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strategy 1 (normass/deepe)

(This is the second of a three-part series on the multi-faceted war in South Vietnam, as Washington-Hanoi peace talks begin).

SAIGON, APRIL 11--Allied commanders here believe the Communists will seek to parallel the approaching peace talks by moving towards heavier, more bitter ground fighting in the South Vietnam.

Few informed sources here foresee the possibility in the near future of the Communists agreeing at the peace table to a truce or ceasefire of hostilities in the jungles and rice paddies of the South.

In ~~the~~ the short term, many American and Vietnamese informed sources foresee the outcome of ~~more bitter~~ ^{viciously-fought battles} ~~vicious fighting~~ in the South ^{discussions} ~~the Hanoi-Washington peace talks~~ before the peace talks end the fighting here.

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strategy 2 (normass/deepe)

When asked what orders he would give his troops during a ceasefire, one senior Allied commander was startled and answered: "What do you mean?[?] We've just been planning a big offensive."

Another explained the prevailing military viewpoint this way:
"I don't think a ceasefire would be a logical thing to occur. The Communists will have to fight-talk-talk, fight and talk, like in the Korean War negotiations. ^{they'll} ~~he'll~~ do the same thing here--a long drawn-out period of talking with very heavy fighting.

"Before President Johnson's speech (on April 1, Saigon time), we thought the Communists would make another push by June--based on the time it takes them to resupply, ^{they'll} get their replacements in from North Vietnam and get ready. Now, we think ~~he'll~~ be tempted to go before that--in order to seek ~~the~~ the strongest possible bargaining position.

"But, if he does talk, the war here is a new ballgame--with ~~a~~ new ground rules, I'm sure."

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strategy 3 (normass/deepe)

Senior commanders here currently see the Allied side as "militarily over the hump"--by regaining the tactical initiative on the ground in all areas except the Mekong Delta where a "~~see-saw~~" "see-saw situation prevails." These sources are particularly pleased ~~and~~ with the offensive operation around Khe Sanh, which they view as "switching the tide in the ~~norther~~ or northern provinces," along the demilitarized zone.

However, these sources believe the Communists have the capability of sending material and men ~~from~~ into the south from North Vietnam, or across the other land borders, at an accelerated rate--and believe they are currently doing so, although with the intelligence lag in documenting infiltration rates, they ~~a~~ ^{HAVE} ~~no~~ ^{NO} repeat no statistical measure of this ~~has~~ yet ~~been~~ ~~made~~.

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strategy 4 (normass/deepe)

Informed sources here believe that since the Tet offensive began in late January, ~~since~~ the Communists have shifted both their time, ^{to H military} frames^d and their strategy. The reason for this is still unclear and topics of debate here--but these sources believe the ~~time~~ timing was once calculated to mesh with the American political party conventions and the Presidential election. ^{However,} They believe President Johnson's refusal to accept a ~~re-~~renomination may have out-dated this theory.

These sources view that the Communist timing has shifted from "a protracted war to a short-term effort," and the Communist strategy has shifted from fighting in the jungles and their remote base areas to fighting in intermediate belts around the urban centers. As a result, "they have base areas everywhere--in the jungles, in the middle areas and in the urban ~~intermediate~~ areas," one reliable source explained. "Despite the heavy losses they've taken, they are keeping their mainforce units in intermediate belts around the cities to maintain some kind of a toehold in the urban areas."

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strategy 5 (normass/deepe)

Informed sources view this as a "very, very clever strategy-- a fiendish, cynical strategy." This shift has unleashed many repercussions --if not dilemmas--upon Allied commanders, the Vietnamese population in the urban centers and for the Communists themselves.

The ~~intensity of the~~ degree of the Communist shift, and the subsequent repercussions seems to vary with different regions of the country, but is most clear-cut in the Third Corps Areas Area surrounding Saigon.

