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## Look for a Nixon Vietnam Surprise

By BRUCE BIOSSAT

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The odds are rising that somewhere in the Oct. 18-22 span President Nixon will spring a Vietnam war announcement which may dash altogether Sen. George McGovern's now faintly building hopes. High sources say the Nixon move will have a hard, convincing core to it, rather than a tone of vague promise.

If the plan comes off as presently projected, the President will not begin his heavy on-the-road campaigning until his announcement is made. On the assumption that it will be well received, the thinking is that Mr. Nixon's two weeks of political travel could take on the air of a triumphal tour.

This strategy would delay by one week the original schedule which called for the President to hit the trail steadily by Oct. 14-15. It does not preclude quick in-and-out trips like the Oct. 12 parade-and-rally venture to Atlanta to show the GOP flag in the Deep South.

Speaking of the President's evident intent to pull off a good one in the closing weeks, a friend says:

"The President has been waiting for this moment for a long time. He's been done to death with Democrats' late-hour coups (like Lyndon Johnson's Oct. 31 bombing halt in 1968). You can just bet he's not going to let this opportunity slip away."

Mr. Nixon, always conscious of political timing and getting frequent advice on the subject, seems to think very late-hour moves like LBJ's are unwise, that there's more benefit from earlier steps which have a chance to sink in with voters and may enhance a candidate's final crowds.

The planned Nixon coup does not reflect fear in the White House and other GOP circles that McGovern is seriously closing the wide gap most public and private polls show still exists between the two presidential nominees. The President has something else in mind. Says a knowledgeable Republican analyst:

"He wants to see some records tumble. He'd like to silence all that talk that he can't be a big winner."

Matching or beating Johnson's 61 per cent in 1964 and Franklin D. Roosevelt's 60.8 per cent in 1936 may be too high a goal, despite today's one-sided polls putting Nixon in that range.

What would be deeply satisfying to the President would be to surpass the landslide margins run up in 1952 and 1956 by national hero Dwight D. Eisenhower on the Republican ticket. Ike's well-remembered best showing, in 1956, gave him 57 per cent of the vote and a winning margin of 9.5 million votes.

The Democrats' early season jibes at Nixon as a man who fades under campaign pressures and nearly blows it probably were a strategic mistake. They have only heightened his determination to apply a crusher to McGovern in what will, of course, be the President's last election campaign of his lifetime.

Nixon clearly relishes his unique chance to command events in a political situation. Only a president, obviously, has so sure an opportunity.

McGovern, of course, is the one who really needs the big coup. My newest nationwide telephone survey of the states produces ample testimony that he is a little better off generally than a month ago, but that few think he can make it a close race unless he "gets a big break" or "catches fire." So far, nothing like this has happened.

Meantime, Mr. Nixon doesn't mind too much McGovern's charges that he is "in hiding." Yes, the President likes the open fight. But it's also nice to sit there, waiting, with one hand on a nice fat surprise package.

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