

U.S. ATTACK ON NORTH VIETNAM CALLED A BLOW TO AMERICAN PRESTIGE

Peking's view of the Tonkin Gulf incidents

By Anna Louise Strong
Guardian staff correspondent

IT IS MORE THAN one month since the U.S. air strike on five naval ports of North Vietnam threatened to escalate war in Southeast Asia. The Washington view seemed to be that Hanoi was unable to retaliate, having lost most of its naval fleet, that Peking, fearing to retaliate because of American nuclear bombs, "only sent a few planes to Hanoi." So President Johnson chalked up a victory.

That is not the way it looks from Peking. Hanoi has been holding "victory meetings," at which 5 million people—one-third of the population, turned out. Peking considers that, while the air strike was an act that "carried America over the brink of war," it was basically a provocative probe which failed of its aim and whose end results are far more to Hanoi's advantage than to Washington's.

To observers here, the question is: Why should either Hanoi or Peking do anything so futile and self-defeating as to take armed action against Saigon, where American influence is already disintegrating rapidly.

While North Vietnam celebrated under the slogan of "Victory—and Vigilance," and gave out "military medals third class" to members of the eight anti-aircraft crews that had brought down U.S. planes, China in early August had a series of mass meetings in support of the Democratic Republic of Vietnam, with a total attendance of more than 20 million, and in the last half of August held a science symposium where more than 300 scientists from 44 countries in four continents—excluding Europe and North America—met to discuss scientific papers and promote scientific development among the new emerging nations on a basis of "self-reliance and mutual support."

A single session of that 11-day symposium, one at which a scientist from South Vietnam presented a paper on "Special War as the Strategy of Neo-colonialism," probably did more damage to Washington's world aims than the U.S. air strike did to North Vietnam. All those 300 scientists adjourned other sessions to listen avidly to the paper, and they will report to 44 nations when they go home.

THE MOST IMPORTANT single statement on the North Vietnam attack by anyone in Peking was an off-the-cuff talk by Vice Premier Chen Yi Aug. 19 to more than a score of delegates from 15 nations who had been to the Japanese Anti-A and H Bomb Conference, and who stopped in Peking on their way home. Chen Yi's remarks, neither officially released nor officially interdicted, swept Peking in many discussions as an unofficial but intentional revelation by a man who knows China not only as foreign minister but as a past revolu-

tionary commander.

Nobody in Peking accepts the American statement that the Aug. 5 bomb onslaught was "retaliation" for a previous attack by North Vietnamese torpedo boats on U.S. destroyers Aug. 4. That alleged "second Tonkin Gulf incident," in which Hanoi was said to have sent torpedo boats 65 miles to sea to attack U.S. destroyers in a three-hour battle in which none of the attackers was seen and none of the U.S. warships was hit, is dismissed as a "fabrication" which Washington does not even trouble to make plausible, and in which most of the world's press, including the press of America's allies, does not believe. The U.S. air strike is considered an attack planned in advance, probably at that Honolulu conference of U.S. top brass, as a first step—perhaps as a trial balloon—for the long-discussed "march to the North." The "Tonkin Gulf incident," it is believed, was invented or staged as excuse.

THE CHIEF CAUSE for the attack on North Vietnam, said Chen Yi, lies in the "internal contradictions" in the U.S. These, he said, include the Johnson-Goldwater presidential conflict, but also many more, among them the difficulties in South Vietnam and the struggle of 20 million Negroes for their rights.

"Why was President Kennedy murdered and why is this case of murder not



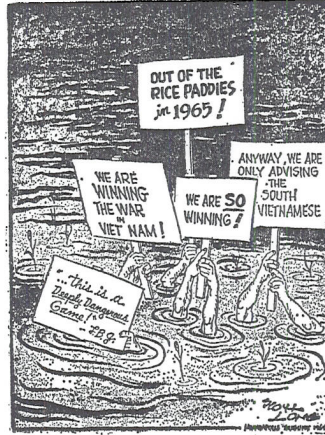
CHEN YI
A warning to Washington

yet cleared up?" he asked. "This testifies to deep internal contradictions in the ruling group. This inner instability eggs U.S. imperialism on to adventurous acts of war." In the Aug. 5 air strike, he said, the U.S. "went beyond the brinkmanship of Dulles; it went over the brink of war."

The air strike failed, in Peking's opinion, and became a defeat for Washington and a victory for Hanoi. Even on Defense Secretary McNamara's official statement that there were 64 "sorties" in which two planes were shot down and two damaged, this 6% rate of "lost and damaged" was conceded by Hanson Baldwin of the New York Times to be a "fairly high casualty rate."

Hanoi, however, said the casualty rate was three times as high, with eight U.S. planes shot down and three damaged. Hanoi not only gave eight military medals to the anti-aircraft crews who downed the planes, but exhibited the wreckage of four U.S. planes in an open square in Hanoi, with television recording the exhibit. Two more planes had been seen by thousands of people as they plunged into the sea off Hon Gay.

