

Why and How to End the Bombing

Mr. Nixon's decision to force a major confrontation with the Soviet Union over the issue of its supply of arms to North Vietnam defies sense. If he "wins," it will only be at the sure cost of humiliating the Kremlin. If he "loses," he will have humiliated himself. In either case, the already difficult and delicate Soviet-American negotiations on other issues will be subjected to heavy, perhaps intolerable, new strains. The crisis can hardly fail to give fresh political ammunition to those on both sides who warn that the other cannot be trusted. Particularly likely, and particularly destructive, would be a bitter mutual spurt ahead on building new arms. It does not seem too much to say that Mr. Nixon has put his whole touted "generation of peace" in the balance.

Indeed, the President seems to have been seized anew by several thoroughly discredited cold-war concepts which we had thought and hoped he had left behind. One such concept is that any bargain with Moscow is the product of American indulgence, not mutual benefit: thus one can threaten not to sell Russia American grain—as though the stuff were not coming out of our ears and as though Canada and others were not desperate to make the sales. Another such concept is that Soviet support of Hanoi and American support of Saigon are analogous, two peas in a pod—a contention ignoring, among many points, the disparities between the few hundred tanks and the like which Moscow has given Hanoi for its current offensive, and the tremendous aid in supplies to say nothing of direct participation, which Washington has afforded Saigon.

Secretary Laird says that "80 per cent of the

equipment being used in this particular conflict continues to be supplied . . . by the Soviet Union." Who doubts it? But it's 80 per cent of not much: all Soviet aid to North Vietnam last year was valued at only \$415 million by the administration. More important, 100 per cent of the men and motivation continue to be supplied by North Vietnam itself—a level of "Vietnamization" surpassing any which even the administration's firmest supporters believe to be within the reach of Saigon, and a level which virtually ensures that there will be another Hanoi offensive, regardless of how this one comes out. Just as it is not within Washington's capacity to impart will to Saigon, so it is not within Moscow's capacity — in the inconceivable event that it chose to—to drain will from Hanoi. Who doubts that?

Moscow has so far avoided substantial or irrevocable comments on the crisis. This is to the good. It leaves it possible for Mr. Nixon to determine that the bombing raids at Haiphong and Hanoi caught the Communists off guard and were eminently successful—so much so that there is no further need to continue them. We don't doubt that, with the facts available, he can support such a judgment. Coupled with a post-offensive judgment that Saigon can now fight its own war, such as we suggested last week, this would give Mr. Nixon the rationale he apparently needs in order to halt the bombing, end the American combat role and open negotiations to retrieve the prisoners. A determination that the bombing had had its intended political/military results would also allow Soviet-American relations to return to the cautiously promising track they were on before the latest raids began.