

Saigon and Vietcong Meet Again In Paris, Report Further Accord

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PARIS, Feb. 7—Vietcong and Saigon Government representatives met here again today and reported further progress on arranging for the start of political negotiations in South Vietnam. They agreed to meet again Saturday.

The three-hour session today was the second in a series—the first was Monday—that is expected to conclude fairly soon. The meetings are concerned only with procedural plans for the crucial talks on a South Vietnamese political settlement that are to be held in Saigon under the provisions of the Vietnam cease-fire accord.

Fundamentally, the meetings are in preparation for efforts among the South Vietnamese alone to resolve the issues that the war was all about. They thus amount to forward-looking negotiations. In contrast, the international conference scheduled here toward the end of the month—it will include the parties to the cease-fire as well as Britain, Canada, China, France, Hungary, Indonesia, Poland and the Soviet Union—is backward-looking, in the sense that its aim is essentially to endorse the accord.

While neither side in the meeting gave details of agreements reached, both issued statements that indicated that the main remaining problem is the Communist side's concern about its freedom of movement and status in Saigon.

The statements were bland for negotiators who had exchanged little more than insults for more than four years. They seemed to suggest that both sides had downgraded the problems of protocol—which symbolized the substantive issues of their conflict before the cease-fire—in the interest of moving on to the bargaining.

Dinh Ba Thi, who headed the delegation of the Vietcong's Provisional Revolutionary Government, said: "The high-level consultations between the two parties will be of great significance for the political future of South Vietnam. A thorough exchange of views for guaranteeing the best conditions for these consultations is necessary to achieve the best results."

"Conditions" was evidently the operative word. Saigon's reply, issued by the South Vietnamese Government delegate, Nguyen Phuong Thiep, said that Communist delegates to the four-sided military commission already operating in Saigon were well-housed and had no difficulty moving around to

carry out their work.

The reply referred to the Vietcong as the National Liberation Front rather than the Provisional Revolutionary Government, which is the Communist side's name for itself.

That apparently no longer represented a stumbling block. More practical matters of movement and of the Communists' right to fly their flag in Saigon were in question.

The Saigon Government statement said that the "future delegation of the National Liberation Front" to the talks would "benefit from all the necessary guarantees." The "apprehensions" shown by the Vietcong are therefore "not justified," the statement added.

While the date for and participants in the talks are not fixed, it is expected that the Foreign Ministers will head the delegations.

The first purpose of the negotiations will be to establish the National Council of National Reconciliation and Concord called for in the cease-fire agreement. The council is intended to establish a basis for the former enemies to live together peacefully in the South.