

Roscoe Drummond

Same Old Stalling By North Vietnam

THERE IS NO REASON to be surprised or even dismayed by the latest hitch in the Vietnam negotiations.

This is absolutely standard Communist negotiating tactic.

The tactic is to use the ploy of a last-second stalemate to try to extract some extra concession after everything appears to be settled. The hope is that the other side will either be so weary or so eager or so pressured that it will yield in desperation.

This is the tactic which the Soviet Communists used before they finally ended the Berlin blockade.

This is the tactic the Chinese Communists used before finally approving the Korean truce.

This is the tactic which the North Vietnamese Communists are using to pry more of what they want from the United States before accepting a Vietnam cease-fire.

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THEY WILL NOT BE successful if we as a nation remain alert to this time-worn Communist one-upmanship, if we shun both impatience and overeagerness and if the American people substantially support the President's determination to get an evenhanded, trustworthy settlement.

There is no doubt in my mind that a settlement is going to come.

The heart of the matter is that Hanoi would very much like to get a cease-fire which it could maintain as long as it suited Hanoi's interests but which would have no effective enforcement so that it could be easily violated.

The North Vietnamese sought exactly that kind of porous cease-fire when on the eve of the U.S. elections they tried to pressure Nixon into signing terms which were without adequate enforcement mechanism.

They failed. They thought the President would capitulate to help his election. They were wrong.

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NOW THEY ARE MAKING one last try at getting a cease-fire with built-in loopholes. They resorted to every known technique of non-negotiation in the book to persuade the United States that if it didn't accept a settlement without means to carry it out, there just wouldn't be any settlement.

Can't blame them for trying. The Communist negotiators always have. But fortunately President Nixon and Henry Kissinger are not buying it.

It seems to me that Hanoi has misjudged its prospects. If Hanoi couldn't get a one-sided settlement during the campaign, it can't get one now. Time is on Mr. Nixon's side. Public opinion is on Mr. Nixon's side as was evident in the election.

The American people and the American government do not want to continue any part of the fighting one day longer than necessary, but the voters clearly showed last November that they do not want to end a long, agonizing war with a short, meaningless peace.

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IT WAS EMINENTLY USEFUL for Kissinger to bring this "charade," as he called it, into the open in his latest public press conference. Hanoi was doing its best to let it appear that the South Vietnamese were vetoing a prompt settlement. They weren't. Hanoi was trying to avoid a prompt settlement in order to extract terms producing a cease-fire which would have an open door to renewing the fighting. Here are some of the ways they maneuvered to do it:

Le Duc Tho presented Kissinger with an English version of a negotiating text which Kissinger found wasn't the same as the Vietnamese version. Then, when they came to discuss it, the original wording was changed and weakened after agreement had apparently been reached.

As soon as one issue was agreed to, another issue, previously accepted, was brought up again.

When second-level experts met with their Hanoi counterparts on one occasion, 17 new changes of substance were made in the guise of linguistics and when most of these were ironed out, 16 new changes were proposed the next day.

On the matter of means to monitor the cease-fire, the United States proposed an international staff of about 3000. Hanoi proposed about 250 — and they were not to be allowed to have their own means of communication — an anemic staff and assured immobility.

This is routine Communist negotiating practice. We shouldn't be intimidated by it.