

Hanoi Says It Won't Press South Politically

By SEYMOUR M. HERSH
Special to The New York Times

HANOI, North Vietnam, March 17—In a series of interviews, North Vietnamese officials have taken pains to say they want to reassure the United States that North Vietnam has no intention of pressing a political or ideological claim on the South if President Nguyen Van Thieu is ousted.

Col. Ha Van Lau, who has been Hanoi's delegate to the Paris peace talks, and Hoang Tung, editor of Nhan Dan, the official North Vietnamese newspaper, acknowledged during more than 15 hours of discussions through interpreters that the war in South Vietnam was militarily stalemated. But they insisted that no serious negotiations to end the fighting were possible so long as the United States maintained its support of the Thieu Government.

The main point of the interviews was the make-up of a future government in Saigon.

"If you in the United States don't want a socialist government," Mr. Tung said, "how can we force it on you? So we understand that everybody in South Vietnam does not have the same desire that we do. And if not 100 per cent, there should be at least 50 or 60 per cent who want to have a certain system—only then will it be possible to have it."

'We Are Quite Realistic'

Mr. Tung added that the situation in the South would be ideal if "we, the Vietnamese, could smash everything—the United States and Saigon troops and foreign mercenaries."

"But we are quite realistic, and we know to do that would take a much longer time," he added. "If it were up to me, I would like to see the whole of Vietnam unified and building socialism, but we are realists. We know that in South Vietnam there are certain other forces. Not only Thieu and Ky, but other people. The Communists and people who are doing the resistance work must find a way to live with other people. Only in this way can we be in conformity with objective reality."

The theme that it is possible to set up a neutral, independent caretaker government in Saigon came up recurrently in seven meetings with Colonel Lau during a two-week stay in North Vietnam that ended March 17.

Neither Colonel Lau nor Mr. Tung made any pretense during the interviews that a new plan, different from their basic negotiating stance, was being offered. Instead, they suggested, they were presenting a candid assessment of Hanoi's long-range thinking and an

elaboration of the Paris proposals of the Communist side.

The colonel, considered by Western diplomats stationed here to have access to Premier Pham Van Dong, said more than once: "We are not in a rush for reunification. In principle, we think that North and South Vietnam should be unified and one, but we have to settle issues on reality as well as on principles."

"Our Governments are very different," he said. "In North Vietnam there is socialism and in South Vietnam they want neutrality. We have to respect that."

The interviews were carefully summarized and placed on the record at the end of this writer's visit to Hanoi. It was made clear that the two men were speaking for the Government with the highest authority, and it was also made clear that they hoped that an account of the interviews would be published in The New York Times.

Over all the interviews seemed to indicate some softening of the recent North Vietnamese and Vietcong negotiating positions. On Feb. 3 the Vietcong presented in Paris a revised two-point "clarification" of their seven-point proposal of July, 1971, which was widely regarded as more conciliatory to the present Saigon Government.

The clarification again called for the resignation of President Thieu—although a demand that the United States be directly involved in his ouster was dropped—and also said that when it was accomplished, the Vietcong would then enter directly into negotiations with the remnants of the current Saigon administration. Saigon's policy regarding the war and its social programs—such as pacification—would have to be changed, the proposal said.

Terms of Vietcong Plan

The original program called on the United States to halt Vietnamization, set a date for a total and unconditional withdrawal of all troops and support units and end its backing of Mr. Thieu pending the establishment of a caretaker government that favored "peace, independence, neutrality and democracy" and would organize general elections.

During the interviews, Colonel Lau and Mr. Tung categorically rejected President Nixon's eight-point peace plan of last Jan. 25, terming it a "surrender" document and insisted that the Vietcong proposal—with its interlocking military and political points—was still on the table in Paris.

The Nixon plan calls for total withdrawal of American and allied forces within six months of an agreement, the exchange

of prisoners of war and a general cease-fire throughout Indochina. In addition, the Vietcong would be permitted to participate in a presidential election in South Vietnam that would be internationally supervised, President Thieu having resigned a month before it.

Colonel Lau and Mr. Tung complained that under the Nixon proposal the Vietcong would be forced to turn in their arms before participating in the elections, which, it was said, would still be under the control of Mr. Thieu whether he was in office or not. In addition, they said, the President's proposal would permit American air and naval units stationed elsewhere in Indochina or at sea to continue to bomb South Vietnam in support of its troops, bolstering Vietnamization.

