

Hanoi Seeks Neutral Saigon

By Murrey Marder
Washington Post Staff Writer

North Vietnam "dared" the United States yesterday to put forth and join in guarantees to insure that "neither side dominates the political life in South Vietnam" in a peace settlement.

This was the clearest public clue so far to what may be a key hangup in secret negotiations to settle the war in Vietnam.

The proposition from Hanoi indicated that North Vietnam and the Vietcong may be ready to bargain for less than a majority share of control in a new three-segment government in Saigon. This is what Hanoi and the Vietcong claimed on Sept. 11 when

they stated they would agree "that neither a Communist regime nor a U.S. stooge regime shall be imposed on South Vietnam." But the United States publicly has contended that the Communists still seek direct or indirect imposition of a government which they can dominate.

North Vietnam, broadcasting an article from its official newspaper, Nhan Dan, signed "The Communist"—signifying an imposed policy statement—challenged the United States to replace the present government of South Vietnam with a government that it said neither side could dominate. It offered to "discard this U.S. fear" of an "imposed" govern-

ment, which it called "absurd," and to deal with "the realities of the situation in South Vietnam..."

"Does the U.S. want peace or to continue the war?" the article said. "Dares it, together with the parties concerned," Nhan Dan continued, "put forth and carry out necessary measures to ensure that neither side dominates the political life in South Vietnam during the said transitional period? How will the U.S. side answer these questions?"

This appeared to be a solicitation by Hanoi for some form of international guarantee against an imposed form of

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new government in South Vietnam. The statement, which referred several times to the "U.S. government... together with the parties concerned," did not say who these parties are or if the ambiguity was intended to include, for example, international guarantees by the United States, China and the Soviet Union or other nations.

The Nhan Dan article aroused considerable interest inside the Nixon administration. There was no immediate official reaction to it, however, because of the general ban on discussing the secret negotiations on Vietnam.

Although the article made no explicit reference to the secret talks in Paris that were last held on Sept. 15 between presidential adviser Henry A. Kissinger and Hanoi Politburo member Le Duc Tho, it challenged the brief public remarks Kissinger made at the White House on Sept. 15 after that meeting.

The Nixon administration "discarded the Vietnamese people's stand," Hanoi said, through Kissinger's remark that the United States would "reject any move that would impose a particular form of government" in South Vietnam. This is an "absurdity," the article claimed, because, it asked rhetorically, "Who has imposed its 'form of government' on South Vietnam?"

That the United States is demanding, said the Nhan Dan commentator, is "the

elimination of its opponent," and the maintenance of "the Saigon puppet administration," instead of the "three-segment government of national concord" which was proposed by the Vietcong in its most recent formulation on Sept. 11.

The three segments would be the Provisional Revolutionary Government of South Vietnam (Vietcong); "people from the Saigon administration... without (President) Nguyen Van Thieu," and "representatives of other political forces in South Vietnam, including those who, for political reasons, have to live abroad."

In the formal Paris peace talks, they are largely polemical exchanges, U.S. Ambassador William J. Porter has assailed the proposal from the Communist side as "illogical, impractical and self-contradictory." Porter said it would wipe out the Saigon government and leave the Communists in control. Kissinger, however, has said much more guardedly that "the latest Vietcong proposal leaves something to be desired" on the subject of imposing political control.

President Thieu, the chief target of the Communist proposal, has assailed it as "a trick." He said his government and people "are determined not to accept any formula for a disguised two-way or three-way coalition administration proposed by the Communists..."

Thieu, in a speech lauding the South Vietnamese recapture from the Communists of the citadel at Quang Tri, said South Vietnam now has "scored brilliant successes." Now, Thieu said bluntly, "no one has the right to negotiate, bargain for or accept any solution in defiance of the southern people."

While the Saigon government was exulting over its position, the North Vietnamese last weekend published a voluminous account of what it claimed to be its successes in the Communist offensive launched March 30.

This assessment, which preceded the new Hanoi overture yesterday, appeared in Nhan Dan and the army newspaper, Quan Doi Nhan Dan, under the signature "Chien Thang," which means victory.

The review rattled the North Vietnam and Vietcong ability to survive the U.S. air onslaught as a "victory."

It claimed, in substance, that North Vietnam and the Vietcong withstood the worst of the massive power that the United States could throw at it during the intervening months, and now must "open a new firm and strong battle position for the southern revolutionary war."

The article said the United States "earlier proposed that it had stopped the transportation flow 100 per cent" on the supply lines to North Vietnam with "its bombings

and shelling"—a claim which U.S. officials made.

"It is very obvious," the article concluded, "that the U.S. air and naval forces have made the war very fierce, but they can never reverse the situation. They can only postpone to some extent the defeat and collapse of the U.S. puppets..."

Despite the "great destructive effect and power" with which the United States "can seriously threaten an adversary" the article said, "the entire North has quickly organized its struggle, production and life on a wartime basis. In a very fierce war situation, the North has passed many great tests and is still able to protect its economic and national defense potential and provide adequate and timely support to the front line."