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What if a Viet Truce Came?

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THE air has been filled with rumors that a breakthrough is possible in the struggle in Vietnam. Whether the rumors originated in Saigon, Paris or here, what person anywhere in the world, with the slightest compassion, does not gratefully hope that something may come of it?

There is speculation as to what candidate for the U.S. Presidency would be helped in the present campaign if a truce and a bombing pause did ensue.

It seems certain that events relative to Vietnam — however good they may be — will come too late for the Democrats. Hubert Humphrey would not be better off.

A truce can't mean anything important in the course of the Wallerstein.

However, the political advance that is bound to be given a boost by the hoped-for events is that of the Republicans. A truce, a pause in the bombing, will help Richard Nixon greatly.

What about those doves who are waiting for some event or a new thought that would move them all the leaves? Action that gives us hope for the end of shooting in Vietnam is going to be the dove that will place them in the Republican camp.

MANY other questions arise. What about the prestige of the United States? A cessation of the fighting in Vietnam has been a hope of everyone. The result is obvious. Our prestige will be strengthened all over the world.

Will the Red Chinese undertake to tell the world that we are "paper tigers" and that the results in Vietnam prove it? Everybody knows we are not paper tigers, but we carry an awful class if we want to use it. Red China usually may be unhappy that we are making progress toward ending the fighting in Vietnam.

What happens in our defense perimeter? Will it be said, unless we acted first in behalf of freedom and self-determination for the South Vietnamese, that the anti-

East will have been in Viet? Many military and diplomatic agencies have been saying for sometime that America's logic and most effective defense perimeter in the Pacific area is our enormous, all-powered Pacific fleet and that so long we as the continent of Asia will ever be effectively fought by the United States.

LET'S have a look back at the problem. Five 36 years or more the French overran a southeastern area of Indochina, which included North and South Vietnam. They exploited all the resources and reaped little in the form of improvements to the country and its people. Guerrilla warfare got under way and French rule came under fire.

We advised the French by as much as \$700 million. As a result of World War II, the Japanese took over. When the war ended, the French returned and the struggle resumed. The capture of Dien Bien Phu ended French rule over Indochina, including Cambodia and Laos. The problem then went to the peace table in Geneva.

An accord was reached in 1954. The United States did not sign. As a result, but did serve as an adviser. Under its terms, Laos and Cambodia became independent. Indochina proper was divided at the 17th parallel. A demilitarized zone 16 kilometers wide divided North and South Vietnam.

To preserve the independence of South Vietnam, we undertook the training of the South Vietnamese army. This and other functions required something less than a thousand "advisers." They were not returned to us.

The North Vietnamese isolated the demilitarized zone and indicated by their harassment that they intended to prevent the entrance of South Vietnamese under the leadership of Ngo Dinh Diem. When they proposed to invade the country, it became necessary to send additional U.S. advisers. This included mainly military leaders who undertook to advise the South Vietnamese as strategy and the building of their army to a formidable size. It should be pointed out that the United States had an obligation under the Southeast Asia Treaty Organization to come to the defense of South Vietnam whenever such a request was made by the chief of state.

That request was actually made, and in pursuance of the needs dictated by the South Vietnamese leaders we continued to send as advisers and the number reached substantial proportions. At some point the reference to advisers was dropped and the instruments of men sent to South Vietnam became known as "troops."

THE UNITED STATES now has about 41,000 troops in South Vietnam.

When the time came for South Vietnam to undertake the construction of a new government, advised by a vote of the people, that free election was conducted under rather careful supervision. A contingent of advisers went to Vietnam to oversee the election arrangements and to make sure the election was conducted in conformity with what should happen in any free election.

But the fighting continued. Desperately efforts were made to induce the leaders of North Vietnam to send preliminary peace negotiators to an agreed spot — eventually, Paris — in the hope that such negotiations would eventually in a truce, a bombing pause and a reestablishment of the real issues. Those talks attended by our negotiators — Cyrus Vance and Averell Harriman — have continued for months. Most of the meetings have been devoted to procedural matters and at no time could it be said that the negotiators finally got down to things of substance.

From time to time the North Vietnamese negotiators, as well as their leaders back home, insisted on a complete cessation of bombing and the withdrawal of our troops. They refused, however, to give any personal assurances with respect to the restoration of the demilitarized zone, the shifting of the southern cities and the recognition of the South Vietnamese government — the latter item apparently the real bone of contention.

That is where the matter rests, and it remains to be seen whether an agreement can be reached under which all parties will come to the peace table for meaningful talks. I think we can reasonably hope for such good events.