



Plain Facts About Nixon's Decision

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IN THIS bilge-prone city of Washington, D.C., much bilge is washing about on the President's new Vietnam decision. In particular, the decision's military usefulness is being loudly questioned. But consider the plain facts:

- It is being said that supplies for North Vietnam which cannot come through the newly mined ports, can easily come down by rail from China. In point of fact, Haiphong alone has been receiving above 2 million tons of supplies a year. This is about seven times the tonnage that has been coming down through China. Replacing Haiphong by overland transport is a total impossibility.

- It is being said that there are no critical, war-affecting categories of supply, because Hanoi's war planners have pre-stocked all needed supplies on such an enormous scale. This may be true for some of the heavy equipment that the North Vietnamese Army is using. But it is emphatically not true for the fuel that permits the heavy equipment to move.

Gasoline and other petroleum products account for the largest single tonnage of supplies being imported into North Vietnam. Hanoi's military requirement alone is around 30,000 tons a month, precisely because of the much larger North Vietnamese use of trucks, tanks and other heavy equipment requiring motorized prime movers. Just on the northern battlefield, the North Vietnamese need is around 10,000 tons a month.

Delivery from Haiphong and Vinh has been by pipeline. Pipelines are notoriously difficult to knock out by bombing, because patches can be pre-positioned. Yet fuel

shortages have already hampered the enemy on the approaches to Hue. Choking off the North Vietnamese fuel imports should in fact produce reasonably early results at the fighting front.

- The U.S. government analysts who concluded bombing was useless before the Johnson bombing halt, omitted a good many key facts from their calculations. One should not be surprised by this. They were the same analysts who over-estimated the number of Viet Cong guerrillas by a factor of five, and under-estimated the enemy's tonnage imports through Cambodian ports by a factor of three.

They were not very reliable analysts, in short.

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THESE ARE only a few of the hard facts that point to the designed result of President Nixon's bold decision. The designed result, of course, is to prevent Hanoi from sustaining its great offensive over a prolonged period of time.

But that leaves the immediate future to consider. Quite obviously, what the President has done cannot produce an instantaneous effect. The North Vietnamese offensive can be sustained, for now, even if it cannot be sustained for a prolonged period.

Meanwhile, the immediate future can prove rough going.

In sum, until the battles of the immediate future have been fought and won, it is still rather like watching the little ball rattle around a roulette wheel, without knowing whether it will come to rest on red or black.