

# Vietnam War

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## Resting in “Peace”

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Mention “Peace Plan” and your listener’s political persuasions immediately become apparent: The Liberal naïvely envisions the Communist leopard changing his spots and disregarding the law of the jungle to coexist with his former prey; the sagacious Conservative, considering 70 years of Communist “peace,” recalls the request of Salome, daughter of Herodias, who instructed Herod in Mark 6:25 to give her in a charger (or dish) the head of John the Baptist.

Whose heads are destined for the next peace platter? Those of all Central Americans who oppose the Communist regime of Daniel Ortega Saavedra in Nicaragua. The Central American peace accord currently being considered was proposed by President Oscar Arias Sánchez of Costa Rica, the winner of this year’s Nobel Peace Prize.

Arias has been, since youth, a devotee of the late President John F. Kennedy, so it is not surprising that former Kennedy aide Theodore C. Sorenson (who travelled to Central America recently as part of a private, nine-member assessment delegation headed by New York Mayor Edward Koch) said in Managua on November 7th that he was “much more hopeful about the possibilities of peace than I expected to be.”

The presidents of Costa Rica, El Salvador, Honduras, Nicaragua, and Guatemala signed the treaty in August; its main provisions call for the negotiation of ceasefires in guerrilla wars, the granting of amnesty to political prisoners, an end to the use of neighboring states’ territory as bases for guerrilla attacks, increased political freedom, the cutoff of outside aid to rebel forces, and encouragement of the return of political exiles.

The cease-fire under the accord was to commence November 7th, with a meeting of Central American leaders scheduled for January to determine how its provisions are being upheld. Like some prima donna ballplayer waiting until the start of training to sign a contract, Nicaraguan dictator Daniel Ortega suddenly announced on November 5th that his government would agree to indirect negotiations with the Contra forces, using Miguel Cardinal Obando y Bravo, the Catholic Primate of Nicaragua, as an intermediary.

Why has the Sandinista regime softened its stance? Pro-Sandinista supporters say Ortega wants only to comply with the Arias Peace Plan. Critics say Ortega is buying time to weaken the Contras and consolidate control. Observers in the United States say that, in light of the accord, Congress may withhold additional aid to the Contras.

For a historical perspective on where such diplomacy may lead, it is worth looking at the agreement concluded by Henry Kissinger and North Vietnamese Special Adviser Le Duc Tho on January 23, 1973. (The 1973 Nobel Peace Prize was awarded to both men, although Tho declined the award.)

After the Vietnam accord was reached, the principal partners involved explained it to the world. Le Duc Tho held a press conference at the Hotel Majestic in Paris, declaring of the event: “It is a moment of joy.” Among the cardinal points of the document, according to Tho, was U.S. recognition of the “independence, sovereignty, unity and territorial integrity” of Vietnam. Other key points included a cease-fire and deactivation of all mines in the North, withdrawal of all troops, prohibition of reintroduction of troops in South Vietnam, and settlement of “the question of Vietnamese forces in South Vietnam” by the two South Vietnamese administrations [Republic of (South) Vietnam and Communist Viet Cong] “without foreign [American] interference.”

Tho was asked by a Polish correspondent if he thought the agreement would end “the last war in the world.” Tho replied: “I am a Communist and, according to Marxist-Leninist theories, so long as imperialism persists in the world there will still be wars.”

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At a press conference held in Washington by Henry Kissinger at the same time, reporters expressed concern about the presence of North Vietnamese troops in South Vietnam.

Kissinger's answers were not exactly reassuring: "First, nothing in the agreement establishes the right of North Vietnamese troops to be in the South .... Secondly, the North Vietnamese have never claimed that they have a right to have troops in the South .... Thirdly ... the North Vietnamese troops in the South *should* over a period of time be subject to considerable reduction." [Emphasis added.]

Le Duc Tho was asked about the status of North Vietnamese troops in" South during his press conference. He answered (in part): "We have completely rejected the allegation about the so-called North Vietnamese forces in South Vietnam ... because, politically speaking, as well as legally speaking, this allegation has no point .... And finally, the United States side dropped completely this proposal of theirs. Therefore in the agreement you can find no word, not a single word implying the presence of the so-called North Vietnamese troops."

On April 30, 1975 the "so-called North Vietnamese troops" entered Saigon, now called Ho Chi Minh City. A little more than two years after the peace accord was signed, South Vietnam ceased to exist.

Central American nations that rely on the Arias peace accord as insurance for their future sovereignty may suffer a similar fate.