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Today and Tomorrow • • By Walter Lippmann

Do Not Ignore the Soviets

IF THE PRESIDENT is really anxious to promote negotiations in Vietnam, he would do well to tell Secretary Rusk to clear up the difference between what the Russians say about Hanoi's position and what we are saying. Premier Kosygin, at his news conference on Feb. 9, and President Podgorny, at a state dinner in Moscow on Monday, said that peace talks would follow the suspension of U.S. bombing in North Vietnam. These two highly placed Soviet spokesmen tell us that the reciprocal action in return for suspending the bombing is the opening of peace negotiations.



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Secretary Rusk, on the other hand, cites North Vietnamese spokesmen who, unlike the Russians, insist that the suspension of bombing must be "unconditional and permanent." Just what Secretary Rusk thinks the word "permanent" means, he did not spell out. But he seems to be saying that Hanoi de-

mands the right to escalate the war in the South without interference by the United States bombers in the North. Can this really be what Hanoi and Moscow mean? is hard to believe that it is. For the demand that the North have the right to wage unlimited war in the South while the United States can wage only a limited war in the North is an absurdity.

The word "permanent," when used in Hanoi, is, to be sure, an ambiguous and confusing word. It cannot mean anything very definite. The Soviet spokesmen do not use it. They say that the suspension of bombing will "clear the way" to a conference dealing with the whole problem of Vietnam. It is hard to understand why Secretary Rusk refuses to deal seriously with such a momentous statement made by both the Prime Minister and the President of the Soviet Union.

UNTIL HE has dealt with the Soviet offer of a peace conference as a consequence of a cease-fire in the North, the Administration will be under strong suspicion of not wanting to negotiate un-

til Hanoi has made at least a symbolic gesture of surrender. What else does Secretary Rusk mean by demanding "military" reciprocity? Suppose Hanoi said it was stopping the infiltration? Would that be anything more than a symbolic gesture of admission that Hanoi has been the aggressor? Would it really settle anything permanently? Would it, in the absence of a true political settlement, last very long?

The crucial fact is that there exists a proposal, stated by the Soviet government, that a peace conference can be opened when the attack on North Vietnam ceases. Until that proposal is taken seriously, the President will not be widely believed when he says that he wants a negotiated settlement.

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