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Comment

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Mr. Nixon's 'Pawns'

To the Editor:

It is President Nixon's practice, as it was President Johnson's, to attach to his "peace" offerings conditions acceptable only to a defeated foe.

Mr. Nixon's current condition is especially cynical since it involves use of our prisoners of war as pawns. War prisoners, as Mr. Nixon well knows, are not customarily released until a war is over. The North Vietnamese can scarcely be expected to be more generous to men who have laid waste their land and slaughtered thousands of their people in the name of our "national interest."

The certain way to obtain prisoner release is to stop waging war. Through his innumerable private channels to Hanoi, Mr. Nixon can readily obtain the commitments for release he says he demands, in return for his agreement to get out of Vietnam.

He does not do this because for him the prisoners provide the rationalization he needs for keeping troops there indefinitely to prevent the toppling of the imposed Thieu regime. Thus, while attacking Hanoi for its "barbaric" refusal to free war prisoners, he is himself prolonging the conditions for their continued incarceration.

In the light of historic fact, his refusal to withdraw all troops on the further ground that he wants to bring permanent peace in Asia is equally insulting to the intelligence.

He pretends to have inherited the war situation *de novo*. In fact, the political goals of this war were precisely defined by the Eisenhower-Nixon Administration in 1954, when it insisted at Geneva that Vietnam be partitioned and the South barred from expressing self-determination because of the otherwise certain election of a Communist-led government. When the Geneva Conference rejected the U.S. demand and mandated 1956 elections



Detail from "Warrior With Shield" by Henry Moore

for a single all-Vietnam regime, Washington deliberately and unilaterally proceeded to enforce partition and imposition of a regime on the South—violating its pledge at Geneva and ignoring its U.N. Charter commitments.

After seventeen years of continuous, bloody efforts to compel Vietnamese acceptance of partition and imposed regimes in Saigon, Mr. Nixon still speaks of maintaining U.S. air and naval power and support troops to give Saigon time to prepare to defend itself. Behind the rhetoric about winding down the war, he is still plainly committed to the political goals of 1954.

Since the bulk of Vietnam's villages—South and North—were solidly identified with Ho Chi Minh's Government, these goals could be realized only by a war of ruthless destruction and extermination. Nixon's plea, plainly, involves continuation, from the air, of that same ruthless process.

His objective of "permanent peace" in Asia can mean only that of total extermination of a resistant population.

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