

# Nixon the rug-puller emerges from seclusion

WASHINGTON—President Nixon has a dangerous habit of putting out particularly lush and tempting-looking rugs for his enemies to assemble upon. When there are enough of them on the rug, he then briskly pulls the rug out from under, causing inevitable disarray. It is a game that he plainly enjoys as he also greatly enjoys the disarray of his enemies.

No one seems to have noticed it as yet, but Nixon-the-rug-puller is at it again. The rug in question is of course the recent picture of the President as secluded, reclusive and cut off from all normal contacts. This was painted last month, on all sides, when the President made one of the most difficult and lonely decisions of his years in office.

## The bombing decision

This was the decision to resume bombing North Vietnam until the Hanoi leaders signified they were ready to sign an acceptable cease-fire agreement. The senators who suggested the President might well be going mad when he took that decision have not yet come forward to admit the decision got the exact result the President desired.

No one has remarked, either, that seclusion was the President's only sensible course in December. If he had consulted the appropriate senators about the bombing decision, they would not have changed his mind. And they would certainly have breached his confidence within half-an-hour of leaving the White House.

## A specific result

By the same token, he could not hold press conferences or talk to the country on the subject. The sole aim of the President's bombing decision was to get a specific result—the message from Hanoi giving way on a long series of disputed points. When that message came, the bombing was instantly stopped. And this was why Dr. Henry A. Kissinger's final trip to Paris required almost no time for further negotiation.

Suppose, instead, that the President had addressed the country about the bombing decision or had called a press conference to answer questions about it. In honesty, he could only have said that he was putting harsh extra pressure on Hanoi to get the result above described. To say this in so many words would surely have made the result itself that much less likely.

## Rug pulling has begun

Now that this highly delicate matter is out of the way, the rug pulling has already begun. Starting with the meeting before his short television announcement of the coming cease-fire agreement, the President held no less than four bipartisan meetings with con-

gressional leaders prior to leaving for Florida.

This was almost up to the standard of the late former President Lyndon B. Johnson. And when the President gets back to

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Washington, the leaders' meetings at the White House will of course continue: They will be amplified, too, by more meetings with individual senators and members of the House than the President has usually scheduled.

In addition, the word has gone out that the President will soon begin holding press conferences again in the various formats that he favors. There will be not one but several radio addresses explaining the White House decisions behind various sections of the State of the Union message and the message to Congress on the budget.

## Seclusion coming to an end

In short, the much-touted seclusion and reclusiveness are coming to an end. The need for them has passed. The President has the cease-fire agreement behind him. The prisoners will soon be coming home. The President has plenty to talk about.

It is also an excellent guess that the President will carefully point out the desirability of silence when desperately delicate diplomacy is being combined with severe pressure tactics. The rule he offers the country will be: "Boast afterward, but do not boast or even talk while playing for high stakes for a much-desired outcome." When he does so, too, it is just about dead certain the country will agree with the President.

## The temptation to assemble

So the picture of Richard M. Nixon as a kind of presidential Howard Hughes, with an added penchant for using B52s just for the hell of it, will soon begin to fade away. Whereupon, no doubt, the President will put out another attractive-looking rug. The temptation to assemble on the rug will once again be too strong for many. And once again the rug will finally be pulled out from under the assemblage.

It is true, to be sure, that President Nixon is not much given to "the buddy-buddy stuff," as he unstylishly puts it. It is true, too, that many of his hardest decisions have necessarily been lonely decisions. But it is true, above all, that the President is an exceedingly long-headed man, capable of thinking several moves ahead of his opponents in the political chess game.

On the political side, his opponents would be wise to remember that these are the President's most striking characteristics.