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strategy 6 (normass/deepe)

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"Last fall with the battles of Loc Ninh and Song Be, the Communists used their main force units—both Viet Cong and North Vietnamese ~~one reliable source explained,~~ mixed in—in the fringe areas along the borders." This cost ~~him dearly~~ them dearly—they were using their elite regiments against an objective which did not hurt severely the populated areas. This strategy ~~has also~~ suited the Allies fine—because we also wanted to fight him out of the populated areas where we could bring our firepower to bear on him.

"Then that changed," ~~the source continued.~~ "With Tet the Communists brought their regiments to the populated areas and fragmented them, making ~~them~~ local units of them. Since Tet, the Communist high command has given orders for these units to hold in an intermediate ring around Saigon and the other cities—and we have hurt alot of ~~of~~ these units badly. But, this shift was the one thing the Communists could have done which really hurt the Allies. This does impinge on the revolutionary development program, operating around the cities, ~~and~~ and on the security of the population in the cities too. Everything in this war stems from or centers around the security of the people."

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strategy 7 (normass/deepe)

Some sources believe this course was chosen because the Vietnamese armed ~~for~~ forces, plus large American ^{installations,} ~~installations,~~ began to smother the Viet Cong local guerrillas and political organizations operating in near the urban centers--and these needed to be reinforced by atomizing their North Vietnamese and Viet Cong main force units. Others believe American air and artillery was hurting ~~them~~ ^{THE MAIN FORCE} too badly in their remote jungled areas and they had to seek shelter around the cities. "Everyone is always using Mac-think to say the Viet Cong are using the countryside to encircle the cities," one American air officer explained. "In fact, they are using Giap-think--they are moving ~~from the~~ into the cities to escape our firepower." Others, primarily Vietnamese sources, believe the Communists are consolidating and strengthening their local guerrilla and regular military structure to mesh with political activities designed to weaken even more seriously the prestige and ^{EFFECTIVENESS} ~~competency~~ of the Vietnamese government ~~is~~ at the provincial, regional and ~~center~~ central levels.

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strategy 8 (normass/deepe)

In the Third Corps area, the 11 provinces surrounding Saigon, the Allied have adjusted to the Communist shift by ~~de-~~ conventionalizing American and Vietnamese maneuver battalions and meshing them with Popular and Regional Forces for a grand-scale, massive sweep of more than 100,000 men.

The Communist pattern holds in the other ~~corps areas~~ three other corps areas--but in more muted form. ~~In the other three corps areas, the Communist pattern is less pronounced.~~ In the top two northern provinces of Quang Tri and Thua Thien, one source explained, "there's such a narrow belt between the remote mountainous regions and the populated centers, that everything up there is Indian country,"--a popular way military way of saying the Communists are just about everywhere.

The remainder of the country, down to the lim Saigon area, seems to be broken into two tactical areas for the Communists--the mountains and ~~the~~ relatively unpopulated and the highly populated coastal region.

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strategy 9 (normass/deepe)

"In Two Corps and Upper Three corps, you have two separate areas," one source explained. "But within each area, the Communists have also shifted their tactics to follow the pattern around Saigon. In the highlands, the Communists are closing in on the cities of Kontum, Ban Me Thuot and Pleiku, rather than pulling back to their base areas or their sanctuaries in Laos and Cambodia. Along the coast, where ^{they} ~~he~~ used to be in the foothills, ^{Palomont} ~~he~~ has now come down to the coastal plain. ^{they're} ~~he~~'s not succeeding, but he's still trying to do it. In fact, this whole move to the urban areas started in the ROK (Republic of Korea) area last ~~summer~~ ^{two Corps.} fall in the coastal provinces of ~~Binh Dinh and Binh Khanh~~ ^{two Corps.} That should have given us a tip, but it didn't. The ROK's have now licked the problem by organizing the villagers. ^{they're} ~~they're~~."

