

How Henry Did It in Viet Nam

Henry Kissinger's success in the Middle East inevitably recalls his negotiations in another battleground: Viet Nam. By coincidence, the first "inside" account of those 3½ years of talks and tribulations appears this week in the summer issue of the quarterly *Foreign Policy*. Written by former New York Timesman Tad Szulc, it offers an insight into the Secretary's "brilliance, stamina and tactics." Szulc pieced together his 47-page narrative from conversations with several officials involved in the peace effort—although not with Kissinger himself. Among the article's principal points:

RUSSIANS TO THE RESCUE. As Szulc tells it, the Soviets played a much bigger role in salvaging the stalled Viet Nam negotiations than they have been credited with. The essential breakthrough came in the Soviet Union after the North Vietnamese launched their Easter offensive in 1972. The Communist onslaught created "a sense of panic in the White House" that the Saigon regime might collapse. Kissinger, who went to Moscow in April to set up Richard Nixon's May summit with Soviet Party Leader Leonid Brezhnev, tried to enlist Russian aid in containing the North Vietnamese drive. During his visit, Kissinger told the Russians that the U.S. would no longer insist on withdrawal of all North Vietnamese troops from the South after a cease-fire—a stunning reversal of the previous U.S. position.

In May, Kissinger returned to Moscow with Nixon for the summit. Viet Nam dominated one long, frosty session. At one point, Premier Aleksei Kosygin turned to Nixon and said: "You have Henry Kissinger. He's a smart man. Why don't you get him to find the right solution for the war?" As the meeting dragged on, Nixon turned to Kissinger and whispered: "God, this cannot go on like this."

Next day Kissinger made another major concession: Viet Cong participation in a mixed tripartite commission to oversee new elections after a cease-fire. The Soviets were suddenly impressed with the U.S. determination to make peace. Brezhnev agreed to send Soviet President Nikolai Podgorny to Hanoi to urge resumption of the secret Paris talks. An elated Kissinger told his aides that "the Russians are going to help us."

MAN IN A HURRY. When the North Vietnamese finally responded to the U.S. concessions and produced a draft agreement in Paris on Oct. 8, Szulc claims, Kissinger fairly grabbed at it. He instructed three staffers to write a counterproposal, then went out to a dinner date. The aides finished at 3 a.m. and

went off to sleep, leaving the document for Kissinger. He awakened them at 8 a.m., raging that the draft was much too tough. "You don't understand," he said. "I want to meet their position." All through that critical week Kissinger kept up a furious pace. Said one American official: "Henry was rushing things too much; it was getting too sloppy."

USING (AND MISUSING) SECRECY. Szulc says that Kissinger made an obsession of secrecy as he shuttled between Washington, Paris, Moscow, Peking and Saigon largely because he wanted to "keep everybody off balance," the better to increase his own room for maneuvering. Says Szulc: "It is possible that even Nixon did not fully understand at all times" what Kissinger was doing.

Kissinger's close-to-the-vest style proved nearly disastrous when it came to dealing with South Viet Nam's President Nguyen Van Thieu, who had been kept in the dark about the negotiations. In a hand-holding visit to Saigon in July 1972, Kissinger made no mention of his concessions to the Communists on troop withdrawals and the tripartite commission. He said merely that with an election coming, the Administration would have to put on a show of serious negotiating for a while, but that it would be "a different story" after a Nixon win. Implying that the U.S. position would harden again, he suggested that Thieu plan on an invasion of North Viet Nam.

Szulc stops short of concluding that Kissinger deliberately misled Thieu, but does insist that he "grossly overestimated his ability to bring Thieu around."

When Kissinger showed him the draft of the peace agreement for the first time in October, Thieu "reacted with undisciplined fury." It was the outraged opposition of Thieu (for whom Kissinger developed an active hatred, says Szulc) that led to delays in the signing of the agreement, to Hanoi's second thoughts about U.S. intentions, and to the "Christmas bombings" that finally ended the agony of Viet Nam.

WATCHING THE POLITICAL CLOCK.

Though Kissinger has publicly denied it, Szulc finds that "the critical factor" in the timing of the negotiations was the approach of the 1972 presidential election, just as Lyndon Johnson's overtures to Hanoi on ending the bombing of the North were prompted by the 1968 election. Szulc says that Kissinger traveled to Moscow and Peking in May and June 1972 with hopes of "resuming secret meetings with the North Vietnamese before the Democratic National Convention—'for the theater,' as the White House saying went." As early as July, Kissinger told his staff that Viet Nam had to be sewed up between the November election and Nixon's second inauguration the following January. "We cannot stand another four years of this," he said. "So let's finish it brutally, once and for all."

READING THE BOSS'S MIND. At times during his long, twisting pursuit of peace, Kissinger had to deal as carefully with Nixon as with the other personalities involved in the complex Viet Nam equation. So it was in the dramatic Kissinger press conference of Oct. 26, 1972, which followed an extraordinary broadcast by Hanoi recounting the history of the secret negotiations and accusing the U.S. of cynically allowing



LEONID BREZHNEV & HENRY KISSINGER SHARING JOKE DURING MEETING IN MOSCOW
"He's a smart man. Why don't you get him to find the right solution?"

THE WORLD

Thieu to prevent final agreement. As Szulc tells it, Kissinger's celebrated statement that "peace is at hand" was not only aimed at Hanoi and Saigon, but made partly with an eye to the election only twelve days away. Some of Kissinger's aides have told Szulc that they doubted that Kissinger really believed an agreement was at hand, but that he wanted "to commit Nixon to a quick peace. He seemed worried that after the elections Nixon might reopen the whole diplomatic situation; he feared that given Nixon's natural inclinations, the President might revert to toughness after being re-elected."

