

Laird Says U.S. Will Bomb Until the North Pulls Back

Nixon Maintains Silence

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WASHINGTON, April 7 — President Nixon has so far maintained silence on the stepped-up fighting in Vietnam to avoid creating a crisis atmosphere and to keep alive all diplomatic options, including his plan to visit Moscow next month, Administration officials said today.

They said that Mr. Nixon had told his principal aides that he does not want to let Hanoi's major offensive against South Vietnam ruin the prospects for what he believes could be a productive meeting with Leonid I. Brezhnev, the Communist party leader, and other officials in Moscow.

With this desire to proceed with the Soviet trip Mr. Nixon has coupled a determination to

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inform the world about the significant character of the up-to-date artillery, tanks and anti-aircraft missiles supplied by the Russians to the North Vietnamese.

Since any discussion of such Soviet aid unavoidably casts a shadow over Soviet-American relations, an official said, Mr. Nixon has let the State and Defense Departments do most of the talking for the Administration.

Aides also suggested privately that Mr. Nixon had chosen not to speak out publicly because of a desire to avoid inflaming the political atmosphere at home. Foremost in his

mind is the crisis psychology that spread in the United States in 1968 during the so-called Tet offensive and contributed to President Johnson's decision not to run for re-election.

Moreover, an official said, Mr. Nixon, before speaking, wants to let the situation in Vietnam become clear — specifically to see how the South Vietnamese Army fares.

In Florida for Weekend

As an indication of the desire to appear unruffled, Mr. Nixon went to Philadelphia yesterday to deliver a speech on education and then flew to the Florida White House at Key Biscayne for the weekend.

Henry A. Kissinger, his adviser on national security, who accompanied him to Florida, was due back in Washington for a meeting tomorrow of the Washington Special Action Group. The group, made up of representatives from the State and Defense Departments, the Central Intelligence Agency and other bodies, meets at times of international tension.

Ronald L. Ziegler, the White House press secretary, referred most questions about Vietnam today to Secretary of Defense Melvin R. Laird's new conference in Washington. But he said that Mr. Nixon had watched events carefully and was making over-all policy.

Mr. Ziegler said that Mr. Nixon was not involving himself in the choice of specific targets in North Vietnam for

American air attack but was delegating that responsibility to the Special Action Group.

The Administration's public posture has been carefully managed in the last week, with Mr. Ziegler conferring by phone or in person with Robert J. McCloskey, the State Department spokesman, and Daniel Z. Henkin, the chief Pentagon information official.

Secretary Laird, in his news conference, forcefully restated the Administration's invitation with the large-scale Soviet military aid to North Vietnam. Earlier in the week the State Department asserted that the North Vietnamese offensive would not have been possible without the Soviet artillery, tanks and missiles.

"The Soviet Union has been and it remains the major supplier of the military arms and the munitions which are being used in North Vietnam," Mr. Laird said. "The Soviet Union, in my opinion is therefore a major contributor to the continuing conflict that exists in Southeast Asia."

He said that the prospect for peace "rests, it seems to me to a major degree, with the Soviet Union."

The stern tone of Mr. Laird's comments about the Russians led to increased speculation in Washington over the prospects for Mr. Nixon's trip to Moscow, due to begin on May 22. But both Mr. Ziegler and Mr. McCloskey, in separate news conferences, said that plans for the visit were proceeding.

Hopes for Arms Accord

Administration officials said privately that Mr. Nixon was counting on an "historic agreement" on limiting strategic arms to emerge from the Moscow trip as well as expecting important progress in expanding trade and cooperation in other fields.

Officials felt that Vietnam would not be a productive subject for the Moscow meeting, since discussions between the two countries have never succeeded in getting either side to agree to limiting aid to its Vietnamese ally.

Administration officials acknowledged that Mr. Nixon's plans to go to Moscow might be endangered if the North Vietnamese were occupying significant areas of South Vietnam by early May. Such an enemy gain could cause significant problems both with American's allies and with large sectors of American public opinion, they speculated.

Similarly, they said, a United States decision to stage punitive air strikes against military targets near populated areas in North Vietnam might cause Moscow to cancel the visit.