

# The Peace Dilemma

By Tom Wicker

IN THE NATION

Dr. Kissinger is home from Paris, but peace seems no more at hand than it ever was. Every report suggests, instead, that President Nixon is confronted with a three-pronged dilemma:

He can sign a separate agreement with Hanoi but without Saigon; it would be essentially the agreement detailed by Dr. Kissinger on Oct. 26.

He can find some means of pressuring President Thieu into signing that agreement.

Or he can abandon the agreement of Oct. 26.

Either of the first two choices would be more difficult for Mr. Nixon to take than may be commonly believed, and the difficulty is largely of his own making. It is that he has fought for four years a war of terrible cost in lives, dollars and national unity solely in order that the Thieu regime might have what he calls "a chance" to survive and thus avoid the blood bath of 500,000 or more executions that Mr. Nixon has repeatedly predicted.

The American people also have been told time and again that if they abandon an ally without making sure it had at least that "chance" to survive, they would be inviting opponents elsewhere to believe in American weakness and lack of purpose, thereby endangering the possibility of a "generation of peace."

So it will not now be easy for Mr. Nixon to announce that he will sign a separate agreement with Hanoi, when Saigon is trumpeting to the world that that agreement does not give it a chance to survive—since it would leave the North Vietnamese Army in South Vietnam, and admit both the Vietcong and non-Communist, but anti-Thieu, elements to some degree of political power in Saigon. Nor will it be easy for Mr. Nixon to force Saigon to accept the agreement unless he at least threatens such a separate agreement with Hanoi.

Signing a separate agreement with Hanoi, however, would be much the same thing as the unilateral withdrawal from the war that Mr. Nixon has resisted for four years of death and destruction. The Saigon regime, the greatest political strength of which has been the South Vietnamese people's belief that the United States would not let it be overthrown, could not long survive even the threat, much less the fact of such a withdrawal.

Of course, it would be harder still for Mr. Nixon to back away from the Oct. 26 agreement, now that peace has been proclaimed at hand; and if he did there is no certainty that the Democratic Congress would continue to finance the war. But an American spokesman in Paris suggested last

week the possibility that a breakdown of negotiations might yet be blamed on Hanoi; the Communist side, he said, was like "the high pressure salesman who tries to obtain immediate signature of an incomplete contract."

The effrontery of this approach is astonishing. On Oct. 26 Dr. Kissinger himself said that "what remains to be done is the smallest part of what has already been accomplished" and stressed that nothing remained but technical and drafting details. It seems reasonably clear that the United States, on behalf of South Vietnam, has reopened substantive questions that Dr. Kissinger described as settled on Oct. 26.

He said then: "The principal provisions were and are that a cease-fire would be observed in South Vietnam at a time to be mutually agreed upon. It would be a cease-fire in place." But it has developed that the negotiations are stuck on Saigon's insistence on either North Vietnamese withdrawal or concurrence in a declaration that the Saigon Government is sovereign throughout South Vietnam. Either way, the agreed-upon "cease-fire in place" would be negated.

Saigon also is said to be seeking modification of the so-called national council of reconciliation agreed to by Dr. Kissinger; it wants the non-Communist "third force" left out. But which force controls what territory in South Vietnam, and who is to have power—either all or a share of it—in Saigon are, and always have been, the major issues of the war. Even that same American spokesman conceded that the recent round of negotiations concentrated on "issues of central importance." Dr. Kissinger said on Oct. 26 that such issues had been settled—"and we give the assurance that we will stick by what we have negotiated and what we have achieved so laboriously."

He said then, too, that agreement had become possible, when it had not been in the preceding four years, because Hanoi had finally accepted the principle that the military issues should be settled first and that then "the two South Vietnamese parties shall settle together the internal matters of South Vietnam."

But everything so far learned about the negotiations since Oct. 26, and after Mr. Nixon's landslide re-election just twelve days later, suggest that if Hanoi has accepted that principle, Richard M. Nixon has not yet finally done so. He is still trying to arrange "the internal matters of South Vietnam" to Saigon's liking and his own political needs.