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paris 1 (park/deepe)

SAIGON, NOVEMBER 20—From the remote and befogged vantage point of Saigon, it currently appears the Paris peace talks are becoming an aimless exercise in diplomatic futility and are likely to remain so until at least January 20 when the Nixon Administration is inaugurated in Washington. Second-guessing in some high-level informed circles here is that if Nixon maintains his current anti-coalition-government solution for the South—then even after January 20th, the Paris talks may evolve into an even more meaningless sideshow to the battlefield arena in the South. The assumption of this line of reasoning is that if the Communists can not win a coalition government in the South at the conference table from either Johnson or Nixon—then they'll continue fighting until they do so or realize they must "fadeaway" from the battlefield. The military prognosis is that Communists ~~have~~ will soon have the capability for one more launching one more massive, Tet-styled offensive of serious magnitude ^{But only one} ~~but~~ within the next twelve months—but that their chances of getting anywhere near the success of their Tet campaign are diminishing sharply.

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paris 2 (park/deepe)

Against this backdrop of victorious campaigns on the battlefield—but facing only the prospects of negotiating a coalition government at the conference table, the ~~stale~~ stratagem of the South Vietnamese government appears at this time to be to stall sending a delegation to Paris if all possible—unless these three unlikely factors occur:

1. The Communists in Paris capitulate on the major point they have already won—or grabbed—from the Johnson Administration, ~~namely~~ and the National Liberation Front is no longer seated as a separate delegation.

2. The Johnson Administration applies so much pressure on Saigon, ~~that~~ President Nguyen Van Thieu is forced to send the delegation. But the only ~~meaningful~~ meaningful pressure would be decisive actions which would result directly or indirectly to the overthrowing of President Thieu and Vice President ~~Nguyen~~ Nguyen Cao Ky—although the ~~faade~~ facade facade of the constitutional government structure would still be held in tact. While there is little evidence Washington is currently contemplating the overthrow of Thieu-Ky, it ~~is~~ appears unlikely the Americans could ~~precipitate~~ ^{significantly} ignite a coup against them even if Johnson so ordered—there is ~~significant~~ ^{significant} sympathy for Thieu's position here among both American military officers and the American Central Intelligence Agency, and Johnson would run the risk of some fairly high-level resignations of his own subordinates if he gave such an order.

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Paris 3 (park/deepe)

3. World public opinion turns radically against the Saigon government. But, thus far, the increasingly shrill demands and accusations of Communist public statements, the Communist shellings of cities and direct violations of the demilitarized zones—which Johnson had led the world to believe would not repeat not happen—and the clumsy "big stick" tantrum Secretary ~~per~~ performed by Secretary of Defense Clark Clifford last week have served either to portray Saigon ~~as a~~ the t in the ^{Holy} useful position of being an underdog, or else to so confuse the whole mass of ~~a~~ tangled issues ~~in~~ ~~Paris~~ associated with Paris that the outside world just ~~gives~~ closes its ears.

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Paris 4 (park/deepe)

Even if Saigon does dispatch a delegation to Paris before January 20, it seems likely ~~it~~ to be unwilling to negotiate anything of substantive importance until after that date.

It does seem that Saigon has ~~been~~ half agreed with the American officials here on the easy half of the obstacle—some ~~arrangement~~ sort of an arrangement of the Allied side of the negotiating team. But, the the real obstacle—the seating of the National Liberation Front as a single delegation—still appears to be unresolved at this time. Also, it is true Saigon has taken half-steps to prepare for sending a delegation to Paris; South Vietnamese Ambassador Pham Dang Lam has cabled the Foreign Ministry here he has already arranged lodging, automobiles and other details for when the delegation ~~arrives~~. A South Vietnamese colonel in charge of the signal corps is scheduled to return to Saigon this week after arranging communications from Paris and two other military technicians are scheduled to leave for Paris this week. And Ambassador Ellsworth Bunker and President Thieu, with aides, are ~~working on a text of a working~~ ^{PAPER} paper defining what Saigon is actually agreeing to—but no repeat no/ agreement ^{has yet to be reached on the paper.}

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Paris 5 (park/deepe)

And, it is true both South Vietnamese and American officials are oozing, rather than leaking, reports of American-South Vietnamese agreements, cordiality and renewed friendship, a friendship greatly enhanced with the ^{"Sick Leave"} ~~its report~~ departure of Deputy Ambassador Samuel Berger, who ~~quite~~ greatly irked Thieu and Ky in the Palace confrontation in October. (Vietnamese sources are ~~about to~~ gloating that Berger has been kicked out of country by Thieu, but, actually, their cheers may be premature. Anyway, there is a perceptible thaw in top US* US-Saigon relations since Clifford's bombshell last week--which was if not tattle-tale answered in hours in equally accusative ~~in a~~ language by Saigon's Minister of ~~Defense~~, Ton That Thien. After these two embarrassing kiss-and-tell ~~flame~~ confrontation, both Saigon and Washington apparently realized the whole alliance for prosecution of the war had reached its gravest crisis since the commitment of American combat troops in 1965. But, while the ~~the~~ official thaw has been sufficient to "patch up" the outward appearance of the anti-Communist alliance here, it still does not seem significant enough at this time for Saigon to willingly send a delegation to Paris. For, as long as President Johnson remains in the White House, President Thieu's proclivity is still to regard dispatching a delegation to Paris in much the same light as launching a funeral procession--a procession to his own funeral and that of a non-Communist South Vietnam.

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