

Hanoi Attitude: Keeping U.S. on Hook

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PARIS, March 2—Although the prisoner crisis drew most attention, the most interesting development at the international conference on Vietnam was evidence of a subtle shift in Hanoi's attitude toward the United States.

North Vietnam had said for so many years that its major aim was to get the United States out of Indochina that the goal had come to be taken for granted. It is no longer quite so evident. In a number of ways, Hanoi's behavior at the conference indicated a determination to affirm direct American responsibility for the Vietnam cease-fire, and inevitably therefore a continued degree of United States influence.

One way the North Vietnamese showed their unwillingness to let the United States off the hook was a repeated insistence that reconstruction aid be given directly rather than through some international body. This was something of a surprise. It is almost an axiom of international relations that aid comes packaged with political strings, but they are much looser when the aid program is delivered by several nations acting in concert, or by an international organization.

Might Lose Some Aid

In the case of North Vietnam, there is also good reason to think that the total of aid would be substantially higher if it was not given directly. Political resistance in the United States is going to make it hard to get an aid bill through Congress, much harder if it is not in an international framework. Japan, which is ready to provide aid, can give more easily through a consortium of nations than on her own, and it ought to be easier for Hanoi to receive it that way than by direct dealings with Tokyo.

The North Vietnamese are aware of these factors. But their position is adamant. Aid must be direct. Do they insist on that even if it means they could not expect nearly so

much foreign help to rebuild their country? Yes, their delegates reply, the political principle is more important even though supplies are needed.

Henry A. Kissinger, President Nixon's adviser on national security, has said that a substantial United States aid program would help persuade Hanoi that it has an overriding interest in keeping the peace. But the North Vietnamese, at least during the Paris conference, said that the United States owes aid and cannot obscure the obligation by contributing through international groups.

Another sign of insistence on keeping the United States primarily responsible was in the Communists' attitude to the United Nations. When Mr. Kissinger was negotiating the cease-fire with Hanoi's Le Duc Tho, North Vietnam seemed eager and certainly willing to associate the Secretary General of the United Nations with guarantees.

Objection to Waldheim

Secretary General Waldheim was invited, without the slightest controversy, to be the 13th party at the international conference of six Communist and six non-Communist parties. He was expected to become chairman.

Some United Nations sources said China raised strong objections. But when the foreign ministers assembled in Paris, Hanoi and the Vietcong's Provisional Revolutionary Government made the most demonstrative demands that Mr. Waldheim's role be restricted to an observer.

Repeatedly, the Vietnamese Communists said that the signatories to the cease-fire must bear "prime responsibility" for preserving it. That means the three rival Vietnamese governments and one foreign country, the United States.

The same principle was brought to the fore in testy arguments over how truce supervision should function. Canada wanted reports on violations to be sent to some "independent political authority" and some outside arbiter established to recall the conference if the cease-fire broke down.

There was a weak compro-

mise, providing for reconvening of the conference if the cease-fire breaks down, but it did not erode the North Vietnamese argument that the United States must remain first on the line of cease-fire guarantors.

The motives for this shift in approach was not at all clear. They seemed to be composed of several elements.

One was that, in effect, Vietnamization has had some success. Saigon today is far more powerful militarily and perhaps politically, though that cannot be tested, than it was when the United States had hundreds of thousands of troops in South Vietnam and Hanoi concentrated on driving them out.

Now that the United States has shown a will to leave, Hanoi may be seeking to extend that to a commitment against Saigon's ability to pursue the war.

A second element, according to participants in the conference, is the intricate balance of relations between Hanoi, Peking and Moscow. This is partly speculation among diplomats, partly based on bits of evidence. Non-Communists think Hanoi has concluded that it will be in a better position to walk a tightrope between Moscow and Peking if it can deal with each separately, and avoid any real internationalization of postwar responsibility, such as the United States seemed to seek.

China Pressure Seen

Some Soviet sources think Hanoi's attitude reflects pressure from China, aimed to keep Soviet influence from growing, and also to limit Japan's possible involvement in Indochinese rehabilitation.

A third possibility, mentioned rather more by leading Americans than by Vietnamese, is a doubt about United States intentions. According to present plans, the United States intends to keep the Seventh Fleet in the area and the big air bases in Thailand.

Whatever the reasons, the feeling came through clearly at the Paris conference that Hanoi does not want the United States to forget all about Vietnam and go home. It is trying to hold Washington to a face-to-face encounter.