

Foe Hints It's Ready For Talks

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But Accuses U.S. of Seeking An Advantage

By Marilyn Berger
and George C. Wilson

Washington Post Staff Writers

Hanoi gave its first unofficial sign yesterday that Le Duc Tho would be prepared to meet again with presidential adviser Henry A. Kissinger.

This clue came in an Agence France Presse report quoting well informed sources in Hanoi as saying that the North Vietnamese government would not be opposed to a further meeting between the two negotiators.

This first sign that Hanoi had relented in its insistence that the agreement was complete came at the same time as a charge that the United States was seeking to "gain a position of strength in the negotiations."

This seemed to back up reports, also confirmed in Washington, that the United States is seeking assurances from North Vietnam that there will be some pullback of its forces in the South.

So far, there has been no overt indication that North Vietnam was making any gestures that would signal a willingness to withdraw. Nor was it indicating that it would meet another key demand which U.S. sources said is being made to link cease-fires in Cambodia and Laos closely to an end to the fighting in Vietnam.

Informed sources in Washington said the United States was seeking a clear understanding that North Vietnam would withdraw a meaningful proportion of the 35,000 troops it has in the northern provinces of South Vietnam. These forces are considered the best equipped and most capable of launching attacks against populated areas. They currently

serve to hold down three of South Vietnam's best divisions.

Since Hanoi has never explicitly acknowledged that it has forces in the South such an understanding would not be written into the agreement but the United States wants assurances that a withdrawal would take place. Informed sources said, however, that this would not have to occur before an agreement is signed.

But instead of pulling back, military sources said yesterday that the North Vietnamese are stepping up their flow of men and supplies into South Vietnam, although not yet to an alarming extent.

Agence France Presse, meanwhile reported from Hanoi that well-informed sources said the North Vietnamese government would not be opposed to a further meeting between Le Duc Tho, its special negotiator, and presidential adviser Kissinger. "Whether there is another meeting or not is not important," the French news agency quoted well-informed sources as saying. "What is important is that the United States keep its word."

Such a readiness to meet is consistent with Hanoi's traditional policy. Analysts of North Vietnamese affairs note that Hanoi has never refused to meet and has refrained from walking out of meetings.

Informed sources in Washington expressed confidence that there would be another meeting but said it has become increasingly unlikely, with every passing hour, that

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it would take place before next Tuesday's elections.

Contacts between Hanoi and Washington are continuing, these sources said, but the two countries are not in an active negotiating period. North Vietnam is said to understand what the U.S. is seeking and is now considering what its next move will be.

Analysts described the current North Vietnamese propaganda statements as being in a holding pattern typical of moments when Hanoi's leadership is planning its next step.

U.S. officials meanwhile were looking for signs of a thinning out of North Vietnamese forces as evidence of Hanoi's willingness to implement an agreement. Even before it became publicly known that a cease-fire agreement was in the offing, documents

from Communist headquarters indicated preparations were under way for a possible withdrawal of North Vietnamese forces.

But military intelligence reports coming into Washington from Vietnam showed that thousands of North Vietnamese troops are moving into South Vietnam from Cambodia's Parrots Beak. These troops are believed to be parts of Hanoi's 5th, 7th and 9th divisions that participated in the battle of Anloc and then holed up in Cambodia.

The two other main routes of north-to-south infiltration are across the demilitarized zone separating the two Vietnams and down the Ho Chi Minh trails of Laos into the jungled Ashau Valley in northern South Vietnam.

In addition to men, North Vietnam is still sending big loads of ammunition, food and other war supplies—including tanks — to their divisions within South Vietnam.

This resupply effort could help prepare North Vietnamese and Vietcong units for quick grabs of territory before a cease-fire can draw the lines of control in South Vietnam. Administration officials said Hanoi's deployment appears designed for this purpose as distinguished from the massing of forces for a big offensive.

The Pentagon estimates that there are between 100,000 and 125,000 North Vietnamese troops in South Vietnam right now. Counting replacements moving across the border, the figure could go as high as 145,000.

Defense Secretary Melvin R. Laird said on Tuesday that plans for Vietnamization—turning the war over to the South Vietnamese—were based upon a "larger North Vietnamese forces that is presently in-country at this time."

He expressed confidence

that the Communists could not make any significant changes in the current pattern of territorial control, noting that "the South Vietnamese are in a very good position." He said the North Vietnamese were very "vulnerable" because they were spread out throughout the countryside in very small units.

Another critical point in the negotiations, U.S. sources have said, involves an effort to assure that cease-fires in Cambodia and Laos will follow shortly upon a cease-fire in Vietnam. This would assure that the back door to North Vietnamese reinforcement would be closed. There was no sign yet that any progress had been achieved on this issue.

Nevertheless, Cambodian Foreign Minister Long Boret met for an hour yesterday with Secretary of State William P. Rogers and emerged "optimistic" about his country's future.

State Department sources also confirmed that Rogers had spoken to representatives of Hungary, Poland Indonesia and Canada to explore their willingness to participate in a peacekeeping body to supervise the agreements.