

U.S. View of Hanoi And the Red Chinese



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CHINESE Premier Chou En-lai's dramatic visit to Hanoi adds new menace to the rumblings that Red China might intervene in Laos as she did once before in Korea.

In the past, the North Vietnamese have hesitated to bring the Chinese too deeply into the Indochina conflict. Now they are turning openly to Peking for support in case the allied escalation in Laos becomes critical.

Nevertheless, the national intelligence estimate, which guides President Nixon, discounts the danger of Chinese intervention. This secret assessment is based upon the best intelligence available to the U.S.

● — The North Vietnamese are reluctant to increase their dependence upon Peking, which would heighten Chinese influence over their affairs. This would also upset Moscow which has furnished most of North Vietnam's military hardware. The Hanoi rulers have always tried to walk a delicate tightrope between Moscow and Peking. The U.S. view, therefore, is that the Hanoi threat to involve the Chinese in Indochina is a bluff.

● — There has been no sign of military movement inside China toward the Indochina border. Indeed, the movement has been in the other direction toward the Soviet frontiers. Although Peking has deployed a large force in South China, these divisions apparently haven't been reinforced or put on alert since the Laos invasion.

● — The U.S. estimate is that a thaw,

rather than a new freeze, is beginning to develop in Chinese-American relations. The hard-liners have been replaced by pragmatists in many key positions in Peking. The American section of the Chinese foreign ministry, for example, has been taken over by a professional diplomat who is more realist than doctrinaire Maoist. There is cautious optimism that Washington's friendly overtures to Peking may bring a positive response.

● — The warnings that preceded Chinese involvement in the Korean War were far more ominous than the current warnings over Laos. There is little doubt in Washington that China would send "volunteers" to stop an outright U.S. invasion of Laos or North Vietnam, but no such operation is planned.

Throughout the U.S. military involvement in Indochina, Washington and Peking have had secret understandings. American and Chinese diplomats have been in constant communication in Warsaw. They have managed, in each crisis, to bridge the great gulf between the two nations.

True, the Chinese diplomats have spoken less for the sake of the listening Americans than for the dogmatists back on mainland China who read the transcripts.

Still, the formal talks and informal contacts have cleared up misunderstandings, prevented miscalculations and provided a clear channel of communication.