

# The Impact of Delay

## 2 Sides in Vietnam Have Something To Gain in Postponement of Signing

By FLORA LEWIS

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PARIS, Oct. 30—After a few frantic days, it is now clear that there will be no Vietnam peace ceremony here tomorrow—and perhaps none before the United States election a week from tomorrow.

North Vietnamese delegates have continued to insist that Oct. 31 is the deadline for the signing of their cease-fire agreement with the United States — a deadline that they say was set by the Americans. But they have carefully avoided saying they would not be as willing to sign the agreement, negotiated by Henry A. Kissinger and Le Duc Tho, after another round of talks.

Clearly they would have preferred to hurry through to a binding accord, and they apparently believed that President Nixon was also eager to have the cease-fire signed and sealed before Election Day.

Both sides also have something to gain in permitting a postponement. The Communists who probably have less to gain than the United States, show some concern lest they be pushed to make further concessions. Still, repeated assurances by Mr. Kissinger, and now by Vice President Agnew, that the United States endorses all the key points in the agreement minimize any disadvantages to Hanoi in a postponement.

The United States has explained its unwillingness to confirm the agreement and implement a cease-fire on the ground that "six or seven" minor points remain to be clarified.

Apart from further concessions that might conceivably be wrung from the Communist side, there are some visible American interests to be served by not proclaiming a cease-fire immediately:

**ARMAMENTS**—Whether because of intense secrecy or lack of confidence in the chances of agreement, the Pentagon apparently had not made special efforts to speed weapons deliv-

eries to South Vietnam until a short time ago. The cease-fire agreement would prohibit further deliveries to either side in South Vietnam—though apparently not to North Vietnam—except on a one-for-one replacement basis.

A rush delivery program is under way now, and a few weeks, even a few days, can make an important difference in the supplies available to the South Vietnamese Army, particularly in view of its heavy losses in the last six months.

**SAIGON**—President Nguyen Van Thieu is not going to make it easy for the United States to go home amid a happy fanfare, as Washington would wish. It may take some stern arm-twisting to get his endorsement of the agreement.

Mr. Thieu knows how to make sure that the process is clearly visible to the American electorate. If it came to that, it would be more comfortable for the Administration to hold off the confrontation at least a week more.

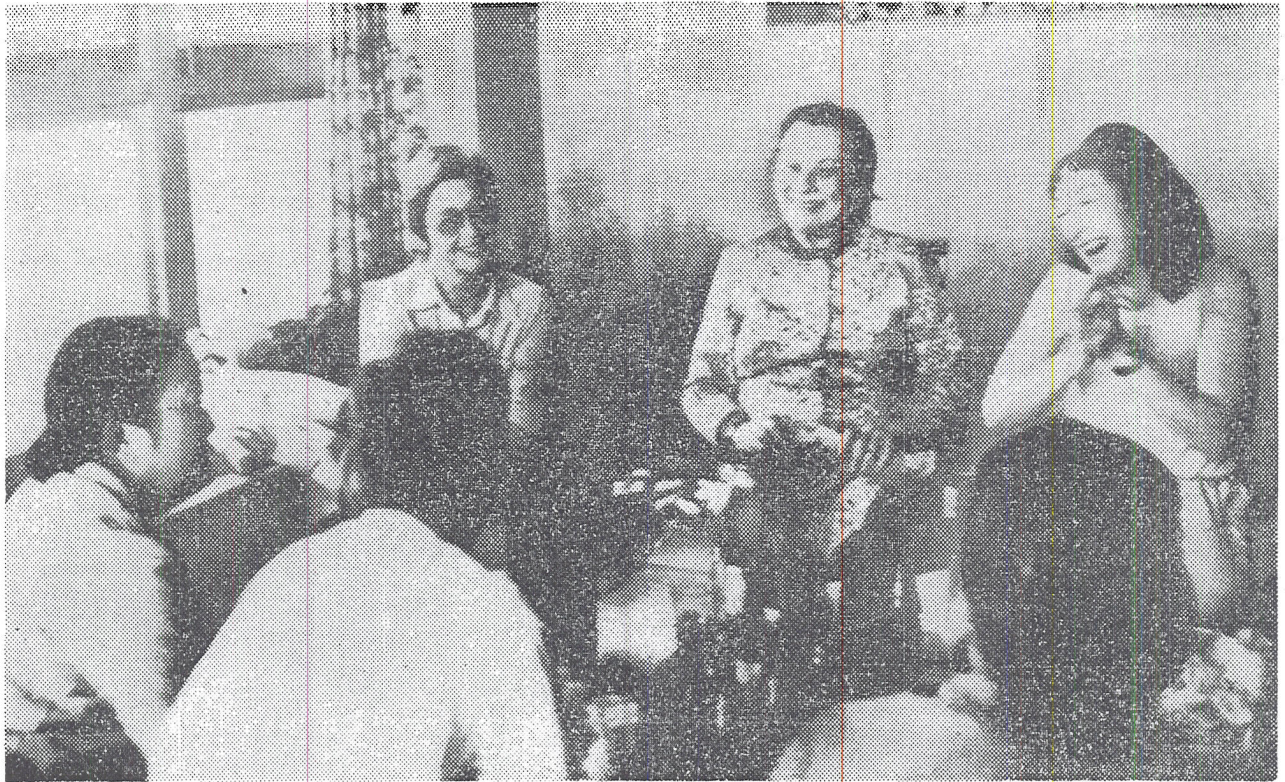
In any event, each passing day since the existence of a cease-fire agreement was disclosed by Hanoi has had an impact on Saigon. Uncertainty is a most fearful demoralizer.

