

## News Analysis

## '72 Offensive Enhances Hanoi's

By RICHARD PYLE

SAIGON (AP) — Although falling well short of the shattering victory that apparently was its ultimate goal, Hanoi's 1972 offensive in South Vietnam has greatly improved the Communist side's strategic position for a settlement — military or political.

And while battlefield reverses have forced numerous changes in the original plan, there are no signs that the North Vietnamese campaign is letting up. Instead it is moving into a new phase.

The lull that followed the recapture of Quang Tri City by the South Vietnamese last month has ended in a new surge of Communist attacks. The "center of gravity," as one senior American officer phrased it, has shifted south to the region around Saigon.

Military commanders expect a rising level of enemy attacks in the vicinity of Saigon and perhaps even on the capital itself, timed to coincide with the U.S. election in an attempt to embarrass President Nixon.

**BUT OFFICIALS** say they find no indications that North Vietnamese regulars elsewhere in the country are pulling back from the areas which they have seized in the last six months.

"The Communist units are rebuilding their former base areas to maintain their presence and to declare, 'we're here,'" said one U.S. officer. "They are here to stay."

As soon as they are refitted and resupplied, the North Vietnamese could launch another major offensive push. This time they would have the advantage of starting from positions far forward of where they were when they launched their offensive last March 30.

Viewed politically, the control the Communists have won of large areas of South Vietnam and a sizable number of its people would be a crucial factor if current maneuvering produced a standstill cease-fire. This apparently is why President Nguyen Van Thieu recently reemphasized that any cease-fire must cover all of Indochina, it must be internationally supervised, and the North Vietnamese must pull all of their forces back within their own borders.

Some 408,600 persons were officially listed under Communist control at the end of August, the most recent month for which such figures have been disclosed. This is only 2.1 per cent of South Vietnam's total of 19 million, but it is 11 times more than were listed under enemy control when the offensive began. And U.S. experts say many areas where the South Vietnamese claim to have regained the edge are actually no man's land.

One official cited coastal Binh Dinh Province, where three heavily populated districts were lost in the early days of the Communist drive. He said government troops made a token recapture of one district headquarters and then pulled out.

"**IF ANYBODY** is there now, it's the other side," he said.

In another district which government troops claim to have recaptured, no civilians have returned, he added.

South Vietnam has also suf-

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## Strategy Position

fered uncounted thousands of civilian casualties, more than one million refugees, and military casualties that far exceed any similar period of the war.

Reliable military informants place the number of government troops killed at more than 35,000 — more than twice what has been publicly acknowledged — and the wounded at well over 100,000.

Allied officials claim nearly 100,000 enemy troops have been killed, but this is based on estimates as well as body counts which also are not necessarily reliable.

Morale in some South Vietnamese military units fell dangerously low during the grimmest period of April, May and June. Military commanders say it has improved since then, largely, perhaps, as the result of the failure of the enemy siege of An Loc, the repulse of the invasion of Kontum, the forestalling of a major assault on Hue, and, most importantly, the recapture of Quang Tri, the only province capital to fall.

Some veteran observers say the fighting appears to have instilled in the South Vietnamese a greater sense of unity

any time in recent years.

**HIGHLY** visible military successes also may have strengthened Thieu's hand, some observers feel. Although there is no massive outpouring of support for the president, neither has he suffered any apparent political effects from the losses of territory or the casualties inflicted on his troops.

Thieu has used the crisis to acquire near dictatorial powers, declaring martial law, suspending the 1967 Constitution and assuming the right to

rule by decree for six months.

The six-month emergency expires Dec. 30, but political sources say the president's special powers may continue in effect unless the National Assembly rescinds them. And that could prove difficult.

The immediate concern of American and South Vietnamese commanders is the Saigon region, where the Communists apparently are readying a "spectacular" in hopes of creating election problems for Nixon. The attempt already has begun, with fighting as

close as 15 miles to the capital.

Overall, however, the consensus of military opinion appears to be that the situation is stalemated and no major changes in the status quo are likely, particularly in the northern region, where the rainy season is just beginning.

"We can expect things to remain about the same there for the next three to five months," said one senior officer. "Neither side has the muscle to fight the other and the elements, too."

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