

DIPLOMATS WEIGH VIEW FROM HANOI

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Envoys in Washington Feel
North Sees an Advantage in
Accepting a Cease-Fire
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WASHINGTON, Oct. 27 — Foreign diplomats with contacts in Hanoi suggested today that North Vietnam decided four weeks ago to accept a cease-fire because of a belief that a settlement would more effectively advance the Communist cause than would a continuation of fighting.

A number of diplomats representing Western as well as Communist governments said in interviews that they believed Hanoi's leaders had reached this decision after a painstaking analysis of the military and diplomatic situation and after quiet talks with several trusted foreign governments.

In view of these considerations, the diplomats cautioned that it would be misleading to regard Hanoi's shift in its negotiating positions as actual concessions or a major "cave-in."

Hanoi Decision Weighed

According to the diplomats, these appeared to be the key elements in the Hanoi decision:

¶President Nixon's commitment to an indefinite heavy bombing of North Vietnam and the mining of its ports convinced North Vietnam's politburo that the Communist offensive, which began last March 30, could not deal a decisive defeat to the South Vietnamese armed forces.

¶Hanoi apparently believed that the best it could have gained would be a prolonged and enormously costly, bloody stalemate. North Vietnam could have kept up the present or even higher level of fighting for many months. But, in the words of a Communist diplomat, the operation had entered the phase of "diminishing returns."

¶China and the Soviet Union did not respond drastically to President Nixon's decision last May to bomb and blockade North Vietnam. These two nations kept up a steady flow of equipment, fuel and food, but with the Soviet Union pressing for a settlement, Hanoi may have wondered how long the supplies would keep coming while both the Russians and the Chinese moved toward better relations with Washington.

¶The damage inflicted in North Vietnam by the bombing

appeared, after more than six months, to outweigh the advantages of a return to "protracted warfare," let alone those of a sustained series of offensives. Seventy-five per cent of North Vietnam's electric power potential, for example, was said to have been knocked out by the American raids.

¶The unfavorable military picture by the end of September forced the decision that what could no longer be accomplished on the battlefield, might now be attained through political action.

The diplomats, including those from Communist countries, tended to discount speculation that the decision to seek a settlement at this time was the result of a rift within the Hanoi politburo between "hawks" and "doves."

These diplomats said—as did United States intelligence specialists on North Vietnam—that the top leadership in Hanoi includes both advocates of continued warfare and those who prefer to husband the nation's resources for economic reconstruction and development.

Split Called Unlikely

But the diplomats emphasized that all the indications were that both the spring offensive and the recent decision to shift to political action, including the cease-fire accord, had unanimous support in the politburo.

"If one method doesn't work, one tries another one," a Communist diplomat observed. "This is what Ho Chi Minh has taught the North Vietnamese. And if there was a 'revolution' in Hanoi last month, we are certainly unaware of it."

Several Communist diplomats observed that while Hanoi's decision was extremely difficult and long in the making, "the dynamics of the situation," as one of them put it, require that North Vietnam push for an immediate cease-fire so that the new consensus will not come apart through diplomatic delays.

"This is why Hanoi is insisting on the Oct. 31 date for signing the agreement," the diplomat said. "You know that this is the way politics work in Communist countries. Once a hard decision is made, it has to be implemented immediately."

Both Western and Communist diplomats saw in Hanoi's decision a shift in long-range strategy rather than the concessions of a government on the brink of defeat.

"They haven't fought for 27 years just to give up all their policies and aspirations," a Western diplomat said.