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strategy 10 (normass/deepe)

In Third Corps, the Communists, formerly were holed up in War Zone C and D and Phuoc Long province, along the Cambodian border-- now they ~~have~~ ~~cons~~ have ~~constructed~~ built intermediate ~~base areas~~ zones around their heartland of Saigon. These intermediate base areas were identified as portions of Long An, ~~Binh~~ southern Binh ~~Chau~~ Duong, Bien Hoa and ~~Bia~~ Gia Dinh, the latter being the ~~donate~~ donut-shaped province surrounding the capital of Saigon.

In Four Corps, the ~~Mekong Delta~~ rice-producing, heavily populated Mekong Delta south of Saigon, the Communists have been concentrating their strength in the most populous and richest ^{upper Delta} provinces from Can Tho, Vinh Long, coast-wards towards Kien Hoa, Dinh ~~Thuong~~ Tuong and Vinh Binh--and also generally also along Highway 4--the only paved road between Saigon and the Delta. This has allowed the Communists to proceed with a policy--only partially partially successful thus far--to choke ~~off~~ ~~commerce~~ Saigon off from the produce of the Delta and prevent transport flowing the other direction.

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strategy 11 (normass/deepe)

"The Allies are over the hump, except in Four Corps. ~~We na~~
the source explained. "We have the initiate^{ive} except in the Delta where
there's a state of ~~equilibrium~~ ~~equilib~~ equilibrium.

"This is a very clever strategy (by the Communists). They
figure if they operate near the urban areas, ~~we'll~~^{they}
force our side into the same areas, ~~and~~ this would leave the countryside
bare, since the Vietnamese troops are committed to the provincial
capitals. And that's what has happened. Because the Communists are
in close, they have ~~cut~~^{disrupted} our lines of communication ~~between~~ between the
outer areas and the inner areas. Now, we are moving to get these
open, ~~and~~ we're succeeding except in Four Corps, where the roads
are cut and the waterways blocked.

"Actually, ~~there's a vacuum in the country~~ in some cases there's
a vacuum in the countryside--~~whatever units~~ whoever moves into that
vacuum can ~~have~~ have it. That's why General (William C.) Westmoreland
wants to get the Vietnamese army and revolutionary development cadre
back into the countryside to fill that vacuum. But, that's easier said
than done."

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strategy 12 (normass/deepe)

The source said the change in Communist strategy also has forced Allied commanders to bring "more destruction" on the people, "and this is a very fiendish--cynical strategy. ~~He digs~~ The Communists ~~dig~~ will move into a friendly village, occupy it, dig mortar pits --and that gives the Allied commanders the rough choice of what to do about it."

However, this strategy has also made their units more vulnerable, ^{COMMUNIST} ~~the Communists are~~ Allied sources believe, and that ~~he~~ is now in ~~a~~ ^{an} understrength ~~military~~ military stance.

"You know I'm not an official optimist," one American source explained. "But more and more since Tet, I have seen all of a sudden a cracking of the wall here that will allow us to push through. The enemy is now doing what he has never done ^{before} before--put his main force out for ^{exposed} destruction by us. ^{HE} But he has inflexible tactics and he's not going to change them to save his ~~man~~ main force. Now his main force--his backbone--is being whittled away. If this continues for four months, we can break his backbone. At the moment, his main force is bleeding to death."

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strategy 13 (normass/deepe)

units ARE pulled.
"All their main force ~~is~~ now exposed, out of their base areas and are bleeding ~~badly~~ badly," the source explained. "In February we were killing 300 ~~mi~~ main force a day, now we're ~~down~~ down to 50, but it's still significant. We are beginning to find they throw their rifles in the river and are leaving their dead and their weapons on the battlefield. This has never happened before in this corps. Last week, the Vietnamese prisoners ~~we~~ knocked out a battalion of the North Vietnamese 101st Regiment--only 50 men were left and the four prisoners said they were ordered to stay there til the last man. It was the first time in the history of the war we've ~~decime~~ decimated an enemy unit. But, the American dead in this corps has doubled too."
"Of course, the reason they're ordered to stay is for a big push next month," the source concluded. "But, I don't think by next month he'll be able to do anything significant at all."

==END REUTER.