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# The Cost of Keeping Nixon Around

*A Commentary*

*By Nicholas von Hoffman*

Much of the press and all of the Republican Party have spent the better part of the last three months computing what it will cost us if we let George McGovern into the White House. The bottom line figure changes from time to time but it's always horrendously large.

No such computations have been run on what it might cost us to keep Nixon for another four years. That figure is hard to arrive at since nobody knows all the different kinds of polite theft going on here, but if you add up the wheat deals, the milk deals, the deals on over-priced unflyable military aircraft, the bank charter deals, it may be that the Nixon people will take as much as the McGovern people will tax.

Then there is the largest cost of all—the war Nixon didn't end. Of late the Nixonites are maintaining that their guy never did say he had a secret plan to end it, which, they seem to think, absolves them from their failure to do so.

Apparently, Nixon and his crowd don't feel under any pressure to end it. It's enough to materialize on television from time to time and announce another troop withdrawal and have Dr. Kissinger dippydoodling around the capital cities of Europe taking swats at the dove of peace with a butterfly net.

The trouble is that there are now almost no ground troops left to withdraw, so that Nixon is running out of good news to announce. There has therefore been a kind of bland shift over to the public presumption that the war is over. Administration spokesmen keep making congratulatory statements about how well we've moved from a wartime to a peacetime economy. They probably could get away with it by dint of simple repetition if the rest of the world were not appallingly aware that we are daily waging the most massive aerial bombardment in the history of warfare.

The news of what we are doing is trickling back to us from the rest of the world. Foreign camera crews are supplying our TV networks with incontestable evidence that we are indeed bombing North Vietnam back to the stone age. With our growing awareness of the dimensions of the bombing, a second issue, that of the dikes, has begun to force itself on us.

With the growth of the number of Americans who, like Ramsey Clark and Joe Kraft, have actually been to North Vietnam and seen the bomb craters in the dikes, Nixon's response to them has become hilarious in a bloody-minded way: "They, of course, brought those who have been invited into the country to the areas where they have found bomb damage. They have not gone to any great pains to fill those holes, which they would naturally want to do before the possibility of rain and flood again comes to the North." (From the White House transcript of the July 27 press conference.) Next we shall hear that the North Vietnamese are blowing up their own dike system, one which has taken several hundred years to build, in order to make us Americans look bad.

Still, in the face of such preposterous apologies from the presidential mouth, we as a nation, accepted the Nixon position that any stray, single, accidental bomb that might possibly have fallen on a dike is because of the dike's proximity to a military target. It is too much

for us psychologically to confront the thought that Nixon is lying and that we are systematically bombing the Red River dike system for the purpose of causing famine even at the risk of drowning hundreds of thousands of people by flooding.

It's not too much for a foreigner to think. In fact that is exactly what Yves Lacoste, professor of geography at the University of Paris, does think. As a geographer Lacoste was professionally equipped to go to North Vietnam, study the bombardment of the hydrologic system and determine if the hits were random ones or patterned, intentional destruction. He concluded (*Le Monde*, Aug. 16):

"The major flood danger area in the delta lies where the arms of the Red River diverge toward the sea. While in the high delta, most villages are located on the heights of many of the old alluvial deposits which rise well above the low areas, in the low delta, on the contrary, most villages are lower than the river, right in the flood danger area if the dikes were to break. It is exactly the eastern part of the delta which has been bombed almost exclusively. If the bombings do not aim at dikes, but at 'military objectives,' they would have to be distributed within the whole delta. The high delta and the region of Hanoi has been bombed repeatedly. Curiously, the dikes have not been hit there."

The reason for this policy of flood and famine is simple. All else practical has failed. The Cambodian escapade and Laotian caper only achieved an increased dominance by the North Vietnamese and their allies. The blockade hasn't worked. The North Vietnamese have as much armor and artillery as before. In South Vietnam, they and NLF are popping up everywhere now that our ground troops are gone. So Nixon must either sign the cease-fire he should have signed four years ago or continue to bomb and hope that fire, flood, famine and disease will do their work.

Let that be added in when the costs are calculated.

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