

Bombing: The Damage at Home [Companion articles, one by Michael Getler and one by Josiah Lee Auspitz.]

By Josiah Lee Auspitz

The writer was a contributor to the 1968 book, "The Realities of Vietnam."

WHAT IS NOW GOING ON in Vietnam, and has been going on since last spring, is probably clearer to the average American that it is to the intelligentsia. Those who read little are not distracted by concepts and ideals; they are able to see President Nixon's bombing and mining as a brute test of wills against the men who ordered North Vietnam's Easter offensive.

They saw during the election campaign what much of the intelligentsia failed to see: that a stable resolution of the war was no better assured under McGovern than under Nixon. And they told pollsters what few writers dared to print in November: that notwithstanding Henry Kissinger's Oct. 26 press conference, the prospects for a quick and lasting settlement were only marginal.

Now doubtless they sense in some way that the President and Kissinger are not telling the full truth about the negotiations. They doubtless sense that Mr. Nixon is being tenacious but also devious in a cause he believes in.

The Kissinger press conference is rightly taken as the first public indication of the deceitfulness. Sen. McGovern's bitter speech following it was based on his own soundings that most Americans viewed it as just that. But the fraud was perpetrated not against the American people but against the North Vietnamese. The press conference was not designed to influence the presidential elections, for Mr. Nixon's own pollsters told him that a preelection peace announcement would hurt him. Rather, it was designed as the last successful diplomatic step to prevent the North Vietnamese from making any military move that could influence the elections.

### How Hanoi Was Had

THE NEGOTIATIONS were carried out in an atmosphere in which both sides knew that a preelection agreement was best for North Vietnam. If Mr. Nixon won reelection there would be little to stop him from continuing a war of aerial bombardment. A preelection quietus on the war front was important to Mr. Nixon, whose own data told him even after the Democratic convention that his support was soft.

Even after the Eagleton fiasco, an

embarrassment in foreign policy could have shattered the air of competence that was the key to his victory over McGovern. He certainly could not have forgotten how the U-2 incident and the anti-American riots in Japan had hurt him in 1960, how the Cuban missile crisis defeated him in 1962 and how the bomb halt almost made Hubert Humphrey President in 1968.

Thus the North Vietnamese wanted a signed agreement; Mr. Nixon wanted a quietus. The Oct. 26 press conference was his way of telling them that though he had got his quietus, they wouldn't get his signature. The Oct. 31 date on which they thought he had promised to sign a peace was now off. They had been had. The President had now begun to consult those whose advice he had neglected during the period when he needed the quietus. He was told that a signing of the Oct. 31 points would bring a collapse of Gen. Thieu, a Communist takeover, a McGovern-style solution. So he changed his mind and began to press for modification in the nine points. The North Vietnamese, feeling cheated, now proposed their own modifications.

What the technical sticking points were in Paris we need not know. The real sticking point to the Oct. 31 agreement is that Mr. Nixon now holds the cards and knows it. Hence he can get a better peace than he had earlier agreed to, a better peace than he offered publicly on May 8 when things looked a lot bleaker. There is very little the North Vietnamese can do about this without great power backing.

The Russians, waiting for the tardy arrival of U.S. wheat shipments to avert localized starvation, are a weak reed for Hanoi. The Chinese may be sturdier allies but the key point here is not what aid they give but whether they are willing to commit troops in Vietnam or even Korea. If Mr. Nixon does not fear a land war with them, it matters little what support they give to Hanoi.

For it was only the prudent desire to avoid a confrontation with China that gave the United States a stake in the survival of North Vietnam. Our desire to preserve Hanoi as a buffer against China was more important than moral scruple in limiting the bombing under President Johnson.

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The Peking summit changed all that. Until such time as there is a change in Chinese leadership, the United States has no stake in the survival of North Vietnam as the preponderant power in Indochina. Neither does Russia. Neither does China. What Mr. Nixon is now doing to bring this point home to Hanoi is the ugliest thing Americans have seen a President do for many a Christmas, but what is to stop him?

Richard Helms, it is said, will no longer be on hand to leak pessimism from the CIA. Elliot Richardson will be frozen out at the first whisper of disloyalty. William Rogers and Henry Kissinger have been through the Vietnam wringer often enough with Mr. Nixon to be awed by the President's guts.

As for Congress, the President has shown himself willing to sacrifice domestic programs in order to face down his Capitol critics in pursuing his foreign policy objectives.

### Three Types of Settlement

THE KEY QUESTION, then, is whether there exists a peace settlement which Mr. Nixon could accept and whether there is anyone he trusts

to negotiate it. If not, the war will go on.

There are three broad types of settlement, each with its own price and risks. None is wholly satisfactory, but that is the nature of Vietnam. None, from the most moderate to the most bloody, is ruled out by Mr. Nixon's action to date.

