

CONFUSION CLOUDS CHANCE OF VIET PEACE

By KENNETH J. FREED

WASHINGTON (AP) — Five weeks have passed since Henry A. Kissinger said "peace is at hand" in Vietnam. That passage of time seems to have brought only confusion and shadow about the real chance of a settlement.

The one thing that is clear is the war. It goes on much as it did before the Oct. 26 disclosure by the North Vietnamese and Kissinger of a nine-point tentative ceasefire agreement.

From Oct. 29 to Nov. 5, the last period for which figures are available, 27 U.S. servicemen died in action, 42 were wounded and nine confirmed taken as prisoners of war.

U.S. B52s resumed raids in North Vietnam and Hanoi's forces kept up steady pressure in the South. The United States counted a B52 among the 28

aircraft it lost in the fighting, the first time one of the giant bombers was shot down.

The fighting keeps on even though Kissinger coupled his peace-at-hand assessment with another saying an agreement could be reached in one more meeting with North Vietnamese negotiator Le Duc Tho, "lasting three or four days."

That meeting took place in Paris from Nov. 20 to Nov. 25 without a final agreement. The next step will be resumption of the Kissinger-Tho talks Monday.

HERE IS an account of some of the major changes and other developments between the Oct. 26 announcements and Kissinger's departure this weekend for Paris:

Almost immediately after Kissinger gave the American view to newsmen, Vietnam opened a dispute by saying there was no need for a new round of talks. Hanoi charged President Nixon with reneging on a promise to sign an accord by Oct. 31.

The United States denied such a promise and pledged not to be forced into a settlement that was not just. Hanoi said the United States should sign by the 31st or see the agreement fall.

The last day in October passed with Kissinger still in the United States. North Vietnam, however, did not break off the possibility of a settlement, although still insisting there was no need for a new meeting.

In the time from Oct. 26 to Oct. 31 the South Vietnamese started develop-

ing what became one of the most important aspects of the peace effort and made Saigon at times appear more of an adversary than Hanoi.

On Oct. 27 South Vietnamese President Nguyen Van Thieu said he would accept no ceasefire without a total withdrawal from his country of all Northern troops.

The following day Tran Van Lam, Saigon's foreign minister, added a call for re-establishment of the demilitarized zone at the 17th parallel.

NEITHER of these conditions is addressed directly in the tentative agreement.

Oct. 31 went by with no settlement, but U.S. officials began what continues to be the official line—they were confident an agreement would be reached soon.

About that time the military activity stepped up with the North Vietnamese and Viet Cong evidently trying to pick up as much territory and population control as possible in the event of a quick ceasefire.

The turn of the month also saw the outlines of the plan for an international commission to supervise a ceasefire. Canada, Poland, Hungary and Indonesia were asked to participate.

The B52 raids resumed in the North and on enemy concentrations below the DMZ. The United States also began increasing shipments of military supplies to South Vietnam to strengthen Saigon's forces to the fullest before a settlement.

By Nov. 5, a shift in Hanoi's thinking became public when Xuan Thuy, a leading North Vietnamese negotiator at the Paris peace talks, said his government was "not creating any difficulties about a further meeting."

He did warn that Hanoi would not accept any effort by Kissinger to negotiate substantive changes in the previous draft accord.

Within that same week Le Duc Tho sent a private signal that he was willing to meet Kissinger in Paris and American officials reported a belief that some substantive negotiations were acceptable to Hanoi.

NOV. 7 passed and President Nixon was overwhelmingly reelected. The next day the White House announced that Kissinger's deputy, Gen. Alexan-

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der Haig, was on his way to Saigon for a meeting with Thieu.

Haig carried a personal letter from Nixon as the United States sought to convince Thieu that Hanoi's refusal to pledge a troop withdrawal in writing would not endanger his regime.

American planes delivered another cargo to Vietnam that day—more than 2,000 tons of explosives dropped in a 40-mile by 130-mile area covering both sides of the DMZ.

Haig reported back to Nixon after two days of meetings with Thieu that the South Vietnamese president remained unconvinced on the troop withdrawal question.

On Nov. 16, the North Vietnamese announced that Le Duc Tho was returning to Paris. Still, in one of the heaviest air raids of the entire war, American military officials reminded the world that the fighting was continuing by sending 33 B52s and 300 other planes above the DMZ on Nov. 16.

THO ARRIVED in Paris Nov. 17. The White House followed in a few hours with the announcement that Kissinger would join him on Nov. 20.

American air strikes were reduced about the same time and so was the ground fighting, and U.S. officials in Washington denied that Kissinger ever intended to rule out further consultations with both South and North Viet-

nam after this round of talks in Paris.

The day the talks opened, the bombing picked up.

After six days, Kissinger and Tho recessed their talks until Dec. 4. The main problem remaining was Saigon's demand for a written pledge on a North Vietnamese troop withdrawal.

Kissinger, even though convinced Hanoi would never agree, is reported to have made the case on behalf of Saigon. Sources said he got Hanoi to agree to at least withdraw some of its forces. Kissinger then asked for the recess to confer with President Nixon on how to handle Thieu.

American officials said there were indications Hanoi could be expected to tie additional pullbacks to the rate of demobilization of the South Vietnamese army.

With Saigon's attitude crucial on this point, President Nixon decided about Nov. 24 to change his mind and meet with a personal representative of President Thieu, Nguyen Phu Duc.

THESE meetings were held Nov. 29 and 30 with Nixon described as saying Hanoi had gone as far as could be reasonably expected on the troop question.

There were no signs Duc was convinced, but there were signs the United States would not hold up an agreement any longer, and Kissinger prepared to leave for Paris and the Dec. 4 resumption of talks with Tho.