

# Reds' Gains in Provinces Worry Saigon Command

NYTimes By JAMES M. MARKHAM SEP 28 / 1974  
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SAIGON, South Vietnam, Sept. 27—Though a relative lull has settled over the battlefields of South Vietnam, Communist forces appear to have achieved a critical degree of momentum in the northern and southernmost provinces that is profoundly worrying to Saigon commanders.

"The Communists have undoubtedly got the initiative," noted one highly informed Western military observer. "And once the rot sets in, it gets hard to stop. It has a snowballing effect."

The deterioration of Saigon's control is particularly noticeable in the northern provinces of Quang Ngai, Quang Nam, and, recently, Thau Thien. In the populous lower Mekong Delta incessant Communist attacks on militia outposts have seriously eroded Government control.

## Cut Into Morale

One senior Western analyst argued that "on paper" the Communist gains are not all that great. But he acknowledged that the heavy summer fighting, compounded by Congressional cuts in United States military assistance, has sharply cut into the morale of South Vietnamese commanders.

The situation in Quang Ngai is particularly disquieting to Saigon.

The South Vietnamese Second Division, not one of the army's best, has lost a series of outposts to the North Vietnamese and Vietcong throughout the summer. "They've been mauled," said one military analyst.

Saigon's forces are now defending essentially a narrow belt of highway running north and south through the province. In the coastal town of Thach By, which was briefly seized by the Communists at the time of the Jan. 23, 1973, cease-fire, soldiers can watch North Vietnamese truck convoys moving on a road parallel to Route 1.

A similar situation prevails in Quang Nam Province, which has also been the scene of heavy fighting. The 2,400-man First Airborne Regiment—perhaps the best in the South Vietnamese Army—is warily picking its way toward the rict town of Thuong Duc, 24 miles southwest of Da Nang, which fell to the Communists on Aug. 7.

But the paratroopers' progress has been halting. An earlier effort to reclaim lost

ground in Duc Duc and Que Son districts was not successful.

Quang Nam has been the testing ground for a new Communist tactic called "ho vo"—or "tiger jump"—in which political officers precede attacking troops and attempt to guide would-be refugees back into "liberated" areas, away from Government-held land. Some 20,000 people were thus shepherded into Communist-held sections of Quang Nam, according to one official estimate.

The Communists have been known to be concerned that their "liberated" areas, while vast, are thinly populated. According to some reports, the new arrivals are treated rather gently, exempt from military service and given adequate rice allowances.

August, according to official Saigon figures, proved to be the bloodiest of the "cease-fire war." Saigon forces reported 1,757 killed in action while claiming 9,111 Communists killed—a total widely believed to be inflated.

This month, 1,256 Saigon soldiers have been listed as killed in action so far—lower than the August total but on a par with the costly level of spring and summer combat.

## First Division Strained

Some military analysts expect that after this month's lull the Communists will begin to increase the pace of the fighting. North Vietnamese attacks around Hue have already strained Saigon's First Division—400 men were listed as "missing" in one engagement—and one well-placed South Vietnamese officer recently expressed concern about the security of the Hue-Da Nang highway.

"It's the beginning of some kind of isolation of Hue," the officer commented. "The odds are getting more and more against us. They have got a lot of artillery up there and they are close to their supply depots—sometimes even closer than we are."

Throughout the country, the Communists have been blowing up bridges and cutting highways temporarily. Hardly a day passes without the announcement of the destruction of a bridge.

In the lower Mekong delta, the Communists have, in the opinion of military analysts, skillfully avoided contact with major South Vietnamese units. But at the same time a steady pattern of unspectacular attacks on militia cut outposts—which never make the headlines—has curtailed the Government's influence in Kien Giang and southern Phong Dinh provinces as well as on the Vinh Binh-Vinh Long border.

Road travel any distance from district towns is reported to have become increasingly hazardous.

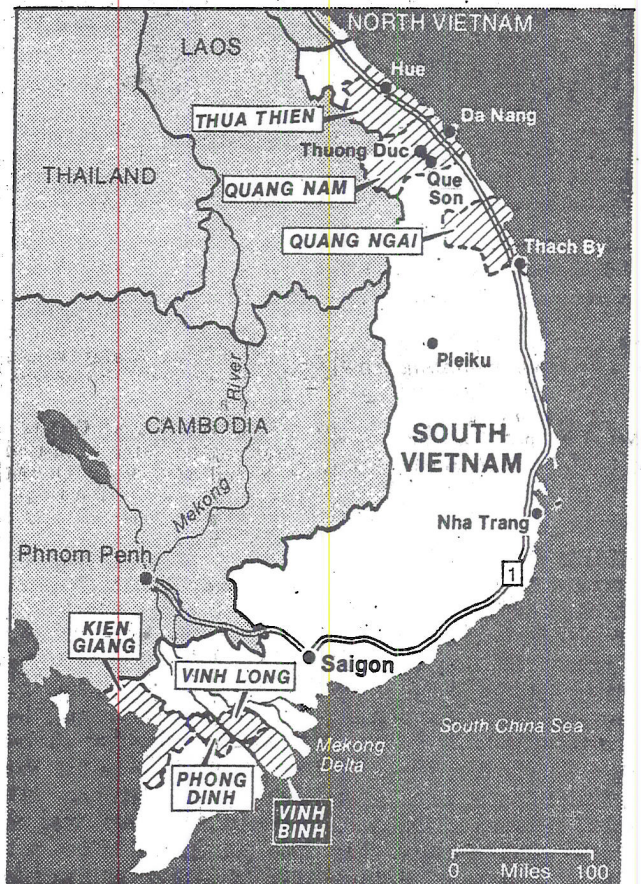
## Hanoi Says American Planes Made Reconnaissance Trips

HANOI, North Vietnam, Sept. 27 (Agence France-Presse)—American reconnaissance aircraft flew over North Vietnam twice today, including the regions near Hanoi and the port of Haiphong, the Foreign Ministry announced.

A statement said the flights "constitute a violation of the sovereignty of the Democratic Republic of Vietnam and a violation of the Paris agreements on Vietnam." It demanded the immediate end of the flights and strict application of the Paris agreements.

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Diagonal shading marks northern and southern provinces where Communists are troubling Saigon commanders.