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Nixon's Dual Strategy for the War

By Charles W. Yost

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THE MOMENT of truth has arrived in Vietnam — not for “Vietnamization,” because despite the vast armament we have provided Thieu, President Nixon obviously does not intend to risk letting him go it alone against the North. What is being tested now, and probably will be for the rest of 1972, is “Vietnamization plus” — that is, Vietnamese fighting on the ground and Americans fighting from the air.

Will Vietnamese and Americans in these complementary belligerent roles be able to repulse General Giap's offensives as effectively as Vietnamese and Americans, both of them fighting on the ground, were able to do in the past? That is the immediate question.

This strategy is no doubt designed to get Americans out of ground combat, where most lives are lost, but nevertheless to enable them still to play a sufficiently decisive role to prevent either victory or significant successes by the North Vietnamese.

This has no doubt been the President's dual objective ever since January, 1969 — to achieve by November 1972 both a with-

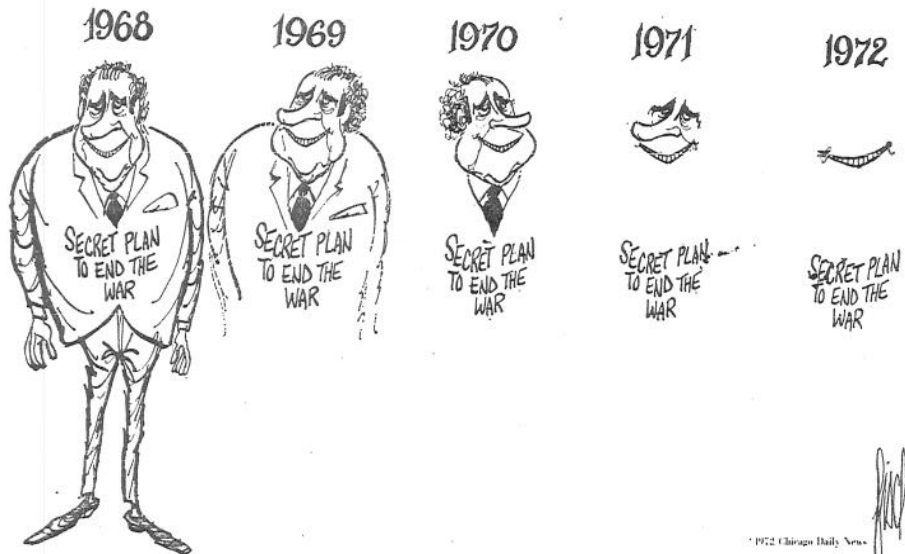
Americans out of it.

It will not end the war because, if Hanoi would not stop fighting when it was confronted by half a million American troops plus heavy American bombing of much of the North, it is certainly not going to stop when it is confronted by the bombing alone.

The essential fact that President Kennedy, President Johnson and President Nixon have failed to understand or to admit is that the North Vietnamese will go on fighting indefinitely, at whatever cost, but that the Americans, being unconvinced the issue is a vital one to them, will not.

Therefore the final settlement, by fighting or by negotiation, will inevitably be made between Vietnamese. Bombing may prolong the war but will not settle it.

The second fact that is clear is that continued United States bombing will not “Vietnamize” the war or get the United States out of it. As long as our bombing continues,



—It Vanished Quite Slowly. . . And Ending With the Grin, Which Remained Some Time After the Rest of It Had Gone. . .

—The Cheshire Cat in Alice in Wonderland.

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drawal of United States ground combat forces and a victory for Thieu in the sense that at that date he would still control Saigon and most of the South.

Obviously no one can be sure at this writing whether this strategy will succeed. Two facts, however, one can be sure of: It will not end the war, and it will not get the

we shall not know whether the South Vietnamese, after seven years of massive American support, are at last able to stand on their own feet.

As long as our bombing continues, more United States lives will be lost, the number of United States prisoners in enemy hands will increase, and the chance of getting any prisoners released will be nil. As long as our bombing continues, the possibility of detente with the Soviet Union and China, and of a comprehensive stabilization of Southeast Asia, will be delayed and perhaps jeopardized.

The old argument that the bombing is “to protect American forces” is completely threadbare, now that we have practically withdrawn from ground combat and our small residual forces are not being directly attacked.

So-called “agreements” about reciprocal restraint announced by the United States in 1968 were never acknowledged by the North Vietnamese and have long since been violated by both sides. We know, moreover, from bitter experience between 1965 and 1968 that bombing in Indo-China is inher-

ently indecisive, that it will not win the war or intimidate Hanoi.

What seems to be taking place on the American side therefore is primarily a buying of time until November. The United States public is simply not going to stand for indefinite United States participation in the war.

At some point, President Thieu and our South Vietnamese friends are going to have to be left to stand on their own feet and prove that "Vietnamization" really works. That means fighting without any United States participation whatsoever, on the ground or in the air, though it does not necessarily mean cutting of United States military and economic aid.

I hope personally that the South Vietnamese can stand on their own feet, fighting if necessary, making their own political settlement if possible. But I see no reason whatsoever to believe that, if they are unable to do so in April 1972, they will be able to do so in November 1972 or in April 1973.

Let us at long last "Vietnamize" 100 percent, stop bombing, arrange the release of our prisoners, and get out completely. This should not be a partisan political issue. It is in the interest of all Americans.

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