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## Nixon overthrow Saigon regime? Muskie had better not say yes

WASHINGTON — If Le Duc Tho, North Vietnam's chief negotiator, wants to resume talks in Peking later this month, he will find Henry Kissinger ready and willing to do so. Moreover, he will find that there is "give" to the American position.

Kissinger does not insist upon 30 days before elections as the time for Thieu to resign; 45 days? Sixty days? More? This is negotiable.

So is the manner in which elections might be held. So is the means of supervising them. So is the government of caretakers which would conduct them. President Nixon is not fooling any more. He really does want to get U.S. troops out of Vietnam.

So he will permit Kissinger to give. Only one thing is not negotiable, and Mr. Nixon has told Kissinger so in plain words. We will not, he has said, agree to the overthrow of the Saigon government. If the Democrats think they can make an issue of that, he is willing to go to the country on it.

The issue will be clearly drawn. North Vietnam's No. 2 negotiator, Xuan Thuy, states the other side of it: "Stop any commitments to the Saigon administration; stop any support to the Saigon administration; no longer maintain this administration. Then the Vietnamese problem will be very rapidly settled."

Would the President lose on this issue? Sen. Muskie, his most likely opponent is saying, "We must set a date when we will withdraw every soldier, sailor and airman and stop all bombing and other American military activity dependent only upon agreement for the return of our prisoners and the safety of our troops as they leave."

But Muskie avoids facing up to the words of Xuan Thuy and therefore avoids facing up to the issue. Sooner or later, somebody is going to ask the senator from Maine whether he would agree to the overthrow of the Saigon government

and he is going to have to answer the question.

Those who are so sick of this war that they would ask him to answer it in the affirmative would do well to recall the words of Robert F. Kennedy:

"Withdrawal is impossible . . . tens of thousands of individual Vietnamese have staked their lives and fortunes on our presence and protection. Teachers, doctors in the villages; mountain tribesmen in the high country; many who work for the present benefit of their people, who have not acceded to the Viet Cong even though they may not support the Saigon government. Many have once already fled the dictatorship of the north. These people . . . cannot suddenly be abandoned to the conquest of a minority."

Kennedy was right. The serious questions are now before us. Kissinger believes—as Kennedy did—that the only way to end the war is by negotiation. He believes—as Kennedy did—that free elections open to all should determine the eventual government of South Vietnam.

But he is willing to give. The North Vietnamese should realize that if Richard Nixon has to go to the country next November as the man who refused to accept the terms of Xuan Thuy, Richard Nixon will win.