

# U.S. Aides Call Offensive A Political Move by Hanoi

*Intelligence Sources Believe Goal Is Not  
a Complete Military Victory but  
a Better Negotiating Position*

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SAIGON, South Vietnam, May 21—Highly placed American intelligence sources believe that the North Vietnamese offensive was not intended to be a decisive campaign for total military victory, but an effort to establish a better base for the political struggle in Vietnam and for the negotiations in Paris.

The officials said they believed that the minimum goal Hanoi's military planners had set was the capture of the two northernmost provinces of South Vietnam—Quangtri and Thuathien. Hue, the former imperial capital, is in Thuathien, and, according to the officials, its capture would constitute a major blow to public morale and to the Government of President Nguyen Van Thieu.

However, there is a strong feeling among the nonpolitical majority in Saigon that if the North Vietnamese managed to capture Hue, the stage might then be set for a compromise that would halt the fighting. The highly developed sectional sentiments among Vietnamese make Hue seem little closer than Hanoi to the people being in the southern part of South Vietnam.

## 2 Other Major Scenes

Two other regions have been the scenes of major prongs of the offensive. In the Central Highlands, the North Vietnamese have mounted a serious threat to the provincial capital of Kontum. And the loss of the city would surprise no one here. Nonetheless, intelligence sources consider the Highlands as a secondary goal of the offensive. They believe that the fall of Kontum would not necessarily lead to grave consequences for the rest of South Vietnam.

In the rubber plantation region north of Saigon, the enemy, after conquering the district capital of Locninh, is said by the intelligence sources to have had his battle plan seriously upset by failing to capture the provincial center of Anloc.

The conclusion appears to be that a major set-piece battle for Hue remains a strong possibility. Elsewhere in the country the outlook is for the most intense warfare since 1968. This fighting is likely to follow the traditional Vietnamese tactics of guerrilla fighting and terrorism, with high points of engagements involving larger units but no massed-division warfare.

## Offensive Seriously Delayed

Intelligence sources say that after a surprisingly easy early success — the capture of the city of Quangtri on May 1 — the enemy offensive in that region has been seriously delayed. They contend that the longer the delay lasts, the better are the chances that South Vietnam and the United States will hold Hue.

The officials believe that one reason for the delay in the attack on Hue is Hanoi's cautious and methodical approach to major operations. They believe that the rapid fall of Quangtri, which they attribute to a collapse of nerve on the part of South Vietnamese generals, caused the North Vietnamese Army to advance faster than it had expected and faster than its supplies could be moved.

The resupplying and moving of artillery, thought to be the prerequisite for an all-out assault on Hue, are believed still under way and, according to the sources, have been significantly slowed by American air raids.

## Good Weather Helps

Excellent flying weather has allowed Air Force and carrier-based Navy planes — heavily augmented since the offensive — to pound enemy troop and supply movements.

Although the effects of the American blockade of supply movements to North Vietnam has not yet been felt on the battlefields, the sources said that the full-scale bombing of North Vietnam had provided an important measure of relief in South Vietnam: American and South Vietnamese pilots have found far fewer surface-to-air missiles defending North Vietnamese troops against air attacks.

The intelligence officials believe that most of the missiles brought South have been used up, and that resupply has been cut back because the missiles are needed to defend Hanoi and Haiphong.

The delay in the attack on Hue has allowed South Vietnam to resupply and reinforce the city's defenses. The American airlift to Danang, the principal base in the northern region, has replaced the tanks, guns and other equipment lost in Quangtri.

## Best Units Sent to Hue

Marines and airborne infantry units—the two best elements of the South Vietnamese forces—have been moved to Hue, and about 3,000 troops of the Third Division, which fled pell-mell from Quangtri, have been gathered up at the Phubai base south of Hue and are being reformed into combat units.

The North Vietnamese around

Hue, the sources said, have not been very aggressive and now most combat actions are initiated by the South Vietnamese attempting to widen their defensive perimeter around the city.

While informed sources believe that the highland provincial capital of Kontum and the larger center of Pleiku to the south remain North Vietnamese targets, the enemy has not yet staged the assault on Kontum that had been expected last week. The intelligence sources described two sharp assaults last week as "half-hearted" in comparison to the sustained attack that had been expected.

In the region north of Saigon, the intelligence officials believe that the enemy, having failed to capture Anloc with one division by April 16—a target date said to have been disclosed in captured documents—then committed three divisions to the task. Despite intense losses, the enemy has still not taken the city.

The losses have been caused by the most sustained use of the B-52 bombers in close support of ground troops of the war. The sources said that prisoners reported staggering casualties. New recruits, still weary from the long march down the Ho Chi Minh Trail network, are reported to have been thrown into the battle for Anloc.

Nonetheless, the sources said, there seems to have been no contingency plan to shift strategy in case Anloc proved too costly to take.

#### **Infiltration Still Heavy**

Despite the present slacking off of the North Vietnamese offensive, intelligence sources report that infiltration of troops along the trail network is still much greater than at the same time last year. Infiltration figures since February were put at 78,500, compared with 23,000 during the same period last year.

Meanwhile, reports are reaching Saigon of a higher level of infiltration by regular North Vietnamese units across the Cambodian border into the Mekong Delta region south of here. Neutral observers of Vietnamese revolutionary politics believe that the open offensive from the North is not only a serious effort by Hanoi to create a stronger negotiating position in relation to the United States and Saigon but also in relation to the Provisional Revolutionary Government of the Vietcong. These observers see the offensive as a serious blow to Vietcong hopes for autonomy from Hanoi.