

Drafting Session Tuesday

All Prisoners To Be Freed After Signing

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KEY BISCAYNE, Fla.,

Jan. 18—The United States and North Vietnam came closer today than ever before to signaling an end to the Vietnam war by announcing that Henry A. Kissinger and Le Duc Tho would meet Tuesday in Paris "for the purpose of completing the text of an agreement."

The long-awaited announcement, which White House press secretary Ronald L. Ziegler read to newsmen here just before noon and which the North Vietnamese, released in Paris, could mean the end in a matter of days to America's involvement in the longest war in its history.

Under terms of the 60-odd page agreement, the fighting will stop and North and South Vietnam will compete, for the time being at least, in the field of politics instead of on the battlefield.

All American prisoners of war held in North Vietnam are to be released within 60 days, with some being released as soon as the agreement is initiated. The initialing will be followed by a formal signing ceremony later.

The joint announcement came after Gen. Alexander M. Haig Jr., vice chief of staff of the Army and formerly Kissinger's deputy, conferred at length in Saigon this week with President Nguyen Van Thieu.

Haig is to meet again Friday with Thieu, following meetings in the last 36 hours with officials in Cambodia, Laos and Thailand, before returning to Washington. At the present time, he is not expected to go to Paris with Kissinger, Ziegler said.

It was on the basis of Haig's

earlier conversations with Thieu that the United States and North Vietnam were able to make today's short but highly meaningful announcement.

The progress being made also helps clear the air for Mr. Nixon's second inaugural Saturday. In that address, he is expected to disclose additional information regarding his future policies in Indochina and to offer American aid in the reconstruction of the coun-

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Ground fighting increases in South Vietnam. Page A16.

The semi-public Paris peace talks were suspended, indicating cease-fire agreement is near. Page A17

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tries involved in the war, which seemed to be without end.

In October, after Kissinger announced that "peace is at hand," Thieu effectively blocked an agreement. But now there seems to be complete confidence that the remaining issues he may have raised in his meetings with Haig can be resolved without undue delay.

Kissinger, the President's national security adviser for four years, and Tho, a member of North Vietnam's Politburo and its chief negotiator, first began secret talks in Paris in 1969. But it was not until last September, following Mr. Nixon's visits to Peking and Moscow, that the two combatants came even close to an understanding.

The Soviet Union's role in the negotiations is understood to have been a major factor, but details of the Soviet involvement are known only to the President and a very few other American officials.

It may be years before the full story of the part the Kremlin played in bringing the war to an end is known publicly. But a major reason for the President's visit to Moscow last May was to further the cause of a negotiated settlement.

Peking also played a part, but it is believed that its participation was less important than Moscow's. Moscow supplied the bulk of the war materiel to North Vietnam, and Moscow was seeking by its contribution to the war to help not only North Vietnam but to extend its own influence in Southeast Asia as a check on its arch rival, China.

Just why Moscow's influ-

ence was not sufficient to bring about a settlement in November and December, before Mr. Nixon resorted to the 12-day bombing of North Vietnam's heartland, is unknown.

Kissinger, in Washington, and Tho, in Hanoi, kept in touch during the bombing, which Mr. Nixon halted Dec. 29 when the two sides agreed to resume negotiations in Paris.

The technical experts resumed their sessions on Jan. 2 and Kissinger and Tho met on Jan. 8. After a week of intensive negotiations, they reportedly agreed on all the major issues.

Kissinger left Paris last Saturday, Jan. 13, and flew to Key Biscayne to report to the President. Tho remained in Paris, as did the North Vietnamese and American technical experts. Ziegler said today that Kissinger and Tho have been in close touch this week.

In Washington, Sen. John C. Stennis (D-Miss.) chairman of the powerful Senate Armed Services Committee, reacted strongly to some press reports that Saigon may still have objections to the draft peace agreements.

Stennis said in a Senate statement he wanted to "make it clear that I do not think this is the time for the government of South Vietnam to be an ob-

stacle to peace." The South Vietnamese, he warned, "must realize that there are limits to what the American people are willing to do."

His statement noted the sacrifices of the South Vietnamese people and supported the need for continued U.S. economic and military aid after a cease-fire. "A peace agreement at this time may not be all that we want," Stennis said, "but it is time to close ranks and agree to a settlement."

In another statement, Sen. Barry Goldwater (R-Ariz.), like Stennis a strong supporter of President Nixon's Vietnam policy, also called on South Vietnamese President Thieu to accept the peace agreement.

Kissinger probably will fly to Paris Monday, but he will not meet with newsmen before resuming his talks with Tho on Tuesday, Ziegler said.

Today's announcement said simply: "Dr. Kissinger will resume private meetings with special adviser Le Duc Tho and minister Xuan Thuy on Jan. 23 for the purpose of completing the text of an agreement."

(The version of the announcement put out by the North Vietnamese delegation in Paris differed in one respect from the text of the Florida White House statement.

(The North Vietnamese said

the top negotiators would meet in Paris "to complete the agreement," whereas Ziegler referred to "an agreement." The North Vietnamese have demanded for almost three months that the United States sign the agreement drafted by Kissinger and Tho in October.

(Asked about the discrepancy, Ziegler said "the intention of both (announcements) is the same. There is no substantive difference.")

Asked if this would be the last meeting, Ziegler replied: "The announcement will have to speak for itself." He noted that he already had said that "progress" had been made.

Asked if there would be a ceasefire before an agreement is initialed, Ziegler said he had seen the speculation to that effect but was not prepared to comment on it.

"However, I would tell you that Dr. Kissinger is returning to Paris for the purpose of completing the text of the agreement," implying that a ceasefire will await completion of the text.

Following Kissinger's meetings with the President here Sunday, Mr. Nixon sent Haig to Southeast Asia for meetings in South Vietnam, Cambodia, Laos and Thailand.

On Monday, the President announced that he had ordered a halt of all offensive action against North Vietnam, including bombing, shelling and the further mining of North Vietnamese harbors.

In last week's negotiating sessions, both sides are believed to have made important concessions. Hanoi agreed to new language defining the demilitarized zone between the two Vietnams. It also agreed to permit several thousand, instead of several hundred,

troops from neutral countries to patrol the ceasefire lines.

Saigon is understood to have yielded to U.S. pressure and agreed to release more than 10,000 North Vietnamese prisoners of war held in the South. Saigon also yielded to North Vietnam's insistence that its troops in the South would remain in place, something Thieu had vowed never to permit.

Since neither the document tentatively agreed to in October nor the document now nearing completion in Paris has been published, the details remain to be disclosed.

According to last October's tentative agreement, the initialing ceremony was to be in Hanoi with a formal signing to take place later in Paris.

Ziegler has refused to say whether Kissinger will be empowered to initial the document before reporting again to the President, but the im-

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plication of today's announcement is that Kissinger will have that authority.

Officials have declined to say where the initialing will take place.

Mr. Nixon has remained in almost total isolation during the critical negotiations that have taken place since his reelection in November. He continued to confer today by telephone with Kissinger, who is

in Washington, Ziegler said, to receive reports from Haig and to work on his inaugural address and messages to Congress.

Following an early dinner here tonight, the President flew to Washington for the beginning of inaugural activities Friday.