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OUTLOOK

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VIETNAM: A LONG WAY FROM PEACE

By Frances FitzGerald

Miss FitzGerald's book on the Vietnam war, "Fire in the Lake," was published last year. This article was written for Newsday.

*"The truce in Vietnam cannot last more than a few months:
It must end either with the renewal of hostilities or with the
beginning of a political contest that, grounded in the
realities of Vietnamese politics, can eventually lead to peace."*

LAST WEDNESDAY Dr. Henry Kissinger took two hours on national television to explain the document known as the "Paris Agreement on Ending the War and Restoring the Peace in Vietnam." In those two hours of explication, clarification and detailed textual analysis, two questions remained unasked and unanswered: Is the Vietnam war over, and if so, who has won it?

The questions were perhaps too dangerous. For as Kissinger spoke, it became evident that the changes that he had negotiated between October and January had all been designed for the purpose of avoiding a U.S. commitment on the central issue of the war. The "clarifications" he sought and obtained were in fact more perfect ambiguities—phrases cut and polished to complete opacity.

If the agreement is meant to end the war, then the great victory of the United States is to have denied all responsibility for its outcome. The United States will have left the war as it entered it, closing the circle of deception around its stated aim of "self-determination for the Vietnamese." If the administration wants peace, it will slowly allow that phrase to become the truth. Meanwhile, it is impossible to tell what the United States will do, for the intentions of the administration remain buried within the deception.

In principle, at least, the Paris agreement opens up a wide and clear path to peace. The first sentence reads: "The United States and all other countries respect the independence, sovereignty, unity and territorial integrity of Vietnam." Subsequent articles state that the "South Vietnamese people shall decide themselves the political future of South Vietnam through genuinely free and democratic general elections," and that the reunification of Vietnam shall be carried out step by step

through peaceful negotiations between North and South.

These sentences would seem to indicate that the United States had agreed to the main principles of the Geneva agreement that it refused to sign in 1954—thus repudiating two decades of U.S. policy in Vietnam and removing the major cause of the war. The accords, however, do not guarantee this. According to the text, the principal signatories undertake responsibility only for the military aspect of the settlement; the United States and North Vietnam agree merely to cease hostilities and to implement a cease-fire in place between two nameless "South Vietnamese parties."

