

# U.S. Asserts Marines Might Land To Help Evacuate Threatened Troops

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WASHINGTON, May 5—The Defense Department held out a possibility today that United States Marines might be landed in South Vietnam to protect withdrawing American forces.

While Pentagon officials said that no such action was planned at the moment, the statement was a distinct modification of recent Administration pledges that American ground troops would not be reintroduced into South Vietnam under any circumstances.

There are 5,000 marines aboard the American warships stationed in the Gulf of Tonkin off the Vietnamese coast. When Jerry W. Friedheim, the Pentagon spokesman, was asked at a briefing today whether these troops might be sent ashore to help evacuate a threatened American unit, he replied:

"I would not want to preclude anything that General Abrams might do to protect withdrawing Americans."

Gen. Creighton W. Abrams is the commander of United States forces in South Vietnam.

### No Major Reintroduction

But Mr. Friedheim quickly added that no major reintroduction of American forces was contemplated, despite the current enemy offensive.

"It is not our intention to resume ground combat responsibility," he said. "We are going to meet the President's goal of reducing American strength in Vietnam to 49,000 men by July 1."

Within that ceiling, however, he said the proportion of combat units providing security around the major American installations might be increased.

"General Abrams might decide to replace a company of cooks with a rifle company," another Defense official said, "if the situation gets bad enough."

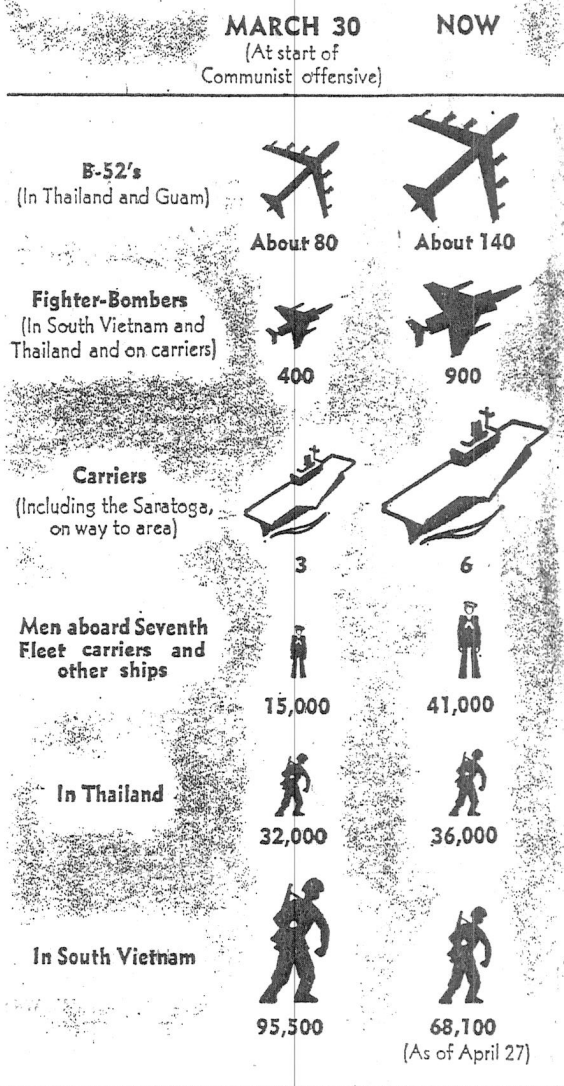
Six battalions, something less than 6,000 men, are providing this security. Mr. Friedheim made it clear that these units would continue performing that role and might be relieved, if necessary, by a rotation force from outside of South Vietnam.

He also said that the United States was reactivating the Ta Khli Air Base in Thailand to accommodate the warplanes that have been sent to the war zone in recent days. In the latest increase, 50 or more fighter-bombers were ordered to Indochina yesterday, raising the total American air strength there to nearly 1,000 combat aircraft.

The Ta Khli base, one of six the United States has developed in Thailand since 1965, was closed last year after several squadrons of American planes were withdrawn.

The continuing build-up of American air strength, combined with the negotiating stalemate that appears to have deepened in recent days, has led many observers here to expect

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an imminent intensification of the bombing of North Vietnam.

Speaking privately, many Government officials expressed the view today that such raids would be carried out shortly, perhaps over the weekend.

### Peace Plan Denied Again

Meanwhile, a spokesman at the State Department denied again today that the United States had proposed either a limited cease-fire or a coalition Government in Saigon as elements in a peace agreement.

It was the second time this week that the Nixon Administration had denied reports that Washington and Hanoi were approaching agreement.

Today's denial came in response to a report from the Washington correspondent of France-Soir, published today in the mass-circulation Paris daily. It said that secret negotiations were under way between the United States and North Vietnam.

Without denying that there might have been private contacts in Paris this week, Charles W. Bray 3d, the spokesman, said the accounts of a coalition proposal were "simply not true."

"We have made no such offer in recent days," he said. "Nor has a cease-fire been proposed,

other than the all-Indochina cease-fire that President Nixon called for in his Jan. 25 speech."

Conceding that no progress had been achieved at Paris, Mr. Bray said that despite the United States' suspension of the negotiating sessions yesterday, "we remain prepared to return to the plenary sessions when the other side gives us a signal that we can expect something reasonable to come out of such talks."

### Stresses U.S. Flexibility

Mr. Bray's emphatic denials of the reports of an impending peace agreement seemed intended at least in large part to reassure the South Vietnamese Government and people.

At the same time, he seemed anxious to stress the flexibility of the American position—perhaps for the North Vietnamese.

He recalled to newsmen that the eight-point proposal by President Nixon in January included a provision for the resignation of President Nguyen Van Thieu and the appointment of an electoral commission to oversee national elections within 30 days.

"These and the other eight points are indeed flexible and were designed to be accommodating when they were made," he said.