

## Podgorny's Promise

Peace in Vietnam is not around the corner, but an early resumption of serious negotiations in Paris, the vital prerequisite, should now be possible. With its sea supplies cut off by the American blockade, with China obstructing Soviet land shipments and with both its major allies putting their relations with Washington above their ties with Hanoi, the North Vietnam Government is under increasing pressure to explore a diplomatic settlement.

The United States has posed two conditions for a return to the semipublic four-party Paris talks: a halt in the North Vietnamese Army offensive in South Vietnam, particularly the drive across the demilitarized zone, and an indication that Hanoi would negotiate seriously in private. Hanoi's minimum conditions for resumption of the private talks appear to include resumption of the semipublic peace conference and suspension of the bombing of North Vietnam, at least in the Hanoi-Haiphong area.

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From this it is evident that mutual de-escalation of the war is the best route to resumption of serious negotiations. President Podgorny's promise, after leaving Hanoi, that the Soviet Union "will do everything possible for a de-escalation of the Vietnam war" and the success of the Paris peace talks, which he said would resume soon, suggests that Moscow is willing to take a hand in helping the two sides clear away negotiation roadblocks.

The Soviet Union has been loath to commit its prestige to such an enterprise since the advent of the Nixon Administration. Soviet reluctance to become involved during the past three years undoubtedly reflected Hanoi's attitude, culminating in the Communists' attempt to win a military victory instead of to resume negotiations, and sensitivity to criticism by China, which had been opposing negotiations until last year. President Nixon's insistence on progress toward settlements in Vietnam, the Middle East and Berlin as the price for a strategic arms limitation pact may also have turned Moscow off, along with Soviet doubts about Mr. Nixon's real desire to end the Vietnam war.

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But now much has changed. Agreements on Berlin and strategic arms have been reached. A Vietnam settlement would further ease relations with the United States and help speed American trade and credits. Peking no longer is opposing a negotiated settlement. Soviet leadership may now be convinced that the United States is in earnest about wanting to end involvement in the Vietnam war.

Mr. Nixon's May 8 peace proposal—American withdrawal in four months in return for a cease-fire and release of prisoners, leaving a political settlement to the Vietnamese—no longer demanded North Vietnamese withdrawal from the South, implied that North Vietnamese gains in the spring offensive would remain in Communist hands during the cease-fire, and avoided any explicit commitment to the future of the regime of President Thieu.

Comments by North Vietnam's chief Paris negotiator, Le Duc Tho, suggested interest in the proposal even before the Podgorny visit to Hanoi. The first need now is to get the talks started again. With Soviet help evidently forthcoming and a lull under way in the Communist offensive in South Vietnam, a suspension of the bombing of the Hanoi-Haiphong area could well open the door to fruitful negotiations.