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DOGMATISM AND DIPLOMACY IN VIETNAM

WASHINGTON--THE PUBLIC REACTION OF THE NORTH VIETNAMESE TO PRESIDENT JOHNSON'S STATE OF THE UNION MESSAGE, IN THE FORM OF A COMMENTARY IN THE OFFICIAL NEWSPAPER NHAN DAN, APPEARS TO HAVE TIGHTENED THE DEADLOCK BETWEEN HANOI AND WASHINGTON OVER THE QUESTION OF NEGOTIATING AN END TO THE WAR.

TO BE SURE, AMERICAN OFFICIALS ARE STILL HOPING AGAINST HOPE THAT A MORE ENCOURAGING PRIVATE RESPONSE MAY YET BE FORTHCOMING TO THEIR DIPLOMATIC EXPLORATIONS, AND THEY ARE STILL PREPARED TO SEIZE ANY OPENING THAT SEEMS TO PROMISE PEACE. BUT THE NHAN DAN COMMENT -- AND THE VERY FACT THAT THE INITIAL REPLY WAS MADE IN A PROPAGANDA ORGAN -- MUST BE REGARDED AS A NEGATIVE DEVELOPMENT.

THE DEADLOCK NOW CENTERS ON THE ISSUE COMMONLY CALLED "RECIPROCITY." UNDERLYING THE TECHNICAL QUESTION, HOWEVER, IS A DIFFERENCE BETWEEN TWO WAYS OF THINKING-- BETWEEN DOGMATISM AND PRAGMATISM-- THAT RUNS ALL THROUGH THE CONFLICT BETWEEN COMMUNIST AND NON-COMMUNIST NATIONS.

THE TERM "RECIPROCITY" IN THE CURRENT CONTROVERSY IS USED AS A SORT OF DIPLOMATIC SHORTHAND TO SUM UP THE ISSUES POSED IN WHAT PRESIDENT JOHNSON HAS CALLED "THE SAN ANTONIO FORMULA." IN HIS STATE OF THE UNION ADDRESS, THE PRESIDENT PARAPHRASED THE POLICY HE HAD ORIGINALLY SET FORTH IN A SPEECH IN THAT TEXAS CITY IN SEPTEMBER, PUTTING IT IN THESE WORDS:

"THE BOMBING WOULD STOP IF TALKS WOULD TAKE PLACE PROMPTLY

THE OFFICIAL HANOI NEWSPAPER HAS RESPONDED BY CALLING THIS STATEMENT "A HABITUAL TRICK OF THE UNITED STATES," WHICH "CONSTITUTES VERY INSOLENT CONDITIONS." MORE SPECIFICALLY, NHAN DAN COMMENTS: "SINCE THE UNITED STATES IS OVERTLY BOMBING THE DRV, AN INDEPENDENT, SOVEREIGN STATE, IT MUST DEFINITELY AND UNCONDITIONALLY PUT AN END TO THIS AGGRESSIVE ACT. THE UNITED STATES HAS NO RPT NO RIGHT TO PUT ANY CONDITIONS TO THE VIETNAMESE PEOPLE. NEITHER HAS IT THE RIGHT TO ASK RECIPROCITY FROM THE VIETNAMESE PEOPLE, WHO HAVE NEVER ENCROACHED ON THE INDEPENDENCE AND SOVEREIGNTY OF THE UNITED STATES."

OF COURSE, THERE IS NO RPT NO MENTION OF THE FACT THAT NORTH VIETNAM IS OVERTLY ENCROACHING ON THE INDEPENDENCE AND SOVEREIGNTY OF SOUTH VIETNAM, WHICH THE UNITED STATES IS TREATY-BOUND TO HELP DEFEND AGAINST SUCH EXTERNAL AGGRESSION. MOREOVER, HANOI SIMPLY IGNORES THE FACT THAT TENS OF THOUSANDS OF ITS SOLDIERS IN ORGANIZED MILITARY UNITS ARE ACTUALLY FIGHTING IN THE SOUTH. AND BY PRETENDING THAT THESE REALITIES DO NOT RPT NOT EXIST, IT FORECLOSES THE POSSIBILITY OF NEGOTIATING A SETTLEMENT OF THE WAR OR EVEN A MUTUAL RESTRAINT UPON MILITARY OPERATIONS.

BY CONTRAST WITH THIS DOGMATIC ATTITUDE, THE UNITED STATES IS TRYING TO APPROACH THE PROBLEM OF ENDING THE WAR PRAGMATICALLY. IT IS COMMITTED TO CHECKING NORTH VIETNAM'S AGGRESSION AND ENABLING SOUTH VIETNAM TO SHAPE ITS OWN FUTURE, BUT IT ALSO RECOGNIZES THE COMPLEX REALITY POSED BY INTERNAL OPPOSITION TO THE SAIGON GOVERNMENT. IT KNOWS THAT A NEGOTIATED SETTLEMENT WILL HAVE TO TAKE THIS REALITY INTO ACCOUNT.

BY THE SAME TOKEN, BECAUSE THE NORTH VIETNAMESE FORCES FIGHTING IN SOUTH VIETNAM POSE A REAL DANGER TO THE TROOPS CONFRONTING THEM, THE UNITED STATES REGARDS ITS DEMAND FOR "RECIPROCITY" IN REDUCING THE LEVEL OF VIOLENCE AS A PRACTICAL

BUT NEGOTIATION MEANS COMPROMISE, AND COMPROMISE REQUIRES
A MUTUAL RECOGNITION OF REALITIES. UNTIL HANOI IS READY TO
ACKNOWLEDGE THE SITUATION THAT ACTUALLY EXISTS IN VIETNAM,
THE ARGUMENT OVER HOW TO END THE WAR WILL APPARENTLY HAVE TO
BE CONDUCTED IN THE LANGUAGE OF POWER, RATHER THAN IN THE LANGUAGE
OF REASON.

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