

New Demand From Hanoi

By Rowland Evans and Robert Novak

WASHINGTON — Delayed beyond President Nixon's arrival in Peking by sluggish logistical preparations and relentless U.S. bombing, the still-pending Communist winter offensive in Vietnam is now clearly aimed at one political goal: forcing U.S. acceptance of its new and suddenly escalated asking price for peace.

A largely overlooked clarification of its latest negotiating proposals strips bare the fact that Hanoi now demands nothing less than total dismantling of South Vietnam's governmental apparatus.

SCARCELY BY COINCIDENCE, this diplomatic escalation is accompanied by preparations for the biggest Communist offensive since the fateful Tet campaign of 1968.

This is the classic Communist technique of fight-and-talk. In the view of experts here, the Hanoi Politburo would not dare demand so much in Paris if it did not anticipate gains on the field of battle. Indeed, North Vietnam hopes such military success may help elect a Democratic President who would probably be more receptive to their proposals than Mr. Nixon.

Involved here is Point Two in the revised seven-point peace plan submitted by Vietcong negotiators at Paris Feb. 2. Besides requiring the immediate resignation of President Nguyen Van Thieu, Point Two insists that Saigon "disband at once its machine of oppression and constraint against the people."

This, in turn, was clarified Feb. 3 by Nhan Dan, the authoritative Communist Party daily in Hanoi. In a remarkable editorial which has received all too little atten-

tion here, Nhan Dan said: "The Saigon Administration must end its bellicose policy, and the oppressive and coercive apparatus in South Vietnam must be abolished immediately."

That apparatus, according to the editorial, consists of the following: "Over a million puppet troops, civil guards, spies and a system of puppet administration and secret agencies from the central level in Saigon down to every village and hamlet."

The meaning is unmistakable. Setting a date certain for withdrawal of U.S. military forces, long demanded by American war critics, is no longer enough to bring peace and release U.S. prisoners. Nor is the ouster of Thieu. Instead, Hanoi says for the first time it wants Saigon's army and police disbanded and its national administrative network destroyed BEFORE the fighting stops.

THIS AUDACIOUS public escalation beyond anything demanded by the Communists during now-concluded secret negotiations in Paris is indigestible even for moderate doves in the United States, much less the President. Thus, Hanoi knows that only some significant Communist battlefield success — exceedingly rare since 1968 — could generate congressional and press demands for acceptance of these terms.

This intent always eclipsed the highly publicized motive of embarrassing Mr. Nixon's arrival in Peking as the principal political goal of the 1972 Tet offensive, in the opinion of many analysts — a view gaining credence now that the President has gone to China without any accompanying Communist salute from the Vietnam front.