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U.S. Should Talk With Hanoi— If Two Conditions Are Met

THERE IS evident movement toward peace talks on the part of Hanoi.

The United States will use every means to determine whether the "change of words" by Hanoi is meaningful or whether it is new psychological warfare.

If the North Vietnamese are serious about wanting peace talks, the United States will respond.

If Hanoi is engaged in a tricky ploy, we will soon know—and not fall for it.

Hanoi's position has changed at two points:

It now says that if the United States unconditionally stops the bombing of the North, it "will" hold peace talks.

It no longer says that the bombing must be stopped "permanently."

THERE ARE further facts which need to be determined and the United States will be seeking to get them from a wide range of sources. If Hanoi is serious about peace talks, they won't be hard to get.

If Hanoi is serious, it alone can't lay down the conditions on which such talks can take place. If Hanoi is serious, it can't choose just the conditions which it wants and ignore the conditions we want.

Hanoi has named its conditions. What about ours? They are these:

1.—If we are to stop bombing North Vietnam, then, in President Johnson's words of Sept. 29 in San Antonio, it must be assumed that North Vietnam "would not take advantage of the bombing cessation." That is, de-escalation must be to some degree reciprocal.

2.—There must be no delay in beginning the talks; they should be "prompt and productive." Obviously we are not going to repeat in Vietnam the tragedy of Panmunjom at which the Korean truce talks were dragged out by the Communists month after month while some of the bloodiest fighting of the war continued.

Hanoi might as well realize that these two conditions are as essential to the United States as its condition—that the bombing must cease—is essential to North Vietnam.

Secretary Rusk has repeatedly warned against "stopping our half of the war while the North Vietnamese continue their half unabated."

It can be said with knowledge that President Johnson views his San Antonio statement setting out the two U.S. conditions cited above as the "rock-bottom" American position.

This means that U.S. and North Vietnamese officials will soon have to talk directly or through trusted intermediaries to find out whether and how the truce in the North can be made reciprocal.

OPINION in Washington is divided over whether Hanoi has launched a serious probe to get peace talks

started or is simply adding another ploy to try to embarrass the United States. There are all kinds of reservations. The United States will

proceed on the assumption that Hanoi is serious—unless and until proved otherwise.

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