

# Paris Stumbling Block: Who'll Rule Saigon?

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PARIS, May 12—The North Vietnamese and the Vietcong insist that they do not want to impose a Communist or socialist government in Saigon. President Nixon and Henry A. Kissinger, his chief adviser for national security, say they do.

This basic disagreement has emerged in recent days as a critical factor behind the inability of all sides to negotiate a new coalition government for South Vietnam.

Hanoi and the Vietcong have insisted that not only the South Vietnamese President, Nguyen Van Thieu, but also those officials who are "war-minded" be replaced before any substantial discussions of "other personalities" can begin. It is becoming increasingly clear that for President Nixon and Mr. Kissinger, the primary question is no longer what will happen to Mr. Thieu but what kind of Government will be set up if he steps down or is forced to share power.

## Secret Talks Hinted

Despite the other side's denials, American sources here insist that at least some preliminary talks concerning the future coalition government have been held in secret. And in his news conference today, Le Duc Tho, the chief North Vietnamese negotiator, seemed to be talking about the secret talks when he said, "Everyone knows that the most arduous problem now existing between the two sides is the problem of power in South Vietnam."

Publicly, the White House has been increasingly pulling away from its personal reliance on Mr. Thieu.

In his eight-point peace proposal of Jan. 25, Mr. Nixon said that Mr. Thieu had agreed to step down a month before an election. The offer was perhaps more symbolic than anything else; no one familiar with the day-to-day rhetoric here in Paris could have expected the North Vietnamese and the Vietcong to treat it seriously, particularly since the Thieu Administration would still be in control of the election apparatus.

In his speech Monday night Mr. Nixon did not mention Mr. Thieu, or, for that matter, have any concrete suggestion for a political solution—except to warn that he would not tolerate a Communist take-over.

## Nixon Stated His View

"The problem is that it takes two to negotiate," Mr. Nixon

said, "and that now, as throughout the past four years, the North Vietnamese arrogantly refuse to negotiate anything but an imposition by the United States of a Communist regime on 17 million people in South Vietnam who do not want a Communist Government."

The President's concerns were amplified by Mr. Kissinger at his news conference Tuesday. Describing his secret meetings with Mr. Tho, Mr. Kissinger said the United States "indicated a readiness to examine any political proposal other than the imposition of a Communist Government."

As Mr. Kissinger stated it, these are the terms of the North Vietnamese:

"The President of South Vietnam must resign. What is called by the other side 'the machinery of oppression of the Government' must be disbanded. Pacification must be stopped. Vietnamization must be stopped, which means the end of American military and economic aid. All persons who have been arrested on political grounds should be set free. Then a Government should be formed which is composed of all those who favor peace, independence, neutrality and democracy, presumably by definition, including the Communists."

## Duc Asks National Coalition

The North Vietnamese and the Vietcong would not seriously quarrel with Mr. Kissinger's assessment of their basic demands, although they would insist that nothing in those criteria presume the installation of a Communist government.

In his news conference today, Mr. Tho noted that "What we want in South Vietnam is a three-segment government of broad national concord reflecting the real political situation of South Vietnam. We have made repeated public statements and told Mr. Kissinger in private meetings that the governments [of North Vietnam

and the Vietcong] have never intended to impose a Communist regime in South Vietnam." He later told reporters that he had made that same categorical statement five times in recent months.

In addition, Mrs. Nguyen Thi Binh, head of the Vietcong delegation to the peace talks, made the same point about the future Government in Saigon during an interview Wednesday as she has many times in the past. Similar statements were repeatedly expressed by Hanoi officials during this correspondent's visit there in March.

There is no question that the other side is demanding, as a "legitimate" right, direct control of at least a third of any new coalition Government. Far less clear is how much veto control it demands over the rest of the Government.

American sources here angrily charge that the other side wants what amounts to full veto rights, while Hanoi and the Vietcong insist that they are only seeking to assure that the participants in the future government are agreed on independence, neutrality and peace as the basic objectives.

So far, apparently, no criteria have been worked out in secret talks to determine who represents what in South Vietnam. Without some sort of guide, many Americans fear the other side would exercise great control over the make-up of a new Government.

Today Mr. Tho seemed to move a slight step toward defining the kind of official who would be acceptable. Asked whether high-ranking members of the present South Vietnamese Army could serve in a coalition government, he said, "Although it is true that these men are all picked by Thieu, the important thing is that all future participants follow the principles" of neutrality and peace. He later said that there would be room for those who do not "like the Americans but do not necessarily approve of the policy" of the Vietcong.

## White House Mistrustful

But Mr. Kissinger went on in his news conference to spell out the American difficulty: The White House simply does not believe the Communist promises.

The problem, Mr. Kissinger said, is that in a new Government, "the Communists would be the only organized force, since all the organized non-Communist forces would have been disbanded by definition."

He went on: "This Government, which already contains the Communists, is then supposed to negotiate" with the provisional revolutionary government, the political arm of the National Liberation Front, or Vietcong.

At that time, he said, the Vietcong "will be the only force in the country that has any physical strength, and it is supposed to negotiate with them a final settlement" before a cease-fire.

The other side would strongly disagree with Mr. Kissinger's contention that all non-Communist forces would be disbanded by definition. In the last week spokesmen have repeatedly said in interviews

that nothing in their seven-point peace offer, their bas negotiating position, explicitly rules out the continuation of the South Vietnamese Army as a standing force.

In an interview today, an American diplomat closely connected with the talks stated the United States objections much more succinctly.

"I don't believe them," he said in response to a question about North Vietnam's and the Vietcong's virtual guarantees about the future of South Vietnam. "Absolutely not. As a matter of fact, I know that their intent is to have a regime — while it may have some trappings of neutrality at least in the early days — which will eventually be under total control of the Lao Dong [the North Vietnamese Communist party]. This is an issue over which the negotiations have broken down. They want us to install their people in Saigon."

## 3-Segment Government

During the interview Wednesday, Mrs. Binh outlined her proposals for a three-segment Government. One segment would be the National Liberation Front, she said.

"The second segment," she said, "will comprise members of the Saigon Administration—but they are not to be the war-minded group of Thieu. In addition, the Saigon Administration must give up its warlike and aggressive policies. As long as it pursues these policies, there cannot be a free and democratic election, and there cannot be cooperation."

The third segment would be composed "of persons of other political and social forces who stand for peace, independence and national accord," Mrs. Binh said. These would include representatives of such groups as the Buddhists, Roman Catholics and minority sects.

Many on the other side be-

lieve that the Nixon Administration missed an opportunity to reach a compromise when it permitted Mr. Thieu to run unopposed for re-election last year.

"This was an occasion when it was very easy for them to get rid of Thieu and we let them know this," Ly Van Sau, the chief spokesman for the front, said in a recent interview.

"Really," he added, "we think we understand Nixon's mind more now — because he chose this election to maintain Thieu."

Gen. Duong Van Minh, who dropped out of the Presidential race complaining that it was rigged, was widely considered to be acceptable to the Vietcong and North Vietnamese as a compromise leader.

In the eyes of Hanoi and the Vietcong, the main stumbling block to a negotiated settlement is still the United States' insistence that Mr. Thieu and his colleagues be maintained in power. United States negotia-

tors believe that the vagueness of the other side's demands really amounts to an attempt to maintain veto control over the make-up of a new Government.

The American fear can be summarized simply: that any replacement to the Thieu regime that can now be negotiated will lead to the imposition of a

Communist government—guarantees to the contrary notwithstanding.

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