

by Victor Zorza:

# Communists Watching Nixon *Victor Zorza Post 12/27/72* To See If They Trust Him

REPORTS of a Nixon-Kissinger rift have upset the White House, which has denied them publicly. Privately, sources inside the Nixon administration have said that they are worried about "damage to Kissinger's credibility" as a negotiator. A prime point of concern, according to The Washington Post's Murrey Marder, "is said to be what the North Vietnamese may conclude from these reports."

But the damage to Kissinger's credibility could be far greater than that. It could extend to his dealings with the Russians and the Chinese, and to Mr. Nixon's own design for an era of negotiation and for the generation of peace. It was known in his second

term, as well as being heard of by the press, that Kissinger was determining how far he could trust the Communists. If they decide that he has kept his word on his own word in the Paris talks, or on Kissinger's, they will be less likely to enter into agreements with the United States which might expose them to similar risks.

THIS COLUMN has sometimes tried to analyze the administration's foreign policy from the standpoint of its foreign adversaries, on the belief that a better understanding of both sides at a time may be acquired thereby. When the Paris impasse is viewed from this angle, there is no doubt that Soviet elements in all the Communist capitals are now claiming it as proof of gross deception by the White House. The hawks in Moscow and Peking will not be easily defeated in the argument that preceded Mr. Nixon's summit visits. But doves in Communist capitals struggle and argue as competitive as they seem.

The doves are able to judge from the evidence between the lines of the Communist press that Mr. Nixon was not to be trusted—*not* just on Vietnam, but on all the other issues which to them, involve the very survival of the Communist system. The doves, on the other hand, maintained that the Communist concessions on strategic arms limitation, on trade and aid, on political issues, were paid for by American concessions as well as by promises of future benefits. But now the hawks

would claim that Soviet and Chinese agreements with the United States might be similarly broken, and American promises reneged upon, whenever Mr. Nixon decides that a little more pressure, another turn of the screw, might get him better terms than he had originally obtained.

If the administration is really concerned at the damage done to Kissinger's credibility by press speculation of the kind which appeared in this column last week, the remedy is in its own hands. What the column suggested was just an attempt to look at the Paris breakdown through the eyes of Hanoi, would lead the Communists to conclude that the agreement negotiated by Kissinger had been disowned by Mr. Nixon. The fuss now made by administration sources about the effect of such an analysis on Kissinger's credibility suggests that the analysis is correct, even in the administration's own view, in attributing this line of reasoning to the Communists. The administration can only prove the Communist hawks wrong by reverting to a less wily posture.

THE DAMAGE, which is of the administration's own making, cannot be undone by denouncing press speculation about it as irresponsible. Where a government restricts the amount of publicly available information, for what may sometimes be good reasons of its own, it is the proper function of the press to speculate.

Where major issues of war and peace are concerned, the speculative reconstruction of the other side's thought processes is more necessary than ever, even if it should appear to reflect badly on one's own side's motives. It is an essential part of the search for an understanding of what is happening in the world, and why. Modern governments have too often neglected this process, but this is no reason why the press should eschew it.

Indeed, in an increasingly interdependent world of Great Powers engaged in the process of secret diplomacy, an insight into the policies of any one government will have to be sought more and more often in the shadows it casts on other countries.