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**Inside Report**

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# Behind Nixon's Decision

By Rowland Evans and Robert Novak

WASHINGTON — President Nixon's difficult decision, reached on Friday, to resume mining Haiphong harbor the following day and unleash full-scale bombing of North Vietnam's heartland Monday morning, exactly fits the tough war strategy he has followed at every climactic point since he took office four years ago.

The President, reacting typically to Hanoi's apparent judgment that he was in a domestic political bind and simply had to produce a peace agreement, scarcely hesitated. He slipped both Moscow and Peking advance word — but not advance enough to permit interference with his decision — and then sent his bombers and minelayers into action.

**THE QUICK RESULT** of this typical Nixonian response to what he and Henry Kissinger regard as Hanoi's calculated foot-dragging is the resumption of full-scale aerial warfare for the first time in two months.

Mr. Nixon hopes that reopening the war in all its fury will purge the Hanoi Politburo of misconceptions that the U.S. will permit the war to end on the cheap.

As for Moscow and Peking, Mr. Nixon counts on screams of protest but not much more than that. Having decided to use force to break the enemy's will, his problem is not Moscow and Peking but whether he now will be trapped in open-ended aerial warfare, further swelling his runaway budget.

When Hanoi made the offer that produced Henry Kissinger's Oct. 26 "peace is at hand" prediction, Mr. Nixon had two options:

● The first option: Make a quick, spectacular peace without nailing down every loose end of the policing machinery, counting instead on the mood of world peace to restrain Hanoi's worst impulses in the delicate post-ceasefire period.

● The second option: Acting more cautiously and insisting on prior agreement from Hanoi on the post-ceasefire arrangements — the precise role, size, mobility and powers of the four-nation policing force.

What tipped Mr. Nixon toward taking the second option was the scream of protest from President Nguyen Van Thieu of South Vietnam. Thieu's rising popularity as the South Vietnamese patriot willing to battle both Hanoi and Washington suddenly transformed him into a far more dangerous antagonist.

Had Kissinger managed to pin Hanoi down to an equitable ceasefire guarantee, Mr. Nixon was prepared to shove it down Thieu's throat. But Thieu's new stature at home forced Mr. Nixon to confront these delicate guarantees in the agreement itself, not after the ceasefire took effect.

**WHAT HAPPENED** is now history. At the negotiating session on Monday, Dec. 11, Le Duc Tho, Hanoi's chief negotiator, showed suspicious signs of stalling. On Tuesday, he produced a new set of protocols for the post-ceasefire machinery that would have made a mockery of any serious policing of the agreement. On Wednesday, Tho added still other demands.

To Mr. Nixon, this sudden change meant one thing: Hanoi had decided that the American President was tied to a peace-at-any-price pledge and would have to knuckle under.