

Deal on Secret Sessions Led to New Peace Talks

[Companion story by Bernard Gwertzman, "Moscow Role Reported," pasted separately; this file.]

Soviet Aid Said to Rise

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Special to The New York Times

WASHINGTON, April 28 — Pentagon officials reported today that the Soviet Union in recent days had doubled the number of ships delivering arms, ammunition and gasoline to North Vietnam.

In addition, the officials said in interviews, two Soviet minesweepers recently sailed from the port of Vladivostok in the Soviet Far East in what might be intended as a signal that if the United States is considering placing mines in Haiphong harbor, as has been reported, the Soviet Union is prepared to contest such a move.

Nixon Administration officials have said that they would not rule out the possibility that the United States might try to close North Vietnam to supply by sea by mining or blockading Haiphong and lesser harbors if Hanoi persisted in its current offensive.

Commanders in the area have reportedly moved additional mines to naval units off North Vietnam in case Presi-

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dent Nixon suddenly order a mining operation. But, knowledgeable sources say, the prospect of such a development is considered small.

The sources express doubt that so direct a challenge to the Soviet Union would be made just before the President's scheduled trip to Moscow next month.

Before the North Vietnamese invasion of South Vietnam four weeks ago, officials here said, about 12 Soviet-bloc freighters and tankers were in the Haiphong area at any given time.

They said that number had recently risen to more than two dozen. Some of the freighters, it was said, had crates on their decks that appeared to be carrying surface-to-air missiles.

It is estimated that North Vietnam has fired from 600 to 800 Sam-2 missiles at American and South Vietnamese aircraft over the last few weeks, presumably decreasing their stocks of these weapons significantly.

Administration officials had hoped that the United States' resumption of heavy bombing in North Vietnam and the recent talks between Henry A. Kissinger, the President's national security adviser, and Soviet leaders in Moscow would persuade the Russians that the situation in Vietnam was becoming more perilous and that Hanoi should be urged to place greater emphasis on negotiations and less on combat to achieve its ends.

But the reported speed-up of supplies to Hanoi suggests to analysts that, for the time being at least, Moscow is showing no sign of attempting to diminish Hanoi's ability to continue its offensive operations throughout South Vietnam.

At the same time, North Vietnam is reportedly shifting elements of two more divisions—one in North Vietnam and the other in northern Laos, adding to apprehension here that it might send additional troops into the fighting in coming days.

Administration sources said that since Moscow must be aware that the United States is unlikely to bomb Haiphong again, at least until the renewed peace negotiations in Paris are given a chance, the Russians appear to be taking advantage of the situation to speed the shipment of war supplies to North Vietnam.

"It's also possible, one defense planner suggested that by clogging Haiphong harbor with ships flying the Russian flag, they want to inhibit us from striking the port again for fear of hitting

their ships."

Indications that North Vietnam may be planning to introduce additional combat units into South Vietnam have reportedly increased in recent days. Analysts have said that part of the headquarters element of the 325-C Division, the last combat division remaining in North Vietnam, has been moving toward the border between North and South Vietnam. The remainder of the division is said to be 20 to 40 miles from the demilitarized zone.

In the past, when the North Vietnamese were preparing to move a division southward, they always moved part of the headquarters forward first to prepare the way for the rest of the division, analysts said.

In addition, the North Vietnamese 312th Division, one of two divisions in northern Laos, has reportedly started to move. The analysts said they were not sure whether the division would return to North Vietnam

to provide reserve strength at home or whether it would be shipped into the fighting in South Vietnam.

"Le Duc Tho is expected to appear in Paris for new negotiations in about a week," one senior Administration planner said. "No doubt they'd very much like to improve their position on the battlefield to strengthen their bargaining hand."

Le Duc Tho, a member of North Vietnam's Politburo, has been a central figure in previous negotiations.

Meanwhile, military sources say that at least two new weapons have appeared in enemy hands during the current offensive. One is said to be a Soviet wire-guided anti-tank rocket, the other a Chinese improvement of the Soviet PT-76 light tank. The Chinese tank is said to have heavier armor and a bigger gun than the Soviet model, which also is being extensively used in the South.