

Administration Aides Say North Has Sent Over 300 Tanks South

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WASHINGTON, March 16—Administration analysts say that most of the more than 300 tanks and hundreds of artillery pieces that have poured down the Ho Chi Minh Trail in recent months are now either in South Vietnam or poised along its borders.

In addition, the analysts say that intercepted directives to Communist troops throughout the South, as well as private comments by North Vietnamese diplomats in various posts, suggest that an offensive is planned in South Vietnam in the summer or fall, after American troops have left.

In his news conference yesterday President Nixon labeled the movement of tanks and guns toward South Vietnam as a violation of the cease-fire agreement and warned: "I would only suggest that, based on my actions over the past four years, that the North Vietnamese should not lightly disregard such expressions of concern."

Intelligence analysts say that with the beginning of the dry season last October along the Ho Chi Minh Trail network in Laos, the North Vietnamese started a major movement of supply trucks, armor, field and antiaircraft artillery and manpower toward South Vietnam. At the time, the analysts say, Hanoi expected to have a cease-fire agreement by Oct. 31.

The flow has continued unabated, the officials say, and is at least as large as the supply effort a year ago, before the spring offensive in South Vietnam. The level of infiltration is larger than that in either of the two previous dry seasons, 1969-1970 and 1970-1971, the analysts say.

"It wasn't apparent at first whether this surge was designed principally to replenish depleted stockpiles of weapons in base areas in Laos or Cambodia, or whether it was headed for South Vietnam," one analyst said. "There is no longer any doubt—most of the gear is either in Vietnam or right along the border available for use there."

He said, for example, that about 60 to 80 tanks had been moved into Tay Ninh Province, northwest of Saigon, and into base camps just across the border in Cambodia.

"At the height of last year's offensive against An Loc," he added, "the Communists had only about 25 tanks in that area. And they had only captured artillery; now they have long-range 130-mm. artillery that will outrange anything the South Vietnamese have in that region."

The official said that the heaviest concentration of tanks and artillery had been moved in the Ashau Valley, southwest of Hue, and near Khesanh, the old Marine base in northern Quang Tri Province.

Another official said the North Vietnamese were believed to have 300 to 500 tanks in South Vietnam or just across the border. "That's as large or larger than what they employed last year, the first time they used tanks extensively in the south," he said.

In addition, officials said, orders have gone out to Vietcong and North Vietnamese units throughout South Vietnam to limit their activities before March 28, when the last Americans are scheduled to have left, to mortar and terror attacks and the building up their strength. They have been told to be prepared to resume open warfare later on in the year, these officials said.

The President's remarks at the news conference yesterday, together with private representations to North Vietnam, the Soviet Union and China to which Mr. Nixon referred, officials said, are part of an effort to dissuade Hanoi from continuing to prepare for, or carry out, a major new offensive.

The fact that officials have been more willing to discuss this situation with reporters is also believed to be part of the campaign.