

10/25/72

PS	FILE	SUBJ.
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10/72		

MAX FRANKEL, NEW YORK TIMES:

WASHINGTON -- THE PEACE TERMS FOR INDOCHINA THAT ARE NOW UNDER SUCH ACTIVE DISCUSSION HAVE BEEN VARIOUSLY DEFINED BY HANOI AND SAIGON, BUT WASHINGTON REMAINS SILENT, AS IF IT WERE A MEDIATOR RATHER THAN A PARTY TO THE WAR. INDEED, MEDIATION MAY BE HENRY KISSINGER'S ESSENTIAL ROLE AT THIS POINT AS HE SEEKS A CEASE-FIRE AND EXIT FOR THE UNITED STATES, WITH OR WITHOUT A PROMISING DEAL ON THE POLITICAL FUTURE OF SOUTH VIETNAM.

IT IS NOW TACITLY ACKNOWLEDGED HERE THAT THE NORTH VIETNAMESE GAVE MR. KISSINGER ENOUGH ENCOURAGEMENT, AFTER HE EXCHANGED CONCESSIONS WITH THEM, TO PRODUCE THE HARD-SELL GATHERING OF AMERICAN OFFICIALS THIS WEEK IN THE SAIGON OFFICE OF PRESIDENT NGUYEN VAN THIEU OF SOUTH VIETNAM.

IT IS ALSO EVIDENT FROM MR. THIEU'S REPORT TO HIS PEOPLE THAT HE IS UNHAPPY WITH THE PROSPECTS, UNRECONCILED TO THE PROPOSED POLITICAL DEAL BUT FEARFUL THAT AN UNDESIRABLE CEASE-FIRE MAY NOW -- "UNFORTUNATELY," AS HE PUT IT -- OCCUR.

WHAT WOULD BE WRONG ABOUT A CEASE-FIRE? IN MR. THIEU'S CALCULATION, THE APPARENT INTENTION OF THE UNITED STATES TO LEAVE 200,000 NORTH VIETNAMESE TROOPS IN SOUTH VIETNAM WHILE AMERICAN FORCES END THEIR BOMBING AND GO HOME FOR GOOD, THEIR PRISONERS IN TOW.

IT MAY BE THAT MR. KISSINGER KNOWS BETTER -- THAT HE HAS A PROMISE OR AN INDICATION THAT HANOI INTENDS TO RECALL ITS FORCES AND WELL AND LET THE VIETCONG TAKE THEIR CHANCES ON POLITICAL COMPETITION AGAINST THEIR ADVERSARIES. HAVING NEVER ACKNOWLEDGED THE "INVASION" OF SOUTH VIETNAM, HANOI MAY NEVER WISH TO ACKNOWLEDGE ANY WITHDRAWAL.

BUT UNTIL THE NIXON ADMINISTRATION CLARIFIES THE POINT, THERE IS AT LEAST SOME GROUND FOR PRESIDENT THIEU'S CONCERN. THE CONCEPT OF A "MUTUAL" WITHDRAWAL OF FORCES FROM SOUTH

VIETNAM DISAPPEARS FROM THE AMERICAN NEGOTIATING RANGE SOMETIME

THERE THE QUESTION HANGS. PREMIER PHAM VAN DONG FORESEES  
"TWO ARMIES AND TWO ADMINISTRATIONS" IN SOUTH VIETNAM,  
WHILE THE SAIGON AND VIETCONG FORCES STRUGGLE FOR POLITICAL  
POWER FROM THE TERRITORIES UNDER THEIR RESPECTIVE CONTROL.  
THAT IMPLIES THE BACKING OF HANOI'S ARMY FOR THE VIETCONG,  
AND PRESIDENT THIEU FEARS THAT HE IS BEING FORCED INTO A CONTEST  
AGAINST AN ARMY THAT HE HAS HELD AT BAY BUT NEVER DEFEATED EVEN  
WITH THE MASSIVE AERIAL SUPPORT OF THE UNITED STATES.

FOUR YEARS AGO, NEGOTIATIONS FOR THE JOHNSON ADMINISTRATION  
CONTENDED THAT NORTH VIETNAMESE FORCES WERE BEING MOVED  
OUT OF SOUTH VIETNAM, AT LEAST TO NEARBY LAOS AND CAMBODIA,  
TO PROMOTE A CEASE-FIRE. ACCORDINGLY, PRESIDENT NIXON'S  
ORIGINAL PEACE TERMS CONTAINED A DEMAND THAT ALL OF HANOI'S  
TROOPS MUST RETURN ALL THE WAY HOME, TO NORTH VIETNAM.

