

At the Paris Peace Table

Washington and Saigon Sit Together, But Attitudes and Goals Seem to Differ

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PARIS, Aug. 10—The former Hotel Majestic on Avenue Kléber, where the American and Vietnamese delegates to the peace talks perform their weekly ritual, seems much more than half a world away from the agonizing realities of the war.

Yet, the battlefield dominates the maneuvers here and there is a sense of some imminent development from the secret exchanges between Henry A. Kissinger, President Nixon's adviser on national security, and Le Duc Tho, the North Vietnamese Politburo member, even though the central issue—whether and how President Nguyen Van Thieu of South Vietnam is to be replaced—remains unchanged.

News Analysis

There have been hints that the United States may have offered to stop bombing North Vietnam, or at least its principal cities, in return for the release of at least some American prisoners.

Conference sources consider this proposal likely because they have heard that the Pentagon feels the military objective of the current all-out bombing campaign is nearing fulfillment.

Aim Reported Achieved

The military purpose, as distinct from political aims, of the bombing has been to reduce North Vietnam's capacity to mount another large-scale offensive in the South. According to these sources, Washington now figures that this has been achieved as far as 1972 is concerned.

The assessment of the damage to the North is that it will take Hanoi at least six months to restore its ability to provoke major battles. Since these are crucial months on the American political calendar, it is considered that a bombing halt may be feasible and even desirable from the American point of view if Washington can get something in exchange.

But the South Vietnamese view is quite different. Release of American prisoners is not a valuable prize for Saigon and the bombing of the North is not seen as a purely military strategy. It has political and

psychological importance for South Vietnam.

President Thieu, who is kept fully informed on the Kissinger-Tho secret talks by Ambassador Ellsworth Bunker, is said to feel that it would be very hard for him to justify a bombing halt to his embattled army.

The "morale factor" has been a significant aspect of bombing in the eyes of the Saigon Government since the start of active American involvement in the war. The Pentagon papers show that each time the question of expanding or halting attacks on the North has been opened, the argument has been advanced that it helps Saigon to be able to show the people of the South they are not the only Vietnamese under fire.

Two recent speeches by President Thieu, more bellicose than usual, seem to reflect a hidden effort to dissuade President Nixon from a bombing halt.

Beyond Nixon's Stand

They go far beyond what President Nixon has been saying and are in apparent contradiction to the stands taken here by the South Vietnamese as well as the American delegate to the conference.

On Aug. 1, President Thieu told officers at Vietnam's military academy that he had asked the United States to remain "firm and determined" on total destruction of North Vietnam's military, economic and political potential unless Hanoi agreed to negotiate "seriously."

"It has to be done once and for all," Mr. Thieu said, according to reports from Saigon in Paris newspapers. "It is the solution to the problem of Communist aggression. Otherwise, they'll start up again."

President Thieu rejected any compromise that would create a coalition government including Communists in South Vietnam.

"We must destroy the enemy at the source," he said. "The Communists must be attacked so that the economy of the North will collapse and Communism will be destroyed."

On Aug. 5, Mr. Thieu called for a far-reaching purge in South Vietnam. He spoke on the occasion of the fourth anniversary of the Self-Defense

Forces, a form of village militia, and ordered the three-million-man force to destroy the "Communist infrastructure" in the South.

This he defined as not only Vietcong members but also "pacifists, Communists, those who start whispering campaigns, those who spread false news and affect the morale of our soldiers and sow confusion in their rear."

"They are everywhere," he said. "They must be wiped out."

A Different Position

Yet today, South Vietnam's Ambassador, Pham Dang Lam, said at the conference, "It has never been among the intentions of the Republic of Vietnam and its allies to seek the destruction of the adversary or to impose on him any other condition than that of ceasing to have recourse to force against South Vietnam."

Ambassador Lam does not

dispute that there is a difference, at least of emphasis if not a flat contradiction, between what Mr. Thieu has been saying and this line, which is also advanced by the United States. When asked about it, he explained it as "the difference in audiences." He said, "President Thieu is addressing the internal Vietnamese public, not the American public or the rest of the world."

Both American and South Vietnamese officials make clear that Mr. Thieu retains a veto on any political agreement that might be reached. He does not have the same power of veto on American military decisions, but he can argue his case.