



Vietnam Peace

May Be Up to U.S.

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IN A TRULY extraordinary feat of diplomacy, President Nixon has brought to bear on behalf of peace in Vietnam the joint efforts of Russia, China and this country. Hanoi has been obviously impressed, and there is now underway there a reconsideration of policy in a leadership situation made fluid by the apparent illness of Premier Pham Van Dong.

But while a settlement is still a possibility, the issue is not solely or even mainly up to Hanoi. The United States will miss the brass ring again unless Washington comes off the heady euphoria engendered by the latest military developments.

BEHIND the recent burst of diplomatic activity there is the offer made in the President's speech of May 8. That offer called on the other side to accept an internationally supervised cease-fire, and to release American prisoners of war.

In return, this country would agree to a "complete withdrawal of all American forces within four months." That withdrawal seemed to include a permanent cessation of all air and naval activities by American forces. Not surprisingly the North Vietnamese were visibly intrigued.

During the President's visit to Moscow at the end of May, the Russians posed intensive questions about both the political and military features of the offer. On the basis of the American answer, the Russians agreed to send President Nikolai Podgorny to Hanoi. Presumably, Podgorny's mission was to persuade the North Vietnamese to take the offer seriously.

The May 8 offer was also the centerpiece of the recent visit to China by the President's chief foreign policy adviser, Henry Kissinger. The Chinese showed some obvious suspicion of the May 8 proposals, particularly about the implications for a continuing American military presence. But the Chinese expressed no support for the notion, dear to Hanoi, that there had to be a major change of government in South Vietnam as a price for peace. So it seems likely that the Chinese will now join the Russians in urging the North Vietnamese to reconsider their position in the light of the May 8 offer.

The outcome of the rethinking remains very much in doubt. But one point is very clear. The recent expressions of interest by Moscow, Peking and Hanoi all rest on the assumption that Washington is seeking a way out of the war — a veil to cover a less than brilliant exit. There is no sign in Moscow, or Peking, or Hanoi that the Communists are giving up.

WHAT THIS means to me is that peace is mainly up to Washington. If the Nixon Administration is finally prepared to accept the fact that it cannot win, then a settlement is possible.

But so far I see no signs beyond the hints in the May 8 offer. On the contrary, peace now seems to me unlikely because the bombing and the mining and the gains on the ground have imbued Washington once again with what one military man here called "the sweet smell of success."