

VIETCONG SPURN TALKS IN SAIGON

Breakdown Occurs in the
Last Remaining Forum
for the Negotiations

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SAIGON, South Vietnam, May 10—A breakdown occurred today in the last remaining forum for negotiations between the Vietcong and the South Vietnamese Government. The two sides were thus left without regular talks for the first time since the Paris agreement was signed 15 months ago.

According to the Saigon military command, the Vietcong walked out of this morning's meeting of the Joint Military Commission and declared in a note that they would not appear at future sessions until their diplomatic privileges and immunities were restored.

This was apparently a reference to the virtual isolation imposed on the Communist delegation since the Government a month ago, ended the Vietcong's weekly press conferences, cut off their telephone lines and halted the liaison flights between Saigon and their administrative capital of Loc Ninh.

About the same time, in the wake of a North Vietnamese take-over of South Vietnamese ranger base called Tong Le Chan, Saigon also suspended the political negotiations with the Vietcong that had been taking place in a Paris suburb.

Virtually no progress had been in either the political talks there or the Joint Military Commission meetings here. But the disruption has nevertheless added to the sense of worry in Saigon, strengthening the feeling that the thin fabric woven by the Paris agreement is now unraveling.

Under the accords, the two-party Joint military Commission was assigned particularly important role: to enforce the cease-fire, to refer disagreements to the International Commission for Control and Supervision to delineate areas of military control by the two sides and to monitor the resupply of weapons and ammunition and the like.

Prisoners Exchanged, but . . .

It has done none of these things. Its only accomplishment has been the exchange of prisoners, and sources on both sides say that as many new prisoners have been taken since the cease-fire as have been released.

Similarly, the political talks, now stalemated have fallen far short of the goals set by the Paris agreement, which called for the guarantee of democratic liberties and the participation of the Communists in general elections.

In March, some hope was stimulated in Paris and Washington by a Vietcong plan that restated elements of the accords and set a timetable for some of the political provisions.

But Saigon never shared even this faint optimism and interest. It has become clear to many diplomats here that the political aspects of the accords, if observed, would probably work more to the advantage of the Vietcong than to that of President Nguyen Van Thieu.

Saigon Calls the Tune

Mr. Thieu is in power, the reasoning goes, and the Paris agreement asks him, in effect, to risk his power by allowing the Communists the freedom to campaign openly in an election.

It is the Thieu regime that sits in the capital city and controls the major highways and the major ports. Much of this control appears fragile at times, especially along the highways, but there is no indication that the Government is about to suffer a military defeat.

Furthermore, the regime is sustained by heavy American military and economic aid, which has not been made contingent on any special behavior by President Thieu. So there seems little motive for him to take the political risk that the Paris agreement envisions.

A Threat Dramatized

At the same time, the Government has tried to dramatize the Communist threat by predicting an imminent North Vietnamese offensive — an expectation that the intelligence community does not share, despite a recent surge in fighting — and by exaggerating the scope of Communist military action.

When the Tong Le Chan ranger base was lost, for example, the Government described a formidable North Vietnamese attack, with tanks and ground troops. The Vietcong delegation in Saigon, however, told newsmen that Communist forces had simply walked into an empty base. This was later confirmed by reliable South Vietnamese and other sources who said that the Government troops had retreated after heavy shelling but before any attack by ground troops or tanks had taken place.

Many diplomats believed that the Government was building up tension in an effort to induce the United States Congress to increase military aid. Both the House and the Senate rejected Pentagon requests for additional aid this year.

The Vietcong's ability to communicate easily with the foreign press, thereby getting

their versions of military events across, was apparently the main target of the measures the Government took against the delegation.

In announcing the measures, the Government's delegate to the Joint Military Commission, Brig. Gen. Phan Hoa Hiep declared that the Communists had used their access to the press "to sow false news and distorting arguments, prejudicing the host country and misleading world opinion."

Vietcong officials have stressed to intermediaries that they will resume the Joint Military Commission meetings as soon as their privileges and access to the press are restored.