

Softer Hanoi Line on Paris Talks

Paris

North Vietnam yesterday dropped recent demands that the United States stop bombing its territory as a precondition for resuming both public and secret peace negotiations.

Apparently as a result of behind-the-scenes contacts, Xuan Thuy, the chief Hanoi negotiator at the suspended public weekly talks, notably softened conditions which he laid down Monday.

At the same time he revealed details of Hanoi's version of the October, 1968, understanding between the United States and North Vietnam that led to the cessation of bombing the North and the opening of formal weekly negotiating sessions

including Saigon and the Viet Cong.

Thuy told a news conference that he released his version to counter "lying" American assertions aimed at "deceiving (world) opinion" into thinking that North Vietnam had violated the agreement's hitherto unpublished provisions.

Stephen Ledogar, the U.S. delegation spokesman, took issue with Thuy's claim that Hanoi had promised nothing in return for the "total and unconditional" cessation of bombing North Vietnam except for agreeing to start the four delegation talks in January, 1969.

Ledogar said Thuy had quoted Averill Harriman, the chief American negotiator at the time of the 1968

understanding. "sometimes inaccurately and sometimes out of context."

Recalling that the controversy over the understanding began within days of its announcement, Ledogar reiterated the American brief that Harriman had agreed privately with North Vietnam that the United States would not publicly state its terms.

Ledogar also said the United States saw "no change" in Thuy's statement on resumption of negotiations. He noted recent statements by Secretary of State William P. Rogers and Defense Secretary Melvin R. Laird all but ruling out new talks while the Communist offensive continued in South Vietnam.

However, in answering newsmen's questions, Thuy said that if the United States agreed to Communist demands to resume the stalemated weekly sessions next Thursday then Hanoi would no longer demand prior cessation of American bombing of North Vietnam.

He also suggested that resumption of the weekly talks — unilaterally suspended by President Nixon on March 23 — would allow the formal conference to "examine the possibility of private meetings."

Such secret meetings have allowed the adversaries to achieve whatever little progress has been made in narrowing still gaping differences.

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