

Bombers Answer to POW StallBy **GEORGE SHERMAN**

©, 1972, Washington Star-News

WASHINGTON — A sudden reversal of Hanoi's position on release of United States prisoners of war played a key role in President Nixon's resumption of all-out bombing of North Vietnam, authoritative sources say.

These sources also maintain Henry A. Kissinger and his Hanoi counterpart in the negotiations, Le Duc Tho, will meet again next month in Paris, before Nixon's inauguration for a second term Jan. 20.

The officials say that in the last round of the private Paris peace talks, Dec. 4-13, the North Vietnamese suddenly linked release of the POWs to freeing some 40,000 political prisoners held in the south by President Nguyen Van Thieu.

That switch, as much as any other factor in the deadlocked talks, the

sources say, convinced Nixon that Hanoi was "playing" with the United States. The President has said repeatedly that return of the prisoners must be dependent only on a cease-fire and withdrawal of U.S. forces from South Vietnam.

IT IS RECOGNIZED generally inside the administration, as well as Congress, that release of the United States prisoners is the greatest focus of United States public interest in a negotiated settlement.

In the original nine-point draft agreement, made public Oct. 26, Hanoi and Washington agreed the release of the prisoners would begin immediately after the cease-fire was signed. It was to be completed during the 60 days of United States military withdrawal. On Dec. 18, five days after the last round of talks, and the day Nixon resumed the bombing, Hanoi publicly confirmed the switch in position. A commentary in the official newspaper, Nhan Dan, said that "the captured U.S. military men will be released after the agreement is signed and correctly implemented."

More important, it expressed fear of any immediate prisoner release on signing of the cease-fire "while hundreds of thousands of patriots remain locked in U.S.-Thieu prisons."

UNDER POINT four of the draft agreement, release of political prisoners is tied to demobilization of armed forces of both Saigon and the Communists in the south, and is to be negotiated between them. Since the issue goes to the heart of the struggle for power in the South American negotiators saw that Hanoi was attempting to

use American prisoner release as "blackmail" in the long and bitter struggle expected in South Vietnam following cease-fire.

The President did not act in anger, an authoritative source said. Another official close to the negotiations said Nixon realized he was on a "merry-go-round" with Hanoi by the last day of the talks, Dec. 13. The result, both sources agree, was that all-out bombing would be resumed as a "penalty" against Hanoi for "playing with us."

According to the sources, the final Nixon decision was reached late last Saturday afternoon — after Kissinger had described the deadlock at the White House. ^{16 DEC}

The previous day Kissinger had met with top members of the executive

Turn to Page 7, Column 1

Continued from Front Page

branch to ask recommendations on the course to follow.

By Saturday afternoon, they had sent their opinions to the President. According to the sources, the verdict in favor of bombing was unanimous. Kissinger met again with Nixon Saturday afternoon, and later that day the President made his decision.

THE SOURCES acknowledge the return to bombing, and its unparalleled severity, could lead Hanoi to break off the negotiations—but they doubt that will happen.

To bolster the argument for the bombing, these sources contend that not to have acted would be equally dangerous and — even worse — "demoralizing." Hanoi could string out the private talks indefinitely, as it has the semi-public sessions in Paris, while it prepared its political and military campaign in Vietnam.

Officials are puzzled about Hanoi's motives in drawing back from the peace settlement that Kissinger said on Saturday was "always just within our reach." One official outlines his view of four possible Hanoi motives:

—To generate pressure in Congress

for an end to the war through a cut-off in funds.

—To heighten the tensions between Washington and Saigon.

—To win time to prepare a new military offensive in south Vietnam.

—To work out deep divisions over the settlement within the Hanoi Politburo.

ON THIS last point the officials interviewed differed — one, more expert, thought a division in Hanoi unlikely, while another, still closer to the negotiations, agreed with Soviet diplomats that a dispute in Hanoi is "quite probable."

On the military front, all sources agreed the severe air raids since Monday followed evidence of movement of about 120 tanks and an unspecified number of personnel down through North Vietnam and across into Southern Laos, possibly for use in South Vietnam. But none maintained that B-52 bombing of Hanoi and Haiphong in the north had only this limited immediate military aim.

The authoritative source said Hanoi "might" ultimately have to decide whether to make peace or suffer the consequences of this all-out war.

SEE MARY MCGILKRY
NOV 23 DEC 72
SP CARONELLE