

The President's Prospects in Moscow

By O. EDMUND CLUBB

The Nixon Administration early proclaimed that the world was emerging from the "era of confrontation" and entering upon an "era of negotiations." Underlying this thought was the concept that the United States would maneuver adeptly among the major states to establish and maintain a balance of power offering more safety than the former bipolar nuclear "terror."

The announcement in July of last year that President Nixon would visit Peking was a clear indication that the United States proposed, as one gambit in the new game plan, to engage Peking in the exercise of political leverage against Moscow. The American proposition assumed that China, being engaged in political warfare with the U.S.S.R., would be found ready to align itself with the United States, that the Soviet position would be correspondingly weakened in Asia, and that Moscow would consequently prove more receptive to American proposals with respect to outstanding issues.

The President duly journeyed to Peking, but logic had already dictated disappointment. It was entirely apparent that the Nixon men aimed at obtaining China's aid for ending the Indochina war. Premier Chou En-lai had earlier stated that the war had priority for settlement over even Taiwan, but Peking had never shown any inclination to have the war end on American terms. By the testimony of the joint Sino-American communiqué issued at the end of the Presidential visit, that war proved to be a prime factor in keeping the two countries at arm's length. Consequently, the only profit won by Washington with respect to the U.S.S.R. was the worry presumed to have been caused in Moscow by the modest détente in Sino-American relations.

It was in that context that the President prepared for his visit to Moscow. Speaking on April 26, he expressed the hope that, even as his trip to Peking, this too would be "a journey for peace." Twelve days later, the American assault on North Vietnam was drastically escalated, to demonstrate again an American President's majestic resolve not to lose a war to the "Communism" of that presumably deceased era of confrontation.

The prospects for the Moscow trip have consequently been altered in important respects; but one prediction can confidently be made at the beginning: the U.S.S.R. will not now or later undertake to bend Hanoi to Washing-

ton's will. Moscow is basically no more inclined than Peking to help President Nixon make Vietnamization work to the satisfaction of American strategic aims. And, other considerations apart, the Soviet Union cannot afford to be less firm than are the Chinese in support of the revolutionary enterprise.

Besides, the escalation of the war offers Moscow a golden opportunity that Washington had thought to deny the Soviet strategists. The mining of North Vietnam's harbors is indeed directed primarily against Soviet shipping, but the bombing of supply depots and of rail lines connecting the Hanoi-Haiphong areas with South China is directed equally against China. Moreover, Peking's "alliances" with the Indochinese revolutionaries are more vital to it than are Moscow's ties to Hanoi, and the blockading of shipment by sea automatically placed upon the Chinese a prime responsibility for collaborating in solution of logistical problems.

Moscow will doubtless be engaged in continuing consultation with both

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Hanoi and its East European allies, and with Peking in particular—and Peking will be listening intently.

The Moscow trip was better prepared diplomatically than was the journey to Peking, and promised richer fruits. The Washington strategists had thought to strengthen their bargaining position vis-à-vis Moscow by (1) the visit to Peking and (2) a "show of strength" in Southeast Asia. Instead, the United States has put itself in the wrong in the eyes of the world, and in so far as the Soviet leadership on its part responds with restraint and statesmanship it will achieve commensurate gain in world esteem. The advantage would then be found on the Soviet instead of the American side. And the escalation will have resulted in a tightening of Sino-Soviet ties and a further deterioration of the American position in Asia.

O. Edmund Clubb served as U.S. consul general in Peking, 1947-50. He is research associate with the East Asian Institute at Columbia.