

Vietnam's Exiles Are Discussing Coalition

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By SEYMOUR M. HERSH

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PARIS, May 17—The Vietnamese expatriate community here, reacting to North Vietnam's initial successes in its current offensive, has begun to broaden contacts with the Vietcong delegation, apparently in anticipation of a future coalition government.

No one knows how many Vietnamese now live in Paris—estimates ranged from 8,000 to 20,000 during two weeks of interviews—but names and ideas have been swarming since the offensive began seven weeks ago.

"At least one-third of the potential coalition government in Saigon is sitting right here in Paris," said one American with close contacts among dissident Vietnamese. He added that many are "hoping for a government of national accord."

"That would be a time when they could go back and find their constituency," he said.

A Reluctance to Talk

One recent visitor here was Tran Van Don, a former leader of the South Vietnamese Senate and former associate of Gen. Duong Van Minh, the Vietnamese who is widely regarded as the strongest opponent of President Nguyen Van Thieu. Although he would deny it, Mr. Don was reliably reported to have made contact with the Vietcong—perhaps on a low level—during his stay. Most sources agreed that he was acting solely on his own behalf.

Most neutralist Vietnamese are understandably reluctant to discuss visits they make to the Vietcong delegation here.

One closely watched clue to the changing attitudes has been the list of those signing antiwar declarations in Doan Ket, the Vietnamese newspaper published every other week in Paris. Since the offensive began, more and more people who previously were uncommitted have signed statements in the newspaper attacking the American bombing and mining of North Vietnam.

"Most of the new personalities who have signed it in the last six weeks," said a knowledgeable source, "are people with some special constituency—either they are historians, or former civil servants or legislators or they represent some religious group."

The Vietcong have always included the expatriates in Paris in their plans for a political coalition. In the 10-point peace proposal they offered in May, 1969, shortly after President Nixon took office, they said that "the political forces representing the various social strata and political tendencies in

South Vietnam that stand for peace, independence and neutrality—including those persons who, for political reasons, have to live abroad—will enter into talks to set up a provisional coalition government."

The Vietnamese community here, as in Saigon, is complex and full of intrigues that are difficult for a Westerner to unravel.

Many of the expatriates fled their country because they opposed successive governments going back to the nineteen-fifties and President Ngo Dinh Diem. They gather in the dingy and inexpensive Vietnamese restaurants that can be found throughout Paris to discuss what all Vietnamese are constantly talking about now—the politics of coalition.

Nearly all the Vietnamese interviewed recently said they were opposed to both President Thieu and the Communists and in favor of a three-part coalition government as proposed by the Vietcong and North Vietnamese.

Favors Two Vietnams

Those few who indicated that they supported the present Government in Saigon tended to shrug off questions about their political views.

"We don't like Communists and we don't like Americans," said Mrs. Ngo Thi Hang, the elderly wife of the owner of Thanh-Bonh, a large Vietnamese grocery store near the Latin Quarter on the Left Bank. Mrs. Hang said she was born in Hanam Province, south of Hanoi, but left after the 1954 Geneva agreement that provided for the partition of Vietnam into North and South because the new Communist Government confiscated her family's property.

Asked to explain her political views, she would say only that there should be two Vietnams, one Communist and the other non-Communist.

The critics of the Thieu Government showed no such reluctance to talk. They include many former politicians and leaders of student and clerical opposition groups in Saigon.

The largest organization of dissidents is the 6,000-member Association of Vietnamese Residents in France, which has separate chapters for students, workers, elders and women. The association is openly anti-Thieu and anti-American, often staging noisy demonstrations at which Vietcong and North Vietnamese representatives make speeches.

Yet many of its members insist that they are not Communists and take issue with the official American view that any coalition government in Saigon would necessarily end up under the control of the North Vietnamese Communist party.

One such is Ngo Con Duc, 36, former editor of Thin San, a leading opposition newspaper in Saigon. He explained that though he had never joined the National Liberation Front, the political arm of the Vietcong, "I am fighting for the same purpose."

"But I like democracy and I like freedom," he added. "Because of that I'm not a Communist and I will never be a Communist. What we need right now are patriots."

Mr. Duc was forced to flee South Vietnam late last year. Although he is a severe critic of the Thieu Government, his anti-Communist credentials seem impeccable. His father, a wealthy landlord in the Mekong Delta, was slain by the Vietcong in the nineteen-fifties and he himself was elected to the South Vietnamese lower house in 1967 from his native Vinh-binh province, south of Saigon.

Mr. Duc has been reported among those South Vietnamese who have established contact with the Vietcong here in hopes of serving in a coalition government, but he denied it in a recent interview.

"I think there are some people in Paris who want to talk to the Front," he said, "but the real opposition—which I represent—for us the issue is only peace and independence. We do not worry about whether we'll be in a new government."

"Many in the Front don't know what Marxism is about," he went on. "There are many differences between northerners and southerners—and some people in the Front don't want to fight so the North can have control."

Mr. Duc argued that "we must have a political solution before a cease-fire."

"But if the Americans continue the war and push them to have more political activity," he said, referring to the North Vietnamese and Vietcong, "I don't know what will happen."

Another Vietnamese, who came to Paris from Saigon in 1965 and who is now working part-time for North Vietnam's permanent delegation to France, said he had changed his views after he began reading Western newspapers.

"They don't always tell the truth, but they tell more than we learned in Saigon," he said.

But he, too, said that he was not a Communist and that he believed the Vietcong and North Vietnamese when they promised the integrity of a future coalition in Saigon.

Many Divisions Noted

Similar sentiments were expressed by four leading opponents of the Thieu Government during a four-hour meeting the

other night conducted in English, French and Vietnamese. One, Thich Thien Chau, president of the Association of Vietnamese Buddhists in France, said:

"I think the front is intelligent enough not to establish a Communist Government because the situation of South Vietnam is quite different from that of North Vietnam in 1954. There are many divisions and many political parties."

Nguyen Le Tranh, a member of the Union of Vietnamese Catholics to Serve the People, argued that "Americans always say that as soon as they leave, that will be the end of democracy in South Vietnam."

"That opinion does not consider the realities of Vietnamese society," he said.

The general attitude was summed up by Tran Hai Hac, a Buddhist. "I think the future of the non-Communist people in South Vietnam will depend on what they are doing right now," he said. "If they struggle for national independence, there will have to be a balance in the future government."

Although a majority of Vietnamese expatriates seem to favor the negotiated settlement now being offered by the North Vietnamese and Vietcong, most of the organized groups stop short of openly declaring their allegiance to the North.

The Association of Vietnamese Elders, however, held a banquet on May 14 to mark the anniversary of the birth of Ho Chi Minh, the late President of North Vietnam. More than 50 Vietnamese, most of them men in their fifties or older, crowded into the Ba Dinh Restaurant (named after the square in Hanoi where Ho Chi Minh declared independence) to eat spicy dishes and listen to speeches.

The group, which donates clothes and money to North Vietnam, was told that its 1972 fund-raising goal was \$200,000—a total the members obviously did not expect to meet.

Yet even in this obviously pro-Hanoi group, none of those interviewed said they were Communists. "Ninety-nine per cent of us are not Communists," asserted Le Mau, 58, who said he served as a soldier in the French Army in Indochina in the early nineteen-forties. "We are nationalists and patriots."

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Photographs for The New York Times by NANCY MORAN

VIETNAMESE IN PARIS: Nguyen Tan Lieu, left, a member of the North Vietnamese delegation, speaking at banquet
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Mrs. Ngo Thi Hang, wife of the owner of a Vietnamese grocery store in French capital. "We don't like Communists and we don't like Americans," elderly woman said.