

View in Paris Is That Status of Thieu Remains Central to Deadlock in Talks

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PARIS, May 9—The basic and thus far unnegotiable demand of the North Vietnamese and Vietcong delegations here—that President Nguyen Van Thieu of South Vietnam leave office—remains at the center of the deadlock in both the private and public sessions of the Paris talks.

Again and again during a wee kof interviews here—and during a two-week visit to North Vietnam in March—this correspondent was told by the Vietnamese communists that no political resolution of the war was possible without the replacement of Mr. Thieu and a change in policy in a new Saigon government.

There are other issues: the withdrawal of troops, the repatriation of prisoners, the timing and extent of a cease-fire, the make-up of an election commission, the questions of Laos and Cambodia.

All have been seriously discussed without any real progress, because the North Vietnamese and the Vietcong insist that they will not accede on any significant detail without having settled the question of the future of the Thieu Government.

No amount of American pressure, including the recent bombings of the Hanoi and Haiphong areas, has forced the Vietnamese Communists to modify their basic demand. Experienced observers here, French and Vietnamese doubt that the mining of North Vietnamese harbors will do so.

"The tragedy of Nixon is that he does not understand the Vietnamese mind," a member of the Vietcong delegation said in an interview. "He doesn't understand the capacity of the Vietnamese to defend our land."

In a separate interview, Ly Van Sau, official Vietcong spokesman, seemed to summarize the belief of all Vietnamese Communists that underlies the persistent demand for a change in the Saigon Government.

"Sometimes we don't understand why the American Government always tries to look at the puppets as Vietnamese," he asserted. They are the worst of the Vietnamese people. It seems to us that it would be an honor for the Americans to deal with the people who represent the best."

Henry A. Kissinger, President Nixon's adviser on national security, arrived last Tuesday for another secret meeting with a high North Vietnamese official, Le Duc Tho. Mr. Kissinger was reliably reported to be bearing what in American eyes were two concessions: an immediate cease-fire in South Vietnam—most recent United States cease-fire offers have involved all of Indochina—and a proposal to negotiate a coalition government in Saigon that some sources said would include Mr. Thieu.

Mr. Kissinger apparently arrived full of optimism. An American here said the Presidential adviser had told colleagues in Washington that there was a good chance a negotiated settlement could be reached within two weeks.

Obviously he was rebuffed out of hand. A Vietnamese Communist involved in the discussions, asked about the offer of a seven-day cease-fire, replied caustically: "And what would happen after seven days? Would they start all over again? I've never heard of such a thing!"

Another Vietnamese negotiator, discussing the question of a coalition government involving Mr. Thieu, declared, "The American Administration refuses to change its policy toward the Thieu Government, and that's why no progress has been made."

Although there has been some give and take by the Vietnamese Communists—most notably in their two-point "clarification" early in February, 1972, which, among other things, restricted the list of undesirables in Saigon to Mr. Thieu—the intractable demand regarding him has angered and frustrated the American negotiators.

"In my personal opinion," an American diplomat commented, "at no time since the negotiations began has Hanoi ever offered a solution that could not be achieved by a simple withdrawal of American forces. We would not be worse off than if the Saigon Government falls."

"We believe," he added, "that the gut position of the other side is that they want the deed to South Vietnam guaranteed by the United States, along with reparations, and they want this all wrapped up with a ribbon. We can always get a better deal by walking out than we can get in negotiations."

The American official went on to maintain that the Vietnamese Communists insisted on the right of veto of potential non-Communist members of a coalition government. "The conversation goes like this,"

the official said. "We ask them to tell us who the Vietnamese are who are in favor of peace and neutrality. They say, 'Everyone knows.' Who will decide whether one is neutral or not? They say, 'We will.'"

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