



The Meaning of The Secret Talks

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NO ONE SEEMS to have remarked upon it publicly, yet much can be learned about the actual intelligence estimates now in use in Hanoi from the course of the secret negotiations conducted by Dr. Henry A. Kissinger.

The current estimates in Hanoi of the present stage of the Vietnamese war can in fact be very easily inferred from the demands presented to Kissinger by the North Vietnamese negotiators, Le Duc Tho and Xuan Thuy. Realistic analysis clearly shows that the Hanoi war-planners have only one remaining hope of success.

They clearly believe they have lost the war — unless the U.S. Senate intervenes to give them the victory. Otherwise, the demands presented to Kissinger make no sense whatever.

In the first phase of the talks, the North Vietnamese literally demanded that the U.S. take away from the South Vietnamese government's army "all foreign" (meaning all American weapons) it was of course tantamount to a demand for the total disarmament of ARVN.

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ON THE PRESIDENT'S instruction, Kissinger soon crossed this piece of nonsense off the agenda. But from start to finish, Le Duc Tho and Xuan Thuy never budged an inch from their two central demands.

The first and most important was that the U.S. quite literally depose the existing Thieu government of South Vietnam. And the second demand was that the U.S. undertake to give no further arms or economic support to the government of South Vietnam and its army.

In addition, when the President at last

removed the veil from the secret talks, a principal point in the bitter North Vietnamese response was that the U.S. was still carrying on the "deceitful" Nixon "program of Vietnamization." This is the same program that the New York Times has just dismissed as an "abysmal failure."

It is obvious, however, that Hanoi's intelligence estimators have a different opinion of Vietnamization. Otherwise, they would hardly have made their crucial demands.

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SUPPOSE THE HANOI estimators also considered Vietnamization an "abysmal failure." Suppose that they still had faith in the overwhelming support for the Communist cause in South Vietnam.

Suppose, too, that the Hanoi estimators regarded the government of President Thieu as deeply unpopular and therefore very easy to topple. Suppose that Hanoi had the smallest confidence in its army's ability to defeat ARVN.

If Hanoi held any of these beliefs, the North Vietnamese negotiators would have been downright lunatic to take the course they took. They should have paid any price, made any imaginable deal about the prisoners of war — just to get the United States out of the act.

If the leaders in Hanoi believed they could really defeat ARVN and destroy the Thieu government on their own, they would hardly have insisted that President Nixon must do this for them.

Yet the only possible meaning of the negotiations is that the Hanoi war leaders believe, as stated above, that they have already lost the war — unless the U.S. Senate can be persuaded to bail them out.