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Behind Hanoi's Peace Stall

WASHINGTON — The big mystery is not why Hanoi has turned down the American eight-point plan for the withdrawal of troops and an internationally supervised election in South Vietnam following a cease-fire throughout Indochina.

The real source of curiosity is why a small government would reject a simple offer that assures both North and South Vietnam their independence.

THE ANSWER PROBABLY is that it was advised by Moscow to wait until after the November elections here in the hope that another American President might pull out all our forces without any conditions and let North Vietnam dominate Indochina.

Certainly Red China is not likely to have held Hanoi back, because there is no advantage to the Peking regime in such a policy. But the Soviets, who have moved into the Indian Ocean with their navy and have enlarged their influence in India and South Asia, presumably want to gain a strong ally in North Vietnam.

President Nixon was right in making public his proposals and the details of his private negotiations with the North Vietnamese, which began 30 months ago. The fact that he offered last October a comprehensive plan for peace will be helpful to him in this country, because many people have not known that he is ready to set a date for total withdrawal of our forces as soon as an over-all settlement has been reached. But apparently the North Vietnamese have brushed the proposal aside and prefer to wait until November.

The American people have been hearing differing opinions about the Vietnam war. But what is needed now is unity be-

hind the President by the critics and aspiring presidential candidates so that the Soviets will not be misled into thinking that the eight points presented by President Nixon will be abandoned by the next administration if he fails to win reelection.

The dissension inside the United States has been reported widely throughout the world, and the impression has prevailed that President Nixon was not trying to end the war. But his latest announcement shows clearly his willingness to terminate American involvement within six months after an agreement is reached with North Vietnam.

Under this plan, the people of South Vietnam would be able to exercise their right of self-determination, which is the principle the United States has supported. But even with the promise of an election and American withdrawal, Hanoi has made no move to help bring about a settlement. Instead, it has stepped up its military activities.

While Red China has been helpful to Hanoi, it may be doubted whether Peking would stand in the way of a peace treaty between North Vietnam and the United States and South Vietnam. Only the Soviet Union would undertake such a risky course. But being assured of Soviet help, the North Vietnamese doubtless feel that they can decide what to do after the November elections here.

IF MR. NIXON IS reelected, they can then negotiate a peace agreement with him and end the war. But if he is defeated, they believe they will get better terms and be able to take over South Vietnam through an election process which they hope to find a way to control.