

Kremlin Policy Goal: Leverage for Summit

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Special to The New York Times

MOSCOW, April 23 — While world attention has been focused on the American-Soviet confrontation over the Haiphong raids, the Kremlin has quietly been bolstering its position elsewhere in the world to gain bargaining leverage for President Nixon's scheduled visit next month. Well-placed Russians say that Premier Fidel Castro of Cuba will be here in mid-May, shortly before Mr. Nixon—a not so gentle reminder to Washington of its vulnerability in Latin America.

News Analysis

The timing is especially propitious for the Kremlin in view of the Nixon Administration's recent clashes with Peru and other Latin-American nations over whether to maintain sanctions against the Castro Government.

Moscow's denunciations of China have virtually ceased over the past month and the chief Soviet negotiator on border issues, Leonid I. Ilyichev, went back to Peking amid signs that more significant bargaining with the Chinese leaders was foreseen.

Whatever the outcome, one evident intention is to neutralize the trump card of President Nixon's dramatic visit to Peking by demonstrating that China-Soviet relations are really not all that bad.

Pressure on Western Oil

In the border lands to the south, the Soviet leadership has recently reached out to put more pressure on Western oil supplies and to assert influence on the exposed southern flank of the North Atlantic Treaty Organization.

Well-placed diplomats disclosed that President Nikolai V. Podgorny tried during his recent visit to Ankara to persuade the Turks to sign a treaty of consultation with the Soviet Union. Turkey, an active member of NATO, balked at that, but Mr. Podgorny did achieve a breakthrough in getting her to sign a joint declaration "on the principles of good-neighborly relations."

Though the Ankara Government insisted on language stressing that the declaration "in no way affects the commitments assumed earlier by either side," the point was made that Washington had better be mindful of Moscow's growing influence with the Turks.

In Iraq, the Soviet leaders scored their signal success of the spring with the conclusion of a treaty of friendship and an even deeper involvement in the Iraqi oil industry. The treaty, patterned after the one the Soviet Union signed with India last fall, calls for consultations on defense.

Of great concern to Western European diplomats is the expanding Soviet role in the nationalized sector of the Iraqi oil industry. It is too soon, they say, to predict the international impact, but some foresee a day when the Soviet-Iraqi combina-

tion—a pattern that may be tried in Libya as well—will lead to nationalization of Western oil interests in several Arab states. Washington must be aware that its European allies are clearly uncomfortable at that prospect.

Lest the significance of Soviet-Iraqi political and defense consultations be discounted, the Kremlin sent a naval squadron into the Iraqi port of Umm Qasr, on the Persian Gulf, on April 11, the day after Premier Aleksei N. Kosygin returned from a triumphant visit to Iraq.

Despite such gains, the North Vietnamese offensive in South Vietnam and the sharp American counterblows have made the next month, leading to the Nixon visit, an extremely delicate time for Soviet diplomacy.

The assessment of experienced Western diplomats here is that the Kremlin is pleased to see the President on the defense—especially if the Vietcong were to hoist their flag over a provincial city like Anloc—and, theoretically, under more compulsion to compromise when and if he gets to Moscow. But the diplomats are skeptical that the Russians instigated the offensive for that purpose.

Rather, they see Hanoi calling the signals both to embarrass Mr. Nixon before his visit and to demonstrate to all concerned, Moscow and Peking included, that no outside power can impose terms or arrange a settlement until it is ready.

According to what American officials have said privately in recent months, Moscow and Washington agreed to the summit meeting in the expectation that the other side would pursue its long-standing policies in Vietnam. In fact, President Podgorny was in Hanoi last October to conclude a new arms deal just as the Soviet invitation to President Nixon was being made public, and Washington raised no overriding objections.

It is taken for granted among the Western diplomats, moreover, that Moscow, as Hanoi's major source of arms, was fully aware of its strategy. They maintain that the Kremlin must have anticipated sharp American retaliation and was prepared to weather it, or at least some of it.

So far that thesis has held. The Kremlin has given ample evidence that it is eager to go through with the visit, even at the risk of appearing more eager than the White House.

Criticism Was Low-Key

The Russians have chosen so far not to use the Vietnam escalation as a pretext for breaking off preparations for the visit. Indeed, the protest over the Haiphong raid, given the damage to four Soviet ships, was relatively moderate by past standards. And well-placed diplomats indicated that the Russians regarded the American reply as equally moderate for the circumstances.

The first criticism of American actions since the Hanoi and Haiphong raids from a member of the ruling Politburo was low-key. Without mentioning the raids or referring to the damage to the Soviet vessels, Fyodor D. Kulakov, a party secretary, said the Soviet people "angrily condemn" the new bombing; implicitly treating the Nixon visit as still on, he sought to reassure the Soviet Union's allies that it was not developing cooperation with the United States and other capitalist countries at their expense.

Even the return to Moscow

of the chief Soviet negotiator at the strategic arms talks in Helsinki preceded the Hanoi-Haiphong raids. Thus, his extended stay here and cancellation of two plenary negotiating sessions is taken at this time as a reflection of serious internal Soviet discussion on terms of an arms arrangement rather than open pressure on Mr. Nixon to give up bombing the north.

For the Soviet leaders, the visit is more than a matter of prestige and an opportunity for bargaining on strategic arms, trade, space cooperation and the Middle East. It has become inextricably bound up with other elements of the policy of détente.

For the present, events in Vietnam are strangely linked with events in West Germany. So vital is ratification of the Soviet-West German nonaggression treaty to Moscow's European policy that Western diplomats reason that the Kremlin call ill afford the all-out confrontation with the West that would arise from canceling the Nixon visit before the vote in the Parliament in Bonn next month.

Chancellor Willy Brandt's precarious majority in favor of

ratification has been bolstered by Washington's support for the treaty. The presumption among diplomats here is that the Russians must worry that American support might be withdrawn or fatally reduced—and

ratification thus jeopardized—if the visit was called off out of a sense of solidarity with Hanoi over some further American raid.

Much of the general Soviet policy of easing tensions with

the West rides, then, on Moscow's keeping cool over Vietnam even as it continues its moral and material support for Hanoi. No one here pretends to know the limits of the Kremlin's tolerance.