

Some N. Viet Gains to Aid Talk Hinted

SFE Examiner

By Peter Lisagor

WASHINGTON — (CDN) — Behind President Nixon's avowal to hang tough in Vietnam is an apparent U.S. willingness to accept limited North Vietnamese military gains provided Hanoi agrees to negotiate seriously in Paris.

Even as the President announced a further troop withdrawal of 20,000 men in the next two months and continued air and sea attacks upon the enemy, his chief national security adviser expressed a muted hope for progress in the peace talks.

Henry Kissinger, in an on-the-record briefing prior to the President's televised report to the nation last night, said that while the U.S. aim is to defeat the invasion of the South, enemy military gains "obviously will be made."

U.S. View

The United States will consider the invasion repulsed, Kissinger strongly implied, "if it is stopped without capturing a very significant number of provincial capitals or without having opened up the countryside so that the Viet Cong or North Vietnamese can operate unimpeded.

"Neither has happened yet."

Kissinger also noted that Hanoi is sending back to Paris Le Duc Tho, a Politburo member with whom he has met secretly on a dozen occasions in the past.

"Le Duc Tho does not generally return for trivial reasons," Kissinger said.

Contrast

Kissinger's statements contrasted sharply in tone and substance with the President's speech, which appealed for national unity in the current war crisis and repeated familiar themes about the necessity to halt

—Turn to Page 14, Col. 4

aggression now lest Americans be required to fight in future Vietnams.

Nixon said the Paris talks were being resumed today not "to hear more empty propaganda and bombast" from the other side.

The United States returns to the table, he said, with "the firm expectation that productive talks leading to rapid progress will follow through all available channels."

That statement appeared to hint at possible secret negotiations and to challenge the Russians, with whom Kissinger conferred for four days last week, to prod Hanoi into seeking a negotiated settlement of the war.

Air Strikes Vital

Explaining his decision to continue the withdrawals of U.S. forces, the President quoted the U.S. commander, Gen. Creighton Abrams, as saying the South Vietnamese "are fighting courageously and well in their self-defense."

U.S. Air Force strikes have been "essential" in protecting U.S. troops and helping the Saigon forces to prevent a Communist takeover. He quoted the Abrams assessment.

Furthermore, the President said, Abrams predicts "several more weeks of hard fighting in which some battles will be lost and others will be won by the South Vietnamese."

But Abrams has concluded that, with U.S. air and sea support, North Vietnam will "fail in its desperate gamble to impose a Communist regime" on the South.

Emphasizing that he had rejected an enemy demand that the bombing be stopped as a condition for resuming the peace talks, the President said:

"They sold that package to the United States once before, in 1968, and we are not going to buy it again in 1972."

The enemy's "one remaining hope," he asserted, "is to win in the Congress . . . and among the people of the United States, the victory they cannot win" in South Vietnam.

To permit the North Vietnamese invasion to succeed, he argued, would encourage

other potential aggressors in the Middle East, Europe and other danger spots and "enormously" increase the risk of war elsewhere.

'Must Not Falter'

Saying that the United States was coming to the "end of this long and difficult struggle," he declared:

"We must be steadfast. We must not falter."

The "risks" and "gains" over the years "now hangs in the balance during the coming weeks and months," he said.

The President's speech, in its sterner passages about the consequences of allowing Hanoi to succeed, was reminiscent of former President Johnson's declarations in past crises in South Vietnam. It was a direct appeal to the American people to stay on the course.

Significantly, Kissinger sought to soften the tough, unyielding public posture of the President in exhibiting a cool, restrained optimism that Hanoi's offensive may be a "prelude" to serious negotiations.

Kissinger held open the prospect that "we will be able to see fairly quickly whether substantive negotiations are possible," and suggested that the United States has "evidence" that the test ought now to be made.

He declined to discuss whether his trip to Moscow improved chances of negotiations.