

MINING IS TERMED '100% EFFECTIVE'

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Administration Aide Says Vessels Avoiding the Harbors Are Soviet NYTimes

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WASHINGTON, May 12—The Defense Department said today that several merchant ships on the way to North Vietnam had apparently changed course to avoid running into the American-laid mines in that country's harbors.

Jerry W. Friedheim, the Pentagon spokesman, refused to give the nationality of the ships, but an Administration official later said they were Soviet. The official said this seemed a further sign that the Soviet leaders had decided — at least for the moment — to avoid a confrontation with the United States over the sealing off of North Vietnam's harbors.

Asserting that the mining operation was so far "100 per cent effective," Mr. Friedheim also said that two or three additional ships, one or two of them Soviet, had been able to leave Haiphong harbor yesterday before the mines became operational.

Some Vessels Trapped

This meant that a total of 28 or 29 vessels remained trapped in Haiphong—the major port of the seven whose approaches have been mined.

The Pentagon announced yesterday that five merchant ships, four of them Soviet, had left Haiphong before the mines were activated at 6 A.M. Eastern daylight time. The additional two or three were added to the total after a recheck today, Mr. Friedheim said, emphasizing that they, too, had existed before the mines were activated.

Some 20 ships, about half of them Soviet, were still reported sailing in the general direction of North Vietnam. Mr. Friedheim refused to give exact details, saying that most of them were so far away that they could head anywhere.

Mine Fields Not Tested

All signs received so far in Washington indicated to Administration officials that the Soviet Union and China, North Vietnam's major allies, had decided to avoid confronting the United States over the mining.

Not only were the merchant ships not testing the minefields, but public statements issued yesterday in Peking and Moscow have been interpreted privately here by the State Department as very mild and moderate. An Administration official said that neither Communist country was threatening or even hinting at retaliating for the mining.

The Administration, however, was taking considerable care to avoid drawing attention to the Soviet and Chinese restraint. White House and State Department spokesmen were directed not to comment on the Communists' statements or to discuss publicly any diplomatic activity going on with Moscow or Peking.

There was considerable speculation here about the possibility that secret contacts were going on with the Russians or Chinese. Several middle-level State Department officials said that they could not make any solid analyses of what was going on because they were completely in the dark about whether Mr. Nixon had been in contact this week with Leonid Brezhnev, the Soviet Communist party leader.

Speculation About Aide

And as usual there was discussion about what Henry A. Kissinger, the President's peripatetic national security affairs adviser, was planning to do.

He has been to Moscow and to Paris in recent weeks on Vietnam business and there was some conjecture that he may seek out Le Duc Tho, the North Vietnamese chief negotiator, in Paris, or perhaps meet again with Mr. Brezhnev in Moscow in advance of Mr. Nixon's trip, which is now only 10 days off.

The Administration continued to make plans for the Nixon trip, but the White House continued to hesitate about announcing a firm departure time or even announcing usual pretrip information such as how many newsmen would be allowed to go.

Mr. Nixon was at his Camp David retreat in Maryland for the weekend and the White House said there would be no news briefings until Monday morning. Such extended silences during periods of international crises always lead to considerable speculation.

A well-placed Administration official said that the White House was surprised by the relatively mild Soviet response to Mr. Nixon's speech Monday night announcing the mining, among other things, since it had anticipated that Moscow would cancel the Nixon visit.

The various signals received in Washington, however, including the decision by the Kremlin to let Nikolai S. Patolichev, the Soviet Foreign Trade Minister, visit the White House yesterday, have now caused the White House to think that the trip probably will take place as planned.