



*1 Hanoi you have. It makes me wonder
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Hanoi Makes a Secret Pledge

HANOI has secretly promised the U.S. to pull out up to 110,000 North Vietnamese troops now in South Vietnam after the war-ending agreement is finally signed, provided Saigon's army is reduced by the same amount.

Under the private understanding, Hanoi would reduce its forces inside South Vietnam at the same numerical rate that Saigon cuts down its huge standing army of over 1 million. Theoretically, then, if South Vietnamese President Nguyen Van Thieu agrees to demobilize 100,000 of his armed forces, Hanoi would withdraw an equal number back across the Demilitarized Zone into North Vietnam.

Even if both sides agreed to reduce troop levels by the maximum 110,000 North Vietnamese troops now in the South, the National Liberation Front (NLF) would still retain some 35,000 indigenous Vietcong troops now organized into three divisions of main force units.

Although this "understanding" was not grafted onto the tentative Washington-Hanoi agreement, it is

viewed here as strong evidence that Hanoi will not continue the war by active military means after the agreement takes effect.

IN SHORT, the Hanoi Politburo seems willing to negotiate with Saigon a nearly-total withdrawal of its own forces from the South over perhaps six to eight months (or even less, according to one qualified expert here).

That raises the question of why Hanoi would not put such a commitment into the agreement itself, as Thieu has been shrilly demanding ever since North Vietnam prematurely published terms of the agreement last month.

The answer is that Hanoi regards its 110,000 troops now in the South as the only insurance policy it has that Thieu will really start political negotiations.

The tens of thousands of Communist cadres and suspected Vietcong sympathizers now in Saigon's jails do not have to be released by Thieu under the tentative ceasefire agreement. Their release is subject to negotia-

tions, something Thieu could stall for months.

Likewise, there is no hard agreement on the timing or nature of elections. The temporary presence of Hanoi's troops in the South, even if they strictly adhere to the "standstill" agreement and stay within their own enclaves, is designed as a spur to Thieu.

For the long run, however, experts here see little possibility that these Communist units could survive indefinitely in the South, to do so would require wholesale violations of the agreement to close down the Ho Chi Minh trail and other infiltration routes, raising the probability of renewed full-scale war with U.S. bombing.

NEVERTHELESS, Thieu continues to maneuver hard for President Nixon to extract even more concessions from Hanoi. Moreover, these maneuvers by Thieu are more popular in South Vietnam than Washington thought likely a few weeks ago.

Playing on the universal fear of Communist domination throughout South Viet-

nam—a fear shared not only by Catholics but by Buddhists, nationalists, and most neutralists—Thieu today has exploited alleged weaknesses in the Washington-Hanoi agreement to build real popularity for himself at home.

Privately, Thieu never tires of telling U.S. diplomats and Nixon emissaries that what brought down President Ngo Dinh Diem in 1963 was not a Washington-planned coup but genuine fear among Saigon's military leaders that Diem was preparing to do business with the Communists. So, he warns Mr. Nixon that, without more concessions from Hanoi, he could suffer Diem's fate.

That's why the continued presence of Communist troops in the South will be opened up when Henry Kissinger renews his negotiations on the tentative agreement after this month. With Thieu riding high in Saigon, the U.S. now needs—and will probably get—specific language from Hanoi on the troop issue similar to the secretly negotiated understanding.