

A Delaying Action by Moscow

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WASHINGTON, May 11—The first Soviet response to the mining of North Vietnam's waters is being read here as a delaying action, probably to buy time for secret diplomacy.

By their statement and their deportment in both Moscow and Washington, the Russians are thought to be confirming the American judgment that they share President Nixon's eagerness to avoid collapse of his Moscow visit scheduled to begin May 22. Mr. Nixon and his aides have been emphasizing the inducements — including large-scale trade credits, access to American technology and budget savings through arms limitation.

In addition, they believe the Russians are eager to upstage their Chinese adversaries in relations with the United States and, particularly in the next 90 days, to avoid anything that might jeopardize West Germany's ratification of treaties accepting the present European frontiers.

Much of this would be delayed and perhaps injured by postponement of the Moscow Conference, although Mr. Nixon's first judgment in ordering the mining and intensified bombing was that the Soviet leaders probably would rescind their invitation until the harbor blockage had been lifted.

Hope to Avoid Crisis

Today, there was a growing hope here that the Kremlin might recoil from direct confrontation and seek instead to disperse the diplomatic and logistic problems created by the American actions.

Running unmistakably through the Soviet note was the theme that all maritime nations, and not merely the Soviet Union, had been challenged—raising the thought here that Moscow might seek an international forum of protest. The Chinese, too, seemed to sense a Soviet desire to consign protest to the United Nations and, with nothing to gain from muffling

the crisis, moved immediately to block that channel.

The Soviet note also contained the advice that the United States should return to the negotiations in Paris, from which Mr. Nixon withdrew only last week after feeling misled by a similar Soviet assurance of progress there. The Russians plainly believe that they can avoid criticism for negotiating with Mr. Nixon during the crisis if Hanoi itself is dealing with his representatives.

It is further expected here that as soon as the Russians survey the actual risks to their shipping and other supply operations in North Vietnam, they will also make direct approaches to the White House to obtain some guarantees that the Moscow meeting would not be marred by some conspicuous damage to Soviet ships or seamen. Not enough is known here about the technology of the mines or, indeed, about Mr. Nixon's mood to predict how he would handle such an approach.

'Be Canceled Without Delay'

"The Soviet Government resolutely insists that the steps taken by the United States to blockade the coast and to disrupt the land communications of the Democratic Republic of Vietnam be canceled without delay, that the United States cease its acts of aggression against the Democratic Republic of Vietnam and that the right to freedom of international navigation and commerce be respected. The Soviet Government is confident that this point of view is being shared by the governments and peoples of all peace-loving states."

This was seen here as a deftly worded call for international protest, negotiation with Hanoi and a rescinding of Mr. Nixon's order. It could still be used to justify disruption of the Nixon visit to Moscow of the negotiations there, but it does not commit the Soviet leaders to an unalterable course of action.

Tougher steps were hinted

also in other portions of the Soviet declaration. By accusing the United States of violating wartime agreements, the Russians laid a basis for balking at some of the scheduled agreements, particularly those dealing with navigation or safety at sea. By defining the American moves as aggressions against North Vietnam but also a "direct threat" to Soviet ships and lives, the Russians left themselves free to play out the crisis as a challenge to their ally or to themselves, or both.

Concern for Treaty

There could be only speculation for the moment about the reasons for the Soviet delaying action. Even if they felt outraged by the President's move, the Russians are thought to fear any move that would upset their treaty with West Germany, now scheduled for formal ratification on the eve of the Nixon visit.

Moreover, even in outrage, the Russians may have concluded that North Vietnam's Army will make enough gains in the weeks to come to deprive the President of any psychological gain while the Soviet Union and China attempt to collaborate in establishing expanded overland supply routes to keep that army going in the months to come.

But it was believed just possible, also, as Mr. Nixon hoped, but did not dare to expect, that Hanoi has strained its relationship with the Russians with attempts to embarrass them over the visit and that the Russians are now unwilling to run any serious risks on North Vietnam's behalf.

The White House has been arguing to the Russians that nothing in Indochina was vital enough for either power to justify destruction of their promising negotiations and that the mining of the harbors was merely meant to compensate for the heavy weapons that the Russians provided for Hanoi's offensive. Perhaps, some officials here are now saying, the Russians agree.

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