

The Peace Negotiations

Lyndon Johnson's April Fool peace offensive was, as Senator [William J.] Fulbright had the enormous courage to point out, a phony. Hanoi had repeatedly said that it would not negotiate until the United States unconditionally and permanently halted the bombing of North Vietnam. Johnson's bombing announcement fooled many people into believing that this is what Johnson had decided to do; instead Johnson continued to bomb North Vietnam up to 200 miles north of the border and, in fact, he bombed this large zone much more intensely after the "bombing halt" than he had done before.

But Johnson had pulled an extraordinarily shrewd maneuver. In the wave of mass adulation and sentimentality over Johnson's withdrawal, the massive hatred and distrust of Johnson at home and abroad evaporated and changed to sympathy and pity; and in the course of this shift, Johnson managed to accrue to himself the mantle of peace. As the American press proclaimed, Hanoi was now on the spot; without doing anything really constructive, Johnson had managed to acquire the aura of peace here and throughout the world. And Johnson confidently expected that Hanoi would maintain its long-held position, and then become, in the eyes of Americans and of world opinion, a stubborn war-making nation. Johnson could then resume and re-escalate the war with impunity.

Not only that: by his brilliant maneuver, Mr. Johnson was, at one blow, able to co-opt the entire "peace" position of Messrs. [Robert F.] Kennedy

and [Eugene] McCarthy, his dangerous rivals. In all the justifiable excitement about the McCarthy and Kennedy campaigns, and in the general hope that they offer significant alternatives to the war, an important point has been lost sight of: For all their sharp criticisms of the war, neither Kennedy nor McCarthy go beyond a call for stopping the bombing and negotiating with all parties, including the National Liberation Front of South Vietnam. Neither call for immediate withdrawal from Vietnam. As a result, Johnson's negotiation-and-bombing curtailment comes pretty close to the maximum demands of his rivals for the nomination. *If* Hanoi had refused to negotiate and Johnson had resumed full-scale war, Kennedy and McCarthy would have been hard put to resume their sharp attacks on the President's policies. By agreeing to negotiate, Hanoi has, with equal shrewdness, tossed the ball back to President Johnson, or at least, has taken any onus off its own shoulders.

Aside from all this, *will* these negotiations bring peace? And when? For if Johnson is able to conclude a full peace settlement by the end of August, it is again possible that his lieutenants will be able to engineer a "draft" by acclamation of the new peace-hero.

I am reasonably sure that this will not happen; that, if peace is concluded, it is still a long way off. The Korean negotiations took two years to conclude peace, and the parties now are at least as far apart as they were then.