

President's New Tactics

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President Nixon's newest tactics in Indochina derive from a recognition that three years of military and diplomatic maneuvers against North Vietnam have failed.

Accordingly, the tactics combine a military and diplomatic challenge to a new adversary — the Soviet Union — and a further retreat from the terms demanded of Hanoi.

At bottom, Mr. Nixon blames the Russians for the failure of his plan to end the war.

Since Moscow, in his view, has provided the arms for his diplomatic and political humiliation, it must now be subjected to overt pressure to find him an acceptable way out.

That failing, he expects to make the Russians suffer at least some of the same frustration that he feels at this juncture.

If he is to be forced to leave an ally struggling for survival with diminishing American help, he wants the Russians to be forced into the same position toward their ally. And if setbacks in South Vietnam result in a loss of respect for American power, as he has said they will, then he intends at the least that the Russians will also suffer a comparable demonstration of impotence.

The underlying effect of the challenge to Soviet shipping into North Vietnam, in the President's calculation, is this demand that the Russians share his Vietnam agony as the price of progress on arms control, tempting trade arrangements and other agreements that had been prepared for the Moscow meeting this month.

In essence, Mr. Nixon is switching attention from a

war he was losing to a confrontation in which he feels himself more evenly matched. And thus far, at least, he hopes to manage that confrontation by indirect means, with a relatively low level of military risk, so as to gain time for intense diplomatic maneuver.

TIME

While he implants his delayed-action mines and while the Russians try to circumvent or disarm them, there will be ample time for Soviet-American consultation.

If the Moscow meeting begins on schedule two weeks hence, then the situation in Vietnam will now be a principal item on the agenda. Mr. Nixon will have forced the Russians to swallow some of their pride and he will have achieved that elusive "linkage" of all East-West issues by which he had hoped to resolve the Vietnam war in the first place.

In the name of "saving the peace" between themselves, the major powers could finally attempt to impose a bargained peace on Indochina.

If the Russians deny the President their hospitality under these circumstances, they will still have to move into negotiations with him at some point, in the United Nations or directly.

AGREEMENT

One way or another, therefore, Mr. Nixon will seek from the Russians what he has been unable to obtain from the North Vietnamese — an agreement covering only military actions by each side while the political future of South Vietnam is left to subsequent bargaining by Hanoi and Saigon.

In his direct talks with Hanoi, the President and his emissary, Henry A. Kissinger, had despaired of exchanging a total American troops withdrawal and cessation of bombing for the return of prisoners, a cease-fire and withdrawal of ma-

nor North Vietnamese units from Laos and Cambodia as well as South Vietnam. Hanoi had always demanded also a halt in American military aid to the Saigon regime and help in deposing the head of that regime, Nguyen Van Thieu.

Beneath the cover of his tough talk and challenge to the Russians Monday night, Mr. Nixon revived the idea of an agreement covering only military actions — "acts of force" — and retreated from his earlier position on those issues.

OFFER

He offered to withdraw all American troops and to stop bombing throughout Indochina in exchange for U.S. prisoners and an internationally supervised cease-fire throughout Indochina.

By not insisting on the withdrawal of the North Vietnamese troops, even from territories conquered during their current offensive, the President was in effect holding out the prospect of an informal partitioning of South Vietnam, Laos and Cambodia to enhance the long-run political and military position of Hanoi.

It is doubtful that Hanoi would find this attractive or fair compensation for its latest military successes. But the President appears to be moving toward an offer that would let Moscow either persuade or force the North Vietnamese to settle for less than half a loaf now and to take their chances on the future.

PROBLEM

The difficulty with the administration's new course is that neither the American carrot nor the Soviet stick

will suffice to persuade Hanoi to entrust its fate to the major powers.

Having felt betrayed by the Russians and Chinese, as well as by the Americans, after the 1954 partition of Vietnam, the survivors of that experience will not lightly agree to a new partition along altered lines. And having absorbed the worst punishment that the U.S. could give for seven years and virtually discredited the Vietnamization program of three years, they must now weigh the pressures to yield in their terms against the prospects of further gains on the ground and possibly the defeat of Mr. Nixon in the November election.

Thus the chances are that the President will be pressed to combine still further military pressures with additional concessions. On both tracks, he has now almost exhausted the alternatives that he would regard as either militarily plausible or politically honorable.