Program Viewed as Ploy

That program, designed to reduce direct American ground involvement, is widely regarded in North Vietnam as another ploy to disguise what is described as Mr. Nixon's desire to keep Mr. Thieu in office and to seek military victory.

Colonel Lau insisted that his Government would be unwilling to discuss any aspect of the Nixon proposal—such as the make-up of an international election commission—separately from the question of Mr. Thieu's future.

"They talk about international controls for the election, the colonel said, "but we think that no international control can take the place of Thieu's election machinery. The offer to dismiss Thieu one month before the election means nothing because his whole machinery is still there."

Guarantee Unclarified

According to Colonel Lau and Mr. Tung, their Government would be willing to support even the staunchest non-Communist to replace Mr. Thieu as long as he was "progressive." They were reluctant, however, to specify a South Vietnamese official who was sufficiently progressive. Instead, they said that North Vietnam would be willing to deal with anyone in Saigon, even someone in the present administration, who was willing to work toward a change in policy.

Neither Mr. Tung nor Colonel Lau made any attempt to explain how North Vietnam would give a hands-off guarantee in connection with a new government in the south. The colonel did note: "When the South develops true independence, the two sides will enter into negotiations without any outside coercion regarding the mutual interest of the two governments. We are certain that

they can settle their own affairs among themselves." He did not elaborate.

The discussion of this approach to the future government in Saigon came amid reliable diplomatic reports indicating that the visit of Premier Chou En-lai of China to North Vietnam March 4 had precipitated a serious re-evaluation of the war effort in Indochina.

Informed sources repeatedly cautioned that under no circumstances could anything as serious as a rift be said to be developing between China and North Vietnam and the revolutionary forces in Cambodia and Laos. But it was acknowledged that during the day-long meeting, as a reliable source put it, "it was agreed that there was a shorter way to go in Laos and Cambodia."

"Let's put it this way," the source said, summarizing what he understood to be the situation. "They can't win the war in the South the way they've been going."

In acknowledging that the war in South Vietnam was not accomplishing as much as the efforts in Cambodia and Laos, Col. Lau and Mr. Tung made it clear that, in their eyes, their seeming offer to guarantee the neutrality of South Vietnam was not being made from weakness.

720-Year Struggle Recalled

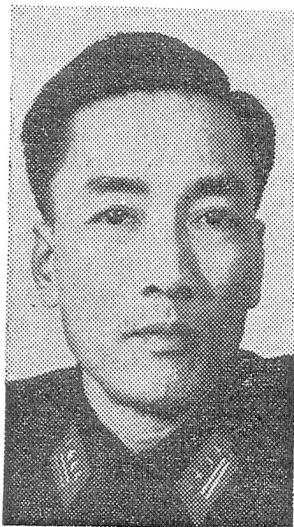
"We will not accept a government that is a tool of the United States," Col. Lau said. "You can say that we have not fought 720 years in Vietnam to let the South come under neo-colonialism."

Both men talked relatively freely about the possibility that victory was nowhere in sight for the Vietcong and North Vietnamese troops in the South. But they also cited Henry Kissinger, President Nixon's adviser on national security, on guerrilla war, noting that he wrote in Foreign Affairs magazine in January, 1969: "The guerrilla wins if he does not lose. The conventional army loses if it does not win."

"Mr. Kissinger and I are not in agreement about winning and losing," Mr. Tung said during a talk at the Nhan Dan offices. "We have never thought that we will not win and we maintain that we are not losing. Yet Mr. Kissinger has said he cannot win, so he is losing."

"But do Mr. Nixon, Mr. Kissinger and Mr. Laird—do they dare make a definite assessment that we are not able to continue the fight? Can these three men say for sure that the Saigon regime won't collapse in the near future? Can they say for sure that the Air Force will

WEDNESDAY, MARCH 29,



Felix Greene

GIVES HANOI'S VIEWS:
Col. Ha Van Lau, a delegate to the Paris peace talks, discussed Vietnam war in press interview.

be enough to save the Thieu regime in case of a pullout?"

The seemingly frank evaluation by Mr. Tung, while similar to comments heard in Washington, stood in sharp contrast to the bellicose editorials that appeared in Nhan Dan early in March. He indicated that he had written many of the articles, which denounced the increased bombing of North Vietnam and declared that "Nixon's acts of escalation will be smashed."