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# New Hanoi Offer Rejected by U.S.

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WASHINGTON—North Vietnam at a secret Paris negotiating session earlier this week made a new proposal for a separate military settlement of the war, reliable diplomatic sources disclosed today.

The proposal was rejected by the U.S. negotiator, probably Dr. Henry Kissinger.

Hanoi's new peace package reportedly offered a phased return of American prisoners of war in exchange for a standstill cease-fire in South Vietnam and a total American troop withdrawal.

North Vietnamese troops were said to be prepared to cease fighting immediately after the capture of Hue, South Vietnam's ancient imperial capital.

Asked about the report the State Department refused to comment.

It was unclear whether Hanoi's traditional demand for an end to all U.S. military aid to the Saigon government was repeated as a precondition of the proposal.

Also unclear was the timing that North Vietnam stipulated for the American troop withdrawal, although it was assumed Hanoi included a "guarantee" for the safety of departing U.S. soldiers.

The intent of the new proposal, as it was understood

here, was to isolate the South Vietnamese — both diplomatically and militarily — from the U.S. forces, which now appear to be the main thing standing between Hanoi and Communist victory in South Vietnam.

It also was assumed that a demand for the end of "acts of war" against the territory of North Vietnam, such as American aerial bombardments against Hanoi and Haiphong, was part of the Communist proposal.

In offering the separate military deal, North Vietnam's chief negotiator, Le Duc Tho, was said to have paraphrased American arguments that the resolution of Vietnamese political prob-

—Turn to Page 4, Col. 1

lems "should be left to the Vietnamese to decide."

In fact, Hanoi's proposal probably would have been welcomed — at least as an opening gambit — by the United States only one month ago.

In the meantime, Hanoi's forces have occupied the northern third of South Vietnam and are threatening Hue and other provincial capitals.

This fact apparently has made a cease-fire unacceptable to the United States and South Vietnam. Such a truce was originally proposed by President Nixon on Jan. 25 as the first step toward arriving at a political settlement.

The sources reiterated that North Vietnam was still willing to negotiate a political solution that would provide for the self-determination of the Vietnamese people.

The said this could be accomplished by establishing a "caretaker" coalition government that would pave the way for future elections.

They said, however, such a coalition would have to be composed of North Vietnamese as well as National Liberation Front representatives in addition to members of the current Saigon government, except President Nguyen Van Thieu and his immediate supporters.

Since the controversial election of Thieu in a one-man race, North Vietnam has been unwilling to separate a political and military settlement, demanding the ouster of Thieu and the end of all American military and economic aid to the Saigon government.

It appeared that Hanoi's proposal may have been the much-heralded "peace offer" that has been expected

by American policymakers ever since Kissinger's secret trip to Moscow two weeks ago.

The presumption here had been that partly as a result of Kissinger's mission, the Soviets had agreed to try to persuade North Vietnam to be more flexible in their negotiating demands.

President Nixon's subsequent statement, in a nationally televised speech last week, that he had "firm expectations" of "rapid progress" toward a break in the talks apparently was based on those Russian assurances.

It now appears that Hanoi's new offer was at least in part the result of that effort.

The fact that the proposal apparently was considered by the United States no more forthcoming than previous Communist offers does not by itself mean the Russians didn't try.

State Department spokesman Charles Bray said yesterday that "when it came time to examine the negotiating baggage that the other side brought to Paris, we found they had only empty suitcases."

Bray added:

"We are disappointed in what we found . . . we are exceptionally frustrated this week."

Asked whether the diplomatic effort to reach a Vietnam solution had failed, he replied:

"It seemed to have gotten nowhere."