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**Hanoi Seen  
Postponing  
Offensive**

By Philip A. McCombs  
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SAIGON — Hanoi has apparently decided against a major offensive in South Vietnam for the next six months, but it may then turn to an all-out offensive if it finds progress toward victory slow.

American Hanoi-watchers here are careful to note that North Vietnam now has the military capability to launch major attacks simultaneously across the South, but the consensus of opinion, which Washington spokesmen have noted, is that it will not do so.

A reading of the Hanoi press and of clandestine captured documents, plus the actions of Hanoi's leadership, all point in this direction, say the experts.

At the same time, they note that debate is going on over this decision, that the decision is especially unpopular in military circles in the Communist camp, and that the policy could change overnight.

South Vietnamese analysts, on the other hand, say they still expect a Communist offensive soon.

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One American here theorized that factionalism in the Communist camp due to unhappiness with the temporary decision against an offensive may have led to the apparently deliberate ambush of an unarmed American body search team last weekend.

In this view, the ambushers may have been Vietcong who favor a general offensive in the South and who wanted to take a slap at North Vietnam's desire to appear to operate within the bounds of the Paris cease-fire agreement.

The attack a week ago came just before Hanoi negotiator Le Duc Tho's Paris meeting with Henry Kissinger to discuss the crumbling agreement.

Tho and other North Vietnamese leaders have called the agreement a great victory for their side and, experts say, have a big stake in "working under the fig-leaf of the agreement" while seeking to topple the Saigon regime.

A general offensive would not fit into this approach right now, the experts say, and the ambush may have been an embarrassment that Hanoi has tried to cover by calling it retaliation for American cease-fire violations.

"No one was more appalled by it than Le Duc Tho," said one analyst.

In today's press conference of the Provisionary Revolutionary government (Vietcong) delegation to the Joint Military Team which is attempting to implement the cease-fire, a spokesman gave a lengthy explanation of the ambush as retaliation for American and South Vietnamese war crimes.

But he seemed to be at a loss when asked if the Americans were unarmed when ambushed and if the captain killed was holding up his hands to surrender. He did not answer.

"If they were planning a general offensive that wouldn't couch everything in terms of the cease-fire," said an American analyst. "They'd be saying the Americans and South Vietnamese have completely ruined the cease-fire and it is now worthless."

Less than two months ago the heating military situation here led many analysts to predict a general offensive, and a kind of offensive bandwagon, particularly among South Vietnamese spokesmen and analysts, got under way.

Now the increase in military activity still seems to dominate the South Vietnamese scene and South Vietnamese analyst still say there will be an offensive, but the Americans seem sure there will not.

Instead, the Americans see Hanoi emphasizing during the next half year the rebuilding of its battered homeland while intensifying the military conflict in the South with the aim of eventual economic and political strangulation of the Saigon government.

Experts see the Communist following a "strategic raid policy" aimed at keeping a high enough military profile to discourage long-range economic investment in South Vietnam and with specific military actions aimed at keeping rice away from the government.

Other aims of the military action are to shatter the morale of the South Vietnamese army and to gain ground and people, the experts say.

The recent destruction of the NHABE fuel depot near Saigon and the shelling of the Bienhoa and Pleiku airfields are examples of "strategic raid" actions calculated to cause a whole range of psychological and economic effects.

The continued heavy fighting in the Mekong Delta seems closely tied to the harvesting of the rice crop there now. If rice sup-

plies to Saigon dwindle seriously, fear and social discontent cannot be far behind.

Even in the big unit actions in the Central Highlands of recent weeks, the experts say, captured Communist documents show that the initial Communist tank attacks were to be considered retaliation for South Vietnamese bombing raids, and not as part of a general offensive.

The process by which the American analysts arrive at their decisions on North Vietnamese strategy involves scholarly patience in analyzing a complex web of inter-related factors. Hanoi-watching is like Kremlinology.

The most important publication in North Vietnam is *Nhan Dan* or *The People*, the official Communist Party publication. Its commentaries are an authoritative, official indication of the party line.

Recently, experts say, these commentaries have emphasized using the army to rebuild North Vietnam.

The military strategics discussions that might be expected in *Nhan Dan* if a general offensive were in the offing have been quite limited, and there have been no truly militant articles stressing military preparedness.

There has been a recent long series of military articles in *Quan Doi Nhan Dan*, or the *Peoples army*, the official armed forces newspaper, but the opinions of American analysts differ on their significance.

