

Soviet and Chinese Choices Assayed by Pentagon Aides

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WASHINGTON, May 9—American military analysts say that the Soviet Union and China have a number of options in responding to the mining of the ports of North Vietnam.

These options include sending minesweepers to try to clear paths through the minefields, providing ship-to-ship missiles to North Vietnam with which to attack American warships, or employing their own forces to attack United States ships or planes attempting to seal off North Vietnam.

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

Would Warn Vessels

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

Defense Department sources said this would apply to minesweepers as well as freighters and tankers.

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

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

Lay Minefield in 'Minutes'

One Pentagon official said, for example, that fewer than a dozen Navy A-6 and A-7 attack planes from an aircraft carrier had laid a minefield 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."

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 surface-to-air 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 ammunition—cannot be supplied by air in any quantity, they said.

The Soviet Union might also be expected to resume supply

shipments over Chinese railroads, a method that was largely abandoned after the 1968 bombing halt in North Vietnam.

Both the Soviet Union and China are seriously short of freight cars and tank cars, and the two rail lines entering North Vietnam from China are expected to come under heavy air attack very soon, according to well placed sources.

The Soviet Union conceivably might decide to provide small attack boats to North Vietnam, analysts said. These boats have missiles with a 20-mile range.

Such boats were rushed to the Indian Navy during the recent India-Pakistan war. At least one Pakistani vessel is believed to have been sunk by such a missile, the same type that sunk an Israeli ship, the Elath, in the Mediterranean on Oct. 21, 1967.

But analysts doubt that the North Vietnamese are trained to operate such craft or that Soviet crews would attack United States ships.

Show of Force Doubted

Finally, the Russians might assemble a task force of warships in the Gulf of Tonkin, off North Vietnam, as a show of force. But American analysts would not expect such a fleet, if it did materialize, to interfere with American warships in the area.

"We are convinced Moscow still wants the meeting with President Nixon and will take no really provocative military action to torpedo the summit," one defense official declared. The meeting is scheduled to begin on May 22.

Similarly, Administration officials believe that China, largely because of her concern about the Russian troop buildup along the border, has moved toward a rapprochement with the United States that she would not jeopardize lightly.

Thus Peking would not be expected to send Chinese-piloted jet interceptors into the sky over North Vietnam to help combat the expanded American bombing campaign. During the height of previous bombing, in 1967 and 1968, when relations between Washington and Peking were very poor, China never attempted such intercession.

MIG Sanctuary Expected

However, officials said they would not be surprised if China decided to reintroduce soldiers, perhaps as many as 50,000, in construction battalions and antiaircraft crews, into North Vietnam. Most of these forces are believed to have been withdrawn after the 1968 bombing halt.

At a recent date, about 40 North Vietnamese MIG fighters of a total of about 250 were stationed at a Chinese air base at Peitun, near the North Vietnamese border. American experts would not be surprised if sanctuary was provided at Chinese bases for a larger number of these aircraft.

As in the past, American fighters would attempt to intercept North Vietnamese planes coming from or returning to Chinese territory, but would not follow beyond North Vietnamese air space, officials said.