

THIEU OPPOSITION TO DRAFT ACCORD REPORTED EASED

Saigon Said to Be Willing to
Accept Pledge in Principle
by Hanoi on Withdrawal

TALKS CALLED CORDIAL
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Concession Believed to Have
Been Offered During Visit
by Kissinger's Deputy
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SAIGON, South Vietnam, Nov. 12—Informed South Vietnamese and American officials said today that President Nguyen Van Thieu had modified his total opposition to the draft United States-North Vietnamese peace settlement, but was still unwilling to accept it fully.

In what Mr. Thieu evidently considered an important concession after two days of talks, the sources report, he told Gen. Alexander M. Haig Jr., Henry A. Kissinger's deputy, that he could agree to the nine-point settlement if North Vietnam would at least pledge "in principle" to withdraw its troops from South Vietnam.

[In Moscow, the Soviet press showed the first signs of impatience with delays in the signing of a Vietnam cease-fire agreement. Page 3.]

One well-placed source in the Saigon presidential palace said that an agreement in principle by North Vietnam on a withdrawal would now satisfy President Thieu's repeated demand that North Vietnam withdraw all its troops from the South before a cease-fire.

'Gradual Withdrawal'

After such a public pledge, according to this source, Saigon would be able to accept a "gradual withdrawal" of what it estimates to be 300,000 North Vietnamese soldiers. American intelligence has put the number at 145,000.

In the only official American statement on the talks here, a United States Embassy spokesman said this morning as General Haig left Tan Son Nhut Airport for Pnompenh, Cambodia, that the meetings had been "cordial and constructive." After conferring briefly in Pnompenh with President Lon Nol, General Haig was to go on to Seoul, South Korea, for talks with President Park Chung Hee.

The palace official said that if the pledge sought by President Thieu were given by the North Vietnamese, Mr. Thieu's two other basic objections to the proposed settlement could be "easily worked out."

These objections are that the settlement does not provide for the re-establishment of the demilitarized zone as the bound-

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ary between North Vietnam and South Vietnam, and that the wording of the draft settlement implies that the joint commission to hold new elections will be a form of coalition government. Mr. Thieu has rejected any plan that involved a coalition government since he fears it would lead to a Communist take-over.

Letter Sent to Nixon

The palace source confirmed that after Mr. Thieu's talks with General Haig, which totaled more than five hours, the President gave General Haig a letter for President Nixon. However, the source said, the letter was mostly one of "courtesy" and did not indicate that Mr. Thieu was prepared to accept a settlement.

[United Press International reported from Saigon that President Thieu said in the letter that President Nixon could negotiate his own cease-fire agreement with North Vietnam as long as it did not include anything Mr. Thieu would object to. Officials in Saigon denied that Mr. Thieu had made any such proposal.] *

The version of the secret talks given by the palace source was substantially confirmed by qualified United States officials, who said that while some progress had been made, "basic differences of position remain."

The key question now, one American official remarked, is how long President Nixon and Mr. Kissinger will be willing to put up with Mr. Thieu's opposition to their carefully planned settlement. The South Vietnamese leader himself is unsure, the official commented, and he is "playing a brand-new ball game where no one knows the rules."

Hints by Hanoi Reported

The official speculated that in the Paris negotiations Mr. Kissinger might have purposely avoided demanding that Hanoi withdraw all its troops, since it would be almost impossible to enforce such a provision. Instead, the official suggested, Mr. Kissinger may have been given some tacit understanding that Hanoi itself wanted to pull back some troops from the South.

Vietnamese sources in the presidential palace reported today that General Haig had in fact told Mr. Thieu the United States had been given indications that North Vietnam would voluntarily withdraw at least some of its troops.

The South Vietnamese Government did not issue any statements of its own today on the outcome of the talks, and in contrast to the two previous days, the official Saigon radio did not say in its news commentary that Mr. Thieu was adamantly opposed to the peace settlement.

The secrecy surrounding the talks here was so strict that when General Haig's small United States Air Force T-39 courier jet took off early this morning, the pilot had not yet been told his destination, an Air Force spokesman said. And at yesterday's three-hour session, even General Haig's aide, John Negroponce, who usually takes the minutes, was excluded.

It was assumed that General Haig's talks in Seoul would center on arrangements concerning the South Korean forces in South Vietnam. South Korea still has 37,000 troops here, 5,000 more than the total of United States troops left in this country.

* See Henry Bradsher, Evening Star, 13 Nov 72