



Victor Zorza

Kissinger Trip A Major Success

THE FAILURE of the Kissinger mission to Saigon is more apparent than real. Washington opinion has become increasingly volatile as the peace settlement, which everybody said was unattainable before the election, has drawn near. The consensus is now swinging back to the depths of pessimism, but the consensus is wrong once again.

In fact, Kissinger's mission was a resounding success. True, he did not make President Thieu accept his peace formula, but he was able to lay the groundwork for a real settlement. Next, Kissinger neatly arranged the rug on the ground—and if Thieu refuses to play, one sharp tug will suffice to pull it from under him.

Neither Saigon nor Washington admits officially that a cease-fire has in fact been arranged, and it is claimed that some key details still remain to be agreed, but these qualifications are part of the diplomatic game.

Thieu's latest demand that the North Vietnamese "must go home" as part of the settlement, should be read together with his rider that they must withdraw all the way to the North, not just to Laos and Cambodia.

This means that the United States is prepared to accept a deal under which the North Vietnamese Army would "withdraw," but only to Laos and Cambodia, while the U.S. forces would also "withdraw" but only to air bases in neighbouring territories and on the high seas.

This would leave the South Vietnamese army, and the Vietcong irregulars, in control of the areas each of them now occupies. Thieu does not like it, because, he says, if the northern troops withdraw only to Laos and Cambodia, they will be in a position to "renew their at-

tacks on the South."

The withdrawal may not satisfy Thieu, but it is more than almost any one would have dared to predict a short while ago. If the Communists do renew their attacks from these bases, the U.S. air force would be in a position to intervene to sup-

port them. So the arrangement seems a fair one.

But Thieu is not after an arrangement that is fair. What he wants, as his speeches show, is that the United States should actually win the war for him militarily—and for this reason he wants the U.S. forces to remain in the country, and to maintain fighting contact with the enemy.

If they break off contact and withdraw to foreign bases, as the new formula proposes, Thieu will be left face to face with the Vietcong—to fight it out, either militarily or politically, but on his own. He does not like that, either.

Saigon has lately been rejecting, with great indignation, any notion of a "four-segment coalition," in a way which suggests that the formula is being pressed on him by the United States.

This is a development of the latest Vietcong proposal, under which both Communists and the Saigon administration appoints, "by consultation," the "neutral" middle segment. In effect, the Communists would appoint their own "half" of the middle segment, and Saigon its own "half." This makes four segments, with the Communists and Saigon

each controlling half of the total.

This would, in effect, block any coalition action every time a 50-50 vote resulted on any proposal, which would happen most or all of the time. The coalition would be a figleaf to hide the reality of partition, as was evident from the Communists' own proposal when it was published last month.

But how can the United States compel Thieu to accept it? This too is revealed in some of his speeches which imply that the United States has threatened to withdraw its military aid—after the election—if he does not accept before the election, the terms it is pressing on him.

This would certainly pull the rug out from under him—and he knows it. Thieu will therefore accept, in good time, both the terms for a military cease-fire and a political settlement which have been put to him by Kissinger.

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