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SAIGON, OCTOBER 30—Worldwide speculation of an impending American bombing halt over North Vietnam and a subsequent "blitz peace" began on October ~~12~~ 16, when American Ambassador Ellsworth S. Bunker visited the South Vietnamese Independence Palace at six in the morning and was kept waiting by President Nguyen Van Thieu for forty-five minutes. Since that first conversation at such an undiplomatic hour, the two-some has met a total of ten times in fifteen days—thus indicating that whatever problems Washington has in reaching agreement with Hanoi, it also has difficulties with its Allied government in Saigon.

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From that very first day, the South Vietnamese officialdom disagreed with the American Ambassador on accepting the three conditions from Hanoi in exchange for a bombing halt—and in subsequent meetings this disagreement has expanded into the proper status and roles of the South Vietnamese government's delegation and the National Liberation Front delegation in the post-bombing ~~at~~ peace talks.

While the face-downs with Bunker have been conducted almost entirely with Thieu alone—the exceptions being several occasions in which he was joined by ^{the} ~~his~~ flamboyant, hard-line Vice President, Nguyen Cao Ky, Thieu has received the ~~unanimous~~ unanimous backing of the National Security Council. With Vice President Ky serving as the most vocal member, the other ^{which echo the views of American military officials.} members of the council ~~also~~ also presented hard-line views. The Council includes:

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Prime Minister Tran Van Huong, Chief of the Vietnamese Armed Forces General Cao Van Vien, the Minister of Defense General Nguyen Van Vy, the Minister of Interior General Tran Thien Khiem, the Foreign Minister Tran Chanh ~~Tam~~ Thanh and the heads of the Vietnamese two-house legislature-- Nguyen Van Huyen, president of the Senate and Nguyen Ba Luong, Speaker of the lower house. Subsequently, Thieu was further backed by a "show of force" vote for the government by the two house legislatures. No for Agreement other bodies in the government--including the Cabinet--was consulted as a ~~group~~ group, thus insuring an unusual degree of state secrecy.

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The objections of Thieu and the National ~~Secr~~ Security Council on the first day were that the three conditions Hanoi would reciprocate in exchange for halting the bombing were ~~hallow conces~~ hollow concessions. Specifically, on restoration of the demilitarized zone ~~by separating North and South Vietnam~~—this was not repeat not a concession since Allied troops ~~had~~ had beaten back Communist thrusts across the line in a series of heavy encounters since the beginning of the year. Furthermore restoration of the DMZ, ~~demilitarized zone which is a very narrow corridor only 40 miles wide~~, did not repeat not prevent Hanoi from shuttling down more men and supplies through their Laotian trails further west. On the ~~second~~ ~~cessation~~ cessation of attacks on South Vietnam's cities—this involved only artillery ~~and~~ and rocket attacks, which the Communists were militarily incapable of doing ~~it~~ effectively and which were politically detrimental to them. If the number of cities were expanded to include the 44 provincial capitals and 250 district capitals throughout the country—as well as cessation from any future ground attacks—then Hanoi might be giving up something, it was argued, but not repeat not the present concession.

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The third so-called condition ~~of~~ from Hanoi of admitting the South Vietnamese government into the next phase of the peace talks was not repeat not a concession at all--since the South Vietnamese government was sovereign and legal and hence beyond ~~negotiation~~ its representation was beyond negotiation.

Another point of ~~an~~ immense controversy was Hanoi's counter-condition that the American and South Vietnamese government must sign a joint communique announcing the halting of the bombing--but this communique must mention the two governments agreed to an "unconditional" cessation--as Hanoi has consistently and officially demanded. The South Vietnamese flatly refused this, ^{declaring} saying that if the American and South Vietnamese officially ~~stated~~ an "unconditional" cessation, then it would prove Hanoi had won a major victory, that Hanoi had been right all along, that the Americans had been the ~~ag~~ aggressor and that the South Vietnamese were simply puppets of the Americans. This would set off a disastrous chain-reaction throughout South Vietnam; the government could not repeat not guarantee public order ~~or~~ that the Vietnamese armed forces would continue fighting, ^{this} and would give the Allies a black eye throughout Asia, if not repeat not the rest of the world.

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In subsequent

In subsequent meetings, discussion arose on the status and roles of the two Southern belligerents at the expanded peace talks in Paris. The South Vietnamese government had long held the ¹ National Liberation Front could be represented as part of the Hanoi delegation; ~~they~~ government held to this position—but wanted additional assurances that the NLF would be ^{NOT} ~~be~~ allowed to speak separately from the Hanoi delegation. The government could foresee the time when discussions of a ceasefire ^{TO BE ARI} ~~arise~~ arose—and Hanoi would ~~not~~ nod to the NLF to answer. Saigon was opposed to ^{the} ~~the~~ NLF talking ~~separately~~ independently from the Hanoi delegation, even if it was technically an integrated part of the ~~North Vietnamese~~ ^{North} Vietnamese delegation.

The more serious confrontation with the American Ambassador, however, centered on the ^{ARRANGEMENT} ~~role~~ of the ~~South~~ Allied delegation. Thieu announced—and thus far held to—his maximum bargaining position of a so-called "three-legged conference table." The South Vietnamese delegation would be ^{TO BE} ~~sepr~~ separate and independent with its own chairman; the same for the Americans and the merged Hanoi-NLF delegation ^{with Hanoi as Chairman}. The Americans officials pointed out to Thieu and Ky that this would ^{Be} ~~unacceptable~~ unacceptable to Hanoi; that if the South Vietnamese government had a separate delegation, then the NLF would demand the same. ^{Point} ~~As of the 15th day of discussions,~~ this argument had not repeat not changed any minds in the upper-chambers of the Vietnamese government and ~~the~~ Thieu reportedly ~~is~~ held to his position.

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Because of governmental warnings and some iron-fisted moves of ~~banning~~
~~for~~ suspending Vietnamese-language newspapers, most ~~of~~ political
groupings stuck to the government's line—or maintained a tougher one. "The
hawk line is the safe line at the moment," one political figure said. But,
there were notable ~~exceptions~~ and ~~into~~ potentially significant exceptions
on the left-wing side of the political spectrum. One ~~was~~ ^{There} veiled editorials
in the ~~militant~~ militant Buddhist publications that President Thieu should
step aside and make room for others—presumably meaning General ~~Nguyen~~ Duong
Van Minh, who has also been making anti-government ~~in~~ remarks to close
associates. Also, a meeting of some 300 labor unionists at the ~~in~~
~~to~~ a pagoda of the militant Buddhist left called for a ceasefire and a lasting
peace. And Tran Van Don, leader of the National Salvation Front and a close
friend of General Minh concluded that if the bombing was halted—then
it could be assumed that Hanoi had ~~made~~ ^{AVM} made ~~and~~ concessions to Washington.
But, Thieu Inc. was not repeat not willing to make such ~~an~~ ^{AVM} assumption,
and even so, he did not they did not repeat not ~~like~~ ^{Beck's H} the concession
~~supposed concess~~ ^{How} ~~lower~~ ^{concessions} Hanoi had yet to agree to, ^{make}.

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