

## 'Surprise blow' from the Corriere della Sera (27 October 1972)

**Caption:** On 27 October 1972, Italian daily newspaper Corriere della Sera gives an account of the difficulties surrounding negotiations on the declaration of a cease fire in Vietnam.

**Source:** Corriere della Sera. dir. de publ. Ottone, Piero. 27.10.1972, n° 239; anno 97. Milano: Corriere della Sera. "Colpo a sorpresa", auteur:Stille, Ugo , p. 1; 2.

**Copyright:** (c) Translation CVCE.EU by UNI.LU

All rights of reproduction, of public communication, of adaptation, of distribution or of dissemination via Internet, internal network or any other means are strictly reserved in all countries.

Consult the legal notice and the terms and conditions of use regarding this site.

**URL:**

[http://www.cvce.eu/obj/surprise\\_blow\\_from\\_the\\_corriere\\_della\\_sera\\_27\\_october\\_1972-en-8b3e0273-043b-419f-b33e-5a053506ceb6.html](http://www.cvce.eu/obj/surprise_blow_from_the_corriere_della_sera_27_october_1972-en-8b3e0273-043b-419f-b33e-5a053506ceb6.html)

**Last updated:** 06/07/2016



## Surprise blow

From our own correspondent

New York, 26 October

Peace in Vietnam is 'at hand', in the words used today by Henry Kissinger, but achieving that peace depends on a final, delicate negotiation that will require great wisdom and skill on the part of the American government, which is now subject to conflicting pressures from Hanoi and Saigon.

This is the stage reached this evening at the end of a day which, beginning dramatically with the 'bombshell' of today's revelations from Hanoi, saw an intense series of meetings between President Nixon and his White House advisers and a lengthy press briefing given by Kissinger.

Hanoi's decision to make public the content of the agreements reached in Paris by the United States and North Vietnam caught the White House by surprise this morning and immediately heightened emotions there. 'The Hanoi bombshell is the response to the Saigon torpedo', was the interpretation given immediately by American leaders. Today's move by North Vietnam is intended to counter the move of Nguyễn Văn Thiệu's speech and in turn to exert pressure on Washington.

Using similar techniques to place their positions on public record, Hanoi and Saigon are both aiming to exert maximum pressure on the Nixon government but with opposite objectives.

Saigon is seeking to delay the entry into force of the armistice agreement until after 7 November, the date of the US presidential elections. Hanoi, on the other hand, wants the agreements to be signed by 7 November. The US election day has become the critical element in the game of diplomatic chess and is the key to understanding developments. Thiệu's hope is that, once re-elected, Nixon will be able to amend the peace agreements so that they are more favourable to Saigon. However, that is also the fear in Hanoi, which therefore wants to protect itself against the danger that, in a negotiation delayed until after the elections, the United States will insist on extracting further concessions from North Vietnam. Through their actions, both Saigon and Hanoi are trying to create difficulties for the US President with public opinion at home on the eve of November's elections.

Nixon faces a difficult problem calling for much skill: he must, on the one hand, persuade Thiệu to abandon his negative intransigence and, on the other, dispel Hanoi's suspicions over the United States' good faith. This is the most delicate aspect of the situation. The weapon held by Hanoi is the threat — not yet made openly, but mentioned behind the scenes — that a refusal by the United States to sign the armistice agreement by 31 October could undermine the entire negotiation.

Kissinger directed most of his efforts at his press briefing today to averting this danger. After vigorously and indignantly rejecting the argument that America is seeking to delay the signing of the agreement in order to be able to amend it after the elections, Kissinger gave the following assessment of the situation: the settlement is in sight, the longest and hardest part of the negotiation has already been resolved, but one more, final meeting with representatives from Hanoi is necessary to 'clarify a few ambiguities and to define a few nuances in the text of the agreement.'

And that is why, Kissinger said, 'we have proposed a new meeting to the North Vietnamese, leaving them to decide the time and place.' He added, his words sounding like a specific, explicit commitment, that this new session of negotiations, which should last three or four days, would be the 'final' one and that, in that session, America intends to reach a final settlement without further delays.

'There are six or seven issues to be discussed and we are convinced that, going by the good will shown so far, these will be able to be resolved without excessive difficulties in a relatively short time'.

Kissinger also made clear, giving an important signal, that in the course of the period in which the 'final session' with negotiators from Hanoi will take place, the United States is convinced that President Thiệu

will eventually accept the agreement, despite his current opposition.

This is essentially a commitment to Hanoi that the US intends to exert due pressure on the President of South Vietnam. The assurances can be explained by important behind-the-scenes activities: by last Sunday, the White House had invited Hanoi to a 'new meeting', which is necessary to remove the final obstacles to the agreement, and Hanoi has not yet responded to that invitation. Instead, North Vietnam's reaction was the 'bombshell' of today's radio broadcast. And this is what makes the White House concerned.

In Washington there are fears that Hanoi is planning to play the extreme card, threatening: 'either the agreement is signed by 31 October or the negotiation collapses'. Personally, Kissinger (from what can be learnt from sources very close to him) does not believe in such a possibility, but the 'assurances' that he gave repeatedly today in the press briefing suggest a deliberate, massive effort to convince the North Vietnamese to accept the proposal for a 'new meeting'.

Throughout the briefing, Kissinger was positive and even commendatory vis-à-vis the North Vietnamese, saying that they conducted the Paris negotiations in October 'with good will and great earnestness'. His overall assessment of the future prospects of the negotiation was optimistic. 'Peace is at hand,' he said. 'The most difficult part of the journey has been completed. The issues that still have to be resolved are much less important than those that have already been resolved.'

As regards the date of the settlement, which obviously depends on when the new meeting with the representatives from Hanoi takes place, he was not specific: 'I am convinced that the final settlement of the problem can be reached in the next few weeks and perhaps before.' At the same time, he chose to warn Hanoi and Saigon not to put pressure on Washington by taking advantage of the current election situation. 'What we are looking for is a fair peace settlement. We will not allow ourselves to be pushed if we do not think it is fair, nor will we be diverted from a settlement if it is fair.'

In the press briefing, Kissinger expressly recognised that the version given by Radio Hanoi concerning the text of the agreement adopted in Paris between them and the North Vietnamese is accurate. He was keen to stress the importance of the concessions given by Hanoi in the decisive phase in October. There are three main concessions.

- 1) Hanoi, after insisting for a long time on making the armistice subject to a political settlement in South Vietnam, has now accepted the American position that the armistice must enter into force before the future political order in Saigon is defined.
- 2) Hanoi no longer insists on a coalition government in the transition period between the armistice and the new elections. Hanoi accepts that the Thiệu government will remain in office and negotiate with representatives of the Vietcong a 'Committee of National Concord'.
- 3) Hanoi will no longer insist on exercising the right of veto when selecting the men to form that Committee. Kissinger then clarified an important element of the current dispute with Hanoi, making clear that America has never made a formal commitment to sign the agreements by 31 October, but has simply promised to 'make every effort' to conclude the agreement by that date.

He explained that it was necessary to delay the signing of the agreement as a result of a series of difficulties that emerged during his talks in Saigon relating to several points of uncertainty and ambiguity in the current text of the plan.

In the final analysis, all the diplomatic observers in Washington conclude that the resolution of 'these points of contention' still to be clarified will depend not on formal details, but on the United States' ability to convince Hanoi that it does not intend to take advantage of Thiệu's opposition in order to delay a settlement.

Ugo Stille