinces of I Corps almost the entire strategic reserve of the North Vietnamese Army. In all, elements of about 12 North Vietnamese regiments are engaged already. As a home-guard, meanwhile, the Hanoi war-planners have retained just one division, the 325th, which is stationed near Hanoi.

To prepare this massive onslaught, the war-planners took two further steps. The SAM-2 anti-aircraft missile system was extended towards the DMZ, to hamper air support of the South Vietnamese troops guarding the border. And besides the usual rockets and mortars, very heavy ar-

tillery pieces — 122 and 132 millimeter guns and 155 millimeter howitzers — were also moved up in large numbers, to hammer the South Vietnamese fire support bases.

The time for attack was chosen to coincide with bad weather for airplanes in the most northerly provinces of South Vietnam. And the immediate target of the attack was the South Vietnamese Army's newest and greenest division which was holding the fire support bases on the border where the attack opened.

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GENERAL Creighton Abrams has reported to President Nixon that given the circumstances, the brand new ARVN Third Division acquitted itself well, hanging on against heavy odds and then falling back in good order to well chosen positions. Reinforcements are already on the way.

Measures are being taken, too, that will bring much greater air power to bear on the attacking North Vietnamese. These will undoubtedly include measures to suppress the extended SAM-2 system.

But as these words are written, new North Vietnamese thrusts are expected, both from the Ashau Valley in the direction of Hue, and also by the long delayed forces threatening the high plateaux-region.

The question, then, is whether these multiple thrusts will drive the U.S.-South Vietnamese high command to the military equivalent of borrowing from Peter to pay Paul. A vital area could be left uncovered in this manner. But there is considerable confidence in the inner circle here, reflecting confidence in Saigon.