

# Hanoi Seen Pressing for Better Terms

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Nixon administration officials said yesterday that in their judgment North Vietnam is stalling on a war settlement in order to extract better terms, without scuttling the deadlocked effort to reach accord.

There is no expectation inside the administration now, however, officials said, that an agreement can be re-fashioned quickly. The unprecedentedly severe bombing of the Hanoi-Haiphong region of North Vietnam by B-52 bombers is now the dominant development of the war.

The fact that North Vietnam, in spite of the heavy bombing, has not broken off all negotiating contacts is regarded as a significant sign inside the administration.

But at the same time, officials concede that North Vietnam probably has over-riding reasons in its own interests for not washing out the incomplete negotiating package bargained out between presidential envoy Henry A. Kissinger and North Vietnam's Le Duc Tho.

North Vietnam, these officials said, may be counting on the return of Congress to raise pressure to cut off funds to continue the war, or may be using the delay in reaching an accord to strain relations between Washington and Saigon, or may seek Communist battlefield gains—or a combination of all three.

Officials were speaking to newsmen on a non-attribution basis in response to requests for answers to dozens of questions raised by the impasse in the negotiations and the resumption of all-out bombing. The officials continued to decline, however, as Kissinger did in public last Saturday, to answer specific questions about the substance of the deadlock. The explanation for the refusal was that North Vietnam also is continuing to honor the agreement not to discuss details.

The United States and North Vietnam have blamed each other for the impasse and charged each other with reneging on previous commitments in the negotiations. North Vietnam explicitly has accused the United States of

seeking modification in terms agreed upon in October, in order to "perpetuate the division of Vietnam" into North and South Vietnam.

Officials yesterday dismissed that "sovereignty" claim as a "red herring." They said that neither the "sovereignty" See **BREAKDOWN, A13, Col. 1**

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question in a general form, nor the dispute over honoring the demilitarized zone between north and south, which is another form of the same issue, was the central obstacle in the talks. The barrier to an agreement was no single issue, they said.

Instead, it was charged, starting on Dec. 6 the American negotiators began to conclude that North Vietnam was engaged in deliberately stalling the negotiations. In retrospect, officials said, what they now call the "stalling" pattern began on Dec. 4, when the talks resumed in Paris after a nine-day recess.

Administration officials said they subsequently learned that on Dec. 3 North Vietnam began to evacuate schoolchildren from Hanoi. This action, plus the pattern of North Vietnamese bargaining in the talks, it is said, caused the Nixon administration to conclude that before the talks resumed on Dec. 4 Hanoi had decided that there was no prospect of resolving the terms on which North Vietnam and the United States could reach a settlement.

The administration sources do not concede that the United States made any demands for substantive changes in the October terms for a settlement that could have caused North Vietnam to conclude that it was the United States that was trying to change the dimensions of the accord. U.S. officials insist the North Vietnamese charge is untrue, but decline to specify or explain the changes the United States did seek.

North Vietnam accepted six or seven changes, officials said, and rejected others. The administration's contention,

however, is that the negotiating breakdown did not develop from these disagreements but resulted instead from a political decision in North Vietnam against concluding an agreement.

U.S. officials said they are completely puzzled about North Vietnam's reasons for what they call Hanoi's turn-about.

Kissinger said last Saturday that President Nixon ordered Kissinger's deputy, Gen. Alexander M. Haig, to return to Washington because "at that point, we thought we were sufficiently close" to produce an agreement.\* When asked later to reconcile that decision with the conclusion that as of Dec. 3 the negotiators in Paris began to suspect a "stall," officials said that the pattern became clear only later. North Vietnam, it was said, constantly raised new demands, including an attempt to put conditions on the anticipated unconditional release of American prisoners, and when that obstacle was eliminated others were raised.

The call for a halt to the secret Paris talks was made by the United States, it was said, but the decision was described as virtually mutual.

President Nixon's order to resume the all-out bombing of North Vietnam was described yesterday as only "restoring what was suspended." The bombing was resumed, it was said, because serious negotiations were no longer under way, and the reasons for the partial bomb halt no longer existed. These sources, however, refused to discuss the reason why the bombing was not only resumed, but greatly intensified.

President Nixon's reason for that decision would appear to be to try to counter or forestall what was presented yes-

terday as the administration's assessment of Communist intentions to put pressure on the Nixon administration, to agree to North Vietnam's terms for a settlement. Officials will not discuss how, or when, the administration expects this bombing campaign to produce diplomatic results.

\*... The Paris negotiations were going so smoothly as of Dec. 10 that Kissinger sent [Haig] to Washington to discuss one major sticking point with the President.

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.... The American delegation was convinced, as late as Dec. 9, that an agreement was in the works. Gen. ... Haig was sent back to Washington on that date with a proposal offered by the other side for Presidential approval.

Joseph Kraft,  
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