

# 1972: Where Are We Going?

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## WASHINGTON

WASHINGTON, Dec. 30—Nineteen hundred and seventy-one went out with a bang and a doubt. Between Christmas Eve and New Year's Eve, President Nixon appealed first for human peace and pity, and then ordered the heaviest bombing of North Vietnam in over three years, and nobody was quite able to reconcile the gentle words and the destructive bombs.

It is a curious business, peace on earth and pass the ammunition! But that's the way 1971 was, a mix perplexing only if started with Mr. Nixon proclaiming a New American Revolution of individual freedom and predictably a vast increase in the G.N.P. and if it ends with wage and price controls and the largest peacetime deficit in history.

It is a matter to understand Mr. Nixon's new economic policy and the new China policy—even if it might be run on both—than to try to arrange his sudden violent jump at North Vietnam during Christmas week.

The military dilemma in Vietnam is clear enough. The more men we bring home, the more vulnerable are the units who remain and the more the greater the President's responsibility to protect his dwindling force.

Hanoi also has a dilemma: The more Mr. Nixon withdraws from the ground fighting and relies on air power, the more it presses the Soviets for air defense and sends Russian MIG fighters into the air to challenge the attacking American bombers. But this doesn't resolve the dilemma; it only deepens them.

For the more Mr. Nixon bombs North Vietnam, the more determined the enemy will be to take a heavy toll at a U.S. American expenditure of force as it increases and the more he borrows from the United States for that matter. The more Hanoi will be asking for the sophisticated missiles Moscow gave the Egyptians in order to intercept and neutralize the highly sophisticated United States carriers in the South China Sea.

It has been clear now for years that Moscow and Peking are not going to allow America a power to be exercised against the North Vietnamese—this is one of the very few things Communist Russia and Communist China agree on—and that they are going to give Hanoi the weapons essential to combat whatever weapons the United States uses against them.

Mr. Nixon knows this better than anybody else. He has known for a long time that the North Vietnamese were gathering an air defense. He had his associates warn the press here about it as soon as Hanoi put its MIG's into the air. But there is no evidence that Hanoi's MIG's presented an immediate

danger to the American command—it was almost painful to watch Secretary of Defense Laird searching for words to justify the 3,000 tons raids on North Vietnam—and presumably there must be some other explanation for the sudden launching of hundreds of United States bombers over North Vietnam during the Christmas week.

One can only guess at the explanation, because at the end of Mr. Nixon's third year in office there is an almost complete breakdown of fruitful communication between the administration and the press. But the pattern of action by the President, especially when he has altered an important diplomatic or strategic policy, such as he has just sustained by the India-Pakistan conflict—is fairly obvious.

It is a certainty that Mr. Nixon does not know his own mind. He has a mind that is a jumble of his psychology, his passions, his wishes, and his political calculations. An admiring admirer might say he would have various qualities if he were not defeated by Kennedy and lost a humiliating defeat. But known to the California gubernatorial race of 1962. But as for this, he has a mind that the press after many years of being told he announced his resignation, "reference," something that is not true.

In an early, if not a very early, for the dramatic gesture, he is going to bid an unqualified goodbye to the White House and go to Cambridge and live. Does he still imagine that the future of his diplomacy is to be decided by a man with Russia, and a world in India and his race and his own government and a great deal of other things? And Nixon has proved that he can be a sometimes a victim.

He crosses his fingers with a son when he moves in one field, even if the question to another are the headlines striking the power of America in the world and the world. Demolition of American air power in Vietnam. But this does not change the direction and dominate the action.

In the short run, it is a brilliant demonstration of political tactics, and the old adversaries in press and television are paties for the dramatic maneuver and give it the big headline; but every bang leaves its doubt, and every successful maneuver, even when it commands the headlines, leaves a drop of poison.

And this is where we are at the beginning of the New Year—or so it seems here—alive, but confused and divided. And the paradox of it is that the New Year is a Presidential election year, and the central issue of the election may very well be between the men who are clever and the men who can be trusted.