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WASHINGTON — Although the general impression for several days has been that the announcement of President Nixon's plan to visit Red China would bring an early peace agreement in Vietnam, there is no sign of such an accord being consummated. On the contrary, North Vietnam insists that its seven-point proposal still stands and that the United States must set a date for withdrawal of all its forces and stop supporting the Thieu government in Saigon before prisoners of war are released.

Also, the propaganda media of the Communist world keep on accusing the United States of "imperialism" and seem to ignore the new approach which President Nixon has made toward a better understanding and "normalizing relations" with Mainland China. The truth, of course, is that Communist governments work slowly. It takes time for procedures to be worked out, especially when they affect operations in countries allied with either Moscow or Peking. There scarcely has been an opportunity for a formula to be developed which could be placed before Hanoi as to how the peace negotiations can be a factor in improving relations between the United States and Red China.

As far as this country is concerned, its envoy at the peace conference in Paris is ready to make a cease-fire agreement and discuss all the points raised by North Vietnam so that a plan for the eventual withdrawal of all American troops can be presented and the position of each side thoroughly explored.

The expectation, to be sure, is that the Vietnam War can be ended soon and a settlement reached with Hanoi which will be satisfactory to Peking. It is assumed that emissaries from the United States will consult the Red China government from time to time in order that the viewpoint of the United States can be explained and the negotiations thereby expedited.

If peace were accomplished in Indo-China, the chances are that the Soviet Union would feel relieved, because it could then devote all of its attention to the serious situation in the Middle East. The United States is bound to play a significant role in this area. And a close relationship between Washington and Moscow is essential to the maintenance of peace in the

Mediterranean.

Many people have been led to believe that, because of the announcement of the President's trip to Red China, the problems of Asia would be solved quickly and that the Peking government would begin to serve as an associate of the United States in ending such unhappy events as the war in Vietnam. But it will take time for the attitude of the peoples of Indo-China to be disclosed. Elections are soon to be held in South Vietnam, and there are divisions of opinion within that country as well as in North Vietnam. Once Hanoi has made it clear that it will sign a cease-fire agreement and negotiate the dates for the withdrawal of American troops and the return of the American prisoners of war, it may be assumed the war will no longer be the cause of friction in Southeast Asia.

While there has been much talk about the release of prisoners, no promises have been made by North Vietnam as to when they will be turned over to the American commanders. First of all, it must be made known exactly how many are held captive and who they are. There have been differences as to the number who are imprisoned by forces under Hanoi's control. It may be, of course, that some of those whose names will not appear on the lists furnished by the Communists will have been lost in action. But opportunities must be given for the prisoners themselves to be interviewed to determine whether they have at any time seen some of the missing individuals. This process may be lengthy, but it will be important to verify lists of missing men which the Americans will have for submission to the North Vietnamese before a final settlement can be made.

Not until a satisfactory arrangement has been made for the return of the prisoners, will American forces be withdrawn from South Vietnam. It is intended, too, to see that North Vietnamese units are pulled back beyond the Demilitarized Zone to the North so that South Vietnam will be free from the presence of any enemy troops. There are many details of this kind to be worked out, and that's why peace negotiations cannot possibly be completed in just a few weeks or even months.