

Logic of events remains on the side of a settlement

DEC 5 1972

WASHINGTON—"I had the illusion,"

Henry Kissinger said privately before leaving for Paris, "that maybe we could get through these peace negotiations without heartbreak, but that was probably expecting too much. The war has

been heart-breaking from the beginning."

The President's chief negotiator seems a little tired now—and no wonder. The smile is still there, but somewhat rueful. Yet he remains confident that he will get through the last hard bargaining phase and come out at last with an agreed cease-fire before too long.

Hard and mysterious

The negotiations have been hard and at times even mysterious. On occasion both the South and North Vietnamese officials have seemed to prefer vague language—almost meaningless to the Americans—to precise language which defined substantive progress for both sides. So the immediate outlook is for more intricate haggling. Le Duc Tho seems to be having almost as much trouble winning agreement from the Viet Cong as Kissinger is having with General Thieu.

Nevertheless, the logic of events remains on the side of a settlement. President Nixon has allowed the Paris negotiations to drag along, mainly because he does not want to give the impression that he is imposing an American diktat on Thieu. Nevertheless, it is being made clear to Thieu, with every passing session of the talks, that the President is not prepared to give Saigon a veto over a cease-fire compromise acceptable to the United States, and that, even if he did, the Congress would not vote the

James Reston

economic and military funds to carry on a war.

The ultimate sanction

In the end, this is, and always has been, Washington's ultimate sanction against Saigon. The President is still trying to avoid telling Thieu he is pulling out by a date certain or that he will sign the agreement with Hanoi even if Thieu refuses to do so, but the longer Thieu holds back, the more determined the President is to come to that decision. Ironically, Thieu's best hope of prolonging the negotiations and the war lies with Hanoi. For if the Hanoi regime insisted that Nixon deliver Thieu's signa-



Gen. Alexander Haig
Optimistic

ture before it would release the American prisoners of war, then there would be a real crisis. But it should be noted that Hanoi has never made Thieu's agreement a condition of carrying out the cease-fire agreement between North Vietnam and the Viet Cong; on the one side and the U.S. on the other.

Washington has always understood that ideally Saigon would want to see all North Vietnamese troops withdrawn to the north, but it is being emphasized here that, long before the Kissinger-Thieu compromise was reached in Paris last October, Nixon had made clear to Thieu that Washington was no longer insisting on the withdrawal of all North Vietnamese troops.

A fundamental difference

In other words, Washington recognizes that there is a fundamental difference now between Saigon's peace aims and Washington's peace aims. Thieu naturally wants to keep the Americans there until he gets all the North Vietnamese out, and longer if possible, but Nixon did not promise to fight until all of Thieu's objectives were achieved, but only until he had a "fair chance" to defend South Vietnam.

The administration here thinks the Kissinger-Thieu draft agreement provides that chance. It makes provision for a demilitarized zone "between the North and South, for the neutralization of Laos and Cambodia which were the supply routes for Hanoi, and there is also a demobilization provision and the promise of substantial reconstruction aid to both North and South Vietnam, if the terms of the cease-fire are respected.

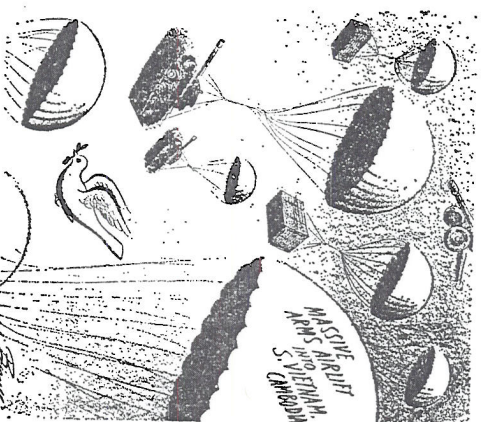
It is true of course, that these terms could be broken, but the point has been

made to Thieu that if he assumes bad faith and the breaking of the truce terms, then even if all the North Vietnamese troops were shipped North, Hanoi could start the war all over again. Even Gen. Haig, Kissinger's deputy, who assumes little good faith on either side of the war, is said to believe that North Vietnam has more to gain by accepting the cease-fire than by plotting to break it, and that even if it did, North Vietnam would have great difficulty in mounting a major successful offensive with the troops and supplies at its command against the much larger forces at Thieu's disposal.

The talk here now is of continuing roughly \$700 million a year of aid to Saigon and of a five-year \$2.5 billion reconstruction program for North Vietnam. Getting this amount of money out of the new Congress even after a cease-fire will not be easy, but without a cease-fire, it would be impossible.

©, New York Times Service

Through crowded skies



Bissell in The Nashville Tennessean