

Weighing the Cost of the Bombing:
Two Views of What Was Gained...

[1st of 2 companion columns;
other by Joseph Kraft]

Rowland Evans and Robert Novak

A Chance for South Vietnam To Survive as a Nation...

WHATEVER THE political cost at home, and with U.S. allies abroad, President Nixon's cold-blooded gamble in the bombing of Hanoi and Haiphong has now paid dividends of possibly historic proportions in the postwar settlement of Vietnam.

For what Mr. Nixon and his Vietnam negotiator, Henry Kissinger, have now achieved in the new agreement with

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Hanoi expected to be initiated in a few days in Paris, is a "decent chance" for South Vietnam to survive as an independent country.

The original October agreement—the Kissinger-Le Duc Tho ceasefire package which South Vietnam's President Nguyen Van Thieu refused to accept—contained provisions that sharply reduced the prospect of a "decent chance" for Thieu to survive as head of an independent state.

Instead, the October agreement was hinged to a subtly lesser goal: The goal of giving Thieu, South Vietnam and the U.S. a "decent interval" between the time of total U.S. withdrawal and the collapse of South Vietnam.

President Nixon had hoped that the momentum of peace, backed by the entire world including the two superpowers and Peking, would be sufficient to convert that "decent interval" into more lasting security for Thieu. He was prepared to take that gamble—but Thieu's refusal to go along forced a reappraisal.

But working under the new constraints imposed by Thieu, the President enlarged his objective from a "decent interval" to a "decent chance"—and sent Kissinger back to Paris in December to tighten the agreement. Hanoi's refusal to change the October package—understandable in view of what Hanoi had regarded as a hard agreement—brought on the pressure-bombing campaign.

That bombing, which made a virtual villain of the President all over the world, had precisely the impact he wanted. Consider, for example, deeply significant changes in the new agreement as contrasted to the old.

The role of the four-power police force—Canada, Poland, Indonesia and Hungary—has now been defined in the kind of detail that Hanoi refused to consider in the earlier agreement.

Instead, Hanoi agreed to supervision in principle but then, in a separate protocol, insisted on a force of less than 250 men from the four policing countries, with rigid limitations on their mobility and rights. Even Poland and Hungary were unwilling to go down that obstacle path.

The new agreement, although still

secret at this writing, is understood to go far toward the U.S. demand of a 5,000-man force with wide-ranging powers. The force itself will be at least 1,000 strong, four times Hanoi's earlier ceiling, with the right to carry out independent inspections of suspected violations. Likewise, the old agreement was loose and highly imprecise on the question of Hanoi sending new equipment (to replace "damaged" and "destroyed" arms) into South Vietnam. It left open the strong probability that new arms could be moved south directly over the Demilitarized Zone.

The new agreement is understood to set up inspection points along the DMZ, at which new arms can be examined and counted. Obviously, the opportunity for clandestine arms shipments down the Ho Chi Minh Trail still exists, but tightened language in the new agreement minimizes chances for cheating.

The inspection points along the DMZ also continue the principle that this dividing line between North and South, established in the 1954 Geneva agreements, has a legal significance.

Beyond this, moreover, the fact that Mr. Nixon decided to bomb military targets in the most heavily populated cities of the North *despite universal world condemnation* is likely to have major impact on whether Hanoi lives up to the new agreement. Wholesale violations, in short, may not be treated tenderly by Richard Nixon.

These are vital ingredients of the thesis now held by experts here that the new agreement, and the events between October and January, do in fact offer Thieu and South Vietnam a "decent chance," as opposed to the "decent interval" held forth in the October draft.