

Letters to the Editor

If South Vietnam Invades North Vietnam

To the Editor:

President Nguyen Van Thieu's repeated threats to invade North Vietnam and President Richard Nixon's refusal to deny American military involvement in such an invasion compel us to ask these questions: Is there any reason to believe Hanoi would not devote all its resources to defeating such an invasion? Should Hanoi fail, is Peking's involvement not inevitable?

We do not need to take Hanoi's explicit warnings at face value or rely on interpreting Peking's more ambiguous statements. We need only recall Chinese intervention in the Korean War after two decades of civil war and foreign invasion and without any modern military power.

Today it is fashionable to talk of "game plans" and "poker player's bluff." In 1950 Washington thought Peking was bluffing when it warned against our crossing the Thirty-eighth Parallel. Three months later thousands of dead and wounded United States Marines provided grim evidence to the contrary. This time it surely must be a bluff on our side, but do Saigon and Washington agree on what to do if it is called?

President Kennedy considered send-

ing American troops to Laos in 1961. Chinese forces moved into the two northern provinces adjoining China's borders where they have remained ever since. Washington got the word and moved to Geneva instead of to a larger war.

President Johnson escalated the air war to North Vietnam and moved massive American ground forces to South Vietnam. In response, Chinese units entered North Vietnam, complete with regular uniforms and military communications which they knew would identify them to United States Intelligence as the People's Liberation Army.

Included in the 50,000 Chinese troops stationed in North Vietnam from 1965 to 1968 were two anti-aircraft divisions whose regular exchanges of fire with attacking American aircraft drew casualties on both sides. When our bombing stopped, the troops went back across the border, but they can return at any time Hanoi and Peking find it necessary.

This is the "moment of truth" for any policy which seeks to "contain China." Either we are willing to fight or we must dissociate ourselves com-

pletely from situations that are likely to trigger China's direct military involvement. Such dissociation is called for by an amendment to the foreign-aid bill introduced by Senator Walter F. Mondale, denying funds for "an invasion by United States ground forces" of North Vietnam as well as for "combat air support" of any such invasion.

There is no ignominy in avoiding war that results from overcommitment. Nikita Khrushchev did just this in the Cuban missile crisis without destroying the credibility of Russian reaction to revolt or invasion in East Europe.

And for those who argue an alternative course lies with nuclear weapons against Chinese manpower, one can only submit them to endless viewing of the Hiroshima and Nagasaki films and hope their vicarious nightmares of suffering suffice to prevent revisiting mankind with that horrible reality. [Editorial March 5.]

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