

HOW DANGEROUS NOW?

Showdown with Communists in Asia is approaching fast. U. S. offer of peace got short shrift from Reds. Talk is not of peace, but bigger war.

U. S. is determined to stand firm, no matter what. Strategy is to put more pressure on enemy and keep it there—make the cost unbearable.

Hope is that Reds will back off, but top U. S. officials are getting ready for the worst.



Vital U. S. air base at Danang, guarded by marines, is considered likely target if Reds step up the war.

Reported from

SAIGON and WASHINGTON

A turning point—a crisis period—lies just ahead in the war in Vietnam.

Communists very soon will be forced to tip their hand. More delay, and the balance will tilt further in the anti-Communists' favor.

The offer of peace and aid made by U. S. President Johnson has been turned down by the Communists out of hand—for the moment at least.

War, however, is starting now to hurt Communist North Vietnam. The longer the war, the more the bombing, the greater the hurt becomes. It can become unbearable.

Moves to break out of this situation are expected—and soon—by American military men and observers. The whole situation is viewed by informed officials as “very dangerous.”

Three possible moves—if a truce really is rejected—are being talked about.

1. An all-out Communist attack on U. S. positions at Danang and other key points in South Vietnam is one move being anticipated.

2. A Red drive with strong forces aimed at central Vietnam, infiltrated and supplied through Laos, is another possibility. There are reports that two divisions of the North Vietnamese Army, regrouped as brigades, now are in the hills along the Laotian-Vietnamese border, ready to move.

3. Another possible course is for a return to strictly guerrilla operations, with hard-core Red units withdrawing across the seventeenth parallel to bide their time. Such a pullback would be calculated to bring an end to U. S. bombing of North Vietnam, with Americans then expected to tire in a war that dragged on and on indecisively.

U. S. is determined to stand firm



March 8, 1965:
Marines land in Danang

Or, if Red China is willing to assume the risk, it can thrust forces into Northern Laos along roads built there in recent years. Much of Southeast Asia would be expected to panic, adding to pressure on the U. S. to relent.

Communists right now are set back on their heels by moves of Mr. Johnson.

Red China is on warning that direct entry of its forces into this war will be at its own peril.

North Vietnam is being bombed and is on warning that bombing will intensify if the war intensifies.

Russia, although reportedly building a surface-to-air missile site near Hanoi, North Vietnam's capital, shows no great desire to get deeply involved in the war.

The U. S., for its part, is building its forces inside Vietnam and strengthening forces in the entire Pacific area.

A high-ranking U. S. official in recent days told a group of editors: "I think we are within reach of a situation where the prospects of general war are not on the horizon."

Behind that cautious statement is growing conviction that Russia's new leaders do not consider Vietnam worth the risk of all-out war with the United States.

The view expressed regarding Red China is that the rulers in Peiping very much want Southeast Asia—but they do not want war over Southeast Asia.

So: The question right now concerns which of these desires is to be decisive in the minds of the Chinese Communists—a desire to get Southeast Asia, or a desire to avoid war.

The dilemma of the Communists in facing this situation is complicated by a further fact: If U. S. forces are attacked and U. S. finds itself in a bigger war, it has the means to impose great punishment on both Red China and North Vietnam. Neither of these countries is in a position to harm the center of U. S. power in America.

It is this factor that is said to account for what is described as an "element of caution" in the present attitudes and actions of Red China.

A silent peace? The U. S. hope is that the small war in Vietnam can be brought to an end without a major test of strength and without need for formal agreement—that the Communists will quietly permit the fighting to stop. Communist guerrilla warfare in Greece ended that way.

The French, reflecting the view of Gen. Charles de Gaulle, their President, are predicting dire consequences from the U. S. policy of firmness.

As seen by the French, the U. S., if serious about peace, should immediately stop bombing North Vietnam and start

U. S. is determined to stand firm withdrawing forces. As things stand, they say, the U. S. wants the Communists to capitulate to U. S. demands.

The French are among those openly predicting a showdown war between the U. S. and Red China in Asia, unless U. S. starts backing away.

U. S. strategy, as worked out at top-most levels, is now being tailored to avoid a direct clash with Red China.

Neither Hanoi nor the nearby vital port of Haiphong is to be bombed—unless there is a radical change in the situation. Nor will the U. S. bomb the bridges north of Hanoi, as things stand, because they are too close to Communist China's borders.

U. S. will tread carefully where Red China is concerned. Yet U. S. is convinced that "toughness" is the only approach that Reds in Peiping understand.

