

Nixon, Tho Views of Talks Differ Little

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The statement of North

Vietnam's negotiator, Le Duc Tho, upon his arrival in Paris Saturday may have been tougher than what President Nixon had to tell congressional leaders about the prospects of peace on Friday, but the message was basically the same.

Neither the President nor Le Duc Tho was publicly optimistic about the substantive talks which open in Paris today. And both said that peace depended upon the other side dropping its

new demands and returning to the principles agreed upon in October.

The negotiations between Henry A. Kissinger and Le Duc Tho resume today after

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a brief but savage test of wills. Both sides claim to have won that test.

The administration claims that the bombing of Hanoi forced the North Vietnamese back to the negotiating table. President Nixon told congressional leaders on Friday that the reason he

had halted the bombing north of the 20th parallel was because "extended exchanges" with Hanoi on Dec. 29 had led him to believe that the North Vietnamese were ready for "serious negotiations."

Unbowed, More United

Le Duc Tho, however, said Saturday that North Vietnam had come through the test of fire unbowed and more unified than ever.

It is not unusual for adversaries to make resolute statements on the eve of negotiations. And analysts here are quick to point out that neither the administration nor North Vietnam has been specific in public on exactly what they will or will not accept in the way of language. There are peripheral issues on which language could be arranged to satisfy both.

"But I would tend to take Le Duc Tho on face value as far as the central issues are concerned," one analyst said over the weekend.

Both sides have accused the other of trying to change what had previously been agreed upon and, it is probable that both sides can be found at fault in this regard.

The central issue still remains, however, a cease-fire

which will allow the Communists a military force in being in the South and a clear shot at the political process to follow a cease-fire.

The Geneva Agreement of 1954 partitioned Vietnam but provided for elections and reunification within two years. When elections did not take place and the Communists were blocked from the political process they took up arms against the government of Saigon.

After so many years of fighting, the Communists may now feel they have compromised enough in not demanding that Thieu be replaced by the Provisional Revolutionary Government as the price of a cease-fire.

The North Vietnamese are still believed to be adamantly opposed to a cease-fire, which would severely hinder their chances in the political struggle to come and perpetuate the division of the two Vietnams.

Vague As to South

The summary of the agreement, which Kissinger presented on Oct. 26, appeared to be vague on the future of South Vietnam. But on Dec. 17 Kissinger said that the talks had broken down partly because the United States wanted a true

peace, not an armistice, and the U.S. position appeared to have hardened in a manner which would limit the Communists' role in South Vietnam.

It is evident that the Communists never envisioned a solution in which two Vietnams would live side by side in peace. Rather, they envisioned a situation in which the struggle would continue in the political sphere rather than in the military sphere.

Administration sources have said that one of Kissinger's great successes at the talks was to separate the military track from the political track. But it is likely that the Communists never accepted this division and, as one expert put it, "What could be more political than a cease-fire in place?"

Le Duc Tho in Paris Saturday spoke of "one more effort" to end the war. One vital question remaining is what can the administration do now if the peace talks collapse? The opinion of many experts and legislators here is that the president's options are narrowing and that it would be very difficult for him to resume the bombing of Hanoi with the same intensity as that which occurred in December.

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