One analyst said the articles, written by someone using the pen name Chien Tang (the victor), have moved away from pure militarism into a discussion of how well the Communists are doing under the cease-fire accords, and including strong emphasis on the need for military discipline.

This indicates, he suggested, that someone trying to hush a militant pro-offensive line in Hanoi had been forced to cool this line and make it conform with the majority line of working under the cease-fire agreement.

Another analyst said that a study of pronoun use in these articles showed that some of them were written by Gen. Vo Nguyen Giap, Hanoi's defense minister, and that they "take a very hard line, emphasize combat readiness, all the bugle sounds."

This analyst said he thinks the articles can be used by those who still argue that there will be a general offensive, but that he himself feels other factors are more important and indicate there will not be an offensive.

Another important indicator that there will not be an offensive is the gradual surfacing here of something called "COSVN Resolution four."

COSVN is an old abbreviation for the Communist government in South Vietnam, the document is thought to reflect the official current Hanoi line as it filters down to the lower levels in the South.

The South Vietnamese have been leaking this document to the press but the government only has fragments of it from its own agents and American CIA informants who sit in on Communist cell discussions of the document and then make reports.

Thus the document is something less than perfect proof that there will be no offensive, and so the South Vietnamese government can still stick to its public line that it believes there will be an offensive.

Other indicators that there will not be an offensive are:

- Giap has dropped out of sight during the past six months. If he is ill, analysts say, it will hinder the side that favors an offensive, since he would be a strong advocate of one.

- Tho made an unprecedented television appearance in North Vietnam in

July to emphasize that the peace accords were good for the Communist side and that additional gains could be made under them.

- An order in October from the Vietcong high command in the south directed forces to repulse attacks and retaliate for cease-fire violations, specifically in rear base areas, an order that tends to support the "strategic raids" theory.

- Commentaries in Nhan Dan have been virulently anti-Nixon, thus suggesting, experts say, a fear of Mr. Nixon and what he might still do should an all-out offensive be launched. The commentaries have also warned that Mr. Nixon is seeking to befriend the So-

viet Union and China, thus suggesting a fear in Hanoi that the American policy of detente might to some extent work.

- A lack of clandestine captured documents indicating a general offensive or giving specific targets for it.

If Hanoi re-evaluates the current policy in another six months and finds that the Thieu regime is not weakening and the Communists have not made significant military gains, one expert said there is a chance that North Vietnam will turn to an all-out offensive.

Another expert said that if Hanoi did find the Thieu government weakening it would launch an offensive simply because the impulse

to finish the job off quickly would be overwhelming.

These differences of opinion are not rare among American Hanoi-watchers, and they often make the business seem a crazy one indeed.

Perhaps the strongest argument on the side of those who still think there will be an all-out offensive soon is the tremendous number of troops, tanks and weaponry that has been moved into South Vietnam since the cease-fire.

About 6,000 troops a month have come down from the north since the cease-fire, giving a total Communist troop strength in South Vietnam of between 120,000 and 225,000,

depending on whom you talk to.

There were 100 Communist tanks in South Vietnam at the time of the cease-fire and there are now thought to be more than 500.

The number of big guns in Communist hands in South Vietnam has tripled since the cease-fire, and all 12 airfields in Communist-controlled zones are heavily defended with anti-aircraft guns. At least two of the airfields are thought to be defended with sophisticated Soviet-built surface-to-air missiles. In all, Communist strength is as high as it was before the spring 1972 offensive.

"If they're not going to have a major offensive you've

got to ask yourself what they need all that stuff for," said one analyst.

However, he said he still feels there will be no immediate offensive, but that the equipment gives the Communists the option of changing their minds and going for broke at a moment's notice.

The Americans here point out that South Vietnamese predictions of an offensive must be viewed in light of the fact that there is no such thing as a South Vietnamese Hanoi-watcher in the scholarly Western sense.

"There are 17 analysts in the South Vietnamese Central intelligence organization," said one American, "and two of them watch the

VC while the others watch the Buddhists and other opposition forces."

There is also apparently a reluctance among South Vietnamese to take too deep an interest in Hanoi's ins and outs for fear of being accused of being a Communist.

Scholarship aside, no American or anyone else here is definitely ruling out the possibility of an all-out offensive, even an immediate one.

"I feel all the other side's behavior now indicates they're testing, experimenting looking for a winning combination," said one American analyst. "You'd have to be a fool to say flatly that there won't be an offensive."