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Nixon's Pax Americana

By GADDIS SMITH

NEW HAVEN, Conn.—Outrage over the new American escalation by bombing and mining of North Vietnam has unfortunately inhibited analysis of American strategy. The President's decision to concentrate available air and naval power from all over the world in the vicinity of Vietnam was in all probability made coolly and unemotionally in the White House and not, as some have suggested, as the frustrated response of a man prone to temper tantrums.

No President since Theodore Roosevelt has been as concerned with sea-power as Mr. Nixon. There may even be position papers arguing that he who controls the Straits of Malacca controls the world, with the issue of control argued in terms of the United States or the Soviet Union. The President's effort to "tilt" in favor of Pakistan and against India during December, 1971, was based primarily on fear of Soviet naval power in South and Southeast Asia. The Nixon Doctrine, whatever else it may mean, entails greater, not less, American naval power.

The trip to Peking had many purposes but the most important was to create a loose, informal alignment of the United States and China against Soviet influence along the southern rim of Asia. No one should be deceived by the excessive denials in the American portion of the Chinese-American communiqué on the trip or in the President's 1972 "state of the world" report.

But what good is an alignment in the grand old game of balance of power if you can't get a pay-off? For the President and Mr. Kissinger the pay-off is the end of Soviet support for North Vietnam. The purpose of the escalation—conveniently and plausibly represented as a righteous response to North Vietnamese aggression—is less to end the war than to cause the Soviet Union to retreat from an alliance and thereby recognize American hegemony in Southeast Asia and status as the first world power.

Ever since the United States first supported the French in Indochina in 1950, American policy has been cast in global terms. It has not changed, despite the President's repeated statements that the postwar era is over. Officially the United States says that

Soviet forbearance is a key to ending the fighting in Vietnam. It would be more accurate to say that an end to the fighting in Vietnam on American terms is a key to strategic goals toward the Soviet Union.

American terms for ending the fighting are an entrenched Saigon regime with American equipment and advisers and American airpower available on ten minutes call. Meanwhile the North, smashed into submission and deprived of outside support, is to be docile and silent. The foes of Saigon in the South are to be "pacified."

According to this scenario, Moscow will acquiesce because it fears the alignment of the United States and China. The Soviet naval presence in South Asian waters will subside. The American Navy will confidently rule the waves and launch the planes. There will be no more Vietnams because "would-be aggressors" and Communist insurgents will realize that they cannot count on Soviet support. The President's vaunted "generation of peace" will be at hand.

Peking, according to the plan, will make some ritualistic denunciations of American imperialism, but will secretly rejoice that the United States has prevented the establishment of Soviet power, in conjunction with a triumphant North Vietnam and a grateful India, along China's southern borders.

If this speculation has any validity, the President may have welcomed the North Vietnamese invasion. Had it not come along, it would have had to be invented. How else could the United States stage a convincing demonstration of its superiority over the Soviet Union?

Will American strategy succeed and even if it does in the short run will the interests of American security and world stability be served? Will Moscow accept a humiliation? Will the Chinese prefer an American military victory in Indochina to a Vietnam whose independence is won with Russian military aid? Will the people of Vietnam accept military defeat if they are deprived of Soviet arms? Will the American people accept this policy once its full strategic implications are made clear? Those implications come back ultimately to a drive for *Pax Americana*.

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