

## Vietnam Agreement . . .

The Vietnam settlement, which will bring an end to American participation in a war that has wracked the United States for nearly a decade and could even conceivably bring peace to Indochina after a quarter-century of hostilities, is a diplomatic triumph that will be welcomed by the people of America and of every other nation in the civilized world.

Although, as Henry Kissinger pointed out in his remarkable television performance yesterday, the agreement is full of ambiguities, its most important aspects from the American point of view are reassuringly unambiguous. These are the sections which provide for the release of American prisoners of war throughout Indochina to United States governmental representatives in Hanoi within sixty days of the signing and for the concurrent safe withdrawal of remaining American troops from South Vietnam under an internationally supervised cease-fire. Although the number of foreign observers is to be substantially less than the United States had originally sought, their responsibilities and mode of operation have been spelled out in a manner which should at least lessen the uncertainties of a formidable task.

The achievement of these essential conditions can only earn the approval and applause of every American, to say nothing of America's many friends abroad who have long waited for this historic moment.

Beyond the immediate cease-fire and early withdrawal of United States troops and prisoners, however, the prospects for a more enduring peace in Indochina remain, in the word ascribed to President Nixon yesterday, "fragile." Ambiguity abounds in the pact's provisions for resolution of the political problem in South Vietnam, which, as Mr. Kissinger candidly observed, was "what the civil war is all about." The proposed Council of Reconciliation in South Vietnam seems more tenuous than ever; and the rule of unanimity under which it is to act bodes ill for any kind of effective political progress, much less "reconciliation."

Failure to resolve this fundamental political problem was unavoidable since, as Mr. Kissinger noted, "it is not easy to achieve through negotiations what has not been achieved on the battlefield." But there may be ground for hope that a people who have suffered through a generation of fraternal bloodletting will, when left to their own devices, at last seek a peaceful resolution of their differences. Much will depend on the willingness of the United States and other involved big powers to honor President Nixon's plea for mutual restraint.

The question will doubtless be debated for years whether the settlement that was finally hammered into completion this week could not have been achieved, at least in its essential details, four years ago—or even last October when Hanoi and Mr. Kissinger outlined an agreement that does not appear to differ in major degree from the one that was made public yesterday. There is plenty of ground for skepticism over President Nixon's assertion that this accord represents "peace with honor" in contrast to every other kind of peace that might have been achieved during the past four years, or months.

But everyone will agree that it is more honorable to end the fighting than to continue a conflict that has brought so much suffering to the people of Indochina for ill-defined purposes that have little relevance, if any, to American interests in the contemporary world. In that sense it is a "right kind of peace," deserving support in the hope that its calculated ambiguities can be transformed in time into the reality of an enduring settlement.

## . . . Motivations . . .

An offhand quip by Mr. Kissinger at yesterday's briefing may well turn into the most revealing and provocative of all his remarks about the final phases of President Nixon's war policy in Vietnam. Asked whether twelve days of saturation bombing of North Vietnam's cities and countryside early this month provided the final impetus to the agreement, the Presidential adviser wisely declined "to speculate on North Vietnamese motives." Then he added, "I have too much trouble analyzing our own."

Mr. Kissinger is not alone in puzzling over what past weeks of delay and combat have been designed to achieve. Only a detailed parsing of the various drafts at each stage of the negotiations will prove just what was conceded by whom, and when.

Mr. Nixon errs in thinking, as he said Monday night, that the nation will now understand why the Chief Executive had to keep silent during all the weeks of final and horrendous combat. Congress and citizens alike still have the right to a fuller explanation of why this ruinous war had to be waged so long and so bitterly after peace was declared at hand.

## . . . and the Kissinger Role

In his impressive account yesterday of how agreement was reached on the war in Vietnam, Henry A. Kissinger observed almost parenthetically that "no one in the war has had a monopoly of anguish and . . . no one in these debates has had a monopoly of moral insight." If there was a defensive note in the comment, there need not have been; for Mr. Kissinger, emerging from his long ordeal of negotiation, clearly deserves the respect and admiration of the country.

Whatever the flaws in the agreement—and there are many—whatever the disappointments that may come—and they may be great—Mr. Kissinger must be credited not only with skill and tenacity as a negotiator but with a calm and detached perseverance under merciless cross-fire from every direction. He can say now that the North Vietnamese, when they are not disposed to settle, are "the most difficult people to negotiate with" that he has ever encountered. But he cannot yet admit to the complex pressures to which he was simultaneously subjected by Washington and Saigon, or complain publicly of the castigation that came his way at the same time from anti-war and pro-war segments of American public opinion. It is to his lasting credit that he remained steadfast "through peaks and valleys in these negotiations of extraordinary intensity."

Some Americans felt, in their deep and understandable resentment of the December bombing of North Vietnam, that Mr. Kissinger should have abandoned his mission in protest rather than appear to endorse so appalling an action. He chose to stay on and ride out that episode in the hope of returning to the negotiating table when the time was ripe. He is now entitled to the nation's gratitude for a job which few would have had the courage to undertake and none would have done better.