

Unless North Viet Nam is itself willing to negotiate, or unless China is willing to have North Viet Nam enter negotiations, it is doubtful if President Johnson's "peace offensive" can succeed. In particular, it is doubtful if Russia has sufficient influence to force an unwilling Hanoi to go to the conference table.

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Communist Intentions Are On Trial Now

The spectacular American peace offensive is being scorned as a hoax by Peking, Moscow and Hanoi, and is viewed with scepticism even in some friendly Western European capitals.

It's suspected that the sudden descent of high U.S. emissaries on foreign capitals is an elaborate propaganda ploy intended--if the Communists fail to respond--to justify a further stepping-up of the American war effort in Viet Nam.

We doubt that all this mistrust is warranted, even though the U.S. pursuit of the Viet Nam peace has been erratic in the past, and even though some counsellors of the Johnson administration are known to believe that non-Communist elements in South Viet Nam are too feeble politically to survive peace now.

It seems more likely that we are witnessing a genuine campaign by the Johnson administration to pull out of a military morass and reach the conference table.

The sceptics say that if the U.S. meant business, it would meet Hanoi's demand that the National Liberation Front, the political arm of the Viet Cong, be assured a voice in the political future of South Viet Nam.

But why should Washington and Saigon concede this vital point before the bargaining begins, especially when Hanoi (on the official, public record at least) offers no compromises at all?

What the Americans are proposing would make a meaty first course for negotiators--if negotiation is what the Communists really want.