

SFE Examiner

AUG 16 1972

Page 2—S.F. Examiner ☆ Wed., Aug. 16, 1972

Harriman: Nixon Let Thieu Block Peace

YORKTOWN (N.Y.) — (UPI) — W. Averell Harriman says when he left the Paris peace talks in 1969 he handed President Nixon a chance for successful peace negotiations "on a silver platter" but Nixon allowed South Vietnamese president Thieu to scuttle it.

Harriman, President Johnson's chief delegate to the talks, said Nixon gave Thieu virtual veto over American positions in the talks in order to maintain a government in South Vietnam beholden to the United States.

During a luncheon interview at his country estate, Harriman said that by January 1969 "all the procedural questions were settled which we thought made it possible to begin really serious negotiations."

Signals

"Unfortunately they never took place. President Thieu, I believe, consciously scuttled the negotiations."

Harriman said the North Vietnamese had signaled — both by withdrawing nearly 50 percent of their troops from the northern two provinces of South Vietnam and by "words" at secret talks in the fall of 1968 — that they were prepared to begin serious negotiations.

The 80-year-old diplomat and former New York governor said it was this opportunity to which he and Cyrus

Vance, his deputy in the talks, referred in their joint statement Saturday supporting Democratic vice presidential nominee Sargent Shriver's statement that Nixon "blew" a chance for peace in 1969.

22 Regiments

By the fall of 1968, Harriman said, he and Vance had overcome the most difficult obstacles — getting the North Vietnamese to begin negotiations and to accept the presence of South Vietnamese representatives.

Starting in October, 1968, Harriman said, there were several indications that fruitful negotiations could begin. Principal among them was the North Vietnamese withdrawal of "22 regiments out of 25" from the northern two provinces of South Vietnam.

More than half of the North Vietnamese troops were withdrawn above the 20th Parallel — the northern limit of U.S. bombing and about 200 miles north of South Vietnam — Harriman said.

Private Talks

"We interpreted (this) to be an indication that they were ready to take seriously our desire to have the DMZ (Demilitarized Zone separating the two Vietnams) re-established and to end the fighting in that area," he said.

What was more, Harriman

said, "we had our discussions, we had our understandings which made it possible for President Johnson to stop the bombing. We had many private talks, none of which have been discussed publicly and I don't intend to do it now."

The beginning of formal talks was delayed at least two months — from October 1968 until about two days before Nixon's inauguration — first by Thieu's refusal to participate, then by the issue of the shape of the table.

On Jan. 29, 1969, Thieu stated he would refuse to engage in secret talks with the National Liberation Front (Viet Cong). He changed his mind and agreed to such talks two months later, but Harriman said it was by then too late; the Communists would no longer talk to Thieu.

Two Points

In March 1969, Harriman said, Thieu "made a public statement . . . that under no circumstances would he ever agree to change the constitution to let the Communist Party operate in South Vietnam nor would he ever agree to any coalition government."

"But as those two points were the essence of any agreement, that ended the other side's willingness to talk to him . . . from then on, the other side has re-

fused to negotiate with President Thieu as they do today.'

"The opportunity for negotiations started almost the day that President Nixon took office and that opportunity was lost because the administration didn't pursue negotiations in private and President Thieu refused to negotiate in private."

"There have been many opportunities since and I believe there is still an opportunity, but I believe we had the best opportunity at that time because we had 500,000 troops in the country at that time."