

NYTimes
OCT 20 1972
Showdown in Saigon?...

With a certain irony, Henry Kissinger's current talks with President Thieu in Saigon stand as the most delicate link in the chain of negotiations which appears to have brought the search for a Vietnam peace to a sensitive juncture. It has often been suggested that when the moment of truth for a Vietnam settlement arrives, it will be this country's nominal ally who proves even more intractable than the enemy.

After his first five hours with Dr. Kissinger yesterday, General Thieu had a characteristically adamant statement put out rebuffing any talk of a coalition government with South Vietnamese Communists and neutral political figures. Earlier he had reportedly warned a meeting of his closest followers to beware of "foreign pressures" toward a political solution.

These and other signs suggest that what Dr. Kissinger is seeking is some kind of interim settlement, or an agreement on political principles for a coalition regime which might include a temporary cease-fire. Outside a tightly enclosed circle of officials no one can know for certain exactly what stage the talks have reached, and rightly so. An intricate and delicate negotiating situation is one case in which the Administration cannot be faulted for maintaining maximum discretion.

The critical point now is that, having gone this far, the effort for a Vietnam settlement must not be allowed to falter because of the recalcitrance of South Vietnam's ruler. President Thieu is not entitled to hold a strangle-grip on the policy the United States follows in ending the Vietnam fighting.

President Nixon may indeed be worried over the possibility of a backlash here at home among his right-wing supporters following news of any formula which seems to undercut President Thieu. But if a peacemaking formula is reached—with or without Thieu—we believe that virtually all Americans, regardless of political ideology and no matter whose political ambitions are affected, will enthusiastically support an end to the fighting in Vietnam.