

Peace Talks' Recess Held Hopeful Sign

By Marilyn Berger

The willingness of the North Vietnamese and American negotiators in Paris to set a date for further discussions provides the strongest indication in a week of wrangling that the conflicting demands on both sides have not yet raised insurmountable barriers to an agreement.

More than the smiles and handshakes and the posing for pictures, and more than the scowls exhibited alternately by negotiators Henry A. Kissinger and Le Duc Tho, the decision to recess the talks and not to break

News Analysis

them off was seen here as the best sign that a settlement may still be achieved in the near future, possibly by the end of the year.

The lid on news about the discussions has provided fertile ground for speculation about what has been said in the suburban villa near Paris.

Kissinger returns amid reports that the United States presented a series of tough demands amounting to a renegotiation of the agreement made public Oct. 26 and was confronted with equally harsh counter-demands by Hanoi that would seem to put the two sides as far apart as they have ever been.

One known fact that has emerged from the six days

of talks in Paris is that Kissinger's timetable for a settlement has gone askew.

When he told reporters on Oct. 26 of the nine-point agreement that would bring a cease-fire to Vietnam, Kissinger said he believed that "what remains to be done can be settled in one more negotiating session with the North Vietnamese negotiators, lasting, I would think, no more than three or four days, so we are not talking of a delay of a very long time."

Subsequently, the official White House line changed, to the effect that further discussions with Saigon would be required following talks with the North Vietnamese.

Another fact is one made clear twice yesterday by White House spokesman Ronald L. Ziegler: That both sides are negotiating seriously." He used the present tense; he sought to leave little room for speculation about an impasse in the talks.

One more thing that is known is that North Vietnam's chief negotiator, Le Duc Tho, will remain in Paris. This would indicate that he has no intention of returning to Hanoi for further instructions that would permit alteration of the position already taken in the talks.

Beyond these known facts there are only glimmerings of what has happened, from reports of well-placed sources and from informed speculation based on such things as official and unoffi-

cial statements issued in Hanoi, Saigon and Paris.

Taken together, these reports indicate that Kissinger reopened the negotiations seeking to win at least some of the chief demands being made by Saigon, including the withdrawal of North Vietnamese troops from the South; a restructuring of the National Council of Reconciliation and Concord, which would administer a political process in South Vietnam; and an arrangement for the government of President Thieu to sign any agreement.

By acceding to Saigon's demands to seek "improvements" in the agreement, the Nixon administration gained a number of things. It made it possible to pass the critical date of the U.S. elections—meaning that there could be no cease-fire, with the expected violations of that cease-fire and a seeming breakdown of the agreement, at a sensitive period in the United States.

It further provided for the United States the appearance of sticking by its allies even at a most difficult moment. It also allowed time to rush more equipment in to prepare Saigon's forces for any ensuing difficulties if the cease-fire should break down, while at the same time raising the level of military supply that could be replaced under the agreement.