1. The Laotian-style (or "leopard spot") agreement: This involves an in-place cease-fire, a freeze on spheres of influence, a low level of violence, a good bit of Communist cheating, continuing clandestine American involvement, but no major disruptions. The Paris negotiations aimed at such an agreement, which has worked in Laos for some time. The offer of reconstruction aid for North Vietnam was intended to create a climate for it to work in Vietnam. The presence at Paris of William Sullivan, our former ambassador to Laos, was an attempt to demonstrate American good faith. The talk about elections, coalitions, international police forces and whatnot are only window dressing for this approach. The crucial thing is a stable balance of forces and the willingness of all parties not to disrupt it in a major way.

If there is to be a quick settlement it will still be along these lines. In this case, Mr. Nixon's current actions will be read backward as an attempt to convince Hanoi that he seriously wants a Laotian stabilization, not a "figleaf" for surrender. And indeed, the credible threat of American bombing is a technical prerequisite to this approach, which requires that all parties be prepared to disrupt massively in order to assure that each will cheat only minimally. The preparations for another North Vietnamese offensive which the administration says have forced it to resume full-scale bombing, as well as the speedup in U.S. arms shipments to Saigon after Oct. 26, both fit into this pattern.

2. The Korean-style solution (or "victory"): the expulsion of all North Vietnamese troops from the South, the firm establishment of the DMZ, the territorial integrity of South Vietnam with a centralized anti-Communist regime within its present boundaries. This would involve a devastation of North Vietnam to the extent that its army is needed merely to rebuild the country. According to intelligence reports leaked to The New York Times over the summer, this would require two years of intensive bombing. It is objectionable on moral grounds and it would cost a lot of money for planes, a lot of good will at home and abroad. But it is not infeasible and not ruled out by the President's current action. Indeed, the President himself has made no public statement since May of what acts the North Vietnamese could take short of withdrawal that would be satisfactory to him. Why should he, until he sees how hard he can shove them, and how many press conferences he can pump out of Henry Kissinger?

3. The confederal (or "patchwork") solution: It is unlikely that a long-term stabilization of Vietnam will be quickly achieved, but if it were it would require that spheres of influence be supported by redrawn political boundaries and new constitutional arrangements. It has been clear for some time that South Vietnam cannot defend its northernmost I Corps area without massive American bombing support, so in any redrawing some sort of Hue-based buffer area loosely associated with Saigon but effectively acting as a North Vietnamese sphere of influence would reflect the actual results of the war. Local guarantees of autonomy in South Vietnam and some additional buffer areas in Laos and Cambodia policed by international forces could separate the North and South Vietnamese armies in a way that a Laotian-style agreement cannot. The Paris negotiations still remain far

from this decentralized approach, which would limit Saigon's sovereignty without extending that of Hanoi.

### A Moral Danger

IT IS OFTEN ARGUED that any approach that involves the United States in minute constitutional arrangements could reinvolve us in case these broke down. That is correct. But the risk of reinvolvement is run in any plan an American President can accept. The United States has spent 18 years making the Vietnam mess; no negotiating proposal is realistic that assumes we can abruptly turn our backs on it.

I have said nothing about the duplicity, bloodthirstiness and determination of the North Vietnamese. But this hardly needs reiteration. They are out for all they can get, and they would of course like to escape paying the consequences for the failure of their spring invasion. They would prefer, despite this failure, to retain the chance of taking all of South Vietnam in the next four years.

But Mr. Nixon also has his problem facing reality. He has won a test of will in a nine-month display of bargaining ability far more impressive and harrowing than the Cuban missile crisis. He has won a landslide election of record proportions. But he has not won for President Thieu the right to rule undisputed over all of South Vietnam. Nothing less than the threat of destroying the North will accomplish this aim. If he has some more humane outcome in mind, he might propose it in terms that Hanoi could say "yes" to, as they did under similar duress to his earlier, pre-election proposal.

The longer the President waits to make an authoritative new proposal or to reaffirm his old one, the more senseless his punishment of the North will appear. He has, in effect, reopened his options on Vietnam by generating uncertainty on a few key points: whether Kissinger can still act for him; whether he is still committed to

the framework of the Oct. 31 points; whether he intends to guarantee the Communists some lasting base of power in the South; whether he is willing to allow them some face-saving pretext for signing (such as a holiday bombing pause) after the double humiliation of postponement and bombing.

If he does get them to sign, he will probably get a better, tougher deal for America in the narrow context of Vietnam than could have been the case before the renewed bombing. The danger of prolonging the uncertainties is thus not so much prudential as moral. It is not the Russians and Chinese so much as the American people who can now foil the plan for Vietnam in Mr. Nixon's larger design. One cannot hide from them the brute outlines of what is going on. The danger is that, unable to bear the long-drawn-out spectacle of naked power, the public will see foreign policy and the presidency itself as a dirty, petty business fit only for short-term calculations and small-time operators.

The strata from which America recruited its foreign policy constituency in the past have already begun to turn inward, probably irrevocably, under the pressure of Vietnam. The danger now is that those who must replace them will be able to understand America's role only in terms of pushing and shoving, protectionist measures, narrow commercial deals, bluff and blackmail. America was made to give the world more than this.