

ROWLAND EVANS AND ROBERT NOVAK

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Whatever comes next, Nixon gained no small victory in Viet settlement

WASHINGTON—The Vietnam cease-fire was far more due to President Nixon's overall foreign policy, including his skillful exploitation of the Moscow-Peking schism, than to any sudden change either on the battlefield or in the Communist politburo of North Vietnam.

Whether the cease-fire now becomes a durable peace, as Mr. Nixon hopes, is open to very large questions indeed. Not open to question, however, is that the President's four-year effort to contrive an "honorable" exit for the U.S. was specifically made a part—and only one part—of his global grand strategy.

Thus, the Nixon handling of Vietnam was in dramatic conflict with the late President Johnson's courageous but clumsy conduct of the war. In a burst of exuberance while visiting South Vietnam, Mr. Johnson talked of "nailing the coon-skin on the wall." In contrast, Mr. Nixon from the start carefully limited the U.S. objective to a goal easily understood in Moscow and Peking: not the victory that the Johnson rhetoric seemed to glorify, but self-determination for South Vietnam.

Mr. Johnson's advisers, it is true, talked of "de-Americanizing" the war. But Mr. Nixon's men, particularly Secretary of Defense Melvin Laird, went much further with an immediate start

toward "Vietnamization." In countless ways, the Nixon men advertised their policy as one certain to eliminate U.S. participation in the war. With the first withdrawal of U.S. troops in 1969, the fear that the U.S. was in Asia to stay began to disappear in Moscow and Peking.

Coupled with this was the President's insistence of what he called a policy of "linkage"—his threat that detente with the U.S. desired by both Moscow and Peking was out of the question without parallel progress toward an end of the war in Vietnam.

In the Soviet Union, it coincided with frightening economic problems at home, and a desire to liquidate the results of World War II in Europe. In China, it coincided with a cataclysmic struggle for power between a faction headed by Prime Minister Chou En-lai, wanting detente with the U.S. out of fear of Moscow, and a pro-Soviet military faction headed by Lin Piao.

At minimum, it has produced a cease-fire with gains that Sen. George McGovern and the inflexible doves always thought impossible: Release of American POWs with no restraints on U.S. economic aid to Saigon, with no imposition of a coalition government and with President Thieu still standing. Whatever comes next, that is no small victory.

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