

Nixon's Turnabout on

By Thomas B. Ross

WASHINGTON — (CDN) — President Nixon insisted at his press conference Wednesday that it is "ridiculous" to suggest he might use tactical nuclear weapons in Indochina.

But it was not so long ago that he was saying it was "foolish" to suggest they would NOT be used.

In a speech to the Executives Club of Chicago March 17, 1955, Nixon, then the vice president, declared:

"Our artillery and our tactical air force in the Pacific are now equipped with atomic explosives which can and will be used on military targets with precision and effectiveness.

"It is foolish to talk about the possibility that the weapons which might be used in

the event war breaks out in the Pacific would be limited to the conventional Korean and World War II Types of explosives.

"Our forces could not fight an effective war in the Pacific with those types of explosives if they wanted to. Tactical atomic explosives are now conventional and will be used against the military targets of any aggressive force."

Kissinger Theory

Henry Kissinger, the President's principal national security adviser, developed an elaborate theory along the same line in his 1957 book, "Nuclear Weapons and Foreign Policy," which established his intellectual reputation.

By 1960 the use of tactical nuclear weapons in a limited

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war had become standard Air Force doctrine. Gen. Frederic H. Smith Jr., writing that year in the Air University Review, described at length the value of such weapon in a situation much like the war in Indochina.

The President and Kissinger, if not the Air Force, have subsequently revised their position drastically in light of growing Soviet nuclear strength and fears that the use of even the smallest atomic bomb would escalate to the use of the biggest.

"I am not going to place any limitation upon the use of air power," Nixon declared Wednesday, "except, of course, to rule out a rather

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ridiculous suggestion that is made from time to time — I think the latest by Hans Morganthau (of the University of Chicago) — that our air power might include the use of tactical nuclear weapons."

Next Year

Richard Barnet, the former State and Defense Department adviser who first raised the alarms about tactical nuclear weapons last spring, wondered what might happen if the South Vietnamese are confronted with a Dien Bien Phu - like situation next year when U.S. forces have been drastically reduced.

Fears have been greatly enlarged by the incursion into Laos, which marks the first time since the Korean war that U.S. forces have been sent into battle in a

country bordering directly on China.

It has been assumed up to now that the Chinese have been deterred from entering the war in Indochina by the threat — implied — or diplomatically relayed — that the United States would respond with nuclear weapons.

The late President Eisenhower expressed the belief that the threatened use of nuclear weapons helped bring the Korean War to an end, and Nixon has indicated agreement with that assessment.

If China should move into the war with anything close to the one million troops it poured into Korea, it is questionable as to whether the President would be able to stick to the non-nuclear pledge he made last week.