

NYTimes

SEP 19 1972

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Vietnam: 'Airpower

Is the Difference'



By ROBERT N. GINSBURGH

WASHINGTON—The North Vietnamese launched their massive invasion of South Vietnam last Easter weekend. What have been the results of that invasion? In a word, failure.

It is always risky to judge a military campaign while it is still being fought—and obviously the end of this campaign is not yet in sight. Nevertheless, as of this date the current North Vietnamese invasion must be judged to have failed on all main fronts.

Why has the invasion failed? Airpower hasn't done it alone, but airpower has made the difference. I hasten to add that it wouldn't have made the difference had it not been for the herculean efforts of the army of South Vietnam. Airpower bought time for that army's efforts to take effect. Airpower slowed the enemy's advance. In the process of slowing the enemy advance, airpower broke the back of the North Vietnamese armor. Seventy per cent of the tanks were destroyed by air. And what is not generally realized, most of these

were destroyed by the South Vietnamese Air Force.

Airpower in the form of some 250 B-52 missions, about 3,500 tactical fighter sorties and approximately 600 C-130 airlift sorties enabled the valiant Vietnamese defenders of Anloc to withstand a siege of eighty days in which they were surrounded, outnumbered and outgunned on the ground.

As the South Vietnamese have gradually moved to the offensive, airpower has paved the way. And finally, airpower in the form of "Operation Linebacker" is carrying the offensive to the homeland of the North Vietnamese.

To expand air capability to cope with the North Vietnamese invasion, President Nixon took three significant steps:

First, he ordered a major increase in the air assets. Tactical fighters, for example, were increased from some 400 to about 800, including those based on carriers. Second, he authorized the resumption of bombing in North Vietnam to include the first

use of B-52's in the Hanoi-Haiphong area. Finally, he directed a systematic air and naval campaign to mine the ports of North Vietnam and to interdict the land lines of communication.

A systematic and swift interdiction campaign has been mounted against



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the lines of communication to the northwest and the northeast of Hanoi leading to the northern border. Furthermore, with the closure of the ports, systematic attacks on the land lines of communication and on the internal waterways have gained much greater significance.

Most of the significant target systems contributing to Hanoi's war-supporting capabilities were authorized for systematic attack, whereas during "Rolling Thunder" such authorities

were granted only periodically over a three-year time period.

We know that North Vietnam is trying desperately to compensate for all of these setbacks. We know that they will try to attack again in South Vietnam if they can. We know that they will try to find ways to import matériel despite our interdiction campaign. We don't yet know how successful they will be in trying to circumvent our interdiction campaign. We don't know how much they have stockpiled, how fast they are consuming their supplies or how much they can tighten their belts and for how long.

We probably will not know the answers until the war is over. After the war is over, I believe that history will show that airpower helped bring the North Vietnamese out of the shadows of intransigence into the light of meaningful negotiations.

Maj. Gen. Robert N. Ginsburgh is director of information for the Air Force. He made these remarks to airmen in North Dakota.