

Paris Talks Center  
On Nature of DMZ

## North Wants Porous Zone

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PARIS, Jan. 9 — The United States and North Vietnam have backed away from their most extreme demands and are now bargaining coldly and toughly on the central obstacles that blocked a peace accord before negotiations collapsed last month, it was learned here.

A distinct chill in the bargaining as a result of the unprecedentedly heavy 12 days of American bombing of North Vietnam hangs over what both sides now agree is the decisive moment of the war. Suspicions have intensified on both sides. The bargaining, however, has now moved back to the make-or-break issues of the negotiations between presidential envoy Henry A. Kissinger and North Vietnam's Le Duc Tho.

It is now possible to identify with new precision the key barrier to a cease-fire accord. This issue is whether there will be a firm, impenetrable dividing line between North and South Vietnam, or what amounts to a "porous" Demilitarized Zone between the two sides.

This is no mere technical question. The substance and

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### DMZ, From A1

the consequences of the entire agreement turn on it, for this will determine if there is to be a relative "ambiguous" agreement or none—or a compromise between ambiguity and precision.

If the Demilitarized Zone is porous enough to permit food, supplies and communications to pass through it, then it could also permit the passage of personnel, including political cadres. The distinction between civilian personnel and concealed military personnel, however, can be a very fine and possibly meaningless one, Western sources emphasize.

Alternatively, if the dividing zone is absolutely solid and noncrossable, it could indefinitely wall off South Vietnam from North Vietnam.

A compromise on this core

question could produce an agreement, according to informed sources here, if the opposing sides in fact are determined to achieve one. Each maintains that it is.

From information pieced together from a number of sources here since the talks resumed yesterday, it is now evident that this is the hitherto secret, fundamental and specific problem that has been only alluded to with deliberate murkiness by the adversaries in a confusion of talk about the "sovereignty" of South Vietnam and Mutual countercharges over who reneged on the draft agreement dramatically announced on Oct. 26.

South Vietnam's ex-President Nguyen Van Thieu's insistence on an agreement guaranteeing the sovereignty of South Vietnam has been mistakenly described for weeks as the major obstacle in the talks, both American and South Vietnamese sources privately concede. Refusal to disclose the more complex obstacle nourished the public confusion, Western sources acknowledge.

If the United States supported Saigon's demand for sovereignty, which American sources insist they never did, it would have violated the whole basis for the intended agreement. The proposed accord rests on the foundation of a standstill ceasefire, which means accepting the existing battle lines and forces in place at the time the military stand-down goes into force. In North Vietnam's language, this means acceptance of "two administrations, two armies" in South Vietnam. That includes the presence of North Vietnamese troops, even though Hanoi still officially refuses to acknowledge that North Vietnamese units as such even are in the south.

That was the basis for potential agreement in the October draft. The agreement was stalled over U.S. insistence on making it more precise to meet a portion of Thieu's demands and to satisfy President Nixon's own conditions for a settlement. North Vietnam's hopes for completing an agreement before the Nov. 8 U.S. Presidential election were destroyed in the process.

When negotiations were resumed in the Nov. 20-Dec. 13 talks in Paris, sources here concede, the asking price for a settlement went up on both sides.

Officially, the Nixon ad-

ministration maintains that it is mystified about what caused North Vietnam to back away from an agreement. Other non-Communist sources here say, however, that they do not see what is so mystifying about what happened.

In brief, they say, as the United States asked for more, as the price of a settlement, North Vietnam offered less.

The Provisional Revolutionary Government (Vietcong), as well as the Saigon government, was disgruntled about the original loose agreement, and mutual suspicions about the accord mounted once the original momentum disappeared. In addition, in Hanoi as well as in Washington, the delay gave skeptics new opportunity to point to holes in what is now privately admitted to have been a deliberately "imperfect" draft accord filled with ambiguities in order to circumvent obstacles that could not be resolved.

The massive American B-52 bomber attacks on the Hanoi-Haiphong region between Dec. 18 and Dec. 30 unquestionably hardened North Vietnam's suspicions. When the present round of talks between Kissinger and Le Duc Tho opened yesterday, there were two overriding questions.

North Vietnam said the issue is whether the United States wants an agreement enough to accept what Hanoi sources here reiterated today are the only possible modifications "minor changes" which will maintain the substance of the October draft. The United States, for its part, insists that it does accept the substance of the October accord, but seeks specific language to enforce its version of the meaning of that substance.