

# High Officials of Saigon and Vietcong Open Talks in Paris on Political Future



Associated Press

Nguyen Trieu Van, left, spokesman for Saigon, and Nguyen Van Hieu, the Vietcong representative, talking to newsmen after opening negotiations in Paris yesterday.

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PARIS, March 19 — The rival South Vietnamese administrations opened negotiations on the political future of their country here today, seven weeks after proclamation of the cease-fire.

While both sides expressed a will to proceed rapidly so that elections for a new unified government could be held, they took basically conflicting positions.

The Saigon delegation stressed quick agreement on how to proceed with elections and withdrawal of North Vietnamese forces. The Vietcong delegation stressed the need for an atmosphere of free political competition before any decision was made on how to proceed with elections, and rejected any mention of North Vietnamese forces.

### National Council Is Stressed

The cease-fire accords required the two to "do their utmost" to set up a National Council of National Reconciliation and Concord by April 27 and then to hold elections. But for most of the time since the cease-fire, they had been arguing about where to start

talking. Finally, they compromised on Paris, 10,000 miles from the country and people at issue.

Both the Saigon Government and the Vietcong's Provisional Revolutionary Government sent new delegation leaders for the talks. Both are men of substantial authority and for the first time, Vietnam talks were being held in Paris without any need for interpreters. But they delivered set speeches, as they had done during four years of formal talks with representatives from Washington and Hanoi, and held news conferences afterward to justify their stands.

The news conferences were held, as usual, at the International Conference Center, the former Hotel Majestic on the Avenue Kléber, where United States and North Vietnamese delegations were holding their second session of talks on aid and future economic relations.

Nothing about what happened in the talks between the Americans and North Vietnamese was disclosed, but official sources indicated that those sessions were still in the early stage of getting organized. Neither side appeared in a hurry to get down to how much and what the United States would send North Vietnam.

The delegations of the Saigon Government and the Vietcong met at the 18th century Chateau de La Celle at St-Cloud, between Paris and Versailles. The chateau and its park, once the property of Louis XV's mistress Madame de Pompadour, now belongs to the French Foreign Ministry and was the scene of the French-Moroccan agreement in 1955 and the Laotian negotiations in 1964.

### "A Good Start"

Saigon's chief delegate, Dr. Nguyen Luu Vien, said afterward that the meeting had been "friendly, a good start." He is a Deputy Premier and has held a number of important Government posts. South Vietnamese sources said that he had the confidence of President Nguyen Van Thieu.

Nguyen Van Hieu represented the Provisional Revolutionary Government, replacing its Foreign Minister, Mrs. Nguyen Thi Binh, who has gone home after more than four years of speeches in Paris.

Mr. Hieu has no formal governmental post, but he is a member of the Politburo and has been the Vietcong's chief envoy in several Eastern European Communist countries, a post of senior responsibility.

Saigon Government said that he probably had more personal authority to act than did Mrs. Binh, despite her more elevated title. He gave that impression at his first news conference, answering questions in a relaxed and confident manner.

Asked about his credentials, Mr. Thieu said that he had "full powers" to negotiate an agreement. He also indicated that he planned to meet privately with all sorts of Vietnamese factions, official, and unofficial, that are represented here.

The speeches and comments after the meeting reflected the conflicting attitudes of the two South Vietnamese sides on the role that "third force" politicians should play in seeking a political settlement.

Each proposed a three-point agenda for the negotiations and two points on each list

were similar. But each list contained one point excluded from the other, and the difference of order was also of key significance.

The Saigon agenda called for talks on these topics:

- General elections in South Vietnam.

- Formation of the national council.

- Reduction and demobilization of armed forces, which a spokesman, Nguyen Trieu Dan, said meant withdrawal of North Vietnamese troops, a point he called "the fundamental question."

Mr. Dan also made it clear that Saigon required agreement on the kind of elections to be held — for existing offices, which is what Saigon wants, or for a constituent assembly, as the Vietcong insist, before the national council is established. The council, he said, would only organize and hold the elections, not define them.

### Vietcong Weapon Is Time

The Vietcong's agenda called for talks on these points:

- Guarantees of democratic liberties and "realization of national concord."

- Formation of a three-part national council with representatives of Saigon, the Vietcong and a third faction representing other South Vietnamese political opinion.

- General elections.

The difference in approach, only dimly reflected in the words, was this:

After the cease-fire, President Thieu—finding that his authority was still intact—decided to press for elections as quickly as possible. According to authoritative sources, he felt that time might erode Saigon's political position and so might any early and prolonged participation of antagonistic neutralists in the crucial political struggle before elections.