

# The War And the Election

By JAMES RESTON

WASHINGTON, Aug. 3—The Senate's 49-47 vote to withdraw all United States forces from Indochina within four months, provided all prisoners of war are released, amounts to a vote of no-confidence in President Nixon's tougher peace terms.

This was done after Henry Kissinger, the President's Security Affairs adviser, had returned from his latest peace mission to Paris, but there is no evidence that it has persuaded the President to give up his additional demands for an internationally supervised cease-fire and his continued support of the present Saigon Government.

If anything, Mr. Nixon seems even more determined to insist on his four-point peace plan than before the Senate's no-confidence vote was taken, for all indications are that he is running well ahead in his campaign for re-election, and now feels confident that he will win in November even if the whole Congress goes along with the Senate and the Paris stalemate continues.

This is one of the ironies of the faltering McGovern campaign, for the more Senator McGovern presses for peace on the Senate's terms—unless of course he wins the election—the

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more Mr. Nixon is likely to interpret a Republican victory at the polls as an endorsement of his present policy and an invitation to carry on the war until the enemy settles on his terms.

There is no evidence on the public record to date that Hanoi and the National Liberation Front are taking this connection between the pro-Nixon trend of the election and the war into account. President Nixon said in his press conference here on July 27, "At this point the chance for a negotiated settlement is better now than it has ever been." But while the private talks with Mr. Kissinger go on, there has been no modification of the enemy's demands.

Nevertheless, Hanoi is now in a more awkward position politically and militarily than it was in early May after its first successful advances into the northern provinces of South Viet-

nam. It has gained ground at appalling cost in men and arms, but its offensive toward Hue and Saigon have been blocked, its ports and industry are under savage and unremitting attack by American air power, the outcry in the United States against this systematic destruction has dwindled, and while Moscow and Peking keep on sending supplies to the North, Soviet and Chinese officials have recently been more cordial to American officials than usual.

This obviously confronts the eight-man Politburo in Hanoi (only one of whom has ever been in the West and only three ever out of Vietnam) with some very hard choices.

If they agree to peace on Mr. Nixon's terms before November, or any rough equivalent thereof, they would almost certainly be assured that both Mr. Nixon and General Thieu in Saigon would remain in office.

But if they don't agree to settle on his terms, the chances are—the way the election is now going—that they will be confronted by a President and maybe even a Congress less willing to compromise than at present. And this after three more months of U.S. bombing between now and the election.

Accordingly, unless Hanoi can manage to mount a military offensive and achieve its objectives on the battlefield, which seems unlikely between now and the autumn, it will either have to make peace or at least accept something like Mr. Nixon's terms of peace before November—or gamble on the odds of a McGovern victory.

Even to those in the Senate who voted against the President and for a simple policy of getting out in four months with the prisoners this seems a very dubious gamble. Yet the Senate has at least clarified one of the fundamental issues of the campaign and put the question of war aims plainly before the American people.

Do they want to end this war in four months if all prisoners of war are released, as the Senate has proposed? Or do they want to continue the war, not only until the prisoners are home, but until South Vietnam is reasonably sure that it will not be

taken over by the Communists?

No doubt the question can be put in a different way. President Nixon phrased it as follows in his last press conference: "It would be the height of immorality," he said, "for the United States at this point to leave Vietnam, and in leaving, to turn over to the North Vietnamese the fate of 17 million South Vietnamese, who do not want a Communist Government. . . . That is what this is about. That is the only issue that is left."

Here then is the great political and moral issue of the election that is bound to emerge, if the Democrats ever get over their fiddling. Mr. McGovern's position is that it is the height of immorality for the United States to continue the killing for the specific purpose of preventing a Communist takeover.

He would leave that question to the South Vietnamese, and so would the Senate, though by a very narrow vote. But the question cannot be decided by the Senate. It is probably going to have to be determined by the American voters, and at least the issue is now being stated in terms that can be widely understood.