

Break in Talks

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SAIGON, Dec. 17.—South Vietnam made it clear today that it is not unhappy about the snarls that have delayed an agreement between Washington and Hanoi on ending the Vietnam war.

Saigon also renewed its pledge not to accept or abide by whatever agreement is finally worked out if its terms are unsatisfactory to "the Vietnamese people."

In a series of commentaries on the government-controlled radio station and in editorials thinly disguised as news accounts, South Vietnam remarked that U.S. negotiator Henry A. Kissinger, was "undoubtedly placed in an embarrassed position" when President Nixon "decided to make public the results of the secret talks" and predicted that "the present bottleneck at the Paris peace talks will still be there for some time to come."

As one Vietnamese analyst put it, "They've all relaxed because they think an accord is far off. They're glad of it," he said, because Thieu and his advisers still believe—despite Kissinger's reassurances—that the agreement as it now stands is a victory for the Communists.

Kissinger said Saturday that serious differences between the Paris negotiators have prevented the conclusion of a peace agreement that seemed imminent eight weeks ago. But he said the principal South Vietnamese demand, a written commitment for a total withdrawal of all North Vietnamese troops, was not

among the issues to be settled, and said the United States was not pressing any such demand.

He declined to say what Washington would do if Thieu carries out his promise to spurn any agreement to which South Vietnam is not a party—a matter on which diplomatic observers here believe Thieu is perfectly serious. Kissinger said "no other party will have a veto" if Washington reaches an agreement with Hanoi.

Apparently in response to that, Saigon Radio commented this morning that "the time has long passed when smaller nations resignedly and readily accepted defeat and unjust destinies.

"Besides its military strength," the commentary said, "South Vietnam has also acquired considerable political maturity. It was this maturity

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that prevented South Vietnam from naively accepting a shaky peace agreement in October, and agreement that (would) surely drive South Vietnam into self-extermination."

While most foreign analysts here might quibble with South Vietnam's claims of military strength and political maturity, there seems to be a general belief that the Thieu government is sincere in its intention to go it alone, if necessary, provided only that U.S. aid continues.

As Kissinger pointed out, that is a situation that Saigon need not yet face because there is no agreement between Washington and Hanoi.

But an eventual confrontation between Washington and Saigon is viewed here by Vietnamese and foreigners alike as inevitable, because it is now clear that Thieu is not going to get what he wants in Paris, and he has convinced many observers that he may try to call the U.S. bluff.

This consensus had developed even before Kissinger said that the North Vietnamese troop withdrawal issue was not on the table. One of the few Western analysts who could be tracked down on this lovely Sunday—when most diplomats and politicians scattered to the beach or tennis courts—expressed incredulity at that news.

"That's the last thing I would have guessed," he said. "Those troops are what it's all about. No wonder Thieu says he won't sign, and I believe him."

As if to confirm Kissinger's observation that "the perils of war, however difficult, seem sometimes more bearable to them than the uncertainties and the risks and perils of peace," Saigon leaped at every opportunity today to predict that the Paris impasse will continue.

In a news broadcast quoting "observers" and foreign sources, Saigon radio said, "The secret talks between Le Duc Tho and Dr. Kissinger ended in failure because of Hanoi's attitude turning completely intransigent."

The broadcast said Kissinger "sincerely thought in October that he could wrap up

an agreement in a few more negotiating sessions" but "reality indicated that the U.S. and North Vietnam had disagreed not only on technical problems but also on political and doctrinal issues. Now, although negotiations are not completely suspended, it is believed that further negotiations will resume only if and when Communist North Vietnam agrees to revise basically its concept of peace in Vietnam."

Another radio editorial cited recent commentaries by North Vietnam's theoretical journals and official newspapers as showing "no favorable signs that will lead to a genuine and lasting peace solution."

"The Communists' outright rejection of our offer for a Christmas truce and an ensuing exchange of prisoners of war," said another broadcast, showed once again that "the Communists remain the stumbling block on the path to peace."

Aside from the question of North Vietnamese troops, Kissinger refused to deal directly with the other chief points being pressed by South Vietnam or to say whether they were under discussion.

These are that South Vietnam be allowed to determine its own political fate, with the proposed National Council of Reconciliation and Concord limited to supervisory functions, and that the Demilitarized Zone at the 17th Parallel be recognized as an international boundary dividing Vietnam into two separate nations.

Fundamental Point
Kissinger acknowledged that "a fundamental point" remains to be settled before an agreement can be concluded but refused to say what it was.

Hanoi may have provided the answer today however, with a broadcast of an editorial from Nhan Dan the party newspaper. The editorial endorsed the statement issued yesterday by the Provisional Revolutionary Government of South Vietnam, Thieu's Communist rivals, to the effect that the DMZ was intended by the 1954 Geneva peace accords for Indochina to be only a temporary demarcation line, not an international boundary, and that Vietnam was supposed to be one country.