

# Peace Hopes Sink--Tho Going Home

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## Paris

The Vietnam peace talks plunged back into the deep-freeze yesterday with a very chilly meeting at the Hotel Majestic and an announcement by the North Vietnamese that their chief negotiator, Le Duc Tho, is returning to Hanoi.

About the only development to relieve the pessimism and gloom was an announcement that the teams of experts from the two sides will meet today.

But there is now virtually no hope or expectation that a cease-fire agreement is likely to be settled and signed before mid-January, and without any new moves by one side or the other, the present state of suspension could continue indefinitely.

Tho, who is expected to depart today for Moscow, Peking and Hanoi has always remained away from Paris for at least one month each time he has returned home for consultations in the past. He is 62 years old and not given to jetting

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around the world like Henry Kissinger.

Moreover, after this latest round of secret negotiations the North Vietnamese give every indication that they are now prepared to sit it out on their present position, if it takes all winter.

## CHARGE

At the 170th plenary session yesterday, the Communist side again accused the U.S. of producing "absurd new demands" on behalf of South Vietnamese President Nguyen Van Thieu.

It said the fighting could end and the American prisoners of war sent home by "an early signature of the agreement reached in October, 1972."

Apparently seeking to outflank any move in which the U.S. might agree to a cease-fire which Saigon would then refuse to accept, the Communist side explicitly insisted that no agreement would be valid without four signatures — North and South Vietnam, the Viet Cong and the U.S.

The Communist side also insisted that areas now under Viet Cong control in South Vietnam must be granted international recognition after a cease-fire.

Another minor flap developed when the American delegation urged North Viet-

nam "to examine objectively and engage in serious discussion" on the latest cease-fire proposals from Thieu. These were formally put before the conference by South Vietnamese Ambassador Pham Dang Lam, but the U.S. endorsement was interpreted by the Communists as proof that the U.S. is backing "absurd proposals" by Thieu in order to hold up an agreement.

Later, the U.S. formally disavowed American support for the Thieu plan.

## PATTERN

With the departure of Kissinger for Washington and Tho for Hanoi, the Hotel Majestic talks are back in the pattern of unending bickering.

The American delegation's spokesman, David Labertson, who last week was ready to venture official optimism that an agreement would be reached "in the near future," spoke yesterday of a "determination to go on pursuing our work on an accord in as businesslike a manner as possible, believing that our efforts are going to bear fruit."

The assumption here is that nothing will happen until another Kissinger-Tho meeting is scheduled via those private exchanges they have agreed to continue.