

Hanoi's Massive Invasion

WHEN THE NORTH VIETNAMESE launched a conventional invasion of the South, complete with Soviet-made T-54 tanks and other heavy equipment, you might have thought that the question of who was doing what to whom would be conclusively settled.

This was straight, naked aggression. Not even the most dedicated opponent of the war could argue that amphibious tanks were being constructed in peasant huts by the Viet Cong.

YET IN SUBSEQUENT WEEKS we have heard some of the strangest explanations of what allegedly occurred: Some commentators have virtually suggested that President Nixon personally sponsored the invasion.

When the bombers went North, the howl went up that we had escalated the war, and Senator J. W. Fulbright suggested that we had provoked Hanoi by breaking off the Paris talks. Fulbright's logic was bizarre — in effect, he said that since we had refused to give the North Vietnamese what they want, they had no recourse except to go for military victory.

The harsh fact is that in terms of the arrangements made in 1968 as a precondition for a full bombing halt, the President was completely justified in taking the air war to the North. There has been a great deal of fudging about whether or not the Hanoi regime accepted any "understandings" and some people seem to have had odd memory lapses.

What occurred in 1968 was that we in-

sisted as a precondition for a total bombing halt that Hanoi agree 1) to respect the inviolability of the DMZ; 2) to cease shelling the cities of South Vietnam; and 3) to permit American aerial reconnaissance of the North.

It is true that Hanoi's representatives never signed on the dotted line; there is no formal piece of paper. But the President of the United States was assured by the Soviets that Hanoi would go along with these terms. Without that assurance Lyndon Johnson told me he would never have agreed to a total halt: "It would be strictly a one-way proposition."

This is not just a matter of recollection. At the time, Secretary of Defense Clark Clifford went on CBS-TV, "Face the Nation," and said in response to a question about the quid pro quo we had extracted from Hanoi, "the situation is that we had certain understandings reached with the North Vietnamese in Paris. They involved the DMZ and the shelling of the cities and the question of reconnaissance. There is the area of agreement." (12-15-68).

WHAT HANOI HAS DONE in the last few years is lay the groundwork for a heavy invasion through the DMZ. Four roads were built and supplies were stockpiled immune to air attack. And then they came in. They have been rocketing Saigon and other cities. In sum, they broke the agreement and, to repeat, Mr. Nixon is correct: All bets are off.

"Johnson's war," in other words, has not become "Nixon's war." The war is now and always has been "Hanoi's war."