

Hanoi Is Stressing That U.S.

Return to Strategy Used At Time of Tet Discerned

By FOX BUTTERFIELD

Special to The New York Times

SAIGON, South Vietnam, Jan. 26—In what appears to signal a switch in enemy military strategy, the North Vietnamese press and radio, have emphasized that the withdrawal of American forces has prepared the way for a big annihilating attacks" by main forces.

Intelligence analysts here, who say they have been struck by the bluntness of the Communists' language, believe that the pronouncements may indicate that Hanoi has decided to revert to the general offensive strategy it adopted at the time of the Lunar New Year offensive in February, 1968.

The 1968 attacks were preceded by a number of comments in the North Vietnamese press that the time was ripe for all-out warfare. After the Tet offensive was blocked, with the loss of thousands of the best Communist troops and leaders, Hanoi is believed to have decided to return to low-level guerrilla warfare to conserve strength.

The most significant of the recent statements, in the opinion of specialists here, was a little-noted editorial last month in Quan Doi Nhan Dan, the Army newspaper, signed Chien Thang (Victor), a pen name frequently used in the official press to indicate important policy pronouncements.

Key Role for 'Main Forces'

"In armed struggle main-force attacks have a key role," the editorial said. "The main force is the most important part of an army's combat strength in a war. These attacks are steel-like ones to annihilate the enemy in an important manner, and rapidly change the balance of forces and the situation on the battlefield."

Pointing out that American strength is below 170,000, the writer continued: "Never have the situation on the battlefield and the balance of forces been as favorable to us and unfavorable to the enemy as today."

The references in the North Vietnamese press to attacks on the main force have coincided with reports of an increasing Communist troop and supply build-up along the Ho Chi Minh trail in Laos.

According to American intelligence reports, the Communists have been moving 200 to 300 trucks a day down the trail since the dry season began last month. A North Vietnamese division has been sighted infiltrating into the border area opposite the South Vietnamese Central Highlands.

In addition, the annual North Vietnamese offensive during the dry season in Laos has been much bigger than in past years, with the Communists driving the Laotian Government forces off the strategic Plaine des Jarres in northern Laos and off the Boloven Plateau in the southern part of the country.

Major Attack Expected

American and South Vietnamese officials say they expect a major Communist attack at the time of Tet, which falls on Feb. 15 this year. But they believe that a sustained offensive will probably come later, after more Americans have been withdrawn.

The new statements are in sharp contrast to speeches two years ago by Gen. Vo Nguyen Giap, the North Vietnamese Defense Minister, who emphasized the need for a flexible policy and small-unit warfare.

In a New Year's Day broadcast, the radio of the National Liberation Front said: "Our regular troops are in good shape, have experience in big battles and are capable of launching big annihilating attacks on various battlefields."

Last week it said: "In a war the fighting capacity of an army usually is gauged through main-force battles fought by crack main-force units."

Another reason the North Vietnamese appear confident about beginning large-scale fighting again, the specialists here believe, is that the decisive defeat last year of South Vietnam's incursion into southern Laos convinced them that they had little to fear in a direct confrontation.

THE NEW YORK TIMES, THURSDAY, JANUARY 27, 1972

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1-27-72
NYT