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Kissinger's Diplomacy

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WASHINGTON, Aug. 15—Henry Kissinger's trips to Paris are good news and good politics, since they suggest that there is some movement toward peace, but the fact is that even Kissinger does not expect any real change in the Paris talks until late in the election campaign.

It is assumed by top officials here that Hanoi and the National Liberation Front, despite their serious losses on the battlefield since May, are determined to mount one more offensive before November.

Their supplies from the North have been reduced by the American mining of Haiphong harbor and the relentless pounding of U.S. air power, but they have not been stopped, and there is no evidence that the Hanoi negotiators are responding to Kissinger's argument that Mr. Nixon's peace terms are more generous now than they are likely to be if he wins the election.

Nevertheless, the Administration intends to keep the secret Paris talks going throughout the campaign, for the more active Kissinger is on the peace front, the more awkward it is for Senator McGovern to argue that Mr. Nixon is concerned mainly with waging war.

Kissinger's mission to Saigon has a dual purpose. It enables him to inform General Thieu of the tone and substance of the Paris talks and relieves him of the charge that the Administration talks to Hanoi but not to Saigon. Also, while Mr. Nixon has said he would not force the retirement of General Thieu, he does not want to give Thieu a veto over Washington's peace terms or allow Thieu to think

that American airpower will be at his disposal for as long as he wishes to remain in office.

The Administration would obviously like to see a compromise settlement and a cease-fire in Vietnam before the election in November, but the President is said to be confident that he can win anyway even if Hanoi offers before the voting to release all prisoners of war under Senator McGovern's more generous peace terms.

What the President has not been able to see, however, is how he will be able to withdraw if both Saigon and Hanoi stick to their present policies, and the Communists go back to guerrilla warfare, which could go on indefinitely.

His dilemma is that the Saigon regime cannot be relied on to defend itself without American air power, and yet is not likely to make any more concessions for peace as long as it thinks the American fighters and bombers will remain.

The Administration has been trying to persuade Hanoi, not only in Paris, but with some help from the Soviets, that it is trying to work out a lasting accommodation with Moscow, Peking and the other Communist capitals, and that North Vietnam can avoid the destruction of its industries and benefit by the reconstruction of its country if it makes peace.

Officials here say Kissinger has been instructed to inform the negotiators on the other side that Mr. Nixon's terms are flexible, and he is said to be urging them to propose modifications to the Nixon peace plan. But unless there has been a change in the last session at Paris, Hanoi has not budged from demands that are unacceptable to the President.

The Administration is said to have pointed to the progress made toward a reconciliation between Washington and Peking, and to have observed that no progress would have been possible if Peking had demanded that the United States get rid of Chiang Kai-shek and take all its troops out of Taiwan as conditions for establishing more normal Sino-American relations. If China could move toward an accommodation one step at a time, why not Hanoi? But apparently this argument made no impression on the other side either.

So the stalemate continues and is likely to do so until it is clear to Hanoi that its next offensive has failed, and that it faces the possibility of a Nixon

victory and the protracted bombardment of its country by a President who doesn't have to worry any longer about the political consequences of the war.

The hope here is that this prospect will look even more unpleasant to Hanoi than Mr. Nixon's terms of peace near the end of the election campaign, and that then the Kissinger's negotiations will finally make progress.

Meanwhile, the Administration is content to carry on the Kissinger talks and let Hanoi choose between bombing and compromise. Logically, officials here still keep saying, Hanoi will finally choose peace, or Thieu, if he cannot count indefinitely on American air support, will adjust to the realities, but logic has never been a surplus commodity in Vietnam, and it is likely to get even scarcer between now and November.



Michael Witt