

'In the Name Of God, Go'

By ANTHONY LEWIS

Vietnam will not be an issue in the campaign as far as this Administration is concerned, because we will have brought the American involvement to an end.

—Richard Nixon, December, 1971.

LONDON, April 7—The Nixon withdrawal from Vietnam has always had something of an illusory character. While American ground troops left, other military involvement continued or intensified. From carriers and from enlarged bases in Thailand, American bombers attacked Laos and both parts of Vietnam. American planes and supplies supported a larger war effort in Cambodia. The phantom C.I.A. army fought in Laos.

Many Americans nevertheless believed—because their President said so and they wanted to believe—that their part in the Indochina war would soon be over. Now that belief must be dead—gone the way of all the other officially propagated illusions about Vietnam.

The South Vietnamese, we had been told, were making remarkable prog-

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ress, their million-man army confident, their political situation stable. The Communists had never rebuilt their southern infrastructure after the losses of Tet 1968. The war was going better than we had hoped.

It took less than a week for the new Communist offensive to shatter that picture and to send President Thieu of South Vietnam crying for help. Of course he cried to Richard Nixon. The response was the familiar one: more B-52's, more destroyers, more carriers, more close air support, more bombing of the North, more U.S. involvement.

Surely now there cannot be any informed person on earth who fails to understand what is the result of the Nixon-Kissinger formula for "peace" and "stability" in Indochina: perpetual war and perpetual American involvement. Unless the war ends on our terms, with Communist acceptance of the Thieu Government, we shall keep killing the inhabitants of Indochina—from a distance.

The Communist offensive did put Mr. Nixon in a difficult position. No American President wants to be seen abandoning a policy under duress, this one least of all. But it was Mr. Nixon and Henry Kissinger themselves who painted themselves into the corner where they have no options except more of the destruction that everyone knows is morally outrageous and politically useless.

When Mr. Nixon took office three years ago, he could have recognized the political realities of Vietnam and left the internal forces there to work out their own balance. Instead he has continued to make the attempt to impose our solution.

He did so, according to report, on the advice of Henry Kissinger that the other side could not indefinitely withstand our superior force and would have to agree to terms. In short, we could bomb them into settling.

But that was the oldest, most tattered official illusion of them all. From Lyndon Johnson's tragedy came the lesson that in a limited war the United States has limited power to impose its terms. If Henry Kissinger did indeed ignore that lesson, he will have a heavy reckoning to pay in history for three more years of pointless death in Indochina—or four or five or ten. For on the present policy, how can anyone pick a date when the war will end?

The Kissinger-Nixon justification for going on in Vietnam is that we must preserve our credibility as a world power. But a great country can justify such relentless destruction of another only if its own safety, its vital strategic interest, is urgently at stake. And virtually no one believes that about Vietnam any more.

A leading British student of international security and war, Michael Howard, has some apt comments in the April issue of *Encounter*. It is a tough-minded article, cautioning idealists that world stability will always require "the acceptance of necessary injustice"—for example, dealing with the Greek military regime.

But as a realist, Mr. Howard says of Vietnam: The evils that would result from Communist domination there are "purely notional and arguable," while "the evils which are perpetuated in preventing it appear so actual and so evident that the 'order' in whose name they are carried out stands... condemned." He concludes:

"Whatever the arguments may be about regional or global stability, about dominoes or deterrence, what the United States has been doing in Vietnam is wrong and ought to be stopped."

The American people have evidently believed for some time that President Nixon's objective—preserving Nguyen Van Thieu—is not worth what we are doing to Indochina and to ourselves. They want an end to American involvement, with its corrupting effects on our reputation abroad and our peace at home. They would say what Cromwell said in dismissing the Long Parliament: "In the name of God, go."