

'Opportunity'

Hanoi Peace Hope Report

Saigon

Senior North Vietnamese government officials told a foreign diplomat in Hanoi last week that North Vietnam is prepared to accept an independent and neutral South Vietnam as part of a political settlement of the

They also said that the seven-point proposal advanced by the South Vietnam Provisional Revolutionary Government on July 1 is genuinely intended to provide a basis for negotiating an end to the war, but they coupled this statement with the proviso, often repeated by Hanoi in the past, that if negotiations are refused then North Vietnam is prepared to fight on.

PARTS

The officials admitted to the diplomat that they have little expectation that the PRG's seven-point proposal will be totally accepted. They said they expected some parts of the proposal to be rejected by allied negotiators.

The information from the foreign diplomat, who cannot be named but whose country has served as a channel of communication in the past between Hanoi and Washington, appeared intended to emphasize the seriousness of the Hanoi leaders in negotiations at this time.

Several times in the course of conversation the diplomat drew attention to the timing of the proposal — three months prior to the South Vietnamese presidential election — and indicated that if this opportunity is lost then the war will likely drag on for years.

BASIS

The diplomat appeared anxious to indicate that while the seven-point proposal has one aspect as propaganda, its main intention is to serve as a genuine basis for negotiations.

The North Vietnamese officials, in their conversation with him, the diplomat said, had drawn attention to the absence of the word "coalition" from this newest version of the PRG's negotiating position.

The North Vietnamese also drew attention to the dropping of the names of Vice President Nguyen Cao Ky and Prime Minister Tran Thien Khiem from the list of Saigon personalities that the PRG says it refuses to negotiate with. The seven-point proposal mentions only President Nguyen Van Thieu as an unacceptable negotiating partner. Ky is a candidate for president in the Oct. 3 election.

The diplomat said that there is no longer any question that the leaders of North Vietnam have accepted the reality of an independent and sovereign South Vietnam for some time to come instead of the rapid, pro forma resolution by a Communist-dominated national assembly in Saigon in favor of reunification that would have amounted to annexation of South Vietnam by the Hanoi government.

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