

Promises of war settlement again raise issue of trust

NEW YORK — On Oct. 26, while he

was announcing that "peace is at hand" in Vietnam, Dr. Henry Kissinger said with what appeared to be unimpeachable dignity and pride, "that while it is possible to disagree with provisions of an agreement, the implication that this is all a gigantic maneuver which we will revoke as soon as this period is over is unworthy of what we have gone through."

Well, it's also unworthy of what the American people have been through, for a decade or more, for at least five or six years before Henry Kissinger came actively on the scene, to give them such an assurance and then to have it prove within hours that — whatever Kissinger's intent — peace is not, after all "at hand." Rather, it may be somewhere in the vaguely foreseeable future, if all goes well, and if President Thieu agrees, and if President Nixon doesn't feel too stampeded, and if we can agree on what an "administrative structure" is, and if . . . and if . . . and if . . .

No hesitation

Kissinger, just for one example, had no hesitation in saying — during what everyone agrees was a virtuoso performance at his Oct. 26 news conference — that "there are no secret side agreements of any kind" and that the sum of the arrangements in which Washington and Hanoi had occurred had been contained in the draft document made public in Hanoi and confirmed in Washington. Yet, now it has been disclosed that in addition to the terms of that document, Kissinger had what he thought

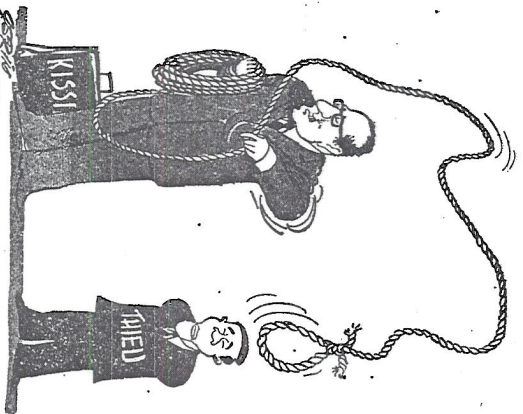
was the private concession by Hanoi that it would pull 35,000 troops out of the northern provinces of South Vietnam;

and getting a more formal assurance that that withdrawal will be accomplished is one of the problems holding up the signing of the draft document. Is there any reason why that "side agreement" could not have been plainly and honorably stated to the American people, along with the statement that peace was "at hand" but could not be had until this further condition was met?

Only South Vietnam

Kissinger also expressed the hope that an international commission to supervise

'All I know is what I read in the papers . . .'



Cartoon by Osrin in The Cleveland Plain Dealer.

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Tom Wicker

the cease-fire could be in place when the cease-fire began; but the draft agreement says only that the commission should be in place 30 days after the guns are silenced. And where Kissinger seemed to imply that there also would be a cease-fire in Laos and Cambodia, the draft mentions only South Vietnam.

Having insisted that the American election had had no influence on the accord with Hanoi, Kissinger subsequently was cut off at the knees by Nixon, who not only referred in a political speech to "a cease-fire throughout Indochina" but also drew the issue in this black-and-white manner: "Shall we have peace with honor or peace with surrender?"

Moreover, the President threw Kissinger down once again in the same speech; he said that what Kissinger had called "details" remaining to be settled were in fact "central points" that, if not settled, could lead to "a resumption of war."

The weakest rationale

No wonder, then, that Sen. McGovern could say in his own political speech that "the remaining issues are the central issues of the war, and Mr. Nixon knows it." And Secretary of State Rogers, answering questions on Sunday, not only confirmed that peace would be "at hand," if at all, several weeks or months further into the future than Kissinger had suggested, but gave only the weakest rationale for the confusion — if that is what it is — on whether the cease-fire

is to apply to all Indochina or only to South Vietnam.

All of these may seem minor points, not properly the concern of the public, to men of great affairs who no doubt think they have a right to shave or distort the truth to achieve great ends; and perhaps it does not seem "unworthy" to them to promise "peace is at hand" two weeks before a national election, when peace is not in fact anywhere so near at hand as promised.

McGovern had purposes

McGovern had his own political purposes in declaring roundly that the "peace is at hand" promise is "one of the cruelest frauds ever perpetrated on the American people;" for others, it is hard not to conclude, at the least, that once again the hopes of the nation appear to have been trifled with; that once again the leaders of the country have not told the whole truth and nothing but the truth; and that once again moments of high solemnity and men of great repute have been tarnished by the political dissimbling that is the inevitable result of mistrust of the people and imperial diplomacy.

Somebody, somewhere, even a victorious presidential candidate, had better beware of the point at which there is nothing left for the American people to trust. Having been lied to consistently, as war mounted and as war declined, must Americans conclude that even in the peacemaking they will not be entrusted with the truth? If so, no man can foresee the outcome, for they shall have "sown the wind, and they shall reap the whirlwind."