

Saigon Aide Bars Accord With Vietcong as an Equal

By FLORA LEWIS

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PARIS, Jan. 17—In a radio interview broadcast today, Foreign Minister Tran Van Lam of South Vietnam said that his Government would refuse to sign an agreement that mentioned the Vietcong's Provisional Revolutionary Government.

Mr. Lam said that an accord should be signed on the same basis as the Paris talks on Vietnam are being held. That is, he said, "the principle of two sides: our side, the Republic of Vietnam and the United States

be posing a condition on the wording and form of signature of a cease-fire agreement, the issue remains fundamental in the Vietnam conflict.

After a draft of a cease-fire accord was published last October, North Vietnam's negotiator, Xuan Thuy, told The New York Times that recognition of equal status for Saigon and the Vietcong was the most important American concession in the document from Hanoi's point of view.

The Lam interview was recorded in Saigon yesterday and broadcast over Radio Luxembourg, a commercial station widely heard in France.

He said that the Saigon Government was ready to "welcome the National Liberation Front" but still considered it "an opposition group which has neither an army nor territory."

Saigon has offered to talk with the Vietcong many times over the years, but never on the basis of equality, which the Vietcong demand.

The disagreement is the main reason that neither Saigon nor the Vietcong have participated in the private talks where the real negotiations have taken place. Mr. Lam's statement was taken to indicate that Saigon had not changed its position on this key issue.

Mr. Lam also said that in the last round of negotiations "there was very little change in the North Vietnamese position."

The Paris talks, particularly among the technical experts, have nearly completed work on military matters, Mr. Lam said, including prisoner exchange, a cease-fire in place and policing machinery.

The experts met here again today for seven and a half hours, drawing up the secondary documents to be attached to a cease-fire agreement. There are understood to be maps delineating areas where main troop units are to be regrouped, and lengthy, detailed texts setting out how the cease-fire is to be implemented.

Completion of that work, in a series of protocols to be added to the principal accord, would ease the problems of putting a cease-fire into effect once the political decision to proclaim it has been made. But it would not necessarily advance the crucial political decision.

Reliable Western sources here continued to point out that the decision depends first on Saigon and then on Washington, because, they said, Hanoi has not and will not budge

on the points it considers vital.

These are essentially political points, Mr. Lam said in the interview that the two points remaining under discussion are the withdrawal of North Vietnamese troops in the South, and a "political solution which is not prefabricated by the North Vietnamese."

"We think that we are very near to peace," he said. "Our main objection so far has been the presence of North Vietnamese troops in the South."

Latest reports from Saigon have aroused a great deal of doubt in Paris about President Nguyen von Thieu's current intentions.

Sources that have followed the negotiations closely said it was now hard to tell whether Saigon was deliberately raising objections to undermine the chance of a cease-fire agreement to sign so as to save face.



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Truce supervisory units would have headquarters in Saigon, but President Thieu also wants them in four other cities (shown in black panels). Hanoi wants them also in three other cities (shown with names in boxes).

and the other side, North Vietnam and the people of the National Liberation Front."

Mr. Lam's comments thus raised the same point that underlay the "shape of the table" argument that stalled the beginning of the conference for over seven months in 1968. Basically, the issue is Saigon's unwillingness to recognize the Vietcong's representatives as equal bargaining partners, and Hanoi's determination that they be so recognized.

The issue was skirted at that time, when, with Soviet help an ambiguous formula was found that allowed each side to say it had won its point.

Although Mr. Lam seemed to



Associated Press

Tran Van Lam