ISRAEL

Rabin's Troubled Start

Even as guns fell silent on the Golan Heights, hostile political shelling within Israel threatened to cut short the life of its budding new government. Factional bitterness and personal acrimony over the choice of Premier-designate Yitzhak Rabin's new 19-member coalition Cabinet have clouded prospects for his long-term success. A thin majority of the 120-member Knesset (Parliament) will probably approve Rabin this week as the country's fifth and youngest (52) Premier.* Nonetheless, many observers believe that new elections, perhaps later this year, must come if Rabin is to secure the mandate he needs to provide Israel with effective leadership.

The commander of Israel's forces in the 1967 Six-Day War and a former Ambassador to Washington, Rabin was selected by a Labor Party Central Committee as Premier-designate after Golda Meir announced her resignation last April 11. Although widely respected by Israeli voters, Rabin has antagonized some members of the Labor establishment by excluding members of the dominant Mapai faction of the Labor Party from important Cabinet posts.

Arab Tilt. Some key offices have gone to dependable veterans: Rabin's old comrade-in-arms Yigal Allon, 55, becomes Foreign Minister as well as continuing as Deputy Premier, while former Transport and Communications Minister Shimon Peres, 51, takes over Defense from Moshe Dayan. But Rabin has appointed others, including five newcomers, who may tilt Israel's new government toward more flexible dealings with Arab nations. Perhaps his most controversial Cabinet choice is Mrs. Shulamit Aloni, 45, head of the dovish Citizens Rights Movement, who advocates the return of most occupied Arab lands in exchange for a Middle East peace accord. Mrs. Aloni's appointment as Minister Without Portfolio makes her the second woman to serve in an Israeli government.

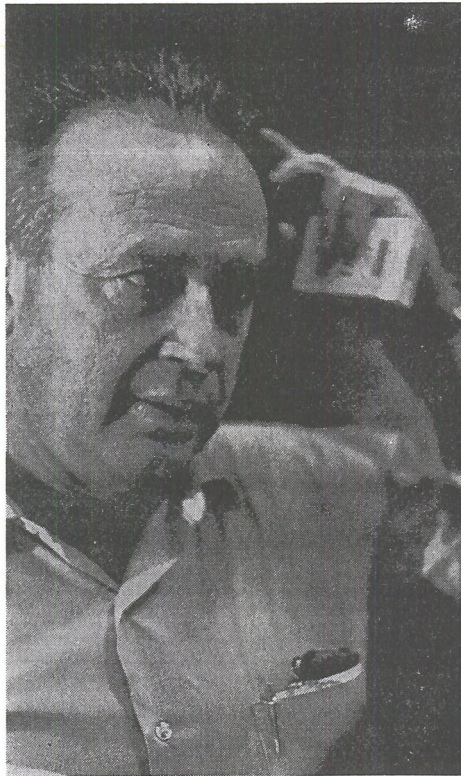
*After David Ben-Gurion, who became Premier at the age of 61, Moshe Sharett at 57, Levi Eshkol at 68, and Golda Meir at 70.

Two other leading Labor stalwarts also rejected offers to serve under the new Premier. Abba Eban, 59, who has feuded with Rabin ever since his appointment as Ambassador to Washington in 1968, was enraged when the Premier-designate offered the Foreign Ministry to Allon. Rubbing salt in the wound, Rabin offered Eban the Minister of Information folio, a lesser Cabinet job that Eban has always considered superfluous. Former Finance Minister Pinhas Sapir, 65—the kingmaker of the Labor Party—flatly refused to stay in his post. According to Rabin's foes, Sapir even cautioned his chosen successor, Banking Executive Yaacov Levinson, not to accept the Finance portfolio because Sapir believes

for the first time have to rely on the three Arab Party and five Communist Party votes in the Knesset to remain in power. In courting support from these fringe groups and such small progressive parties as the Independent Liberals and the Citizens Rights Movement, Rabin has driven his party's traditional coalition partner, the hawkish National Religious Party, into opposition, thus depriving himself of the N.R.P.'s ten votes and a more broadly based government. "This is not a government to save the country," commented Tel Aviv's mass-circulation daily *Yediot Aharonot*, "not a national government, nor even a party government, but in large part a factional government."

The self-effacing and introspective

DAVID RUBINGER



YITZHAK RABIN

A tilt toward more flexible dealings with Arab nations.



SHULAMIT ALONI

that the new government will not survive for more than two months. Nor has departing Golda Meir gone out of her way to bolster Rabin's cause. Since he was neither a dyed-in-the-wool Mapai man nor an experienced politician, she was cool to his selection as the new Premier-designate and did not attend all of the Labor Party meetings at which the makeup of the new government was discussed.

Factionalism within the Labor Party has added to Rabin's woes. Members of Labor's traditionally dominant wing, Mapai, simmered over the granting of more power to Allon in the Cabinet—a move that places Allon's own small Labor faction Ahdut Avodah (United Labor) in a commanding position. More upsetting to many party elders is the prospect that a Labor government will

Rabin lacks the toughening political experience of past Israeli leaders, an asset that might help him to deal more firmly with his party's recalcitrants instead of seeming to plead for their cooperation. As he urged Mapai leaders last week, "It's impossible to find the magic formula to please everyone and everything. I propose that we desist from squabbling."

Nevertheless, he intends to press ahead with some clearly set priority goals: rebuilding the prestige of Israel's army, which took a battering in last October's war, opening new diplomatic bridges to the Arabs, and tackling the problems of Israel's underprivileged, notably Jewish immigrants from the Arab world. But whether time and his increasingly sour critics will allow him to do so remains doubtful.