

Serious Difference, Not Details, Apparently Stalls Peace

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Serious differences over completing a Vietnam peace accord that would meet the Nixon administration's revised terms—not mere technicalities or language changes—now appear to be blocking agreement.

The agreement can take considerably more time to complete than the general public expects, many specialists believe.

Administration officials insist that expectations focused on producing an accord by today's presidential election were not stimulated by the Nixon administration, but by North Vietnam. The official U.S. forecast on Oct. 26 that an agreement could be completed in "three or four days" of further negotiation was tied to a carefully phrased qualification that

the entire process could extend over "weeks."

That important distinction was missed by many. Now

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all official talk is of weeks, even possibly months.

North Vietnam planned to use today's presidential election as a deadline in order to pin down the Nixon administration to a disengagement from the war, experts noted, and with its passing there is no other "automatic deadline" for agreement.

Documents disclosed in South Vietnam report that North Vietnam made extensive plans to position its forces to exploit a cease-fire on or before Oct. 31, as originally scheduled. If those unusually detailed captured documents are authentic, North Vietnam's strategy

has been considerably disrupted by the signing delay, and it could require time to reposition its forces.

In that event, North Vietnam could have a double reason for responding slowly to the Nixon administration's new negotiating demands. A key U.S. demand is the tightening of provisions to enforce a cease-fire in order to limit attempts to exploit it.

There is speculation that South Vietnam induced the United States to refuse to conclude the agreement with Hanoi by pressing on presidential envoy Henry A. Kissinger its documents on North Vietnam's pre-arranged plans to exploit the cease-fire.

Those documents, especially a set reportedly captured in Danang on Oct. 9, set target dates for military and political action closely timed to the peace plan secretly

negotiated in Paris between Kissinger and North Vietnamese Politburo member Le Duc Tho, it was reported from Danang on Monday by Don Oberdorfer of The Washington Post Foreign Service.

According to the reported documents, Communist leaders in Danang were instructed on Oct. 19 to launch a military drive Oct. 24-28, to exploit "the period of confusion" immediately after the signing of a cease-fire. Officials in Washington said yesterday that many similar, less-exact documents were obtained in earlier weeks and months, instructing North Vietnamese and Vietcong cadre how to take advantage of a cease-fire.

North Vietnam, in disclosing on Oct. 26 a summary of the nine-point plan negotiated with Kissinger, said the United States three times

put off time-schedules for signing it and finally on Oct. 23 requested re-negotiations, claiming "difficulties in Saigon."

Kissinger said he had no quarrel with Hanoi's account. But he said the deadlines were pressed by North Vietnam, not the United States, "and they constantly insisted that we give some commitment that we would settle the war and complete the negotiations by Oct. 31." The United States only agreed to "make a major effort" to meet that deadline, he said, and not a firm commitment.

One argument that South Vietnam may have employed to induce the United States to pass up Hanoi's deadline may have been the contention that to do so would confound North Vietnamese attempts to exploit the cease-fire.

No informed U.S. official could be reached yesterday to ascertain that. Kissinger in his briefing, however, and subsequently Secretary of State William P. Rogers, put considerable emphasis on the need to perfect cease-fire supervision arrangements in the peace plan.

Kissinger, on Oct. 26, told a White House news conference that in the secret negotiations on a cease-fire, "neither side was perhaps as precise as it had to become later about the timing and spacing of the cease-fire in a country in which there are no clear front lines."

He said, "It has become apparent to us that there will be a great temptation for the cease-fire to be paralleled by a last effort to seize as much territory as possible . . ." As a result, he

said, the United States wants to "discuss methods by which the international supervisory body can be put in place at the same time that the cease-fire is promulgated." *

Kissinger also referred to "linguistic" and "technical problems" in the agreement which required clarification. These and other phrases, especially the assertion that "We believe peace is at hand," created the public impression that the unresolved issues were comparatively simple and minor. On Nov. 2, however, President Nixon said he was "insisting that the central points be clearly settled . . ." Kissinger later said there was no difference between his remarks and the President's.

The potential agreement, Kissinger reiterated on Saturday, was in the same promising status as he pub-

licly projected it. Secretary Rogers, in a Sunday TV interview, reflected similar optimism. Rogers, however, also centered on the problem of creating effective arrangements for international supervision to regulate a cease-fire, as well as clarification of the functions of a National Council of Reconciliation and Concord for South Vietnam.

North Vietnam and the Vietcong call this proposed three-segment group a form of the "coalition" they always have demanded. Kissinger has said clarification is needed "to make clear that we do not see it as anything comparable to a coalition government."

Each of these issues, specialists point out, can raise fundamental problems that could require difficult negotiation.

* See Flora Lewis, SFChronicle 6 Nov 72.