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Strategy in Southeast Asia

To the Editor: APR 13 1972

The Nixon-Kissinger strategy for Southeast Asia is ingenious but self-defeating. It often gains a temporary advantage here and there, but in doing so forces the enemy into a winning counterstrategy. As with the mediocre chess player, it outsmarts itself with clever moves that give even better options to the opponent.

This is nowhere so evident as in the present invasion of South Vietnam, which is ultimately the responsibility of President Nixon—not only in his Vietnamization program but also in his election strategy and general approach to foreign policy.

His support of President Thieu's bogus election taught the Vietcong it could not trust the American peace plan calling for another such election. His Laotian invasion taught North Vietnam it could win conventional battles against South Vietnamese troops even with full U.S. air support.

His Pakistan policy taught the Soviet Union it could effectively undercut a potential Peking-Washington axis by supporting decisive military invasions.

His 1970 election strategy of shifting from dovish peace proposals before the election to hawkish attacks after the election taught North Vietnam that such a major effort is not only feasible but necessary before the November election. His visit to China also taught them that he is flexible enough, if necessary to win the election, to reverse his policy and negotiate seriously on the formation of a coalition government.

Now President Nixon must reap the consequences of his cleverness, trying to bolster the enormous contradictions in withdrawing American troops while dismantling the Paris peace talks and spreading the war to Laos and Cambodia. The entire chicken coop has come home to roost, and he must abandon his vaunted "secret plan" to avoid being dumped on the boneyard of Presidents and candidates who have tried to protract the war contrary to the will of the American and Vietnamese people. I hope and pray his decision is to begin serious negotiations.

EDWARD JAYNE

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