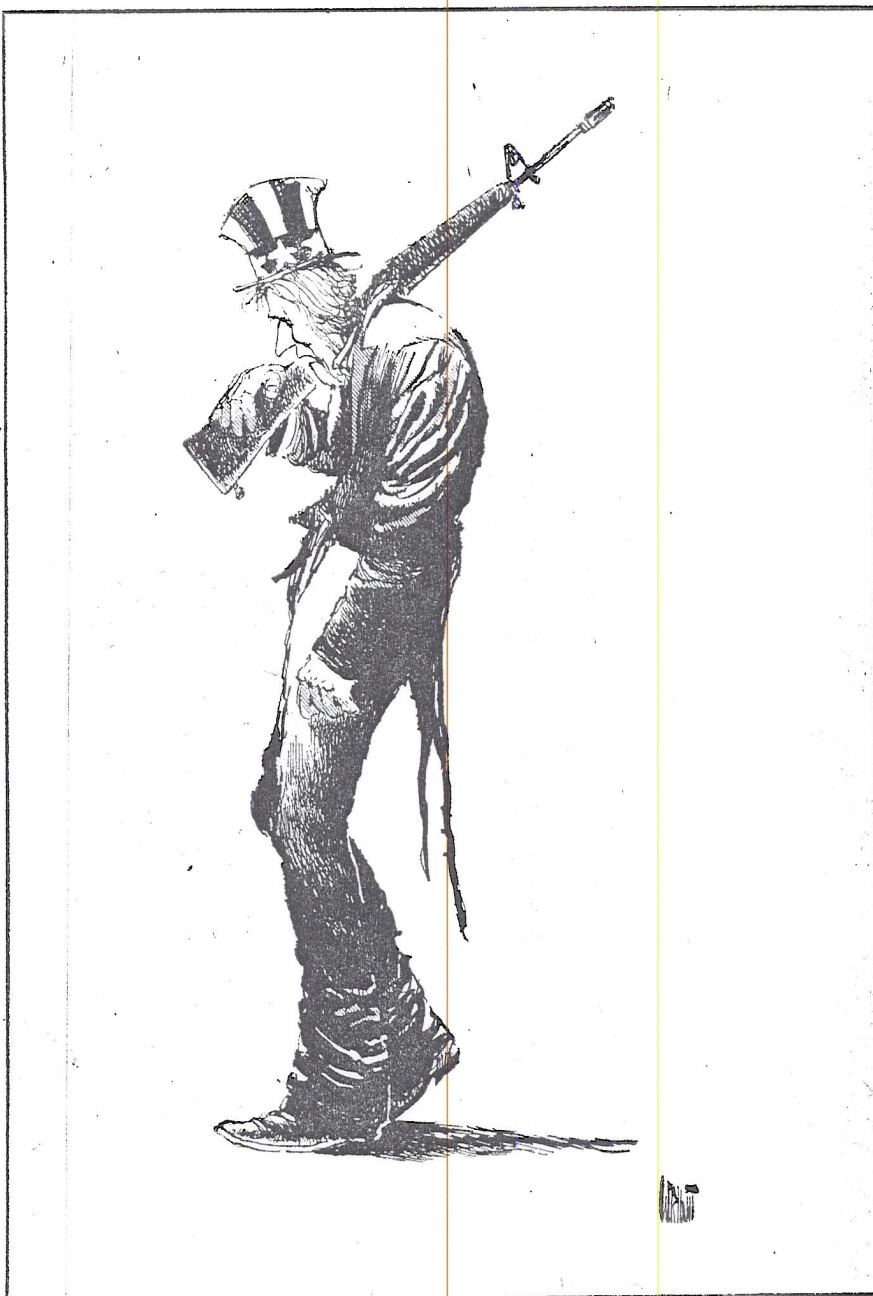
A Brief, Fragile Truce

WHILE THE AGREEMENT represents an advance over the attempt of both sides to obliterate each other, it is a truce rather than a peace. And, as was not the case in Korea, it is a truce that by its very nature must be both fragile and short-lived. In strict military terms it is almost impossible to maintain a cease-fire along lines as numerous and as complicated as those drawn across the face of Vietnam. Then, in a war that is at base a political struggle, even a cease-fire does not constitute a standstill, for life-like politics—continues even though the killing stops.

As a result, the truce in Vietnam cannot last more than a few months: It must end either with the renewal of hostilities or with the beginning of a political contest that, grounded in the realities of Vietnamese politics, can eventually lead to peace.

The choice would seem clear enough. But it is not. For in order to maintain the deception of the U.S. role, the Nixon administration has managed to make the second path as difficult as possible for the Vietnamese.

See VIETNAM, Page B5



Wright in The Miami News

"When Johnny comes marching home again, hurrah, hurrah . . ."

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VIETNAM, From Page B1

The accord it has negotiated leaves the responsibility for working out a political settlement in the South to two parties, neither of which recognizes the existence of the other and only one of which can possibly benefit from it.

Looked at in the abstract, the text of the accord would indicate that there are two South Vietnamese parties of relatively equal stature. But that is not the case. The "parties" differ in size, but more important, they do not even belong to a single class, like apples and oranges. They are qualitatively different, like apples and theorems. One of them, the PRG (Provisional Revolutionary Government), is a political party with a relatively small military force, even including the North Vietnamese troops, but with strong roots in the countryside of the South. The other is a product of the American pacification of Vietnam, a vast military administration containing most of the draft-age men without a political direction except the vague negative of anti-communism.

Drawing all of its support from the United States, the Saigon regime has no responsibility to its own people and no coherent interest except in maintaining the flow of American aid. It occupies the country rather than governs it. And since the success of this occupation depends largely on the use of its great weaponry to keep the population concentrated in a few places and locked in a state of economic dependency on the United States, any reduction in the use of force must serve only to erode it—and by comparison, at least, to strengthen the PRG.

Fighting to Survive

SINCE THE announcement of the draft accord in October, the Thieu regime has done nothing but resist any language that would fall short of giving it complete sovereignty over South Vietnam. In the future it can be counted on to resist any and all steps that would lead the country toward a permanent end to the fighting. With the three months of grace that President Nixon allowed him, Thieu has already

promulgated new laws that in effect suspend the American-style constitution of the regime and with it most of its civil liberties—including the right to buy pieces of blue cloth that might be sewn into the flag of the PRG.

Saigon has made an extensive series of arrests, filling its already crowded jails with people who might be expected to take an independent political stance. Once the cease-fire is declared, its energies will be concentrated on preventing the mass of refugees from returning to their land in the PRG-controlled zones, so long made unlivable by the bombing. Its efforts will also go into discovering, provoking or inventing cease-fire violations by the other side in an attempt to bring the United States back into the war.

