

Firm Yet Prudent

Moves by Nixon

PRESIDENT NIXON'S new counter military moves in Southeast Asia are nothing more than a further response to Communist aggression. They constitute, moreover, the minimum response available to him that can be firm yet prudent.

Let it be remembered that Soviet Russia raised the stakes gravely when it supplied North Vietnam with heavy armor — MIGs, tanks, artillery — and other modern weapons for the current mass invasion of South Vietnam. The Russians did this virtually on the eve of President Nixon's scheduled visit to Moscow.

The heavy flow of Russian arms continues. Unless it can be checked, the complete conquest of South Vietnam and the entrapment of more than 60,000 American soldiers becomes a very serious possibility.

To argue that the stemming of this arms flow is a further escalation of the war is to accept the appeasement line that this country should turn tail and desert an ally in the face of raw aggression and mass invasion.

By any definition of war,* Haiphong harbor and other ports through which this arms flow pours are legitimate military targets. So are the rail lines over which war goods reach the North Vietnamese from mainland China.

Mr. Nixon rejected the hard line of a blockade, thus signaling anew to Moscow this country's desire to avoid a true escalation and to take only those steps necessary to preserve South Vietnam and the American withdrawal program. Each of these steps has been forced upon this country by acts of the other side.

That is why we say that the mining of the North Vietnamese harbors and the asserted intention to cut North Vietnamese rail lines are the minimum response consistent with a determination not to be defeated and not to spread the war outside the confines of Southeast Asia.

It remains to be seen how effective these steps will be in stemming the arms flow to the enemy. Should they prove to be effective they cannot affect the actual battlefields for many weeks. However, the question arises, if this approach is deemed to be efficacious, wouldn't it have been better to implement it a few years ago?

Mr. Nixon's program of Vietnamization has gone badly, and may soon face an ultimate test.

Mr. Nixon's new moves, coupled with his call for a cease-fire, are a warning to the other side in both Moscow and Hanoi not to push matters to that ultimate test.

* DECLARED WAR?