

Excerpt from report of the Asia Information Group:

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The U.S. press continues to raise questions of whether the U.S. got major concessions from North Vietnam since the draft 9-point peace agreement was first announced on October 26th. Here's Jan Austen, with that story.

Austen: The excuse used by the United States for its refusal to sign the October peace agreement, for the repeated delays and for the massive bombing of Hanoi and Haiphong in December, was that important concessions were being wrested from North Vietnam. But the final agreement is, in all important respects, the October agreement. The concessions from North Vietnam did not materialize.

The main change from the revisions of the October agreement is the mention of the Demilitarized Zone. During the December negotiations Henry Kissinger was reported to have requested changes that would provide for a boundary between North and South Vietnam. The North Vietnamese were insistent that the agreement contain the principle that Vietnam is one country and that it is to be re-unified. The agreement contains these points. It also states, "The military demarcation line between the two zones at the 17th Parallel is only provisional and not a political or territorial boundary," as provided in the 1954 Geneva Agreement, and that North and South Vietnam shall promptly start negotiations with a view to re-establishing normal relations in various fields, including modalities of civilian movement across the provisional military demarcation line.

If there is any doubt that this does not represent a major concession from North Vietnam, New York Times correspondent Flora Lewis reports that in November North Vietnam's head delegate, Xuan Thuy, told her that North Vietnam would accept a military demarcation line as in the Geneva accords, providing that it would not become a political or territorial border.

Kissinger indicated in his January 24th press conference that a second concession concerned the question of the National Council of National Reconciliation and Concord which is to set up new elections in South Vietnam. Kissinger said that the final agreement leaves no ambiguity over whether the National Council might be a coalition government. However, in an interview in November, Xuan Thuy told The New York Times that the Council would not be a coalition government and that Kissinger's interpretation of the language on this point was quite correct.

In general the points which Kissinger claimed as concessions were very minor, particularly when compared to the demands which he was widely reported to have made in December.

On December 16th, for example, The New York Times reported [do not have in file], "Responsible officials have told The Times that the last round was unproductive because Mr. Kissinger raised a new element, to get Hanoi to agree in writing to either withdraw its forces from South Vietnam or at least acknowledge that they were there illegally, by conceding that the Saigon government has complete sovereignty over all of South Vietnam." Two days later the same Times reporter wrote [do not have in file], "A responsible official told The New York Times in Paris last week that the key issue was South Vietnam's insistence that Hanoi acknowledge in writing that there are two separate Vietnams, North and South, and that the Saigon government is sovereign over all of South Vietnam. This issue was raised by the U.S. on November 20th."

On the day of this New York Times report the U.S. began the saturation bombing of North Vietnam.

On the question of the sovereignty of the Thieu government, Kissinger reported that under the final agreement "the existing government in Saigon can remain in office." It can remain in office, but it is not sovereign over all of South Vietnam. The agreement states clearly that there are two parties, each with its own zone and its own army. A single government for the whole country will only come after general elections.

It appears then that the demands which Kissinger made in December were never met, even after the December bombing of Hanoi, and the concessions which he claims now to have won were actually available in November before he ever began his last rounds of meetings with the North Vietnamese.