HANOI will not announce her own losses from the air strike, but American guesses that they destroyed half to three-fourths of Hanoi's naval strength are discounted in view of the jubilation of the North Vietnam mass meetings, and the congratulations that poured in from nearby nations and from organizations. Physical losses apparently were compensated for by the boost in anger and morale and the sudden leap of North Vietnam to recognition as the central rallying point



Long in the Minneapolis Tribune
The signs in Southeast Asia

of anti-imperialist world forces. Cambodia and Indonesia moved to direct diplomatic recognition of the Democratic Republic of Vietnam, which meant a definite break with Saigon.

Hanoi and the Democratic Republic of Vietnam were hailed by mass meetings and demonstrations from Tokyo around the world to Cuba, and by editorials in much of the world press. Washington was so widely criticized from Tokyo to London, from Pakistan to France by former neutrals and present allies that the U.S. bomb attack may go down in history as the sharpest blow to American prestige since the Korean war.

If Washington's aim was to stabilize control in South Vietnam, the air strike failed, for it brought forth the worst chaos ever seen in South Vietnam. If the aim was political—to meet Goldwater criticism, its effect was of brief duration. If the aim was to impress the world, the result was not favorable. The world sided with Hanoi.

If the aim was to test the strength of North Vietnam, and the position of China, then the attack achieved results. Hanoi showed itself able and willing to defend itself, and Peking declared unreserved support for North Vietnam. Both Hanoi and Peking, however, also indicated that they were not going to be trapped into a major war by a provocative attack. For some years now the U.S. has been staging provocative raids, and these have been handled locally, on the spot. But if the U.S. intends real war, Chen Yi warned, China will come in on the side of North Vietnam.

"As long as the U.S. does not expand the war, we are not going to interfere," Chen Yi said. "But if the U.S. expands into North Vietnam, we will definitely enter it. We cannot stand aside and let the Democratic Republic of Vietnam be made a victim."

PRESIDENT JOHNSON has stated that such a war would cost millions of lives. Chen Yi agrees. It would not be like the Korean war, he said. "It would be wider in scope. The total situation differs; the strategy and tactics would differ."

First, the general situation differs. Eight million people in South Vietnam support the National Liberation forces there. ("If the U.S. tries to use the South to attack the North, it will first lose the South," Chen Yi said.) Second, in Korea the U.S. depended on armies of 14 nations through the UN; in Vietnam she fights alone. No ally offers serious help; even the Philippines, which declared it would join the war, withdrew the statement almost at once. Japan cannot serve as standby and arsenal as in Korea, both because of distance and because the Japanese people are not willing. Neither

Correction

The name of the Socialist Labor Party candidate for President was incorrectly given as Haas in last week's GUARDIAN. The correct spelling is Eric J. Hass.

the Philippines, Singapore or any place in Southeast Asia can give the help Japan gave in Korea; they lack the heavy industry. To fight Vietnam, the U.S. has no stable rear.

"Fighters depend on their rear; they also look to their flanks," said Chen Yi. "In Korea the peninsula was narrow; there were no flanks. In Vietnam the flanks are wide and include several nations. The U.S. will find it necessary to occupy Cambodia; Cambodia will resist. This is what already worries Prince Sihanouk." Chen Yi cited Laos and Thailand as among countries likely to be drawn in "as far as Singapore."

RECENT reports that the U.S. has stockpiled deadly "nerve gas" of which one drop on the skin is fatal in quantities of tins in South Korea for use against China were taken as an indication that Washington may spread the war northward, too.

China will not widen the war; this is shown not only by her statements but by her clear basic policy. But if the U.S. widens the conflict by trying to conquer North Vietnam, China will come in.

If Washington cannot succeed in suppressing the 14 million people of South Vietnam, she will not succeed against the 700 million of China.

In such a war, according to Chen Yi, the U.S., despite its nuclear bombs and nerve gas, will lose, because it is essentially unstable, alienating its allies and eventually its own citizens by wanton aggressions and the injustice of its cause. But China would endure, he believes, because it is not only large but essentially stable, with its citizens united in defense of their land.

Cuba-trip students
to report at N.Y. forum

A GROUP of students who visited Cuba last summer in spite of the travel ban will give a "Report on Cuba" at 8:30 p.m. Friday, Sept. 25, at 116 University Pl., New York, under the auspices of the Militant Labor Forum.

The panelists and the schools at which they have studied are: Joel Agee, Humboldt University, East Berlin; Ann Kramer, Los Angeles City College; Allen Krebs, a sociologist, University of Michigan; Sharon Krebs, Columbia University; and William Sumner, San Francisco State College.

The students went to Cuba with the Student Committee for Travel to Cuba, which is challenging the U.S. ban on travel to the island.

Who Killed Kennedy?

The question first raised in the NATIONAL GUARDIAN by Attorney Mark Lane, immediately following the assassination of the President, assumes new significance as the Warren Commission report is readied for release. The NATIONAL GUARDIAN articulates . . . and often answers the doubts and misgivings of thinking Americans. Don't you know one who would like to read the paper each week? Who would like a sub to begin with a free copy of Lane's legal brief in the Oswald case? Use this coupon:

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