

Kissinger Meets Thieu Twice After Quick Trip to Cambodia

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By FOX BUTTERFIELD OCT 23 1972

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SAIGON, South Vietnam, Oct. 22—In a display of hectic personal diplomacy, Henry A. Kissinger conferred early this morning with President Nguyen Van Thieu, flew suddenly to Pnompenh to meet with Cambodia's President, Lon Nol, and then unexpectedly returned to Saigon for another meeting with Mr. Thieu this evening. It was the fourth straight day of secret meetings for Mr. Kissinger, President Nixon's adviser on national security, since he arrived in Saigon (S. Oct.) Wednesday, and it increased the feeling among knowledgeable officials here that a major breakthrough in the talks to the end of the Vietnam war was now a realistic possibility.

Although the meetings here have been conducted in the strictest secrecy, a high-level South Vietnamese official said today that Mr. Kissinger and President Thieu had spent considerable time discussing details of a cease-fire.

The Saigon official also disclosed that two weeks ago, following the visit here of Mr. Kissinger's deputy, Gen. Alexander M. Haig, President Thieu ordered the creation of a special high-level committee to study the problems of implementing a cease-fire.

As a sign of the importance of the day's two meetings in Saigon, the only person present besides Mr. Kissinger and President Thieu was Ambassador Ellsworth Bunker, Mr. Thieu's closest American friend.

The previous talks had been attended by a large retinue of South Vietnamese Cabinet ministers, ambassadors and presidential aides, and there had been speculation that Mr. Thieu, a very private man, would not discuss his personal future or a possible resignation before his subordinates. Mr. Thieu's ouster has long been the key demand by the Communist side at the Paris peace talks.

Time in Saigon Not Specified

The morning session in the presidential palace lasted from 8 A.M. to 10 A.M. and in the evening, after Mr. Kissinger returned from Cambodia he met with Mr. Thieu from 5 P.M. to 7 P.M. Mr. Kissinger was again spending the night at Ambassador Bunker's residence, and embassy spokesmen refused to say how long he would stay in Saigon.

Mr. Kissinger's flight to Pnompenh came as only a partial surprise, since there had long been speculation here that the peace plan Mr. Kissinger brought with him must include Laos and Cambodia. However, embassy spokesmen would not

confirm Mr. Kissinger's destination, for what they described as "security reasons," until he landed in Cambodia.

Mr. Kissinger flew in a United States Air Force T-39, a small twin-engine jet courier, accompanied by William H. Sullivan, a Deputy Assistant Secretary of State for East Asian and Pacific Affairs, and John D. Negroponte, a White House aide.

In Pnompenh, Mr. Kissinger went directly by helicopter to the official residence of President Lon Nol, where he conferred with the Cambodian leader for some four hours and had lunch. There was no official word on what was discussed.

Knowledgeable observers in Saigon feel that in any cease-fire arrangement, Cambodia would play a critical role, since about two-thirds of the country is now under North Vietnamese control and because the Communists have extensive base areas there.

Many South Vietnamese fear that under an agreement that allowed the Communists to maintain their present areas in Cambodia, they could build up these bases for an attack on South Vietnam in case a cease-fire broke down.

Saigon Is Feverish

Mr. Sullivan had earlier made unannounced visits to Vientiane, Laos, and Bangkok, Thailand, for conferences with the leaders of two countries.

Mr. Kissinger's visit to Saigon has created an atmosphere of feverish speculation mixed with the awe among the South Vietnamese, and informed sources said that the same feelings prevail in the American Embassy.

A frequent visitor to the embassy remarked that secretaries and Foreign Service officers lined up outside their office doors to stare at Mr. Kissinger as he walked in and out each day.

Most Vietnamese now appear convinced that Mr. Kissinger has already agreed with Hanoi to get rid of President Thieu and replace him with some form of coalition.

"It does look like it this time, I am afraid," a driver of one of Saigon's ancient and tiny French taxis said. "There will finally be a cease-fire and Thieu will have to go."

But officially, no one is willing to say anything in Saigon. The secretary on duty at President Thieu's office today answered all phone calls with the simple statement "I don't know" in a high-pitched nervous voice.