

## Upping Stakes in Vietnam

WASHINGTON — Suddenly, with the bombings at Haiphong and Hanoi and the damaging of four Soviet merchant ships, President Nixon has thrown some mighty big chips on the table.

It is like the poker player who has lost all night asking for a high-stakes hand of "showdown" as the game is breaking up in the desperate hope that he will not go home so big a loser.

LIKE THE POKER PLAYER, Mr. Nixon is sending good money after bad. The bombings of Hanoi and Haiphong are understandable only as manifestations of a policy of desperation.

Secretary of State William P. Rogers said the bombings were ordered "to prevent a Communist takeover." That is the heart of the truth, despite the fact that it contradicts glowing testimony about the success of Vietnamization and the performance of South Vietnamese troops.

The Administration was worried that the Communists might take over militarily, and that would have been a calamity for Richard Nixon.

He can ill afford to limp into Moscow next month as a man who has just been driven out of South Vietnam, who has just watched the United States suffer her first military humiliation.

Nor can Nixon afford to go before U.S. voters this fall as a man who has seen Vietnamization and the Nixon Doctrine blow up in his face.

Those raids on Haiphong and Hanoi were more political than military. They were supposed to intimidate North Vietnamese leaders, and their Soviet and Chinese suppliers, to force them to forget

about military victory and accept a settlement that allows Nixon and the U.S. to save some face.

More than seven years of costly bombings and battling have given evidence that the new bombings will only make the North Vietnamese more obdurate than ever.

Now that Mr. Nixon has thrown his blue chips on the table with these bombings, he has paused to see if the cards fall his way. The critical question is what does he do if they don't?

The prospect is that Hanoi will continue this offensive. If they are driven back, or decide to fall back, they very surely will attack again — and again. Has Mr. Nixon committed himself to new bombings of Hanoi or Haiphong every time the Communists heighten their military activity in the south?

Or is he threatening to mine Haiphong harbor and bomb North Vietnam so massively that it will be virtually destroyed as a nation and a warmaking power?

The President has raised the stakes to where it is more difficult than ever to walk out of the game without a tarnished reputation, a wounded pride.

THE QUESTION IS whether the American people feel that they or the nation have enough at stake in Indochina to justify this continued participation in the Indochina game when the stakes have been lifted to the level of brinkmanship.

I doubt that the President can convince many Americans that if he stays long enough, with a raise here and a bluff there, the United States will eventually emerge as the big winner. The President must doubt it, too.