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Recon Planes Spot Supply Buildup in N. Viet

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SAIGON — Secretary of the Air Force Robert C. Seamans Jr. revealed Thursday that reconnaissance aircraft have discovered an extensive buildup in enemy supplies throughout the southern portion of North Vietnam and said the war is entering a critical period.

"We noticed during the past rainy season that they did not, as in previous years, fully pull out their support people along the Ho Chi Minh trail," Seamans said. "They were keeping the road built up and, as a matter of fact, improving it," he added at a press conference here.

While declining to detail strategy, the secretary said "Our plan is to make it difficult or impossible for them to get their supplies down the trail.

"So far we haven't seen enough to know what's really going to happen. The North Vietnamese have been hampered by very heavy rains so we are just at the beginning of a critical period. I really think it's too soon to try and make projections on what's going to happen in the next six months," he said.

Seamans said that at present, the Communists "have not been able to move

a very significant amount of supplies over these routes."

He said the Ho Chi Minh trail would be one of the primary objectives in the months ahead.

"This is a very crucial time in the air war," Seamans stressed. "As a result of the Cambodian campaign, a large number of supplies have been wiped out. . . . They must get in rather major increases in ammunition and supplies.

"They no longer have this year the alternative they had last year in using the forests of Cambodia to hoard their supplies," he said.

Seamans said the effort to modernize

the Vietnamese Air Force "has convinced me this program is solidly based and progressing, if anything, ahead of schedule."

Responding to a query about the types of aircraft to be given to the Vietnamese government, Seamans said the Vietnamese would be given jet fighters capable of dealing with MIG21 planes.

"Our intent is that they will have a plane for in-country operation that could, if necessary, have an air superiority role vis-a-vis with the MIG21," he said.

Seamans, who spent three days in Vietnam, left for Thailand after the news conference.