

SFChronicle  
**McGovern's Gaffes**

AUG 19 1972

# Why the Vietnam War May Not Be an Issue

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 Washington Star-News

## Washington

Sometimes when a peace mission is contradicted by a bombing raid, it is an accident. Such was the case in December 1966 when 'Operation Mari-gold' three months in careful calculation, was wiped out by an untimely strike in Hanoi. Somebody forgot to ground the Air Force that particular day.

In 1965,

when Soviet Premier Alexei Kosygin was visiting Hanoi supposedly to

talk reason, the Air Force apparently failed to get the word.

Sometimes, however, it is deliberate. In 1967, when Harold Wilson, then Britain's Prime Minister, thought he had sighted a dove, in long talks with Kosygin, a bombing pause was brusquely terminated by Lyndon Johnson, who could not wait another 48 hours.

So the fact that Henry Kissinger's arrival in Saigon for talks with Nguyen Van Thieu coincided with massive raids on the North could mean that nothing can stop the Air Force once it's programmed for 400 strikes or that the President didn't want the North Vietnamese to think he was going soft.

Le Duc Tho was simultaneously arriving in Hanoi,

and since he spends much of his time in Paris as North Vietnam's chief negotiator, maybe the President thought Tho should have a taste of the medicine he has prescribed in unlimited doses for a stubborn little nation that refuses to cooperate in his re-election plans.

## COMPLAINED

Maybe the routine raids were to reassure President Thieu, who has lately complained of faintheartedness from Washington.

There is speculation that Kissinger took in his baggage the deed of a villain on the Riviera where Thieu could spend his exile. His departure is a hardcore demand of the North Vietnamese, but they have also added the condition that Thieu's entire government be "dismantled."

Still, if Thieu were to go, and the war still goes on, Mr. Nixon can claim on the campaign trail that he has gone the extra mile, and that only the intransigence and arrogance of the North condemns its people to further and perhaps even more severe punishment.

## EFFECT

Ramsey Clark, who is justing on the people who endure it has been to stiffen their resistance. The former attorney general cannot expect a hearing on this point, although history is on his side.

No doubt Richard Nixon would like to have peace in Vietnam, as another star in his crown. But each passing day seems to persuade him that he can be re-elected without it. At the moment,

the McGovern campaign poses as much threat to his prospects as North Vietnam does to the security of the U.S.

McGovern's talkative friends are providing him with unlimited embarrassment on his key issue. Sargent Shriver's initiative about the bright prospects in 1968 and 1969 falls awkwardly within the Johnson period in the White House. Ramsey Clark's suggestion that the prisoners would be released upon the election of McGovern didn't help noticeably either.

## GAFFES

But these gaffes fade into brilliance when compared with the revelations of Pierre Salinger's diplomatic efforts in Paris last month and McGovern's handling of them. The candidate, who is surrounded by men with a marked lack of passion for anonymity, first denied that Salinger was his agent, later declared that it was at his "request" that Salinger sounded out the North Vietnamese about the prisoners.

The episode did not jeopardize the prospects of peace as much as the bombing of Hanoi, but it did raise serious questions about McGovern's judgment and capacity for self-preservation.

No matter what Kissinger brings back from his pre-convention spectacular, the President feels confident of his own future. The public, according to available indicators, is not aroused by the bombing. The polls show that in a choice between the vindictive and the hapless, the country will go for the vindictive. The Republicans have ruled out the war as a subject for discussion at the convention. It seems well on its way to being eliminated as a campaign issue as well.

