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Russians Helped Arrange Evacuation, Sources Say

Washington

The Soviet Union acted as the principal intermediary in secret diplomatic exchanges between the United States and North Vietnam

during the ten days prior to Tuesday's evacuation of Americans from South Vietnam, it was learned yesterday.

Informed sources said the

United States tried to accomplish three main objectives in its last-ditch diplomatic efforts to contact North Vietnam. They were:

- To bring about a cease-fire before a final North Vietnamese military drive against Saigon.

- To arrange a political accommodation in Saigon that would fall short of an outright South Vietnamese surrender to North Vietnam and the Communist Provisional Revolutionary Government (PRG) in the South.

- To conduct an orderly evacuation of Americans and South Vietnamese under controlled conditions.

These three points, according to the sources, formed the substance of a message passed to Hanoi with the help of the Soviet Union. It was understood that the Soviet Embassy in Washington was used as the main point of contact to get the U.S. position across to the North Vietnamese government.

The sources said Hanoi responded to the U.S. initiative in a manner that led the

Ford administration to believe it had more time to evacuate Americans and South Vietnamese than actually proved to be the case.

They said the judgment among ranking U.S. officials late last week was that the airlift of Americans and South Vietnamese could con-

tinue at a steady and even increasing pace over a longer period of time.

The judgment was based in part on the messages being passed back and forth

between Washington and Hanoi. It also was based on the six-day lull in fighting last week at a time when North Vietnamese troops could have overrun Saigon

at any moment.*

In retrospect, U.S. officials now believe the diplomatic contacts with Hanoi through the Soviet Union may have been responsible

for the pause in the North Vietnamese drive against Saigon.

In the end, however, the diplomatic efforts proved too little and too late to ac-

complish the three U.S. objectives and to prevent South Vietnam's final collapse and surrender Wednesday.

Los Angeles Times

* "Secret messages from Martin ... made this forecast to President Ford: The lull late last week in the battle for Saigon and its suburbs signalled Hanoi's willingness to strike a deal with incoming President Minh allowing the Americans 'two to three weeks' to complete the evacuation."

WXPost 1 May 75, Evans and Novak, filed Comment

Does this mean such a "deal" would include a promise or understanding that this length of time would be allowed for evacuation? - or Martin's in opinion or supposition that this would be a by-product of such a deal?