

# N. Viets Continue Arming

## Pentagon Says Some Troops Crossed DMZ

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Sizable numbers of North Vietnamese troops, armored vehicles and supplies continue to move toward, and in some cases into, South Vietnam, the Pentagon said yesterday.

The movements are described by administration officials as a source of "substantial concern" within the White House, though there is only speculation at this point as to Hanoi's motives and the long-term military significance of the supply effort.

Since the first of this year, it is estimated that roughly 30,000 fresh troops, crew-served weapons and more than 300 armored vehicles—including large numbers of light tanks—have moved southward mostly through the Ho Chi Minh Trail in Laos to areas in southern Laos, Cambodia and just north of the demilitarized zone in North Vietnam.

Defense officials say that as has always been the case in Vietnam, the troop and tank estimates are very rough at best. But there reportedly is evidence that at least several thousand troops have actually moved into South Vietnam in recent weeks—since the Jan. 28 cease-fire agreements were signed—entering all four military regions throughout the country.

Thus far, only a small number of tanks has been identified as actually moving into the south from neighboring areas, but considerable truck traffic across the DMZ is being reported.

In answering questions on the continuing infiltration effort yesterday, Pentagon spokesman Jerry W. Friedheim declined to speculate on why the administration has made no sharp public protest to Hanoi over these apparent cease-fire violations as it did a few weeks ago when the release of prisoners of war ap-

peared to be in jeopardy.

Friedheim ducked a direct answer, indicating that this was a question for the "diplomatic arena" which went beyond the Pentagon, but he strongly implied that the continuing prisoner release was the principal issue getting attention at present.

While all U.S. actions are aimed at gaining adherence to the cease-fire, Friedheim said, "in particular we are striving during these weeks to assure adherence to the POW protocols. All of our efforts are designed with that in mind."

The continuing North Vietnamese infiltration, however, has implications beyond the POW release, raising questions about what the administration will do after all the

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POWs are out by the end of this month.

Administration officials also say it will be even harder than it looks now to get approval for economic aid to North Vietnam if the troop and arms movements continue.

Few officials express a fear that North Vietnam is planning any major offensive soon after the last U.S. troops leave and all prisoners are returned. The most widely held view is that Hanoi is "keeping its options open" with respect to its future position in the South.

White House and Pentagon officials point out that much of the troop and supply movement—especially the dispatch of the tanks—was set in motion along the Ho Chi Minh Trail in the weeks immediately preceding the actual cease-fire, especially after the heavy U.S. bombing in December.

A lot of what is now arriving in Laos, Cambodia and South Vietnam after weeks of moving southward is described by officials as undoubtedly part of this pre-cease-fire "momentum." Thus, a number of government analysts believe that it may take another month or so to see if Hanoi has in fact begun to reduce its arms flow to the south and to adjust to the Jan. 27 agreements which prohibit such rearmament except on an internationally monitored, one-for-one replacement basis.

Pentagon sources say that the tank flow appears to be tapering off since the cease-fire.

The range of speculation concerning North Vietnam's intentions runs from the prospect that Hanoi may want to beef up some positions to prevent their being overrun by Saigon's forces, to the possibility that the Communist leadership has simply not made up its mind what its future actions will be and has decided that it has more flexibility by

keeping its troops and tanks in or near the south.

Hanoi may rationalize the additional men and munitions as replacements for those being lost in the continued fighting—though no tanks are being lost—or as a bargaining chip in future negotiations over mutual troop reductions.

It had been anticipated that Hanoi would attempt to take some advantage of the immediate post cease-fire period, before international control teams were able to operate effectively.

"But the longer it continues,

the tougher it is for us to explain," one official said. "Replacements are one thing, but a buildup is another. It's still too early to panic though," he added.

As for the prospects of a new offensive, some analysts suggest that the ability of Hanoi to move supplies down the trail faster now because U.S. bombing has stopped in Laos is more than off-set by the loss of experienced combat leaders among Communist forces.

Aside from those lost in last year's major offensive, officials say many others were

lost around the time of the cease-fire "when the Vietcong stuck its head up."

Overall troop and supply movement, Friedheim said yesterday, has been about the same thus far into the 1972-73 dry season along the trail as it was during 1971-72. The current dry season normally ends around May.

The only official U.S. protest on infiltration made public thus far came at Paris late last month at a time when the White House reacted strongly to the prospect of a delay in further POW release.