

# Where the Peace Talks Stand: Some Questions and Answers

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WASHINGTON, Jan. 21—President Nixon's statement in his inaugural address yesterday that the Vietnam war was coming to an end was his first public comment on the war since his election, and it reinforced expectations here that a settlement was near. Following is an assessment, in question-and-answer form, of the current situation.

**Q. How far have the Vietnam negotiations in Paris progressed, particularly in the last round of talks, Jan. 8 to 13?**

A. By agreement, neither Hanoi nor Washington has so far provided any details on the last round. But for the first time, both have said that negotiations had made "progress." In addition, they have signaled in such a way as to leave the clear impression that the "peace" that Mr. Kissinger discussed on Oct. 26 may now actually be "at hand."

**Q. What kind of signals?**

A. The most significant was the joint Hanoi-Washington announcement last Thursday that Mr. Kissinger and Mr. Tho, the chief negotiators, would resume talks in Paris on Tuesday "for the purpose of completing the text of an agreement." Also Mr. Nixon halted all bombing, mining and shelling of North Vietnam last Monday, something the Administration had said it would not do until a settlement with Hanoi was reached.

**Q. But isn't the phrase "completing the text" ambiguous? Couldn't it mean that instead of negotiations being about over, additional issues still have to be negotiated?**

A. It could. The Administration has made no effort to clear up any ambiguity. But in the diplomatic language "completing the text of an agreement" would suggest that matters of principle have been resolved, and that what remains is the technical chore of finding the right language and making sure that the translations jibe with each other.

**Q. But even if Mr. Kissinger and Mr. Tho conclude an agreement, doesn't South Vietnam have to concur in order for it to have any effect? After all, the war has been fought in South Vietnam.**

A. This is a somewhat murky area. The whole concept of the original nine-point draft agreement in October was based on the Saigon Government's participation. But the Nixon Administration has never said what would happen if Hanoi and Washington agreed and Saigon did not. Mr. Kissinger said on Dec. 16 that Saigon could not veto an agreement with Hanoi that Washington believed was "just and fair," but he would not say if an accord limited to Washington and Hanoi was possible.

**Q. What is Saigon's current attitude toward an agreement?**

A. Gen. Alexander M. Haig Jr. was sent to Saigon to explore this question with

President Nguyen Van Thieu and he returned to Washington today to report to Mr. Nixon. So far there has been no official word on the results of the Saigon meetings, but various news reports from the South Vietnamese capital have suggested that, while Mr. Thieu was not enthusiastic about the prospect, he was reluctantly accepting the "inevitable" and would agree to the current draft as worked out by Washington and Hanoi. News reports said he was sending Foreign Minister Tran Van Lam to Paris to seek certain undisclosed clarifications, and to be on hand to initial a final agreement.

**Q. But couldn't this wish for "clarification," if the reports are true, delay an accord and possibly cause a breakdown similar to that last fall?**

A. This is possible, but, from all signs, General Haig told Mr. Thieu that Mr. Nixon was satisfied with the new agreement with Hanoi and would not agree to any further substantive changes that might be suggested by Saigon. Mr. Thieu cannot risk losing American economic and military aid, as two Senators who have supported Mr. Thieu in the past, Barry Goldwater and John C. Stennis, indicated on the Senate floor last week.

**Q. Are the terms of the new agreement much different from the nine-point accord reached last October, but not signed then?**

A. The full details of neither accord have been made public, but a summary of the original agreement was disclosed by Hanoi and went undisputed by Washington. From everything that has been said since then, it seems likely that the basic structure of the current agreement is similar to the October draft, but with more specific provisions and with some changes sought by Saigon and Washington included, as well as some modifications sought by Hanoi.

**Q. What does the agreement probably include?**

A. Extrapolating from what has been said, it can be assumed that the agreement and its accompanying protocols and understandings include a cease-fire in place throughout Vietnam, the release of American prisoners, the creation of an international team to supervise the cease-fire, creation of a national council to supervise elections, aid payments by the United States to North Vietnam and an acknowledgement of some kind that, pending a final political solution by all Vietnamese, there will be two Vietnams, divided by the demilitarized zone.

**Q. Does the cease-fire extend to Laos and Cambodia?**

A. This is not known. Mr. Nixon originally said he wanted the accord to cover all of Indochina, but reports from Saigon last week indicated that this was not achieved.

**Q. How large will the supervisory team be?**

A. The details are not known. Presumably it will be smaller than the 5,000-man force sought by Washington, and

larger than the 250-man force suggested by Hanoi in December. Reports from Paris and Saigon last week spoke of a force of 2,500 to 4,000.

**Q. Didn't Mr. Thieu make the withdrawal of North Vietnamese forces from South Vietnam a condition for agreeing to the accord? Has Hanoi agreed to this?**

A. From all signs, North Vietnam will be permitted to retain its 145,000-man force in South Vietnam to protect the Vietcong enclaves. The United States, as Mr. Kissinger said on Dec. 16, never supported Mr. Thieu on this question.

**Q. What then did Mr. Thieu gain and was the decision not to sign the agreement in October worth while?**

A. Mr. Thieu gained important time. In the intervening three months, he has received considerable military supplies, has stiffened his political apparatus and has psychologically prepared his country for a settlement. He received little new in specifics, it seems, in the current accord.

**Q. If the current accord turns out, in fact, to be similar to the October one, why has it taken three additional months to negotiate?**

A. The American decision to reopen the talks, to make an effort to "harden" some of the points, and to press for some of Mr. Thieu's demands, such as acknowledgement of the two Vietnams, apparently caused Hanoi to question Washington's motives and to make new demands of its own in the negotiations between Nov. 20 and 25 and Dec. 4 and 13. The breakdown of the talks on Dec. 13 prompted Mr. Nixon to order heavy 5-52 bombing raids over Hanoi from Dec. 18 to 29.

**Q. Did the bombing raids accomplish anything?**

A. The complete answer to that question will require more knowledge than is known now about the talks. Certainly, the raids were only marginally important militarily.

**Q. Did the Soviet Union and China have any influence on Hanoi's desire to negotiate?**

A. In the long run, the improved relations between Washington and both Moscow and Peking probably contributed to Hanoi's decision to seek a political instead of a military solution. But it is not clear whether Moscow or Peking actually played a day-to-day role in the negotiations as some observers believe. What will be of some interest is whether after a cease-fire, Moscow, Peking and Washington can act in concert to keep the peace in Indochina.