

# Hanoi: It's Still U.S. War Too

## POWs Used as Last Lever on American Policy

By Peter Osnos  
Washington Post Staff Writer

SAIGON, Feb. 28—The agreement to end the Vietnam war, celebrated as peace with honor by President Nixon, has turned out in its early stages to be little more than an excuse for American disengagement from a continuing bloody conflict.

As long as American prisoners were

### News Analysis

released on schedule and the withdrawal of U.S. forces proceeded quietly, the countless violations of the Paris accord by all of the Vietnamese contestants attracted no great international attention and concern, at least as viewed from here.

In an effort to keep the American departure going smoothly and give conditions in the Vietnamese countryside a

chance to settle down, the extent of the problems has been minimized by many U.S. officials. Gloomy reports were easily submerged beneath the hoopla of POW homecomings and Henry Kissinger's travels to Peking and Hanoi.

But by holding up this week's prisoner release, the North Vietnamese brought events to a head. They have, in effect, reminded the United States that "this is still your war, too."

"We have the impression that the U.S. delegation is solely concerned with the release of American prisoners of war," a North Vietnamese spokesman said Tuesday, expressing a feeling shared by Vietnamese of all allegiances.

Putting it another way, Hanoi was telling the United States that in its haste to end a long and much regretted involvement in Vietnam, it has overlooked the

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fact that the agreement to bring peace has failed so far in its objective, even in the imperfect way that had been predicted.

The North Vietnamese have used the POWs as their only leverage in bringing U.S. influence to bear on the present situation in which hundreds of North Vietnamese and Vietcong cease-fire delegates are being held virtual captives in South Vietnamese compounds while the fighting goes on.

The Communist ploy was an artful one and it may bring short-term improvements as the South Vietnamese respond to American pressures to end blatant harassment of the other side. But the inevitable moment will still arrive when the United States is gone and the Vietnamese themselves will have to come to terms.

What will happen then? Doubts about the future loom as large as ever.

There has been nothing visible here in the month since the agreement was signed that shows a genuine willingness to do as Article 11 of the accord instructed, "achieve national reconciliation and concord, end hatred and enmity, prohibit all acts of reprisal and discrimination against individu-

als or organizations that have collaborated with one side or another."

President Thieu's government and the Viet Cong's Provisional Revolutionary Government have managed to agree on political discussions near Paris, thousands of miles removed from what takes place here.

Perhaps those talks will make headway towards a meaningful political accommodation. The mere fact of ranking officials from the two sides meeting raises a shred of hope.

Meanwhile, Thieu, backed by his army and police, maintains the position that the Vietcong are enemies of the state.

One of the first things that returning South Vietnamese POWs are required to do, for example, is chant

in unison: "Overthrow the Communists. Republic of Vietnam Forever."

The raising of a Vietcong flag is regarded as a provocation to be met with maximum available force.

Thieu is keeping such a tight and threatening grip on political expression that even his non-communist opponents are afraid to make any moves that might be wrongfully construed. Gen. Duong Van (Big) Minh's attempt the other day to speak out on behalf of what he called South Vietnam's "third entity" had to be billed as a reception for friends because a press con-

ference would risk reprisals.

Minh, in a somewhat forlorn appeal to the international conference on Vietnam now meeting in Paris, correctly observed that none of the guarantees of personal freedom theoretically insured by the agreement is actually being observed.

The agreement solemnly pledged there would be "freedom of speech, freedom of the press, freedom of meeting, freedom of organization, freedom of political activities, freedom of belief, freedom of movement, freedom of residence, freedom of work, right to property ownership and right to free enterprise."

It was extremely unrealistic, Vietnamese and American observers now agree, to promise reforms which did not have the slightest chance. If anything, the South Vietnamese government has become more restrictive since the agreement took effect, rather than less.

Even so, a semblance of a true cease-fire, the core of the accord, was expected. That has not happened either.

The scale of combat has diminished in the past few days, according to informed diplomatic assessments, but it is still reckoned to be greater than it was during many periods of the war. One reliable intelligence estimate places the current level of activity at about what it was in October 1972.

### Aviation Fuel

Commercial suppliers of

fuel to the South Vietnamese air force say that consumption by government war planes is as great as before the cease-fire, even though all bombing missions are supposed to have ended. U.S. officials in one important province northwest of Saigon said last weekend that South Vietnamese air strikes there were still routine.

Artillery fire is another index of warfare. Diplomatic sources, with access to highly classified South Vietnamese reports, say that in the northern military region alone, government troops have been firing an average of 35,000 rounds a day.

Official casualty figures continue to show both government and Communist killed in the same numbers as before.

With then successful end the South Vietnamese drive to retake the coastal town of Sahuynh in Quangngai Province, there are no longer any major ongoing battles. But scores of skirmishes are taking place every day. According to U.S. officials in at least one province, government commanders are still ordering their troops to shoot communists on sight.

The Vietcong are also violating the cease fire by tak-

ing potshots at helicopters, closing roads ostensibly in government hands and by shelling government units in many areas, military sources say.

The prevailing view among the American officials and other Western intelligence experts is that the Communists had intended a substantial standdown throughout the country for at least the period of the American withdrawal. Their big final effort, it is said, came before the start of the cease-fire, when they penetrated hundreds of hamlets, attempted to seize Tyninh Province on the Cambodian border and captured Sa-huymh.

The South Vietnamese argue privately that they have a right to take back what had been theirs. Now that that has been accomplished, the justification for ongoing attacks is beginning to look threadbare, even to U.S. officials willing to give the

Thieu government the widest possible margin of doubt.

The extent of the fighting might not be as discouraging if the international supervisory apparatus was showing any signs of life. The International Commission of Control and Supervision has settled into a kind

of lethargy, carrying out bureaucratic functions but still unable to monitor the countryside.

"It is not our job to go out in cross fire and get killed,"

Ambassador Michel Guavin, the chief Canadian delegate to the ICCS, observed last week.

Today, the ICCS grounded all its flights because so

many of the aircraft were being shot at.

On Sunday<sup>at</sup> the White House Dr. Norman Vincent Peale told the worshippers at a service there: "The guns are being silenced all over the world.... a generation of peace does indeed lie ahead." In Saigon, however, you can still hear the gund firing!