A PARTIAL WITHDRAWAL MAY AGAIN BE UNDER DISCUSSION NOW.  
PRESIDENT THIEU SAID TODAY THAT UNDER A "SERIOUS CEASE-FIRE,"  
THE NORTH VIETNAMESE MUST GO HOME TO THE NORTH, NOT JUST WITHDRAW  
TO LAOS AND CAMBODIA, FROM WHERE THEY COULD STRIKE AGAIN OR,  
IN ANY CASE, INFILTRATE AND RESUPPLY THE VIETCONG.

THIS QUESTION, AND NOT JUST THE NATURE OF A FUTURE  
COALITION GOVERNMENT IN SAIGON, APPEARS TO HAVE BEEN NEAR THE  
CENTER OF MR. KISSINGER'S ARGUMENTS WITH MR. THIEU. THE  
SOUTH VIETNAMESE PRESIDENT SAID AGAIN THAT HE MIGHT STEP ASIDE FOR  
ANOTHER POLITICAL PROCESS IF THE VIETCONG WERE LEFT TO FEND  
FOR THEMSELVES AND WITH THE PROMISE OF NO MORE THAN A 10 PER  
CENT OF SHARE OF POWER, AS HE ARGUES THEY DESERVE. BUT A NEW  
PROCESS WHILE HANOI'S TROOPS REMAIN POISED, HE ARGUED, WOULD BE  
TO "IMPOSE" COMMUNIST CONTROL ON MUCH OF HIS COUNTRY, AS PRESIDENT  
NIXON HAS PROMISED HE WOULD NEVER DO...

JAMES RESTON: 10/25/72

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WASHINGTON -- THE MAIN POINT NOW IN THIS SENSITIVE PHASE OF THE VIETNAM PEACE TALKS IS TO GET AS SECURE A CEASE-FIRE AS POSSIBLE, GUARANTEED BY THE UNITED STATES, THE SOVIET UNION AND CHINA, AND THEN A LONG PAUSE TO GIVE TIME FOR REALLY CAREFUL AND PRIVATE NEGOTIATIONS. IT WILL NOT BE EASY BUT IT IS THE FIRST PRIORITY.

A FINAL SETTLEMENT CANNOT BE ARRANGED NOW. EVEN AN INTERIM AGREEMENT TO STOP THE FIGHTING CANNOT BE NEGOTIATED IN THE HEADLINES OF THE WORLD'S PRESS DURING THE FINAL DAYS OF AN AMERICAN ELECTION CAMPAIGN, PARTICULARLY IF IT IS CONTINGENT ON DOZENS OF CONTRADICTIONARY DEMANDS BY SAIGON AND HANOI, WHICH WILL TAKE MONTHS OF HARD BARGAINING TO RESOLVE.

THE FIRST THING IS TO STOP THE KILLING UNDER CONDITIONS THAT WILL NOT GIVE EITHER GENERAL THIEU'S SOUTH VIETNAMESE NATIONALISTS OR THE SOUTH VIETNAMESE NATIONALISTS OR THE SOUTH VIETNAMESE COMMUNISTS ANY SPECIAL MILITARY ADVANTAGE, AND MEANWHILE TO STOP THE FLOW OF ARMS FROM MOSCOW AND PEKING TO HANOI AND FROM THE UNITED STATES TO SAIGON.

NOTHING IN THE RECENT LIVELY PHASE OF THE NEGOTIATIONS SUGGESTS THAT THIS IS YET IN THE CARDS, BUT HANOI AND SAIGON ARE AT LEAST TALKING PUBLICLY ABOUT A CEASE-FIRE, AND THIS RECALLS AN OFFER PRESIDENT NIXON MADE ON OCT. 12, 1970, WHEN HE SEEMED TO REALIZE, AS OTHERS ARE DOING NOW, THAT PEACE PROBABLY HAD TO BE NEGOTIATED, NOT ALL AT ONCE, BUT IN STAGES.

A LOT HAS HAPPENED SINCE THEN IN THIS TRAGIC WAR, AND IN THE RELATIONS BETWEEN WASHINGTON AND MOSCOW AND PEKING. WHAT HE OFFERED THEN WAS NOT ACCEPTABLE TO HANOI, AND SINCE HANOI'S LATEST MILITARY OFFENSIVE HAS FAILED, MAYBE MR. NIXON IS NO LONGER INTERESTED IN HIS CEASE-FIRE TERMS OF 1970. BUT THE PRINCIPLES HE DEFINED THEN MAY BE WORTH RECALLING NOW.

