

Kissinger, a Most Unlikely Victim, Was Had

HENRY KISSINGER was had. There can be no other satisfactory explanation for his recanting in December the October announcement that peace in Vietnam was "at hand." He was not the first American negotiator to be doublecrossed by the communists and he probably will not be the last.

But he was the most unlikely of victims. A profound student of diplomatic history, brilliant both as a theorist and activist, experienced in dealing with the first-string communists of Moscow and Peking, he was nevertheless had by the second-string communists of Hanoi.

How it happened is not quite clear. His own explanation was puzzling. Consider one of the "problems" he said he encountered at the end of October after his peace-at-hand announcement: "It became apparent that there was in preparation a communist effort to launch an attack throughout South Vietnam to begin several days before the cease-fire would have been declared, and to continue for some weeks after the cease-fire came into being."

Quite a problem. He was about to sit down to clarify peace negotiations with representatives of a government which, he was convinced, planned to anticipate a cease-fire by mounting a big offensive and breaking the agreement by continuing the attack after the agreement was signed.

Yet Kissinger apparently hoped that the planners of this offensive could be persuaded to approach the task of completing negotiation of a peace treaty in a spirit of good will. This hope suggests a kind of naivete nobody would have imputed to Kissinger two months ago.

THE ALTERNATIVE explanation—that the original Kissinger announcement was a deliberate hoax intended to bolster President Nixon's campaign for reelection—is an article of faith to Sen. George McGovern and a few others. A defeated candidate is entitled to

his consolations, no doubt, but nobody else has to buy them.

It was Hanoi, not Washington, that first disclosed the terms of the October accords. Kissinger merely confirmed their existence. To believe that his confirmation was a last-minute campaign hoax, one must believe that Kissinger and the North Vietnamese conspired in the timing to assure Mr. Nixon's reelection. This is unbelievable.

The North Vietnamese have still another explanation for the breakdown of the Paris negotiations, more plausible but still not persuasive. They say that Kissinger reneged on the October agreement under pressure from President Thieu of South Vietnam and, by implication, President Nixon. Kissinger conceded in his recanting announcement that Thieu's objections to the October draft were considered. But he specifically denied that the offer of a cease-fire in place, permitting the North Vietnamese to leave troops in the South, was withdrawn. This had seemed to be Thieu's principal objection.

IT NOW APPEARS that the North Vietnamese insisted that the tentative October draft be signed immediately because it was vague enough to be subject to interpretation as recognizing all of Vietnam as a single entity, subject to unified administration, not divided at the DMZ between North and South, each sovereign in its own sphere at least until unification could be achieved by mutual consent. This was not Kissinger's interpretation and he thought it had not been Hanoi's either. And this was what he tried to clarify.

Thereupon the communists went into their pettifoggling, obfuscating, nerve-jangling act. Anyone who has ever seen this performance, even in a communist-infiltrated civic organization or union, must sympathize with Kissinger. After his October optimism, they had him set up for the double-cross.

As Clausewitz regarded war as an extension of politics by other means,

so the communists regard peace as an extension of war by other means. And the other means can be quite as hellish as war itself. They are still determined to take control of South Vietnam by fair means or foul, by force of arms or force of exhausting diplomacy.

THE ADMINISTRATION'S answer has been renewed and intensified bombing of the North and mining of harbors. The idea is to push diplomacy along by military means. It worked before to the extent of persuading the North Vietnamese not to continue their insistence that all American troops be withdrawn and Thieu be forced out of office as preconditions to negotiation.

If it is the right tactic now, then it was a mistake to discontinue the bombing as a gesture of good faith while the Paris negotiations were proceeding. The respite gave the North Vietnamese a chance to send troops part way South unhindered and to re-enforce their anti-aircraft defenses. They made the most of it, as the recent loss of B-52s has demonstrated.

Objections to the administration's course are starting and will build unless negotiations are promptly resumed. The plight of civilians caught in the bombing will be deplored. The argument will be made that years of off-and-on bombing having failed to produce peace and that more of the same will be equally unproductive.

The notion that the North Vietnamese have no breaking point has taken hold in this country. But it apparently has not affected the administration, perhaps because some of its members have read the book, "Khrushchev Remembers." One of the things the former Russian leader remembered is that Ho Chi Minh confided to fellow communists at the Geneva conference of 1954 that his resistance movement was "on the brink of collapse." It was saved, says Khrushchev, by the victory at Dienbienphu. Even so, the communists were happily surprised by the generosity of the settlement deal offered by the French.