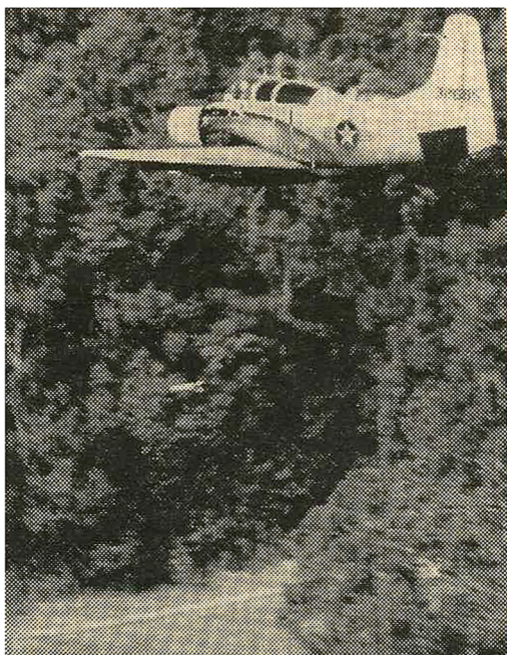
Experience is cited to show that Chinese seldom match actions to threats in a real crisis. Offshore islands of Quemoy and Matsu are still in Nationalist hands despite years of threats by Peiping. Even the border attack on India was halted before it could spread into anything really dangerous for Mao Tse-tung. Nor has Mao done anything so reckless as Nikita Khrushchev's shipping of nuclear missiles to Cuba.

Peiping has roared like a lion but acted like a mouse in the first two months of bombings of North Vietnam. In recent days, when U. S. planes engaged Red Chinese MIG's off Hainan, Peiping shied away from claiming credit for downing a Navy jet, reported it was hit by another U. S. plane. The judgment is that the Chinese wanted no part of a wider war—at least for the moment.

U. S. power: vast. A look at the chart on these pages helps explain Peiping's go-slow approach. In addition to a vast array of U. S. conventional military power, there is an ace in the hole: nuclear power, available in many forms—aboard Air Force bombers, in Polaris submarines, on carrier aircraft and in battlefield weapons.

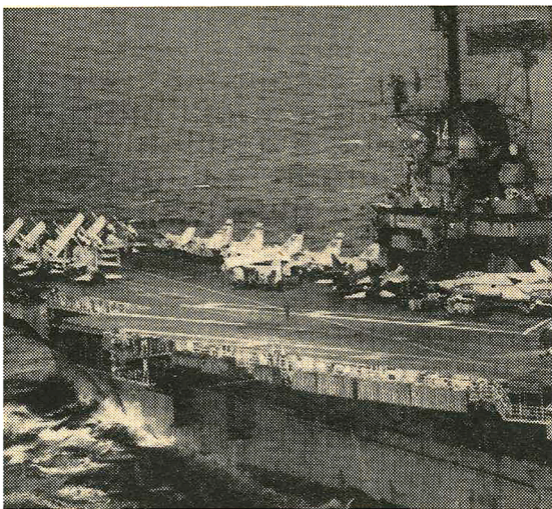
China has been told, in effect, that if it brings into play its massive land armies, then the mainland will not be a sanctuary, immune from nuclear attack.

In one blow—in just one hour—China could be set back 20 years, its major



AIR POWER ranges from Skyraider, above, to latest jets.

U. S. is determined to stand firm



NAVAL MIGHT is unchallenged in Far East, includes 3 carriers, 250 planes off Vietnam.

cities devastated, industries crippled, its budding nuclear capability destroyed.

Where it hurts now. U. S. air power is being used at this time in a most controlled and limited way over North Vietnam. U. S. officials insist that the impact is starting to be felt, nevertheless, by leaders in Hanoi. Take one example:

American planes destroyed the "bridge of reunification" at Thanhhoa early in April. This bridge was one of the precious few accomplishments of the destitute North Vietnamese regime. It was the second-longest railroad bridge in North Vietnam, connecting Hanoi-Haiphong with Vinh, the home town of President Ho Chi Minh.

That bridge took three years of around-the-clock construction and was dedicated just a year ago by Ho himself. For months Communist propaganda trumpeted completion of the bridge, a feat performed without Chinese or Russian help. It was to stand as an example of Hanoi's own power.

Loss of that bridge hurt Hanoi in more ways than one.

"Saved our skins." From a top U. S. observer comes this analysis: "Bombings of the North have saved our skins. If the situation of last fall and winter had continued, South Vietnam would have gone down the drain. It's helped morale in the South and demonstrated to Hanoi how vulnerable it is. But bombing alone won't win the war."

One assessment in Saigon is that, while the attention of Washington is riveted on bombing, the job of building an integrated police, economic and political organization to win the population of South Vietnam to an active role against the Communists in the countryside is not being attended to.

Turn of the tide? Despite serious problems inside South Vietnam, there's guarded optimism in Saigon for the first time in many months about possibly turning the tide against the Reds.

South Vietnamese troops have taken the offensive. They've won some big battles and have been killing three Viet Cong for each Government casualty. Peasants are bringing in more information about the activities of the Communist guerrillas. There are more Communist defectors.

U. S. air power has been taking a heavy toll of guerrillas inside South Vietnam. During the current dry harvest season in the Mekong River Delta south of Saigon, the mere presence of air power has forced the Communist guerrillas to keep their heads down.

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GROUND FORCES are on the increase. Here American tanks go into position near Danang.

There is a constant stream of reports from the Mekong Delta of guerrilla withdrawals.

Suggestion is heard that Red morale on the ground may be sagging under the onslaught of air raids.

