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STATIN

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The Die Is Cast, but Possibility of Talk Remains

By TED LEWIS

Washington, May 11—We are now committed as a nation to seeking an end to the Vietnam war by halting the flow of supplies to North Vietnam from Soviet Russia and Red China. Whatever the risks in this enterprise, the American people must accept them, for the gamble has been taken by an administration they elected and entrusted their security to.

It follows that on this one issue, now that it has been joined, there is no pulling back. We have a *fait accompli*. The harbors have live mines. What responses come from Peking and Moscow must be based on the fact that the deed is done.

So it is futile to raise voices, either in protest or in support, for there are going to be no changes made in this Nixon effort "to end the war" in this fashion. Having said that, in connection with the all-out naval and air action to deprive Hanoi of military supplies, there are two aspects of Nixon Vietnam policy, both tangential to the decision to expand the war, that cannot come under the national unity motif no matter how much the administration tries to include them.

What is past is prologue. And there is no question, despite Nixon's obtuse evasiveness on the issue, that Vietnamization as he had planned it failed significantly to come up to expectations. If it had the South Vietnamese would have been able "to hack it," as Gen. Abrams put it, and beaten off North Vietnamese ground onslaughts.

And neither is there any question, despite the fuzzy denial by Defense Secretary Laird, that our intelligence apparatus misread all signals from North Vietnam. The offensive power of Hanoi was totally underestimated, including its tank, artillery and anti-aircraft strength.

Nixon's Offer to Hanoi

Sure, this is all water over the dam, but it is relevant. Had the Communist invasion been checked, there obviously would have been no necessity for the U.S. to carry the war by sea and air to the north, with the attendant risk

night announcement of his harbor mining and rail interdiction decision. He offered a "ceasefire throughout Indochina" to accompany American military disengagement from the war on release of American PWs.

This ceasefire proposal was supposed to be a most generous offer. But to this date, its terms have been shrouded in deliberate ambiguity. Clearly it was unacceptable to Hanoi if it required the withdrawal of all North Vietnamese troops from South Vietnam. For that reason there have been hints here that the offer could be a ceasefire based on

the present ground positions of the bulk of the invading forces.

What goes on in this juggling of semantics is almost beyond comprehension. But something is in the wind and it definitely does not jibe with the tough anti-invasion language delivered by Nixon and Laird among others previously.

Any negotiations with Hanoi were supposed to be out until North Vietnam withdrew all the forces that launched the "massive invasion" of March 30 across the demilitarized zone.

Currency for a Rumor

A ceasefire leaving the Hanoi Reds in strategic positions they now hold within South Vietnam could scarcely contribute to the cause of an honorable peace as envisioned by Nixon. Yet for some unfathomable reason the administration—including presidential adviser Henry Kissinger—have allowed this possibility to be bandied about by de-emphasizing as a must the withdrawal of all Communist troops from South Vietnam.

We bring up these points of controversy because they involve issues of policy separate from the military effort to halt the flow of war materiel into North Vietnam. There is a strained effort in the administration to silence critics of these aspects as well as critics of the expanded U.S. air and naval involvement.

Bragged of Vietnamization

We have, for example, Treasury Secretary Connally accusing Senate Democrats of "placing partisan politics above the interests of this nation." And Defense Secretary Laird saying, "This is no time for quitters or for a lot of talk about instant surrender." He said

he was convinced the American people "support Gen. Abrams and our men in opposing Communist aggression."

Abrams is the general who time and again, with an echo from Nixon, said Vietnamization was a success and the troops of South Vietnam were capable, on the ground, of keeping their country safe from Red aggression.

That issue in itself cannot be eliminated. The only way it could be eliminated is by the U.S. withdrawing its troops. Neither, for that matter, can



UPI photo

The Newport News—heavy cruiser on duty near Haiphong.

Nixon's 1968 pledge to end the war, for he "had a plan" that would do just that nor the horrific mess in our intelligence setup, including the CIA with its ignorance of the vast Soviet-supplied arsenal of offensive weapons available for the invasion.

Whether this war will be won, lost or compromised is still up in the air despite all the flamboyant rhetoric. Which way it is going to go for the next few months will not depend on how bellicose the Soviet statements are to the U.S. crackdown on Red shipping, but on what the North Vietnam invading divisions do before Hue, An Loc and Kontum.

CAPITOL STUFF

to Nixon's "generation of peace" gestures to Peking and Moscow.

But there is another tangential aspect to the carrying of the war to North Vietnam that is far more pertinent and even more perplexing.

This concerns "the carrot" that Nixon

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