

# Why Hopes for Peace Faded.

SF Examiner

3\*

NOV 26 1972

By James Houck  
Examiner News Staff

A month ago today, according to Henry Kissinger, peace was at hand.

An agreement to end the war and bring home the American prisoners of war could be signed "within a matter of weeks or less," he said on Oct. 26, subject only to one more huddle with the North Vietnamese "lasting no more than three or four days."

Now, 30 days later, 22 hours of private talks spread over six days have ended with Kissinger returning home and peace possibly even less at hand than it was at the moment of his dramatic announcement.

What happened?

It appears to be a combination of South Vietnamese intransigence, American surprise, leading to euphoria and over-optimism, and North Vietnamese refusal to be pushed into further concessions.

Kissinger returned to Washington Oct. 23 from five days of meetings in Saigon with South Vietnam's president, Nguyen Van Thieu, with no intention of announcing three days later that "peace is at hand."

But early on Thursday, Oct. 26, 12 days before the American presidential election, North Vietnam made a startling move.

It announced that it had reached a nine-point agreement with the United States and was prepared to sign it the following Tuesday — Oct. 31.

The agreement, a summary of which Hanoi broadcast in great length, provided for a cease-fire in Vietnam within 24 hours of signing, the release of all prisoners of war and the withdrawal of all American troops

—Turn to Page 22, Col. 1

—From Page 1

and those of the foreign allies within 60 days.

That concluded, a "National Council of national Reconciliation and Concord" would organize elections "to Saigon government and the Viet Cong's Provisional Revolutionary Government. It would organize elections "to determine the political future of South Vietnam, promote the implementation of the signed agreements," and discuss demobilization of both parties' armed forces.

Two things the agreement did not do:

- It did not establish a coalition government as such. The National Council of National Reconciliation and Concord was assigned specific duties that presumably

for the withdrawal of North Vietnamese troops then in South Vietnam.

In revealing the agreement, the North Vietnamese complained that while the United States had promised to sign it, Kissinger had twice asked for more time, claiming "difficulties in Saigon."

For several hours after the startling North Vietnamese announcement, Washington was silent. Later it would be said that the word was stunned.

Finally, at midday, Kissinger held a press conference.

"Peace," he said, "is at hand," and only six or seven "very concrete" issues need be cleared up to nail down the agreement and end the war.

He would lead to its own liquidation.

- And it did not provide for a truly accurate one, and yes, he added in response to a question, he was confident that Thieu would sign it.

Left to work out, the ebullient Kissinger said, were these details:

- The establishment of an international supervisory panel in time to prevent "a last effort to seize as much territory as possible" before the cease-fire goes into effect.

- Ways "to compress" the time between a cease-fire in Vietnam and a settlement in Laos and Cambodia.

- Clarification of unspecified "misapprehensions" North Vietnamese premier Pham Van Dong had evidenced in an interview with Newsweek magazine the week before.

Overcoming "linguistic problems," which is how Kissinger characterized making sure that Hanoi understood that the National Council of National Reconciliation and Concord was not intended to be a coalition government.

- Determining exactly what clauses of the 1954 Geneva Accords would be a part of the new settlement.

- Obtaining Hanoi's agreement that the Saigon government would "have the right to sign its own peace treaty."

## Difficulties

As events have demonstrated, the difficulties were more — and more — substantial than Kissinger had stated.

The first difficulty, apparently, was that Washington — let alone Saigon — wasn't ready to sign.

Unfinished, indeed barely under way, was a massive airlift of American war materiel to sustain Saigon's military forces in the twilight zone between cease-fire and peace.

The airlift, the biggest of the war and now completed, gave Saigon, among other things, the third largest air force in the world.

Then there was Thieu.

Kissinger had apparently underestimated his willingness to agree to anything with his Communist opponents short of their thinly disguised surrender.

First Thieu branded the National Council for National Reconciliation and Concord a euphemism for a coalition government.

## Withdrawals

Then he said that all North Vietnamese troops would have to be withdrawn, and to make his point he insisted that their number is not the 140,000 the U.S. estimates but as many as 300,000.

Beyond that, he says that the agreement makes no provision for restoration of the Demilitarized Zone between North and South Vietnam.

Reports from Paris indicate that Kissinger, chastened by Thieu's obstinance, has adopted the most critical of Thieu's demands — the withdrawal of the North Vietnamese.

Indeed, it appears that it has led Hanoi to stiffen its position, calling for a revision of some of the basic terms in the draft agreement.

Why the North Vietnamese were so eager late in October to sign an agreement is generally attributed to two factors:

- Their belief that President Nixon, sure of re-election but wanting very badly a landslide re-election,

would sign quickly to assume the cloak of peacemaker.

• Their desire to catch the United States and Saigon off-guard, to implement a cease-fire and the rearmament limitations that were part of the draft agreement before the United States could begin its massive arms airlift. Thus, in a war of one-upmanship, the Communists would have been ultimately one-up.

#### Questions

Why, then, was Kissinger so hyper-optimistic, particularly when Thieu's objections to the American course were still ringing in his ears?

Was optimism a political necessity 12 days before Nixon was to face the voters?

More specifically, was it fatal to be otherwise when the other side had just handed him the concessions he said he had been waiting for four years?

Those questions will remain unanswered at least until Kissinger writes a book that publishers are scrambling to pay him \$1 million for.

Also uncertain is what will happen Dec. 4, when Kissinger goes back to Paris, where the talks began four years ago in a dispute over the shape of the table.

---