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# An End to the War? Who Needs It?

By Gene La Rocque

WASHINGTON — Henry Kissinger's statement on the reasons for the failure of peace negotiations has made one thing perfectly clear. In the same way that we have been unable to explain the reason for American military involvement in South Vietnam, we are now unable to explain in precise detail the type of peace we are seeking. We ought not blame Mr. Kissinger or his fellow negotiator from North Vietnam for failure to achieve peace in Southeast Asia. The fact is that none of the combatants has compelling reasons to end the war at this time.

First of all, consider the war from the point of view of President Thieu. He cannot accept a treaty which might endanger his administration. An agreement permitting thousands of North Vietnamese regular soldiers to remain indefinitely in South Vietnam would be evidence that his political and military control was not complete. With over a million troops under his command and huge stockpiles of munitions he could continue fighting for a long

time even after a cease-fire. No peace and continued fighting is less risky to his position as chief of state.

In light of President Nixon's reassurances, South Vietnam can count on military support, but only if war continues. Signs of weakness or a peace treaty would surely be a precursor of the termination of American military assistance. It is clearly in the interests of President Thieu to continue the war.

For Premier Pham Van Dong of North Vietnam, there is no reason to stop fighting. Reverting once again to sapper tactics against military installations hurts the U.S. and South Vietnam forces physically and psychologically at very little cost to North Vietnam.

North Vietnam retains the initiative and can expand military efforts as it wishes. The North Vietnamese have demonstrated a willingness to negotiate, and supplies from Russia and China continue to be received in adequate quantities to continue the fight.

Although the U.S. Navy blockade has made life more difficult, it is bearable. Bombing of North Vietnam may be increased, but it can be little worse than previously. And it is highly un-

likely that the U.S. would accept the opprobrium attached to outright devastation of Hanoi, Haiphong or the deltas. There are not many other targets left.

The U.S. game plan is limited to a continuation of aerial attacks and blockade of coasts, both of which the Vietnamese feel they can continue to accept.

Although overshadowed by the emphasis placed on North Vietnamese troops by Saigon and the United States, the National Liberation Front's attitude closely parallels that of the North Vietnamese. They, too, see no reason to accede to U.S. peace demands which would leave their twenty-year war unwon and many of their supporters in South Vietnamese jails while President Thieu's power remains undiminished.

From President Nixon's point of view, there is also little reason to stop the war. U.S. battle casualties are almost zero. The less than 27,000 servicemen still in Vietnam create almost no problems at home, and the bombing of the North maintains pressure at comparatively little cost in American lives.

Internationally, U.S. reputation has been enhanced by demonstrated willingness to bargain with the North Vietnamese in Paris. Improved relations with the Chinese and the Soviets followed by new trade agreements have virtually neutralized the two most likely problem areas. Although China and the U.S.S.R. will continue to provide munitions of war for North Vietnam, they can be expected to limit supplies to levels making major and sustained North Vietnamese attacks unlikely. The U.S. has no need to initiate major new offensives in Vietnam, and hence the public will remain apathetic.

President Nixon can break the endless stalemate by exercising the flexibility which only the U.S. has in the Vietnam conflict as the one combatant for whom the war is less than a struggle for existence. What is required is an act of moral leadership based on the clear truth that American national interests are served by peace in Vietnam.

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John Bryson/Rainie Guillemette



Vietnam News Agency

*A Vietcong prisoner and an American prisoner (identified as Ralph William Galati)*