

# Hanoi Says It Prefers McGovern

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In their first comment on the U.S. presidential campaign, the North Vietnamese have informed us they expect President Nixon to win reelection, but they would prefer to deal with George McGovern.

From their Paris embassy, North Vietnamese spokesmen have sent us an exclusive message that they feel sure McGovern would pull U.S. troops out of Vietnam as he has promised. They also believe he would keep his word not to give more military backing to the Saigon regime.

They, therefore, not only would negotiate the POW issue with McGovern, but they would move fast, suggested one North Vietnamese diplomat, to return American prisoners.

But the North Vietnamese conceded, in the end, they probably will have to negotiate with a re-elected Richard Nixon. They couldn't afford, therefore, to place all their bets on McGovern, they said.

Hanoi's views on the election were delivered to us by an emissary who met with the North Vietnamese three times for a total of four and one-half hours. For diplomatic reasons, we agreed to withhold the names of the participants.

All the discussions were held in French, so we can only paraphrase what the North Vietnamese said. Their suspicion

of Mr. Nixon seemed almost paranoid, their trust in McGovern wary.

## Nixon Paranoia

They recited Mr. Nixon's record back to his 1953-61 term as Vice President when he made saber-rattling speeches about Indochina. Nevertheless, they were ready to negotiate with Mr. Nixon in 1971, they said, for the total withdrawal of U.S. forces and the immediate return of U.S. prisoners.

But the rigged re-election of President Thieu on Oct. 1 and the escalated bombing of North Vietnam a few days later, they said exacerbated their old suspicions of Mr. Nixon.

Now they feared Mr. Nixon would listen to Thieu's appeals for renewed U.S. intervention in the Vietnam war. As evidence, they cited the buildup of U.S. forces in neighboring Thailand and the increase in air-naval units around Vietnam.

The Communist diplomats said they trusted McGovern, if he should be elected, not to re-intervene in the war. But one diplomat suggested that they would make rapid arrangements with McGovern to return American prisoners so he would have no excuse to re-intervene.

## Bombing of Dikes

The North Vietnamese said they would make an account-

possible, at the same time a POW settlement is reached.

The 60 to 100 Americans held by the Communist forces in Laos, the North Vietnamese said, could be returned as part of a general U.S. agreement to withdraw from Indochina. They said the Americans held in Cambodia could also be returned as part of a general Indochina settlement.

A Cambodian Communist, who was present during the discussions, said the American prisoners in Cambodia are suspected CIA agents and special forces, not combat troops captured during the U.S. incursion of May, 1970.

The North Vietnamese were particularly emotional over the alleged American bombing of the dikes, which they pleaded could lead to two million deaths from drowning and starvation.

We have seen secret Pentagon documents, which substantiate the U.S. claim that the Red River dikes and dams are off limits to our bombers. The documents indicate, however, that some flood-control installations have been hit accidentally, because of the close proximity of military targets.

The North Vietnamese explained to our emissary that they had bolstered the hill-sides above the dams and dikes with trees, grass and underbrush. The torrential rains of U.S. missing, insofar as

last year eroded these natural barriers. Thus, U.S. bombs exploding near the dikes jar the weakened bulwarks and cause severe leaks.

Some roads also run directly on top of dikes, and U.S. attacks on the military traffic have blown holes in the dikes, they said. A combination of air raids, defoliation and artificial rain-making, they feared, could turn their flood-control system into a huge mudslide.

Footnote: Intelligence reports suggest that Moscow and Peking, unlike Hanoi, would prefer to deal with Richard Nixon than George McGovern. The reason, apparently, is that they feel more comfortable with the known Nixon than the unknown McGovern.

## Appeal to Pope

Three priests imprisoned in Brazil's dread Sao Paulo penitentiary have smuggled out a letter to Pope Paul begging him to intervene against the torturing of political prisoners by Brazilian authorities.

The priests' letter, dated June 29, said they had fasted 21 days in protest against "atrocious tortures" that have killed more than 200 Brazilians. Although the priests claim they and hundreds of others are political prisoners, they have been thrown into common cells with rapists, murderers and other hardened criminals.