Unless pressured by the United States, Saigon will refuse to make any form of political agreement that gives the PRG or any other group a share of power; it will resist the demobilization of its troops, and it will oppose every single provision for the achievement of "national reconciliation" contained in the accord. And it will do so not for mysterious Oriental reasons—not irrationally—but because its very survival depends on maintaining the state of hostility. Without that one unifying principle, the regime would burst open like a ripe fruit, releasing people of every political group from Catholics to Cao Daists to Buddhists—but mainly a mass of uncommitted people who might provide recruits to the PRG.

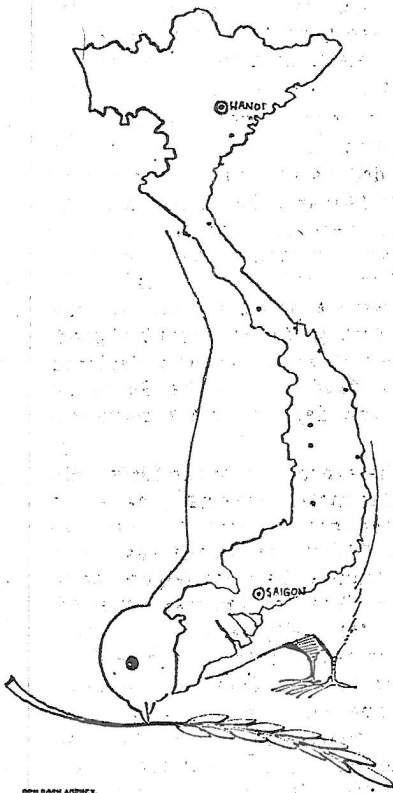
No Quick Takeover

THE PRG CAN BE expected to take the opposite stance for similarly practical reasons. Its line—already announced to the Vietnamese—is that it favors reconciliation and concord, that it has worked for peace (alongside

North Vietnam) while the Thieu government has resisted it. In the next three months it will certainly press for a restitution of all those freedoms spelled out in the accord, most particularly freedom of movement from zone to zone and freedom for political prisoners (the vast majority of whom are held by the Saigon regime). It will press for demobilization and the holding of elections within the framework of a Council of National Reconciliation and Concord.

Contrary to the fears expressed by U.S. officials, both the PRG and Hanoi will do their best to prevent truce violations by their own forces. In fact, since the United States can blame any truce violation on them in the expectation of credence by the American public, they will attempt even to obscure minor violations by the troops of the Saigon government. The PRG will do so because, as a political organization with a relatively small military force, the transition from a military to a political conflict can only favor their cause, even if it means confusion and the emergence of new political parties in the short run.

In the near future—that is, for the next several years—the aim of the PRG is not, as Americans and Saigonese officials claim, to replace the Thieu regime and take over the government of the South. As Pham Van Dong, the North Vietnamese prime minister, said in a recent interview: "The political situation in the South is such that one must have a government that reflects the realities. You must realize that war in the South has meant that an entire generation has known no other way of life. There has been terrible suffering in every family. No one has been spared. Families are divided, father on one side, son on the other.



NEW YORK AGENCY.

LaGrilliere in De Nieuwe Gazet, Antwerp

Those are the realities. One must now try to abolish those divisions and not by imposing our will. That's why national reconciliation is paramount."

An Ungovernable Country

TO BELIEVE Pham Van Dong it is not necessary to believe that the PRG and the North Vietnamese are more humanitarian than any other group in their country. It is merely to believe that they understand their country. After 13 years of a major war, South Vietnam has become ungovern-

able—a mass of refugees, an ecological disaster and a catalog of social and economic ills. Those who pushed—or are pushed—into taking responsibility for this anarchy are bound to be repudiated in the long run, be they as wise and well-intentioned as the angel Gabriel. At the moment, therefore, the PRG wishes merely to call into question the dominance of the Thieu regime and to set into motion the political process which, as Marxists, they are confident will end with the victory of their particular revolution.

Since Hanoi will back the PRG in this endeavor, there remains only one party to the accord whose intentions are not entirely predictable, and that is the United States government. What does Mr. Nixon want?

The answer to that question may not be known for certain for several months. If Mr. Nixon wants a continuation of the war, that is easy. He need only accuse the PRG or Hanoi of a violation of the accords and resume the American bombardment of Vietnam—a move that no International Control Commission in this world can prevent. Alternatively, he has the option to declare the "truce violations" a matter for settlement between the two "South Vietnamese parties" and continue to fuel the conflict without American aid while disassociating himself from the results of the struggle.

But if Mr. Nixon wants peace—peace with honor or peace with mustard or just plain peace—he has to force the Thieu regime step by step all the way down the road toward its own dissolution. For only its dissolution will provide the condition for a peaceful settlement and restore meaning to that long ill-used phrase, "self-determination for the South Vietnamese."