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Kissinger's Scenario

THE PAST WEEK cannot have been an easy one for Henry A. Kissinger, who as a professor sought to teach American negotiators a lesson about how to get along with allies whose fate was on the line.

Despite protestations by the administration that it has been consulting all along with the South Vietnamese as the Paris peace talks were conducted over their heads, the Thieu government has now made its unhappiness with the settlement crystal clear.

The meetings in Washington this week between President Nixon and President

Thieu's special emissary look like a final effort to avoid an open breach with an ally. Nguieu Phu Duc was received, although there were indications at first that he would not be. He was even received a second time although the President kept him cooling his heels for an hour.

So there should be no doubt that Kissinger had done the President's bidding, Mr. Nixon included his national security adviser in both meetings. Saigon's attempt to put Kissinger on the spot for allegedly going beyond presidential instructions was scotched.

One can only imagine what went on in these lengthy meetings but, given the signal being put out by the administration that the negotiations are on track, it seems pretty clear that Duc got the word that the time has come for Saigon to sign on. It also seems likely that Kissinger may have learned what Averell Harriman and Cyrus Vance learned before him in 1968: that negotiations with the ally can be a lot tougher than those with the adversary.

Kissinger had chided his predecessors at the peace table for allowing the breach with Saigon over the opening of negotiations to become public. In an article on the Vietnam negotiations written for Foreign Affairs just four years ago, Kissinger wrote:

"The public rift between Saigon and Washington compromised what had been achieved. To split Washington and Saigon had been a constant objective of Hanoi; if the Paris talks turn into an instrument to accomplish this, Hanoi will be tempted to use them for political warfare rather than for serious discussions."

Like the professor that he was, still comfortable as a sometime consultant but still a permanent outsider, Kissinger drew the wider implications elaborated in a properly academic footnote which looks strangely prophetic now.

"Clashes with our allies in which both sides claim to have been deceived occur so frequently as to suggest structural causes," he wrote. "When an issue is fairly ab-

stract — before there is a prospect for an agreement—our diplomats tend to present our view in a bland, relaxed fashion to the ally whose interests are involved but who is not present at the negotiations. The ally responds equally vaguely for three reasons: (a) he may be misled into believing that no decision is imminent and therefore sees no purpose in making an issue; (b) he is afraid that if he forces the issue the decision will go against him; (c) he hopes the problem will go away because agreement will prove impossible. When agreement seems imminent, American diplomats suddenly go into high gear to gain the acquiescence of the ally. He in turn feels tricked by the very intensity and suddenness of the pressure while we are outraged to learn of objections heretofore not made explicit. This almost guarantees that the ensuing controversy will take place under the most difficult conditions."

WHAT SEEMED so obviously curable from his Harvard vantage point must have looked considerably different a month after Kissinger himself had told the world that "peace is at hand" and found a reluctant Saigon putting it beyond reach. Merely to state the problem, clearly was not to solve it.

If he lacked a cure, however, he did lack decisiveness. In the same article Kissinger wrote: "Clearly, there is a point beyond which Saigon cannot be given a veto over negotiations." The lengthy meetings with Duc, the convening of the Joint Chiefs of Staff which occurs when decisions are imminent, even the suspension of troop cuts to permit orderly withdrawal within 60 days of the signing of an agreement, can be read as signs that that point has been reached.

Kissinger's article, which has been looked to as the outline for much of the scenario that has followed in the ensuing four years is not precise on what happens then. But officials here keep insisting that this is the final act.