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# What Russia and China Could Do About Mines

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American military analysts say the Soviet Union and China have a number of ways to respond to the mining of North Vietnam's ports.

These range from sending minesweepers to try to clear paths through the mine fields, to providing shipboard missiles to North Vietnam with which to attack American warships, to employing their own forces to attack United States ships or planes attempting to seal off North Vietnam.

As long as American forces avoid direct challenges to the minesweepers which are expected to be used, and keep air attacks at least 25 miles from the China - North Vietnam border, the prospect of harsh retaliatory military moves by the Soviet Union and China is regarded as remote.

## WARNINGS

At his news conference yesterday, Henry A. Kissinger, the President's national security adviser, said American warships would warn all foreign vessels of the existence of mine fields, "but not interfere with them if they decide to proceed into the mine fields at their own risk."

Defense Department sources said this would ap-

ply to minesweepers as well as merchant vessels.

The Russians recently sent two minesweepers from Vladivostok toward the war zone. Informed sources refused to say where these vessels are now, but noted that both Russia and China have large numbers of such ships within easy sailing distance of North Vietnam.

## RISKY

But if either country attempted to sweep mines—considered very risky with modern mines of various types—the American Navy could sow new mines much more rapidly than old ones could be destroyed or neutralized.

Pentagon sources declared that should Hanoi decide to accept President Nixon's offer to stop the mining and the bombing in return for American war prisoners and a supervised cease-fire, the U.S. could disarm the mines fairly quickly.

## FIELD

The sources pointed out that the mines are programmed to disarm themselves at an undisclosed time. They declined to say whether this was a matter of days, weeks or months. But they hinted there were other methods—which they would not disclose—by which the mines could be activated sooner.

One Pentagon official noted that fewer than a dozen Navy A-6 and A-7 attack planes from an aircraft carrier had laid a mine field blocking the main channel to Haiphong harbor yesterday "in a matter of minutes." The same could be done repeatedly, he said.

Another official commented: "This might be an ideal situation. Russia could show its active support for an ally by trying to sweep mines, without any interference from us. And we could keep the ports bottled up by quickly resowing behind them."

## BOMBING

The Russians might also attempt to fly supplies to Hanoi, but intelligence specialists say it would be difficult to bring in more than token numbers of missiles and tanks this way.

"If the traffic became very heavy, the airfields probably would be bombed—at times when Russian planes were not present, military sources suggested.

The main requirements of the current offensive in South Vietnam—gasoline, fuel oil and heavy munitions—cannot be supplied by air in any quantity, they said.

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