

Inside Report

A Change in Red Strategy

By Rowland Evans and Robert Novak

WARSAW — Within hours of President Nixon's decision to blockade North Vietnam, an inner-circle member of Poland's Communist Party argued heatedly in a closed-door session of party leaders that both Moscow and its Eastern European allies must "see the world as it really is, not just as we would like it to be."

In short, Hanoi's fury should be turned aside with barest murmurs of sympathy while preparations for the President's visit to Warsaw continued with maximum enthusiasm.

THAT ARGUMENT exactly fitted the mood of Edward Gierek, the flexible, pragmatic Communist Party leader here in the world's third largest Communist country and unquestionably the Soviet Union's most confidential ally today.

Thus, within hours of the moment that Polish ships were forced by U.S. mines to turn back from their course to Haiphong harbor, party leader Gierek issued two orders: that the controlled press downplay this latest American offensive in Vietnam, printing only bare essentials with no editorial comment and no attack on Mr. Nixon; and that the U.S. ambassador here be informed that Mr. Nixon was enthusiastically awaited. Vietnam, in short, was treated as though it were somewhere in outer space.

It was no accident, then, that the first private indication that Moscow had no intention of disinviting the President came not from the Kremlin but from the Polish government. With almost daily telephone calls with Soviet party leader Leonid Brezhnev (conversations that continued throughout Mr. Nixon's stay in Moscow),

Gierek led the way in informing the White House that nothing would be permitted to upset the strategic decision of the Soviet bloc to gain detente with the U.S.

That evidence of the lust for detente is the outward manifestation of an intriguing, potentially far-reaching debate inside the party here that could conceivably result in some basic doctrinal changes in Communist orthodoxy.

As seen here, the Kremlin — with strong encouragement from the Polish Communist Party — has now espoused a new international policy certain to lead to "serious ideological problems" in every Moscow-allied Communist country.

"The concept that we call orthodox Communism is a thing of the past," one middle-level party theoretician told us, and the first break in orthodoxy will be a turning inward to concentrate on economic betterment at home at the expense of the global policy of Third World penetration pursued with implacable energy by Moscow since the end of World War II.

IN RETURN, Polish party leaders say that Moscow believes the "process of encirclement" by the U.S. will diminish. Of utmost importance was the specific U.S. affirmation of the Soviet goal of equality, an objective pursued by Moscow with almost psychotic zeal. Thus, Point Two in the U.S.-Soviet "Declaration," affirming super-power "equality," is regarded here as the single most important gain made by the Soviet during the summit.

Whether this almost euphoric view of changed Soviet policy reflects Moscow's own perception is a question that must be treated with skepticism in Washington.