

Vietnam Policy: Who's on First?

By James Burnham

We all know that in relation to Vietnam Richard Nixon is a war-monger, a butcher and a monster more vile than Hitler, and that George McGovern is a defeatist, a quitter and a modern Benedict Arnold. But suppose a visitor from Uganda, impressed by the ferocity of the dove vs. hawk rhetoric, asked us to explain just exactly how the President's Vietnam policy differs from the rival candidate's.

"Senator McGovern," we might start, "wants to stop the war."

Q. "Mr. Nixon doesn't want to stop it?"

A. "Yes, certainly, but Nixon wants peace with honor, and McGovern. . . ."

Q. "Peace with dishonor?"

A. "No, of course not. But peace quickly. . . ."

Q. "Nixon *doesn't* want it quickly?"

A. "Yes, but you see, McGovern won't fool around. He'll have everybody out and the war over in ninety days or maybe it's sixty days, period."

Q. "No matter what?"

A. "Well, naturally there will be some sort of understanding on the P.O.W.'s, and an arrangement about refuge for key anti-Communists who stood with us loyally. . . ."

And so it might go.

There is no strategic issue between President Nixon and Senator McGovern on Vietnam. They have the same strategic objective: to get out. The differences between them, rhetoric apart, are tactical, concerning methods and timing. Even these probably don't amount to much from a practical standpoint, as McGovern would find out if he (per impossible) had to translate his Vietnam policy from words to acts. It's a lot harder to end a war than to begin one.

The President, in his Vietnamization

policy, made two promises: to get all our troops out, and to leave behind an independent, non-Communist South Vietnamese Government capable of standing on its own feet. His performance on the first is pretty good as political performances go, but he has not been able to deliver on his second promise.

From the beginning of our Vietnam intervention there has been only one way to fulfill that second aim: by defeating North Vietnam, which would have required an invasion of the North. Though this was understood by many in the Pentagon and the intel-



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ligence agencies (as the Pentagon Papers annotate), the objective of defeating North Vietnam was consistently (and explicitly) excluded, in keeping with our defensive global policy.

Vietnamization enthusiasts claim "success" from the fact that the South Vietnamese Army and Government still exist after the blows of this year's North Vietnamese offensive. But they exist only because massive U.S. military forces have carried out a blockade of the northern ports, strategic bombing of the North, and tactical bombing in the South. If the U.S. military operations are stopped, the South Vietnamese cannot substitute for them, if for no other reason because we have not supplied them with the necessary weapons. In fact, as soon as our aircraft withdraw, Hanoi will have air superiority. We have given Saigon no supersonic aircraft and no

air defense system. Hanoi has supersonic MIG's as well as advanced anti-aircraft weapons.

When we end military action, Hanoi will have a preponderance of power in Vietnam and, indeed, in Indochina as a whole. Hanoi will use this to establish political domination in South Vietnam—no doubt by stages—and in due course throughout Indochina. This has been Hanoi's undeviating aim. Why should it renounce its aim when it has not been defeated?

Since defeat of North Vietnam is excluded, it follows from the real situation in Vietnam that the Saigon Government can be kept genuinely independent (of Hanoi, that is; Saigon is not independent of us) only so long as our military forces remain active or ready to be active in the theater.

Flying down to Miami, the President told Stewart Alsop: "I'm sure of one thing. The war will be over. The war can't be hanging over us in a second term." I think he meant it, and it's my guess that "the war will be over"—for us, at any rate, since that much is within the President's power—fairly soon now, by some time in 1973 and just possibly in 1972.

It's kind of mean to Senator McGovern. According to a recent poll, the voters are nearly four to one in favor of getting *all* our men home, and by five to three believe Nixon a better man than McGovern to do it. But that sort of paradox is common enough in politics. Just as it was only the nation's leading anti-Communist who could inaugurate a global detente with Communism, so, often, it takes a warmonger to make peace.

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