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 The Real Issues  
 Of Renegotiation

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THE QUESTION of the withdrawal of North Vietnamese troops from the South has not been left quite so much in the air as is generally assumed. The basis for a North Vietnamese withdrawal is discernible in some of the information publicly available.

The real delay in signing an agreement appears to be attributable to an attempt to make the withdrawal provisions more specific, not to the transparently contrived reasons given by Henry Kissinger.

The agreement as published provides for troop withdrawal negotiations in what looks like two stages—first, on “steps to reduce the military numbers on both sides,” and second, “to demobilize the troops being reduced.” Although this refers to “Vietnamese Armed Forces in the South,” without specifying Northern troops by name, it is obvious that these are included.

PRESIDENT THIEU of South Vietnam insists, however, that the agreement allows Northern troops to remain in the South—but this cannot be taken at its face value, any more than his other claims. Thus, Thieu maintains that the Communists demand a coalition government, while Kissinger says that this is not so. Thieu claims that the Communists have refused to withdraw from Laos and Cambodia, while Kissinger says explicitly that they have agreed to withdraw.

What Thieu is really saying is that he wants the agreement to be more specific on these points. Thus, the United States has undertaken to limit its arms aid to South Vietnam, and to resupply it with weapons only as they wear out, on a one-for-one basis. But, Thieu protests, the Soviet Union and China will go on arming the North.

Kissinger, however, has indicated that there is a secret understanding under which Moscow and Peking will do unto the North as Washington does unto the South. When asked whether the North would be free to go on receiving arms from the Soviet Union, Kissinger said that “the formal provisions” limiting arms supplies apply only to the South. “But there is no question,” he said, “and there can be no question, that the gen-

eral conditions in Indochina will govern the actions of many of the countries, but I don't want to go into it in greater detail.”

So what Thieu is really complaining about is not the continued supply of arms to the North, which he knows is barred by great power agreements, but their failure to guarantee this publicly.

HIS COMPLAINT that the Northern troops would remain in Laos and Cambodia, which is contradicted by the agreement as published, ought also to be read in the light of Kissinger's remarks. Kissinger says that the relationship of the cease-fire in Laos and Cambodia to that in Vietnam is so “complex” that he wants to renegotiate it with Hanoi.

This has a direct bearing on the Northern withdrawal from the South. Some of Thieu's more opaque remarks suggest that the North has already agreed to withdraw some of its troops to Laos and Cambodia in the first place. This fits in with the two-stage plan hinted at by Hanoi.

While the negotiators, after the cease-fire begins, concern themselves with “steps to reduce the military numbers on both sides,” the Northern troops would be pulled back to Laos and Cambodia, perhaps under the plausible pretext that they were taking the most direct route home.

Meantime, it would become apparent whether Saigon was going to reduce proportionately its own army of 1 million men, which compares with the 145,000 Northern troops and about 100,000 Vietcong troops in the South. If it did, “demobilization” as envisaged in the agreement, and the Communist withdrawal from Laos and Cambodia, as implied in what has been said.

These are the real issues Kissinger wants to renegotiate, not the flimsy issues he raised in public. The suggestion that the world's most skillful negotiator forgot to check the English and Vietnamese texts of the agreement, or the relevant clauses of the Geneva accords is, to paraphrase Kissinger himself, unworthy of what we know of his own dedication to his job.