

U.S., Vietnam Open First Formal Talks Since Fall of Saigon

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By FLORA LEWIS

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PARIS, Nov. 12—American and Vietnamese diplomats met here today to begin their first formal talks since the fall of Saigon last year.

Although the goal of the meetings has been said to be the establishment of diplomatic relations, the contacts during today's two-hour session were considered preliminary ones, testing whether conditions were favorable for full-scale negotiations on all issues between the United States and Vietnam.

The prime issue for the United States—the fate of some 800 American servicemen still officially listed as missing in action in the Vietnam war—was raised by the American delegation, headed by Samuel Rhee-Gammon, the deputy chief of mission at the United States Embassy here. The United States has long stressed that Vietnam must account for the missing Americans before other problems can be settled.

[In Washington, the State Department said no progress was made in the initial session to warrant any change in the United States intention to veto Vietnam's application for United Nations membership. A spokesman reported that the two delegations had said they would study each other's statements but that they did not set a date for the next meeting.]

The Vietnamese delegation was headed by Tan Hoan, who like the

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American delegate, is the second-ranking diplomat in his embassy here, where he is in charge of political affairs.

No substantive change in the American-Vietnamese relationship was considered likely to develop before the Carter administration takes office in January.

In advance of today's meeting, Secretary of State Henry A. Kissinger had issued instructions that all comment, beyond a bare announcement that it took place, must come from Washington.

The United States Embassy here did issue a statement saying that "issues of interest to both countries were raised, with the missing-in-action issue our pri-

mary concern" and referring further questions to the State Department. But this statement had been drafted in Washington.

The reason for the imposition of the type of intense secrecy that surrounded the negotiations Mr. Kissinger held leading up to the 1973 Paris peace accords was not explained. The talks were deliberately held at the level of embassy officials, it was understood, to make clear their tentative, probing status.

U.S. Confirms Meeting

"We can confirm," the United States said in its statement, "that today our deputy chief of mission met with the counselor of the embassy of the Socialist Republic of Vietnam." That is the new name for the country adopted in Hanoi after the formal unification of North and South Vietnam earlier this year.

The talks were held at the house in suburban Neuilly that had served as the embassy of the Provisional Revolutionary Government of South Vietnam, Hanoi's Vietcong negotiating partner during the four-year Paris conference with the United States and the now defunct Saigon government. The house is now an annex of the Hanoi embassy here.

The initial position of each side as they resumed formal contact were well known. On the American demand for an accounting for the missing servicemen, the Vietnamese say they are willing to do their best to fulfill that obligation under the 1973 accords, but only on condition that the United States fulfills its pledge of postwar reconstruction aid at the same time.

During the pre-election debates, both President Ford and Jimmy Carter said they would veto Hanoi's admission to the United Nations unless the missing-in-action list were cleared up. Vietnam's application for membership comes up before the Security Council again next week.

Delay Till After Election

When it came up two months ago, the issue was postponed until after the American election. Previously the United States had twice blocked the admission of the Vietnamese, but those vetoes were cast against separate applications submitted last year by North and South Vietnam.

Mr. Gammon, the American delegate at the talks, is a 52-year-old career diplomat from Texas who had served in a number of European embassies and was in the State Department from 1970 until he came to Paris in September 1975.

During his last two years in Washington, his title was deputy executive secretary of the executive secretariat in the State Department, meaning he worked on Mr. Kissinger's staff.

After the Paris accords were signed in January 1973, the United States continued negotiations for a time. They went on while withdrawal of American troops was completed, American prisoners were released, and the United States participated in de-mining Haiphong harbor and North Vietnamese coastal waters.

From the beginning, Vietnam's demand for reconstruction aid, which it at first called reparations, and the American de-

mand for a full accounting of missing Americans were central issues. The talks broke down after a few months, and when Hanoi began the offensive that led to the fall of Saigon last year, Washington said it was no longer bound by the promise of aid since Hanoi had violated the cease-fire.

The missing-in-action issue became a heated one in American politics, and in effect provided Hanoi with bargaining leverage.

The Vietnamese have important political and economic goals. They are already in contact with American oil companies about renewing offshore exploration contracts, and have made clear their eagerness to get outside help for a rapid reconstruction and development effort.

Apart from a desire for aid and trade with the United States the establishment of relations with Washington would make it easier for Hanoi to get substantial credits in Europe.

American officials believe that Hanoi wants American and European aid and trade not only to speed economic development but also to give it a source of support other than that of the Russians and Chinese.

U.S. Rules Out Shift

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WASHINGTON, Nov. 12—The State Department said today that no progress occurred in the first round of talks with Vietnam in Paris to warrant any change in the American intention to veto Vietnam's application for United Nations membership if it comes to a vote next week.

All of the missing are believed dead, but Vietnam is thought to possess information on how several hundred died or where their remains are.

Robert L. Funseth, the department spokesman, reported that the two sides had said they would study each other's statements but that no decision was made on when to meet again.

Vietnam Willing to Continue

PARIS, Nov. 12 (UPI)—The Vietnamese Embassy said in a statement after the meeting it was ready to discuss the American demand for information about Americans missing in action but insisted the United States must help pay for Vietnam's reconstruction.

"The American side is dutybound to fulfill its obligations as to helping to cure the wounds of the war and postwar reconstruction in Vietnam and thus carrying out the agreement reached in the mixed economic commission in Paris in 1973," the embassy said.

"This is not only a legal question, but a question of honor, responsibility and conscience."