

# Another Look at a 1969 Article by Henry Kissinger

THE GUIDEBOOK for understanding the Indochina War negotiations is that remarkable article written by Henry A. Kissinger just before he came to the White House as President Nixon's foreign policy chief. To read it again against the Hanoi statement and Kissinger's press conference remarks clarifies both the nature of the negotiations and the shadowy outcome which the agreement would produce in South Vietnam.

A major Kissinger forte is the conceptual approach to a problem. From his analysis of the problem (and he had some direct negotiating experience during the Johnson Administration) Kissinger concluded that "the United States should concentrate on the subject of the mutual withdrawal of external forces and avoid negotiating about the internal structure of South Vietnam for as long as possible." If the U.S. were to "involve ourselves deeply in the issue of South Vietnam's internal arrangements," he added, "our pressure may wind up being directed against Saigon as the seeming obstacle to an accommodation" with the result "the complete demoralization of Saigon..." The structure and content of an agreement between the rival forces within South Vietnam, he

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wrote, "must be left to the South Vietnamese."

It is evident enough that for the past three years and more the U.S. was following the Kissinger dictum, in attempting to negotiate a military settlement with Hanoi while leaving the political settlement to the rival Vietnamese. In his Thursday press conference Kissinger stated that this had been fruitless because not until Oct. 8 did Hanoi "for the first time" propose that the U.S. and North Vietnam "in the first instance" concentrate on ending military aspects of the war. Judging from the public record thus far it is true that the Oct. 8 Hanoi proposal did separate the military and political problems far more than had been the case before.

KISSINGER also said that on Oct. 8 Hanoi proposed as well that the U.S. and North Vietnam "agree on some very general principles within which the South Vietnamese parties could then determine the political evolution of South Vietnam, which was exactly the position which we had always taken." It is, of course, these "very general principles" to which South Vietnamese President Thieu is objecting, contending that they amount to forcing a "coalition regime on his country.

How, then, do the Kissinger concepts of his 1969 article square with his 1972 negotiations? Ending the military part of the war always has been the easier part and Mr. Nixon's gradual drawdown of U.S. forces has made it easier. His bombing and blockade of the North did provide him with a lever, as doubtless it was intended to do. But what is the result? The Hanoi proposals, we now know, would not mean the "mutual withdrawal of external forces" that Kissinger saw as the chief U.S.-North Vietnam task. American forces would leave, totally, but North Vietnamese forces now in the South, the core of the Communist military power there, will be under no injunction to leave. The "question of Vietnamese armed forces in South Vietnam," says the Hanoi version which Kissinger has certified as correct, "shall be settled by the two South Vietnamese parties..." In short, Hanoi's troops will not leave without Hanoi's consent. They will remain, that is, as an instrument of power in the political arena.

Kissinger's 1969 theme was that the U.S. should avoid entanglement in the political negotiations, or at least avoid getting "deeply" entangled as he put it. But Hanoi has never been willing to let the U.S. off the hook. By the record it still has not done so. Kissinger said Thursday that Hanoi had proposed that it agree with the U.S. on some "very general" political principles. Point 4 of Hanoi's version of the 9-point draft agreement is both the longest and most complex and it has to do with these political principles. They are very general but they are

