



Will Hanoi Listen To Chou En-lai?

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WITH each week that passes, there is a modest increase in the possibility that the North Vietnamese Politburo will take the advice of Chou En-lai. Even today, it is no more than a one in four chance. Yet it is so important that even with these odds, the matter deserves consideration.

After saying farewell to President Nixon, the Chinese Prime Minister went south almost immediately, to meet with the openly alarmed and angered leaders of North Vietnam.

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YOU DO NOT need to have been an eavesdropper, in order to reconstruct what Chou En-lai had to say. On the one hand, it can be taken for granted that he sought to reassure the North Vietnamese, by promising continued military aid, and by swearing he had warned President Nixon that Peking would never cease to support Hanoi.

It can also be taken for granted that Chou En-lai offered the North Vietnamese his own impressions of the President.

On that entirely safe assumption, Chou En-lai must have said that he had found the American President extremely tough-minded, with no intention whatever of giving up in South Vietnam. Equally, he must have pointed out that the Hanoi leaders would find President Nixon even rougher to deal with, if and when he had been re-elected.

Such is the reconstruction of Chou En-

lai's advice that is now generally credited at the highest level of U.S. policy-making. The question remains whether Hanoi will therefore reconsider its war policy.

Each week that passes modestly increases the chance that this will happen. It must be understood, to begin with, that the warnings from the U.S. military of a new TET offensive were not empty scare-talk.

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TWO THINGS have delayed the planned offensive to date. To begin with, the Viet Cong military and political apparatus inside South Vietnam has rather suddenly ceased to obey Hanoi's orders, or even to pretend obedience. And a large North Vietnamese offensive, planned for the plateau region of central South Vietnam, has been repeatedly preempted by U.S. air attacks and by the South Vietnamese Army.

Some sort of offensive will almost certainly be tried before long, despite the preemption. But if one can trust the judgment of those on the spot, the long delayed offensive should prove a sanguinary failure for Hanoi.

In sum, the enemy has developed quite new kinds of weaknesses, while President Nixon's Vietnamization has been going forward quite admirably. So there really is an off chance of reconsideration in Hanoi before election day comes in this country.