

. . . 'Signals' to Hanoi

There are ominous hints of impending new United States military action in Indochina in Henry A. Kissinger's charge before the Associated Press meeting that North Vietnam has "totally violated" the Vietnam cease-fire agreement, an accusation that was backed up yesterday by a formal protest to signatories of the Paris peace accords.

In retaliation, the United States last week suspended all mine-clearing operations in North Vietnamese waters, recalled its chief delegate to Paris talks on possible reconstruction assistance to North Vietnam and resumed military reconnaissance flights over the North. Defense Secretary Elliot L. Richardson said Hanoi should interpret these moves as "signals of possible retaliation."

"What should the United States do?" Mr. Kissinger asked. "If we can neither threaten nor offer incentives, if we are criticized for attempting to maintain the agreement by force and pressed not to provide the economic incentives which might be another motive for keeping the agreement, then we should ask ourselves where we will be if what was a very solemn agreement, very painfully achieved, in which we made very major concessions, is simply disregarded."

No one, so far as we are aware, is seriously challenging the Administration's right to take diplomatic action in support of the peace or even to suspend such United States obligations as mine-clearing and economic aid so long as the Communists fail to uphold their side of the Paris bargain. But any attempt by the Administration unilaterally "to maintain the agreement by force" raises grave constitutional issues and revives the whole question of United States involvement in Indochina that most Americans thought had been resolved with the withdrawal of the last American prisoners and combat troops last month.

Mr. Kissinger himself declared that "our purpose in negotiating the agreement was to end the American involvement in Southeast Asia. . . ." That purpose was admirably fulfilled when both sides carried out the only unambiguous portions of the Paris accords. Although President Nixon boasted of having achieved "peace with honor" in Paris, it was clear from the beginning that the pact did not resolve the underlying political problems

of Indochina and that in this imperfect context, provisions for supervising the cease-fire were unworkable.

For the United States to re-enter the fray in order to try to enforce its own version of a settlement that can only be worked out by the peoples of Indochina themselves would be to repeat the tragic errors of the past. The Administration's "signals" to Hanoi should also serve as a warning to the American people that they may be on the way once more into the quagmire from which they thought they had been delivered.