

By C. I. SULZBERGER

PARIS—The French Government is convinced that United States entry into Cambodia has—at least for the short-term future—completely changed the international situation and set back a gradual inching toward political settlements in both the Middle East and Southeast Asia.

Moreover there isn't any doubt that Paris feels Washington's failure to consult France on this dramatic move violates the spirit of an accord on bilateral consultations arranged during President Nixon's visit here last year and reaffirmed when President Pompidou went to the U.S.A. in February.

France believes the Russians have been placed in a position where, unless they get tough, they will lose influence to China in the Communist world. It is assumed the most logical way for Moscow to support ideological friends in Southeast Asia is by creating a diversion in the Middle East to draw American attention away from Vietnam and Cambodia. Paris only hopes such a move can be controlled and limited.

Right or wrong, the French felt that slow but discernible progress toward settlement was being registered at both

ends of Asia when the Cambodian crisis exploded. Paris had proposed a generalized Indochinese peace conference which, although coolly received abroad, seemed to suit the aims of at least three concerned powers: the United States sought disengagement, the French sought outright peace and the Russians sought to frustrate China's bid for regional leadership.

Mideast Setback

Now even the faint prospect of such a conference is recognized as gone. Paris won't put the idea in any icebox and will continue to revive it from time to time, but it is obviously disappointed. Likewise, it is felt here that patient initiatives to calm down the Middle East have been tragically set back.

This capital thought the positions of America, Russia, Britain and France had actually been moving closer to each other. Cairo's reaction to the latest U.S. peace plan, presented by Assistant Secretary Sisco, was not viewed as entirely negative.

Moreover, it was felt that, despite angry propaganda, the Soviet and U.S. stands were now less far apart. The Russians admitted there could be

no unconditional Israeli withdrawal from areas occupied in the 1967 war and the Americans admitted there must be such a withdrawal, except for minimal border rectifications.

Paris is sure there has been a deal between Moscow and Washington limiting arms shipments to the Middle East and that the dispatch to Nasser of Soviet missiles, aircraft and crews doesn't violate this. The belief is that without such an accord Nixon would already have sent Israel the additional F-4 jets it requested. The French argue that the military balance has not been altered by the new Russian weapons and crews because they are rigidly limited to defensive assignments.

But both the tentative move by the superpowers to ration weapons shipments and snail-like Big Four progress toward agreements among themselves—by, initially, cataloguing all points of accord and discord—have now been upset. Just as in 1956 Soviet troubles in Poland and Hungary encouraged Britain and France to go ahead with their disastrous Suez expedition, there is a suspicion Moscow may feel forced to use the Middle East as the scene for a diversion now.

The logic is simply that the U.S.S.R. cannot mount any kind of expeditionary force to help Southeast Asian Communists, thus easing China from the forefront, but it can easily provoke a new Arab-Israeli crisis and scare the daylighters out of American doves. Furthermore, although nobody knows much about either his plans or his position, there are some here who believe such an idea would appeal to Brezhnev.

French Anger and Concern

The upshot is that France is angrier with the United States than it has so far said officially and also it is unhappy to see its two pet diplomatic enterprises suddenly kicked into a cocked hat. Moreover, the French are positive that, while American might will not be defeated in the Cambodian battle, neither can it triumph.

This country believes it learned a hard truth the hard way in its own Indochina and Algerian campaigns and insists on regarding the American commitment in Vietnam as another form of colonial war and therefore unwinnable. Such is the mood of official France today—sad, embittered, inked with the United States, deeply worried about the immediate future.