There is no sure way of measuring how much political erosion President Thieu has suffered as a result of what many Vietnamese consider a brutal rebuff from his American friends. The longer he has to fight off a settlement he dislikes, the weaker may be his defenses against the argument that he has no choice. The arm-twisting may become easier.

**DISCLOSURE**—Hanoi's delegates have said that their published nine-point document is only an outline of the agreement reached with Mr. Kissinger and that many other vital issues have been fully settled.

They have hinted that among them is the figure — believed high — for the United States pledged for reconstruction of the North. Doubtless there are other points that will surprise

News  
Analysis



Associated Press

**AMERICAN WOMEN VISITING NORTH VIETNAM:** This photograph released yesterday by a North Vietnamese press agency shows, facing the camera, Mrs. Jane Hart, wife of Senator Philip A. Hart of Michigan; Denise Lever-tov, poet, from Boston, and a writer, Muriel Rukeyser. At left is Mrs. Phan Ti An, a member of the Vietnam Women's Union, who was among those who met the visitors at the airport.

many Americans and perhaps dismay some of them.

Americans are unlikely to criticize a President running for re-election on the basis of Hanoi's still-undisclosed concessions, but there is likely to be some outcry about details of the American concessions. The text of the agreement is to be published after signature, so the date of the ceasefire will determine the date of disclosure.

On the North Vietnamese side, so long as there is no doubt that an agreement will be signed fairly soon, there are some benefits to be achieved in delay:

**ARMAMENTS** — Latest reports indicate that Ho Chi Minh Trail is laden with supplies en route south. The effort to stockpile weapons for the post-cease-fire period would match that of speeded deliveries to Saigon.

**TERRITORY**—The agreement provides that Saigon and the Vietcong will control the territory they hold. In recent weeks the Vietcong have been

making intensive, and fairly successful, efforts to install themselves in villages around the major cities and along important highways and there is at least a good chance that they will win more rather than less ground with a little more time.

**THIRD FORCE**—The fragmented but no doubt large number of South Vietnamese who oppose both the Communists and Mr. Thieu are beginning to raise their voices. It was Hanoi and the Vietcong that insisted on a role for them in the post-war arrangements; President Thieu has scorned them.

The growing belief that the

President is blocking a settlement may persuade increasing numbers of neutralists that it may after all be easier to work with the Communists than with the President, who has imprisoned many potential third-force leaders.

The interests of the various factions are not necessarily what has led to the sudden pause in peace diplomacy after the hectic dash to general agreement earlier this month. However, those interests help to explain the relatively cool way each side is now waiting for the other to signal the next step.

It would have been awkward for the North Vietnamese to

agree to another session with Mr. Kissinger before the Oct. 31 deadline after having insisted so loudly that it must be observed. On the other hand, it should not be difficult for them to say shortly after the deadline that, despite the "prolonging of the war," they are so dedicated no peace that they accept the final round of talks requested by Washington.

Whatever happens, there is no longer much doubt here in Paris that an agreement will be signed soon. The immediate question is when, and the big question on which the parties have begun to concentrate is, What then for South Vietnam?