

# N. Viets

OCT 31 1972

## Alerted to

## Withdraw

10/31/72 JW

By Michael Getler

Washington Post Staff Writer

SAIGON, Oct. 30—North Vietnam began alerting some of its forces during September and early October that they may be withdrawn from South Vietnam as part of a future cease-fire agreement, according to U.S. official sources here.

Lack of any requirement for North Vietnamese withdrawal in the proposed peace agreement—at least the version of it made public so far—is a major sticking point for the South Vietnamese.

President Nguyen Van Thieu and his Saigon government are demanding a North Vietnamese pullout as part of the terms for settlement of the war.

The reported North Vietnamese withdrawal alert—described as Communist “contingency plans” by U.S. intelligence—suggests that there may be room for concessions by the Hanoi regime on this important point, or that concessions may already have been made.

Only the general outline of the proposed peace agreement has been made public. In some accounts here, the nine-point agreement announced by Hanoi last Thursday and confirmed in essence by White House adviser Henry Kissinger is said actually to contain more than 30 points.

A willingness by Hanoi to make at least a partial withdrawal might help soften some of the Saigon government's current opposition to the proposed settlement and bolster the public image of President Thieu.

However, a limited withdrawal of the type referred to in the reported Hanoi alerts may not totally satisfy the Saigon regime and could be

See PULLOUT, A14, Col. 3

### PULLOUT, From A1

viewed as of only limited military significance.

Documents from the Communist command headquarters referring to preparations for possible withdrawals first surfaced in mid-September, according to intelligence sources. The documents were attributed to the Central Office for South Vietnam (COSVN), the Communist military command center for the war in the South, and were reportedly addressed to a regimental commander operating in the Mekong Delta. Normally, North Vietnamese regiment at full strength is about 2,900 men.

#### Directive for Quangtri

In early October, a similar directive is said to have been addressed to a larger concentration of North Vietnamese forces around the Quangtri area in Military Region 1, the northernmost section of South Vietnam.

The Quangtri document reportedly called for planning for the possible withdrawal of about two-thirds of the North Vietnamese main force strength in the area, reckoned at roughly five divisions. The other one-third of the force would remain in the South.

Given the relatively fixed battle lines in Quangtri, where the war has been fought along almost conventional lines, Hanoi could probably bring home a considerable part of its force from the area it occupies without losing any military advantage in a cease-fire.

Smaller North Vietnamese units scattered around more populated sections of the country would be more of a problem for the Saigon regime if there is a cease-fire “in place.”

Larger-sized elements of the North Vietnamese army are already reported to be breaking down into small platoons and squads. These can dominate hamlets and villages in strategic areas, but they are more difficult to detect.

Another mid-October directive from Communist headquarters is said to have informed unit commanders throughout the South that the entire question of withdrawal was still to be settled. Sources here suggest that the question may still be open.

Thus far, both U.S. military and intelligence sources here say there is no evidence that Hanoi has actually begun to withdraw any of these forces. Military observers here believe it is unlikely that any such movement would precede a final agreement. Even if a withdrawal had begun, observers say it would be hard to detect.