

Aid and Vietnam Future

As the Factions Contend in the South,
Foreign Help Will Be Political Weapon

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PARIS, Feb. 14 — Although continuing official Vietnam meetings remain focused on the stability of the cease-fire, various talks are getting under way between the rival South Vietnamese factions about their country's political future.

The key, as seen by Vietnamese here of assorted allegiances, is the form in which foreign economic aid is delivered and administered. In a sense, the aid will be to the forthcoming political warfare in Vietnam what United States air power was to warfare even after the Americans withdrew from major ground combat and undertook Vietnamization: By either its presence or its absence it will have intense effects.

This is so in both North and South, but in quite different ways. Reconstruction aid is a major tool with which the United States hopes to wedge the North into a position of desiring to maintain the peace long after the last American G.I. and P.O.W. have gone home.

The first step in that policy was taken during Henry A. Kissinger's talks in Hanoi. As a result, it was announced today, the United States and North Vietnam have agreed to establish a joint commission to develop mutual economic relations.

In the South aid will unavoidably become a major weapon among the rivals for political ascendancy. Whether it is delivered by the United States and other countries directly or through international organizations, the way it is used and the South Vietnamese groups that handle it and direct its use will be politically crucial.

South Vietnamese Communist officials in Paris, according to some people involved, have begun energetically seeking contacts with non-Communist South Vietnamese exiles to discuss future politics.

Direct Aid Continuing

One thing they have been talking about is economic aid. The sources said that the Vietcong did not object now to continued direct United States delivery of economic support to President Nguyen Van Thieu, pointing out that in the period between cease-fire and peace they too are getting direct support from their allies.

In any case, that view was implicit in the Communists' abandonment of their long-standing demand that Mr. Thieu be removed before a cease-fire and in their willingness to sign an agreement that left negotiations for a political settlement to the South Vietnamese.

The Vietcong are now looking further ahead. The first step in the negotiations, as defined in the cease-fire accords, is to be the establishment by Saigon and the Vietcong of a "National Council of National Reconciliation and Concord, in three segments. The two sides are pledged "to do their utmost" to set up a council within 90 days of the cease-fire—a deadline unlikely to be met but which nonetheless exerts some pressure. The

third segment was in no way defined, and it will be a vital consideration for both sides. The assumption during the negotiations was that it would somehow represent the many South Vietnamese factions whose allegiance has not been clearly tied either to the Vietcong or to President Thieu's Government.

The haggling during the cease-fire negotiations and conversation with the rival parties since then have demonstrated that Mr. Thieu and the Communists have sharply different ideas about the third segment and the council's role.

All the signs have been that Mr. Thieu does not trust his non-Communist opposition, in the country or in exile, to support him against the Communists in the council. On the other side, there has been mounting evidence, both in public statements from Hanoi and in private comment in Paris, that the Communists look to the third segment as a most important element in their long-term plans.

North Vietnamese and Vietcong leaders have said repeatedly that they do not aim for a Communist take-over in the South but for a "national democratic revolution." South Vietnamese nationalists here believe that this is true and that it reflects the Communists' awareness that they do not have the strength to dominate the country—that they must look for third-segment people who will cooperate.

Bolstering Saigon's Hopes

The aid question enters at this point. If economic support is channeled through Saigon, it will greatly enhance the likelihood of a thumping victory for the President when the time comes for election of a postwar government. Therefore the Communists have begun to talk with likely third-segment adherents about the desirability of channeling aid through the national council—which Mr. Thieu can be expected to resist, since it would give the council just the governmental power he has refused to relinquish.

Under the best of circumstances large infusions of foreign goods and money have a distorting influence on national life. This is more the case in an undeveloped country, especially so in a war-torn country and overwhelmingly so in a country riven by civil strife.

The United States never did find a way of delivering economic aid to South Vietnam without producing deep social disturbances. The postwar problem will be intensified by the political struggle.

It is an issue that goes beyond the power of the Vietnamese to settle among themselves. Willy-nilly, the way foreign suppliers, including the United States, decide to deliver help will be a form of intervention favoring one South Vietnamese faction or another. It is likely to involve the United States, the Soviet Union and other countries in the Vietnamese dispute until there is a new South Vietnamese government recognized by all.