

Nixon Letter Reveals Aid Promised to Hanoi

Washington

Richard Nixon, in a letter made public yesterday, told North Vietnamese Foreign Minister Pham Van Dong on Feb. 1, 1973, that the United States would furnish North Vietnam with up to \$4.75 billion in postwar reconstruction and other kinds of aid "without any political conditions."

In a statement made public along with the letter, the former President said, however, that in light of North Vietnam's "flagrant violations" of the Paris peace agreements of 1973, "there is no commitment of any kind, moral or legal, to provide aid to the Hanoi government."

"On the contrary," Nixon said in a letter to Representative Lester Wolff (Dem-N.Y.), "I can think of no action which would be less justified or more immoral than to provide any aid whatever to the Hanoi government."

The Nixon letter, often cited by Vietnamese officials as an American commitment but never previously made public, was declassified and released simultaneously with Nixon's concurrence by the State Department and Wolff, chairman of the House international relations subcommittee on Asian and Pacific affairs.

In a related development, the New York Times learned that Nixon told David Frost in their interviews for television of a stern warning he had given Hanoi Feb. 12, 1973, that American aid was contingent on strict compliance with the peace agreements.

Nixon said he had ordered

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Henry Kissinger, then in Hanoi, to "take the strongest and firmest possible line," reminding the Vietnamese that Congress had to approve aid and saying he would not ask for any if it might go for Vietnamese military actions in Laos, Cambodia or any other country. It was understood that Nixon's remarks would not be used in Frost's TV interview series with Nixon.

Wolff, who had threatened to subpoena the former President to testify on the matter, said the two Nixon letters — the one to Pham Van Dong and the one to Wolff — confirmed that "the Congress and the American people have been consistently misled as to the very existence of any secret negotiations," as well as to the actual content of the agreements.

The congressman was particularly critical of Kissinger, who negotiated the Paris accords, and his predecessor, William Rogers. He accused both of denying "what in fact was the truth" when they denied the existence of any secret agreements with Vietnam in 1973 congressional testimony.

Wolff said that in an effort "not to dig up the ashes but to set the record straight," he intended to call Kissinger and Rogers before his subcommittee by subpoena if necessary.

It was obvious from exchanges among subcommittee members that making public the two Nixon letters had left unanswered a great many questions about what conditions were attached or implied in the American aid offer and what its relationship was intended to be with the Paris peace agreements.

The text of the letter to Pham Van Dong issued by the State

Department contained two paragraphs evidently added subsequently to the original body of the document.

The second addendum merely said in effect that in addition to \$3.25 billion in grants for postwar reconstruction over five years, referred to in the body of the letter, the United States would provide North Vietnam with \$1 billion to \$1.5 billion in other forms of aid, including food and commodities.

But the first addendum bore the title, "Understanding Regarding Economic Construction Program," and said in effect that the aid pledge and other recommendations of a Joint Economic Commission would be carried out by each government "in accordance with its own constitutional provisions."

In his letter to Wolff, Nixon said that "constitutional provisions" in the case of the United States clearly meant that the aid program would have to be approved by Congress.

Moreover, Nixon said, the fact that a general American offer of reconstruction aid was included in the peace agreement itself meant that fulfillment of the aid program "obviously depended on adherence to the agreement's provisions."

Congressional sources said,

however, that they found a conflict between Nixon's insistence that the aid offer was linked to North Vietnam's compliance with the peace agreement and the first of seven "principles" laid down by Nixon in the letter to Pham Van Dong.

That first "principle" said flatly that the United States would contribute to postwar reconstruction in North Vietnam "without any political conditions."

On the point of whether Hanoi understood that any aid offer was contingent on action by Congress, Wolff said he wanted to find out how and when the two additional paragraphs were appended to the Nixon letter.

"We don't know whether they were part of the original letter or were delivered later or were never sent at all," Wolff said. The State Department, which had insisted until recently that it had no copy of the Nixon letter, could shed no light on the circumstances of the addenda.

Whatever the various interpretations about the content of Nixon's letter, Wolff and other members of his subcommittee were in complete agreement with the former President that the United States currently is under no obligation to provide any aid for Vietnam.