

Last 2 Soviet Ships Bound for Haiphong Said to Veer Away

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WASHINGTON, May 18—The last two Soviet freighters reported approaching Haiphong have been diverted to other ports, Administration officials said today.

This was taken here as a sign that the Soviet Government is unwilling to risk a confrontation with the United States, which has mined Haiphong and six other North Vietnamese harbors, on the eve of President Nixon's scheduled visit to Moscow. Mr. Nixon is to leave here Saturday and to visit the Soviet Union for a week, beginning Monday.

Two days ago five Soviet freighters were reported to be among a total of 13 bound for Haiphong. Yesterday three Russian ships were reported diverted.

Officials said that "virtually all" the 13 ships appeared to have been ordered toward other ports. Some may enter south China ports if they maintain their present course, officials said.

Some officials suggested that

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the diversions might indicate an expectation by the Soviet Union and its allies that Mr. Nixon is planning to ease actions against North Vietnam during his visit.

These sources noted that Chankiang, once known as Fort Bayard, on the eastern side of the Liuchiao Peninsula has an excellent roadstead and a railhead and is about 140 miles from the North Vietnamese border. Some of the diverted ships may put in here, they said.

Experts on naval mines said today that the United States Seventh Fleet operating off Vietnam had needed "at least two weeks" to train A-6 and A-7 carrier pilots and crews to carry out President Nixon's order of May 8 to mine the harbors and territorial waters of North Vietnam.

"This would have coincided with Kissinger's visit to Moscow," one ranking official said. "It seems increasingly probable that the Russians were warned privately about the decision to mine—and that's why they've reacted so quietly."

He referred to Henry A. Kissinger, Mr. Nixon's assistant for national security, who visited Moscow from April 20 to 24. The administration has disclosed virtually no details of his talks. Shortly after his visit, however, the Vietnamese peace talks in Paris were resumed and then broken off. Within days, Mr. Nixon announced his new military actions, including the mining.

Contention Is Discounted

Mine experts here discounted North Vietnamese contentions that mines dropped at Haiphong and other ports had been deactivated and that one East Ger-

man ship, the Frieden, had safely crossed the minefield.

"There are basically three types of sophisticated mines in our inventory — acoustical, pressure and magnetic," one expert said. "We're using magnetic for the time being—but you can combine all three types in one container."

Acoustical mines are activated by the sound of ships machinery or propellers, while pressure mines explode when water pressures in the area vary or a ship passes.

The mines laid by the Grumman A-6 and A-17 carrier planes on May 8, he said, were "preset" to explode at the passage of a substantial body of steel, such as a ship's hull, which creates a magnetic field. Even a specially designed United States minesweeper would find passage hazardous, he said.

"Magnetic mines have an effective radius of about 150

feet," another source said. "The Haiphong Channel is about 60 feet deep. Our mines have built-in computers that can turn them on and off—and they can be programmed to turn on so many times then shut themselves off permanently so they're not a danger in years ahead. We call this 'sterilizing.'"

Radio Control Difficult

Technical experts said that once the mines are "pre-set" there is virtually no way to deactivate them until their routine has been completed.

"Radio signals don't pass easily through water, so it's virtually impossible to control these things from the air, from the land or even from submarines," one specialist said. "And we're not going to risk submarines around Haiphong right now—that's for sure."

The Soviet fleet is estimated to have 35 to 40 minesweepers at Vladivostok, its main Pacific base, and the Chinese southern fleet is reported to have 10 minesweepers, these sources said. But so far, they said, there are no signs of sweepers moving toward North Vietnam. The four North Vietnamese sweepers are believed unserviceable.

"The Russians might fly some specially trained frogmen or underwater demolition teams to Haiphong and turn them loose," said one expert. "But clearing those mines would be risky as hell—even for our own experts."

"Even once they've turned themselves off it would take us two to three days—maybe 10 to 12 sweeps—to clear a safe channel and place buoys and then send a ship of our own up to show everyone it's safe," the expert said.