

Toward a Moscow-Peking Axis?

By Drew Pearson

The second big question which American ambassadors to Pacific nations, meeting in the Philippines this week, are debating is whether the U.S. retaliatory air raids on North Viet-Nam have pushed the two bitter factions of the Communist world together.



Pearson

If so, this could set back one of the greatest American diplomatic triumphs of the decade and unite Chinese manpower with Russian nuclear power in an unbeatable threat to the peace.

The American ambassadors know that previously Moscow had called a meeting of European Communist nations to try to work out the problems of Chinese-Russian friction. They also know that most of the European Communist leaders did not want to get in the middle of this row. Only the Bulgarians and the East Germans failed to protest.

They also know that, for the past year, President Johnson and Premier Khrushchev had made amazing progress in getting the two nations together and that this had continued under Kosygin and Brezhnev.

And they know that simultaneously the animosity be-

tween Moscow and Peking had increased almost to white heat.

Will all this be reversed by the bombing raids over North Viet-Nam? That is the big question.

Secret Harmony

The diplomats obviously know considerably more than the American public about recent harmony between the Kremlin and the White House. It began when the President overrode right wing congressional objections to selling wheat to Russia in December, 1963, and was further emphasized by Mr. Johnson's reduction of 26 surplus military bases and a cut of 21,000 civilian defense personnel, announced Dec. 7, 1963, followed by Khrushchev's announcement Dec. 14 of a cut in the Russian military budget.

Later, in April, 1964, President Johnson cut back our plutonium and enriched uranium stockpiles 20 per cent and 40 per cent respectively, and Khrushchev matched this cut the same day. In May, the two men worked out an informal plan to avoid the danger of having U.S. observation planes shot down over Cuba. They also agreed on a treaty providing for the opening of more consulates in each country.

After Khrushchev left office, the New Kremlin leaders indicated they wanted to continue this informal coopera-

tion. So before Kosygin made his speech to the Supreme Soviet on the arms budget, he had his ambassador in Washington call at the State Department to see what U.S. arms cuts were going to be, if any.

He got a reply which enabled Kosygin to tell the Supreme Soviet that Russia was cutting its arms budget and he had reason to believe that the United States was cutting by a similar proportion.

Finally the Kremlin agreed to Mr. Johnson's invitation, publicly issued, to exchange visits.

Peking Fumes

Meanwhile Peking was fusing and fuming. The Chinese had called Khrushchev a "psalm-singing tool of American imperialism," and it was partly to try to improve Chinese-Russian relations that the Presidium had kicked him out.

So when the new Kremlin leaders began warming up to Mr. Johnson, Chinese attacks against Kosygin and Brezhnev took on the same bitter tone. Radio Peking began demanding once again the return of the Siberian maritime provinces on the ground that they had been wrested from China by the Czars.

Siberia or Viet-Nam?

Basically the trouble in North Viet-Nam boils down to

a Chinese push for more room. With around 700,000,000 people bulging China's borders, Peking figures it must expand its influence into the small rice-growing countries to the South or else up into the wide-open wheat-growing areas of Siberia.

I have traveled along this Siberian-Chinese border and marveled at the fact that the Chinese have not burst into it before this. The fact that they are moving South, through Viet-Nam, therefore, is a plus for Moscow. It relieves pressure on Siberia.

It is all the more reason why the new leaders of the Kremlin should try to forget their quarrel with Peking and use the excuse of the recent American bombing raids to rush back into the arms of their old Chinese Communist ally.

If China's vast manpower should unite with Russian nuclear know-how, it would make a combination which not even the strength of the United States could beat.

This is the most dangerous possibility stemming from our retaliatory raids over North Viet-Nam, and this is one of the imponderables the ambassadors meeting in the Philippines will try to decide.