But any decisive development in the ground war is still felt to be some time off, if one comes at all. Communists still control vast areas of the countryside. Their capacity for terror has not been seriously diminished.

Just what is going to happen next?

This much comes through loud and clear: Chances of serious negotiations to end the war in Vietnam are ruled out at this time by almost every top authority. The price asked by each side is much too high for the other.

North Vietnam is the only Communist country getting hurt right now and should be most willing to listen to U. S. peace overtures. But if Hanoi negotiates now for a return to the situation as it was after the Geneva Accords of 1954—currently the minimum U. S. demand—it will be a disastrous defeat for Ho Chi Minh.

Experts say that, if Ho called off the war, he would be telling the Viet Cong in the South that all their fighting for the last 10 years has been for nothing. In the view of many, Viet Cong leaders are more determined to carry on with the war than Red leaders in Hanoi.

More than that, Red China's own theory of the inevitability of victory in "revolutionary wars" rests explicitly on success or failure in South Vietnam. If the theory fails in South Vietnam, it would threaten Mao Tse-tung's claims to leadership not only among the world's Communist parties but the nations of Africa, Asia and Latin America.

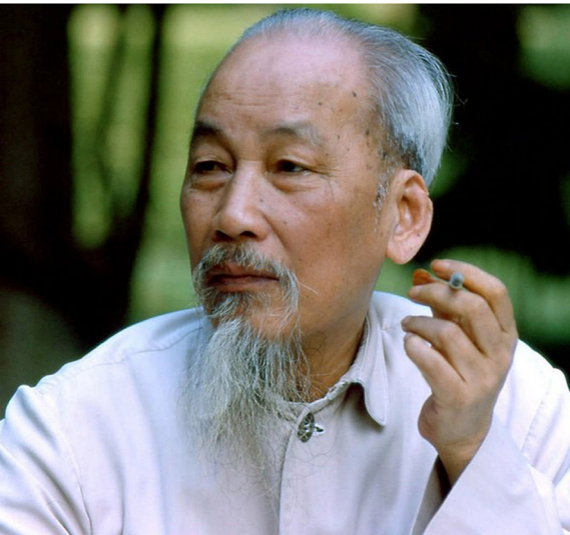
Dangerous game. Against that background, the Communists are regarded by many as ready to start playing a very dangerous game with the U. S. Some U. S. authorities fear that the Reds badly underestimate President Johnson's determination to hang on in Vietnam and, because of their bitter hatred for America, misunderstand U. S. intentions.

That could lead to serious miscalculation by the Communist side in this war. It's considered likely, for example, that North Vietnam may try for a quick victory on the ground by sharply stepping up infiltration of regular troops into the South, with Red China helping to fill the vacuum in the North by sending in some of its own forces.

This could lead to the sending of large-scale U. S. combat forces to South Vietnam and to air attacks on Red China itself.

The Chinese Communists seem to be preparing for this possibility. Reports from Peiping indicate the Reds are virtually convinced that the U. S. will use

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Ho Chi Minh of North Vietnam. Next move is up to his Red regime in Hanoi, with prospect of heavier U. S. bombings if he doesn't call off war in South.

conventional—but not nuclear—explosives against the mainland at some point in an escalating war.

The Chinese appear equally convinced that the U. S. would never dare to bring its nuclear arsenal into play against teeming Chinese cities. They are said to believe they can weather conventional U. S. air attacks and go on to win the war on the ground.

A period of real danger is shaping up. Neither Red China nor North Vietnam wants a showdown with the U. S.—but the Communists seem just as determined as the U. S. to keep on with the war. Ahead lies a clash of strong wills, and a period of grave crisis.

IF BIG WAR COMES IN ASIA—



U.S. IS READY TO HIT COMMUNISTS WITH MASSIVE POWER

...ON THE GROUND
IN VIETNAM
32,000 soldiers and marines

...IN THE AIR
IN VIETNAM
More than 200 jets—latest Air Force and Marine fighters and bombers

...AT SEA
OFF VIETNAM
U. S. Seventh Fleet with 3 carriers, 250 strike planes, 30 destroyers—125 ships in all

BACKED UP BY
75,000 Army troops on Okinawa, Hawaii, South Korea
70,000 marines in Pacific force

BACKED UP BY
600 strike planes in Japan, Korea, Okinawa, Formosa, Philippines and Thailand

BACKED UP BY
U.S. Pacific Fleet with 425 ships, 3,000 planes, 180,000 men. On the way: Nuclear task force spearheaded by super-carrier Constellation

PLUS THESE NUCLEAR WEAPONS:
Hundreds of atomic bombs to arm the fighter-bombers now at Far East bases
Growing arsenals of Army battlefield nuclear weapons at Asian depots
48 Polaris missiles aboard nuclear submarines cruising off China mainland
2 squadrons of B-52 nuclear bombers ready on Guam
More than 900 intercontinental bombers of Strategic Air Command, armed with hydrogen bombs and all within easy range of Asia

AGAINST U.S. POWER, Communists in Asia can mount virtually no sea forces, small and weak air forces. Only on the ground do Reds hold superiority, and that can be offset by nuclear weapons if all-out war is forced on U.S.