

Joe Belden: What happened yesterday was that it was revealed that the United States and North Vietnam were on the brink of signing a cease-fire agreement and one that was to go into effect sometime this week, but that the United States had asked for some delays. One of the reasons ~~that~~ the United States asked for delays was problems with President Nguyen Van Thieu of South Vietnam. Today President Thieu said that only his signature can bring peace to South Vietnam, and he said, "We have not agreed to anythingx yet." He said, "The peace agreement that is valid for South Vietnam is the one x I sign as representative of the whole people. I can die now, or tomorrow, but the position of the people must be continued and finally won." (I don't know whether that is intimations of mortality or not.) General Thieu's closest adviser was telling newsmen at just about the same time, "There is no rupture between the United States and South Vietnam, but we still have many basic principles to work out. Peace is near," he said, "but we want a guaranteed peace with a solid base. We believe we have a reasonable chance to achieve an accord."

The reason^{that}/the peace negotiations came out into the open was that Radio Hanoi accused the United States of agreeing to sign a ~~cease-fire, sign a~~ peace agreement, on October 31st. Presidential adviser Henry Kissinger then told newsmen yesterday that the United States had never agreed to do it, never agreed to abide by an October 31st deadline, but instead had agreed to work as hard as possible to sign an agreement by October 31st.

In Paris a North Vietnamese spokesman said today that his government is prepared to meet with Dr. Kissinger whenever Kissinger is ready. However, he disputed Dr. Kissinger's claim that there was a misunderstanding over the U.S. position on the October 31st deadline. The North Vietnamese spokesman, Nguyen ^{THANH LE} ~~Tan-Lai~~ [phonetic], said, "We don't believe there is a misunderstanding. It was written, black ^{on} and white, in a message from the President (President Nixon), on October 20th."

And we have a report from the Asia Information Group on further indications that North Vietnam is not prepared to wait beyond October 31st for U.S. action.

{Jan Austen#} The French news agency, Agence France-Presse, reports this morning that North Vietnam today rejected U.S. requests for a further round of negotiations before the final signing of a Vietnam cease-fire agreement. A spokesman for the North Vietnamese delegation told newsmen in Paris that North Vietnamese negotiat~~ions~~ would meet Dr. Henry Kissinger only to sign the agreement and not to re-negotiate it. Yesterday in Washington Dr. Kissinger had said that the U.S. was seeking a final round of talks with the North Vietnamese to iron out nuances and ambiguities in the agreements reached between the two countries on October 8th.

According to the AFP report, North Vietnamese spokesman Nguyen ^{THANH LE} ~~Tan-Lai~~ [phonetic] repeated the North Vietnamese claim that the U.S. had agreed to October 31st as the date

for signing the agreement. "The American side is pretending that some problems remain to be discussed before the signature," he said. "I repeat, these are unjustified pretexts. If Dr. Kissinger wanted to meet chief delegate Xuan Thuy and Hanoi's special negotiator Le Duc Tho on October 31st, it would be a pleasure for them to receive him on that date," Mr. Lei said. He added that if Dr. Kissinger wanted to meet Mr. Thuy and Mr. Tho on November 1st or 2nd, after the signing of the agreement, to discuss questions of interest to the two sides, "I think the answer will be affirmative. Or, another possibility, if Dr. Kissinger wants to meet Mr. Le Duc Tho or Xuan Thuy on October 30th, the eve of the signing, to drink champagne, the answer will also be affirmative," Mr. Lei said.

The Hanoi spokesman said that the signing of the agreement ending the Vietnam war would take place in two stages. After the signing of the agreement by the American Secretary of State and the North Vietnamese Foreign Minister, there would be a second signing. This would take in the foreign ministers of all four parties directly involved in the conflict, the United States, the Democratic Republic of Vietnam, the Republic of South Vietnam, and the Provisional Revolutionary Government of the Republic of South Vietnam. The first signing would be preceded by initialing in Hanoi by U.S. and North Vietnamese representatives, Mr. Lei added.

This is Jan Austen, of the Asia Information Group.

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Joe Belden: In Washington, Presidential spokesman Ziegler refused to comment on the report from Paris but he indicated there had been no official reply from North Vietnam to Dr. Kissinger's request for an additional meeting. Private sources told the AP that Administration officials did not regard the statement from Paris as an answer to Dr. Kissinger. They pointed out that the reply would likely come through private channels, not through a low-ranking official in Paris. The AP ~~also~~ ^{also} said it was/indicated that the Administration "expects a barrage of negative statements and criticism from North Vietnam while private efforts proceed quietly."

The sources also cautioned against considering the public statements by President Thieu as a rejection of the terms outlined by Dr. Kissinger and Radio Hanoi. According to these sources - who may be Dr. Kissinger himself - General Thieu has not expressed criticism of any of the nine points of the tentative agreement, and the sources said the United States is in full agreement with General Thieu when he says that no agreement can go into effect without him.

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