

SF Examiner
Can a Cease-Fire Work?

WASHINGTON — There are four crucial questions which must be on everyone's mind now that the cease-fire is at hand in Vietnam. Here are the most candid and realistic answers I can give:

Question — Is it a good agreement?

Answer — It is a good agreement for the United States.

It is the best possible agreement which South Vietnam could expect after a war neither side could win.

It enables the United States to end the fighting honorably after having done so much to shield South Vietnam from Communist conquest by force. We leave a South Vietnam stronger and more secure than most believed possible.

That which President Thieu most feared — and rightly — is excluded from the settlement. There is to be no coalition government in Saigon.

Question — Will the cease-fire hold and will peace come to South Vietnam?

Answer — It is a near certainty that the cease-fire will hold. It will be policed by the signatories and by international observers.

It is a great uncertainty whether political peace in South Vietnam will result. Both sides are committed to all the right things. Saigon says it accepts that the Communists should have equal authority in arranging the elections and in supervising them. Hanoi says the people of South Vietnam shall be free to choose their political leaders.

But the effect of the cease-fire will be to transfer the struggle for control from the battlefield to the political arena. Since the

Communists do not rely on elections to get power, the political prospects are foreboding.

Question — Could President Nixon have ended the war four years ago, even a year ago, on the same terms he got last week?

Answer — No.

For four years Hanoi insisted that it would accept no cease-fire until all political issues were settled.

The moment Hanoi embraced the U.S. proposal that cease-fire should come first, rapid progress started.

Obviously we could have gotten out of Vietnam any time during the past years if it didn't matter what kind of settlement we accepted.

We could not have gotten any earlier the honorable, prudent and promising terms we obtained.

Question — What made it possible?

Answer — The American people made it possible by showing Hanoi in the present campaign that they were overwhelmingly united behind the President's approach to ending the war.

Nixon made it possible by the Peking and Moscow summit conferences.

CHINA AND PARTICULARLY the Soviet Union made it possible by their passive and relaxed response to the U.S. action in mining the North Vietnamese harbors and stepping up bombing to contain Hanoi's latest offensive. This was their clear signal to the North Vietnamese that Peking and Moscow did not want to keep the war going.

This war is not being ended by just good fortune. It is being brought to an end by well-conceived design.