

The Kissinger Peace Plan: Thieu Is

By David Landau

the Catch

BERKELEY, Calif.—If only it were true that, as Henry Kissinger says, peace is at hand, if only there were some sign that the Vietnam war will soon pass into history, a bitter yet faded memory. Along with the Vietnamese, our country badly wants an end of the war, so that we grasp at the nearest rumor, seize on the slightest pretext to believe a settlement is in reach. The imminence of peace is a message that Henry Kissinger has repeatedly conveyed, in varying forms and intensities, since early 1969, and this time around it was accepted with an eagerness that surpassed even the usual unblinking credulity.

Yet despite Kissinger's fervent reassurances, there is still no visible agreement on the issue that has dominated the Vietnam negotiations for four years: who will supervise the election of a new South Vietnamese Government, and hence, who will rule in the South.

In a little-noticed statement buried in the midst of his news conference last week, Kissinger took issue with the account of the draft agreement which the North Vietnamese Premier, Pham Van Dong, recently disclosed. The Premier, Kissinger contended, "seemed to be, with respect to one or two points, under a misapprehension as to what the agreement contained, and at any rate we would like to have that clarified."

In the context of what Kissinger had already described as a broad-based understanding with the other side, it was remarkable for him to say that the North Vietnamese head of state was misinformed about what had been negotiated. Yet Kissinger went even further to say that Pham Van Dong's misinformation concerned the vital matter of the interim government to be set up in the South: "There are linguistic problems in which, for example, we call the National Council of Reconciliation an administrative structure in order to make clear that we do not see it as anything comparable to a coalition government. We want to make sure that the Vietnamese text conveys the same meaning." Thus, the need for another meeting in Paris.

But the problem is far more than "linguistic." It strikes at the heart of what has kept the two sides at war for ten years. In a magazine interview, Pham Van Dong made clear his view that a "three-sided coalition of transition" would govern the South prior to elections. True, Hanoi was dropping its demand that Nguyen Van Thieu depart from the South Vietnamese political scene, and it acknowledged that the "three-sided coalition" would be formed in direct talks between Thieu and the N.L.F. Yet, as has been the case since they first proposed coalition in 1969, Hanoi and the N.L.F. maintained that the interim government in the South would have to represent a drastic break with the structure of the Thieu regime, and would have to recognize the N.L.F. and the neutralists as legitimate actors in the political life of the South.

Kissinger's description of the interim body was quite different; he pictured it as essentially the appendage of an unchanged Thieu regime. Its function, he said, "would be to help promote the maintenance of a cease-fire and to supervise the elections on which the parties might agree." This scheme is no more than a resurrection of the nongovernmental supervisory commission, one lacking any degree of state power, which the U.S. has repeatedly proposed, and Hanoi and the N.L.F. have just as repeatedly rejected, since 1969. It is a far cry from what Pham Van Dong described in the magazine interview.

How is it possible that such a gross ambiguity persists? Precisely because, as Kissinger said, the two sides have agreed to separate the political from the military issues; in other words, they have agreed not to agree on the future make-up of the government in the South. Kissinger can still say that the U.S. did not abandon an ally under siege, Madame Binh can still "insist" that Thieu resign, and, lo and behold, an armistice can still take place. But such a prescription can never be satisfactory, certainly not in the long range. It does not define a settlement; it merely postpones the armed struggle which will forge a settlement in the absence of further negotiation. And its inconsistencies are even now so great as to make its adoption highly improbable.

The current U.S. "peace" proposal is, in fact, the Nixon Administration's way of abdicating its responsibility for a situation it largely created. The President and Kissinger have long recognized that the U.S. cannot possibly "win" in Vietnam, that the best it can do is postpone the collapse of the Thieu regime until well after an American withdrawal so that Washington will not appear to have

failed in Saigon's defense. The idea to separate political and military matters in any negotiation of the war was adopted by Kissinger in 1969 as a means to preserve the political status quo in the South for a brief period of time and erase any U.S. blame for what he recognized was the inevitable eruption in Saigon. But Kissinger and the President are not blameless; they have held Thieu in power for nearly four years.

The Administration, appearances to the contrary, has yet failed in its essential responsibility: to advance a peace proposal which directly confronts the issue of political power in South Vietnam. And if that proposal is to have any element of fairness about it, it must provide for the dissolution of the unrepresentative, dictatorial regime now holding power in Saigon.

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By I. F. Stone

WASHINGTON—"An act of healing rather than a source of new division." This, Henry Kissinger said last week, was the Nixon objective in the cease-fire negotiations. But the agreement promises more recrimination, disillusion and bloodshed.

As in 1954, free elections are called for. But the provisions already agreed on make it much easier now to break that promise. The broken promise last time led to renewed guerrilla activity and then to civil war. The new agreement is setting the stage for a replay.

On elections Hanoi's broadcast was vague but Mr. Kissinger's glass disturbingly precise. Hanoi said that the National Council of National Reconciliation and Concord would "organize the general elections." But Kissinger explained that the two parties, i.e., President Thieu and the other side,

would first "negotiate about the timing, the nature of the elections and the offices for which these elections were to be held." Only then would the national council "supervise the elections on which the parties might agree."

Thieu doesn't want elections. He can delay on the timing. He can refuse to agree to any election in which his own office would be at stake, insisting that his four-year mandate does not expire until 1975. Most important of all is the reference to the "nature" of the elections. Thieu can refuse to agree to an election for a constituent assembly which would write a new constitution.

Free elections are impossible under the Thieu constitution, which has allowed him to jail opponents as Communists or neutralists, to close down newspapers opposed to him and to rule by decree. Without a new constitution, there can be no free elections. So long as Thieu must give his consent, there will be no new constitution.

For the third time since World War II, Vietnamese hopes are being sold down the river; this time with open aid of Moscow and Peking. Thieu is left in control of the army and the police, with his pipeline to the U.S. Treasury unimpaired. Military aid is cut off, but economic aid is left without limit. Thieu can buy arms elsewhere and cover the deficits of a large oppressive apparatus by drafts on Washington.

The new agreement is in the pattern of the past. It still seeks a political victory by force and again it leaves the opposition little alternative but to join with the Communists. The third force is the stepchild of the agreement.

Instead of allowing the exiles in Paris and the non-Communist opposition in the South an opportunity to name their own representatives to the three-tiered National Council of Na-

tional Reconciliation, the agreement provides that each side will pick not only its own representatives but also its own "neutralists." So they would be compromised from the start, half by being Thieu's choice, half by being Hanoi's.

Secondly, one of the concessions obtained by Kissinger is that release of our prisoners of war would not be contingent on the release of civilian political prisoners in the South. There are thousands of oppositionists in Thieu's jails, including Truong Dinh Dzu, the runner-up in Thieu's Presidential race in 1967, the only one in which he allowed any opposition. Release of these prisoners is left to negotiation between Thieu and the other side. Thieu is not anxious to free opposition leaders. On this too he holds a veto.

Finally the agreement contains no guarantees whatsoever of political freedom. Under the smooth formula of leaving political matters to be settled by the Vietnamese, we leave the fate of free press and speech to the dictator we created and imposed. So the farce of "self-determinations" will continue, along with the suffering there and the alienation here. That is hardly a formula for healing.

Nor is it a program for disengagement. Mr. Kissinger was asked what recourse the other side would have if the negotiations for elections broke down. He answered, opaquely, that the cease-fire has no time limit. To break the cease-fire because Thieu had broken the implied promise of new and free elections would thus still be a violation of Hanoi's cease-fire agreement with us. And the Navy will still be offshore and the planes ready on the Thai bases.

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