

The 'Secret Plan'

Nixon, Vietnam & Russia

By Mary McGrory
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Washington

Four years ago Sunday, Richard Nixon almost gave a speech which contained his "secret plan" to end the war.

Quite simply, he proposed "candid, toughminded, face-to-face diplomacy" with the Soviets to bring home to them the danger of their support of the North Vietnamese.

A
News
Analysis

The sources for this curious and by now peripheral intelligence is a book by Richard Whalen, entitled "To Catch a Falling Flag." A memoir of his days as a Nixon campaign adviser and speech writer. It is not scheduled for publication until May 17, but Kevin Phillips revealed its most stressing item in a book review in a recent edition of "Human Events," a conservative weekly.

The plan has not changed in four years. President Nixon is today packing his bags, ready to put to the test — 18,000 American casualties and god knows how many Asian dead later — his theory that the way out of Vietnam is through Moscow.

The never-delivered speech was some six months in preparation. In the early 1968 primaries, Mr. Nixon confined himself to criticism of the Johnson policy of "gradual escalation." Nelson Rockefeller withdrawal and Robert Kennedy's entry offered him a chance to put some light between him and Lyndon Johnson.

TIME

He discarded the speech when the appointed time collided with the half-hour Johnson chose to announce a bombing halt and his abdication.

At one of the numerous planning and drafting sessions, Mr. Nixon gave this stark appraisal of Vietnam: "I've come to the conclusion that there's no way to win the war. But we can't say that, of course. In fact, we have to say the opposite, just to keep some degree of bargaining leverage."

Mr. Nixon's idea was to seek a summit with the Soviets and say to them, "If you're willing to give ground and help us out of this morass, it would mean a lot of good things."

Whalen, who was to resign from the campaign in mid-course, disgusted with the "risen advance men" who took it over, was given the job of drawing up the final draft.

NIGHT

The speech, published in its entirety, is a far more measured and less bellicose utterance than the bombastic defiance the president unleashed last Wednesday night. The purpose was, as Whalen explained, that "even if the Soviets could not reasonably be expected to accommodate Nixon where they had disappointed Johnson, it was essential to identify Moscow as the primary source of our frustration in Southeast Asia." Since the North Vietnamese offensive began Moscow has been fingered by two cabinet officers and the President himself as the villain of the piece — with little notable effect on the military situation.

The first year he was in office, Mr. Nixon sought repeatedly to interest the Russians in getting him off the hook. The record of those early months is replete with references to conferences with Soviet representatives. Now that he is negotiating from a position of weakness



RICHARD WHALEN
He's the source

— Vietnamization is currently at a shambles — will they be more interested in helping him out?

CLIQUE

Henry Kissinger — contemptuously dismissed by Whalen as a "standing clique of the cold war" came back from his secret journey to Moscow proclaiming light at the end of the tunnel by July 1.

Was he whistling past the graveyard, or did he extract from the Russians a promise of cutting off arms to Hanoi in return for an escalation of

"good things" in big-power agreements?

Do concessions on trade, arms limitations and space mean more to Moscow than its prestige as a big brother and shield to little Red nations fighting the capitalist imperialists? How interested are Brezhnev and company in Mr. Nixon's re-election?

ROLE

The equation then, as now, leaves out the North Vietnamese, who have stubbornly refused to recognize their role as a chess piece on the Kissinger-Nixon board, not even when explained to them by Chou En-lai. They are fighting for a victory. We are bombing for "a retreat without dishonor," and in his three years in office Richard Nixon has not been able to nail that particular coonskin to the wall.

It matters little what he thought and almost did four years ago. The ominous question is what will he do for it now. If he comes home from Moscow emptyhanded and the North Vietnamese are still advancing, will he take some drastic new military measures? His tendency, as he has warned us often, is when cornered "to strike back."