



# 'Rough Water Ahead' in Vietnam

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ON THE RIVERS where the tourists run the rapids in canoes, they post warnings when a dangerous patch is coming, "Rough water ahead!" Such a warning should now be posted in Washington, because of President Nixon's foreseeable response to Hanoi's flagrant violations of the cease-fire accord in Vietnam.

The warning is particularly badly needed for a simple, rather silly reason. Just about everyone in Washington, and what is even worse, just about everyone in Hanoi, expects the U.S. government to follow the precedent of 1962.

In that year, Hanoi broke every promise made in the Laos treaty negotiated with Averell Harriman. Yet the U.S. government sweetly looked the other way in 1962.

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MR. NIXON has always been persuaded that this decision of the Kennedy administration was a fatal and fundamental mistake.

The leaders in Hanoi do not appear to realize this. Yet the record shows that trying to corner Richard M. Nixon is an exceptionally risky operation. The violations of the cease-fire accord — massive, gross and militarily dangerous — are having just the effect of driving the President into a corner.

The cease-fire accord was based on two calculations, both of them with their own considerable elements of risk on the American side of the balance sheet. The

first calculation was that the South Vietnamese would choose some sort of independence under a non-communist government if they were given half a chance to choose for themselves.

The second calculation was that after recovery, South Vietnam was expected to be able to face up to the worst kind of military threat North Vietnam could organize.

The cease-fire accord left large numbers of North Vietnamese troops in place in South Vietnam. But the White House further calculated that this problem could be handled comfortably by the South Vietnamese if the North Vietnamese in the South were not heavily reinforced. The current violations of the accord by Hanoi take the form of such reinforcement.

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THIS IS what corners Mr. Nixon. If Hanoi tears up the cease-fire accord to win the war by straight military means, all the country's and the President's efforts since 1968 will have gone for nothing.

This is a result Mr. Nixon is "not repeat not" going to accept, if one can believe those who should know. The President may well defer his decision until March 28, when the cease-fire accord requires the return of the last U.S. prisoners. But the mere publicity given to Hanoi's violations by the Pentagon should be taken, both in Hanoi and in Washington, as tantamount to the warning, "Rough water ahead!"