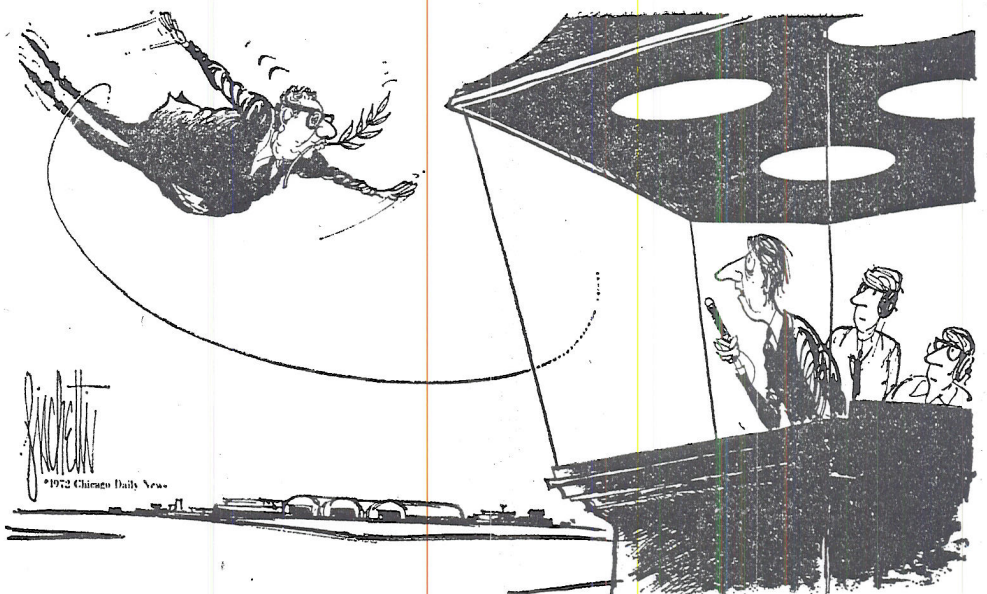
By Chalmers M. Roberts

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critical to the eventual outcome in South Vietnam as both Kissinger and Thieu, as well as Hanoi and the Vietcong, very well know.

WHETHER the U.S. violated the Kissinger admonition not to get "deeply" involved here may be a matter of semantics. It seems to me we did get so involved. Kissinger's rationale, it would seem, is that on these political issues Hanoi made one major concession that justified the U.S. getting as involved as it has: It dropped its demand for a coalition regime to "absorb all existing authority" in the South and it dropped its demand that Thieu himself must be dumped. The latter

"Control Tower to Dr. Kissinger—I've Lost Track—Are You Coming or Going?"



Fischetti in the Chicago Daily News.

was a concession, but is the former? Or in reality has Hanoi just gone about the same end by another tack?

The draft agreement calls for something to be called the National Council of Reconciliation and Concord, operating on the basis of unanimity, to be composed of "three equal segments" which would be the chief

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body for political decisions. If this is not a coalition I don't know what it is. "Three equal segments" means those of the Thieu regime, of the Communists and of a third neutralist group picked by the first two, a very difficult task in itself. All must agree or nothing can be done. If such a council does come into being its chances of ever doing business unanimously would seem to be minimal.

Americans must realize, wrote Kissinger in 1969, that "the subject of a coalition government is the most thankless and tricky area for negotiation by outsiders." But that is what he has been negotiating, whatever term is used to describe the draft agreement. It may not provide in itself for a coalition, it can be argued, but it makes one inevitable. Inevitable, that is, unless there is an alternative. In 1969 Kissinger wrote that there are "two meanings" of the term coalition: a true coalition regime attempting to govern the country and "as a means of legit-

imizing partition." In 1972 the Communists are in control of far more of the South than they were in 1969.

Thus, it seems to me, that it can be argued that the draft agreement provides for either a true coalition, which Thieu says he will never accept and which would require unanimity in the proposed Council, or a de facto division of the South. If it is to be the latter, the Communists will have the support of the North Vietnamese forces after the Americans are gone and after Washington has signed a pledge not to use its aircraft again in either North or South.

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Hanoi's obvious view, provides that chance and in the long run (at least, after American power is gone), more chance of winning than of losing. Thieu sees it the other way around. Hanoi insists, too, that Washington sign not only for itself but also for Saigon. Thieu indicates he will accept nothing he himself does not sign and that he wants no agreement he does not sign.

In 1969 Kissinger made two other observations. The U.S. then had "been unable so far to create a political structure that could survive military opposition from Hanoi after we withdraw." It is doubtful that there is such a structure today although no one can be sure. Secondly, Kissinger wrote that "as long as Hanoi can preserve some political assets in the South, it retains the prospect of an ultimately favorable political outcome." Hanoi will retain some of those assets, under the draft agreement, and they will be backed by military assets even though there would be a cease-fire in place. Kissinger said Thursday one of the still unresolved issues is getting the proposed international supervisory body "put in place at the same time that the cease-fire is promulgated." Hanoi has agreed to creation of such a body but when and how it works is the question.

In sum, there has been considerable compromise by Washington and Hanoi to reach the draft agreement. In general terms the deal roughly follows Kissinger's 1969 dicta but in some critical specifics it violates them. All of this is not to say that Washington should not accept the deal, once some of the "ambiguities" Kissinger mentioned are cleared up. But it is to say that the eventual outcome in South Vietnam under terms of the deal is very problematic as far as the continuation of a non-Communist regime for most of the country is concerned.

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