"FIRST," HE SAID, "I PROPOSE THAT ALL ARMED FORCES THROUGHOUT INDOCHINA CEASE FIRING THEIR WEAPONS AND REMAIN IN THE POSITIONS

HE ASKED THAT THIS CEASE-FIRE BE SUPERVISED BY NORTH AND SOUTH VIETNAM AND BY INTERNATIONAL OBSERVERS; THAT IT FORBID A BUILD-UP OF ARMS ON EITHER SIDE IN ALL OF INDOCHINA; THAT IT SHOULD COVER ALL MILITARY ACTIVITY FROM BOMBING TO TERRORISM; AND FINALLY, THAT THIS SUPERVISED CEASE-FIRE SHOULD BE PRELIMINARY TO NEGOTIATIONS FOR A FINAL SETTLEMENT OF THE WAR.

ALSO, HE SUGGESTED THAT AFTER A CEASE-FIRE HE WOULD ACCEPT A SOLUTION THAT REFLECTED THE "EXISTING RELATIONSHIP OF POLITICAL FORCES" IN THE SOUTH VIETNAMESE COUNTRYSIDE.

THIS WAS INTERPRETED BY THE WHITE HOUSE SPOKESMAN AT THAT TIME AS MEANING THAT THE ADMINISTRATION WOULD BE WILLING TO STOP THE FIGHTING AND LEAVE POLITICAL CONTROL TO THE MILITARY FORCES IN COMMAND OF THE TERRITORY THEY HELD.

IN OTHER WORDS, IF THERE WAS A MILITARY STALEMATE, THERE SHOULD BE A POLITICAL COMPROMISE ON THE CONTROL OF TERRITORY. HE DID NOT SAY THAT A "CEASE-FIRE IN PLACE" SHOULD PERMIT THE ORGANIZED NORTH VIETNAMESE REGIMENTS AND DIVISIONS, AMOUNTING NOW TO 200,000 MEN, TO REMAIN IN SOUTH VIETNAM, AND THIS IS STILL ONE OF THE IMPORTANT UNSETTLED QUESTIONS.

IN THAT PROPOSAL, PRESIDENT NIXON RECOGNIZED THE DIFFICULTIES AND DANGERS, WHICH EVERYBODY IS POINTING OUT NOW IN THE CHANGED CIRCUMSTANCES OF LATE 1972.

"A CEASEFIRE IN PLACE WOULD UNDOUBTEDLY CREATE A HOST OF PROBLEMS IN ITS MAINTENANCE. BUT IT'S ALWAYS EASIER TO MAKE WAR THAN TO MAKE A TRUCE. TO BUILD AN HONORABLE PEACE, WE MUST ACCEPT THE CHALLENGE OF LONG AND DIFFICULT NEGOTIATIONS."

THIS OBVIOUSLY LEAVES OUT OF ACCOUNT A WHOLE THICKET OF DEMANDS AND COUNTER-DEMANDS BY SAIGON AND HANOI, BUT AT SOME POINT IN THIS TRAGEDY THERE HAS TO BE A DECISION ON PRIORITIES, AND THERE IS SOME EVIDENCE THAT THE PRESIDENT IS NOW PUTTING PRESSURE ON BOTH NORTH AND SOUTH VIETNAM TO AGREE TO A CONTROLLED CEASE-FIRE, HOLD THE BALANCE OF POWER, AND GIVE TIME FOR A CAREFUL AND QUIET SETTLEMENT LATER ON...

WELL, NOBODY KNOWS IN THIS CAPITAL THESE DAYS BECAUSE --  
AND THIS IS THE HEART OF THE WASHINGTON PROBLEM -- THERE IS  
MISTRUST IN THE PRESIDENT BECAUSE HE TRUSTS NO MAN, EVEN MANY  
OF THE MEN IN HIS OWN OFFICIAL FAMILY.

NEVERTHELESS, THERE IS REASON FOR BELIEVING THAT HE IS NOW  
PRESSING FOR A CEASE-FIRE, URGING BOTH SAIGON AND HANOI TO MAKE  
COMPROMISES TO END THE KILLING, AND LEAVE THE FINAL SETTLEMENT  
FOR LATER. IF THIS IS TRUE, HE DESERVES TIME TO PROVE HIS POINT,  
FOR THE MAIN THING IS TO GET THIS UNSPEAKABLE WAR BEHIND US AND  
GO ON TO THE DECENT AND HONORABLE WORK OF THE REPUBLIC.

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