

## Merry-Go-Round

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# Nixon's Promises To Hanoi, Saigon



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**I**N AN EFFORT to halt the North Vietnamese offensive long enough to get re-elected, President Nixon is giving opposite assurances to Saigon and Hanoi.

He has sent a secret message to President Nguyen Van Thieu, promising powerful U.S. military blows to help the South Vietnamese push back the invaders from the north.

At the same time, Mr. Nixon has promised the North Vietnamese that he will withdraw all American troops and stop "all acts of force" within four months after a cease-fire.

His objective, apparently, is to prevent a South Vietnamese defeat before the election. The four-month grace period, if he can get the North Vietnamese to agree to it, should get him safely past election day.

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**T**HEREAFTER, he is willing to let the Vietnamese settle their own affairs. All his secret advices warn, however, that the settlement can only come on the battlefield.

The North Vietnamese are unwilling to give up at a truce table what they are confident they can win on the battlefield. The South Vietnamese, on the other hand, are unwilling to give up at a truce table what they haven't yet lost on the battlefield.

A military showdown, therefore, is inevitable. The President merely wants to postpone it until after the election.

His message to Thieu, hand-delivered by American Ambassador Ellsworth Bunker and General Creighton Abrams,

encouraged Saigon to resist the invasion on the ground. In return, Mr. Nixon promised that American air and naval power would destroy the North Vietnamese military machinery.

The secret battle reports, however, raise grave doubts about South Vietnam's ability to resist. One secret report predicts pessimistically that the northern citadel of Hue would fall and that the Thieu government couldn't survive the consequences.

The President has been sending signals to Hanoi, therefore, that the North Vietnamese might achieve the goal less painfully by granting a cease-fire and waiting four months for the United States to pull out of Vietnam gracefully. The implication is that Hanoi would then be free to resume the offensive unhampered by the terrifying U.S. air and naval bombardment.

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**Y**ET, all the while, the Nixon Administration has tried to bolster the Saigon Regime with constant assurances of U.S. support. During Foreign Minister Tran Van Do's recent Washington visit, for example, Secretary of State William Rogers told him it would be "sheer stupidity" for the United States to cease giving support to Saigon after the tremendous investment in the war effort.

Concludes a confidential report on the visit: "We believe Do's visit will serve to give him an arsenal of arguments and opinions . . . to help convince President Thieu that U.S. constancy of purpose and intention is not in doubt."