

Nixon's Hand In the Blasts At Russ Aid

By Thomas B. Ross

WASHINGTON — (CST) — President Nixon has quietly ordered a step-up in criticism of Soviet aid to North Vietnam in order to rally American public opinion for continued U.S. aid to South Vietnam.

A confidential memo, circulating here and in U.S. missions abroad, directs officials to "draw attention at every opportunity to the volume of Soviet military aid."

"Stress, emphasize and continuously underline" the Soviet role, the memo declares, "so that the need for continued U.S. support for South Vietnam becomes clear . . .

Code Translated

"The need for American assistance to Saigon, it is felt at the highest level here, can be best explained to critical public opinion in terms of reaction to Soviet aid to Hanoi . . . public acceptance of this appreciation could well determine the future of the U.S. aid program in Indochina given the current political climate."

The term "highest level" is a bureaucratic code word for the President.

The memo thus makes clear that the Administration's criticism of the Soviet role in the current North Vietnamese offensive is designed by the President as much for American as Russian ears.

Peking Pressure

It also tends to explain why the White House insists that there is no change in Nixon's plans to visit Moscow next month despite his criticism of the Soviet role in Vietnam.

The Russians deny any part in Hanoi's decision to attack across the Demilitarized Zone. If Moscow had played a role, they argue, the attack would surely have been timed so as to disrupt Nixon's visit to China in Febru-

ary rather than now, when it could complicate his trip to the Soviet Union.

The Russians suggest that, in fact, Peking put pressure on Hanoi to strike at this time so as to sabotage the Moscow summit. But U.S. officials have said nothing publicly about China's role.

Defense Secretary Melvin Laird opened the attack on the Soviet Union last Friday, accusing it of being a "major contributor" to the renewed fighting by supplying 80 percent of Hanoi's weapons and putting no restraint on how they can be used.

The President himself indirectly attacked the Russians on Monday, reminding them that great powers should not encourage directly or indirectly any other nation to use force or armed aggression against one of its neighbors."

3 Times as Much

Administration officials acknowledge that the United States is giving three times as much to South Vietnam as the Soviet Union and China together are giving to North Vietnam. But they insist that all the aid is for defensive weapons, whereas the North Vietnamese are using theirs for offensive purposes.

U.S. aid to South Vietnam, or at least to the government of President Nguyen Van Thieu, has been a major sticking point in negotiating with the North Vietnamese.

They have demanded an end to Vietnamization, which involves substantial U.S. military assistance, as well as the withdrawal of U.S. troops, as a condition for the return of U.S. prisoners of war.

The confidential memo indicates the President considers the aid program a continuing necessity and not negotiable.

See also columns (this date and later) by Henry J. Taylor, William F. Buckley, Jr., Evans and Novak - filed Indochina/Comment.