



Kissinger's Real Mission in Hanoi

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ON THE SURFACE, the signs in Vietnam are far better than you might suppose from the reports from the scene. Two ironically comic stories and a statistic offer proof enough of this.

The North Vietnamese and Viet Cong groups that went from Paris to Saigon made an odd request of the pilot of their special plane when they left Bangkok. En route to Saigon, they asked to fly low over Tay Ninh, on the South Vietnamese border. Nothing loath, the pilot took them in low over Tay Ninh.

The shock and disappointment of those who rushed to crane down from the airplane windows were far too strong to be concealed. The passengers from Paris had been told that Tay Ninh, a minor provincial capital, had already been seized by the North Vietnamese, in order to serve as the permanent capital of the Viet Cong "government." But there it was, with South Vietnamese government flags flying from almost every house.

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THE FAILURE of the North Vietnamese to take Tay Ninh must at least have been known to the Viet Cong "military representative," North Vietnamese Lieutenant General Tran Van Tra, when he later headed for Saigon. Yet he asked to see Tay Ninh, too.

The American chopper that picked him up in the jungle circled low and long. Again, the general's disappointment was bitter and obvious. The unit commanders had told their general they still held Tay Ninh's suburbs. Instead they were at least ten miles away in deep jungle.

As to the statistic, it has been loudly announced from Saigon that the Viet Cong and North Vietnamese still hold 34 per cent of South Vietnam's land area. The more important fact is that they now control barely more than 5 per cent of the population. The famous "leopard spots" are pretty desolate, in short, and the cease-fire round of the struggle has been won by the government in Saigon.

It is not the last round, however. The intelligence suggests that all the North Vietnamese units now in Cambodia may be thrown into the III Corps area of South Vietnam to mount a massive attack in a matter of two or three months.

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IF THIS is the intention, the accord obtained by President Nixon and Henry A. Kissinger is to be treated by Hanoi like the accord obtained by President Kennedy and Governor Averell Harriman in 1962—as a scrap of paper, to be torn up and tossed away as soon as convenient. But the President is not ready to go through the kind of charade the U.S. government went through in 1962.

In 1962, a handful of North Vietnamese soldiers, ostentatiously parading past a checkpoint were accepted as "proof" that Hanoi was keeping the promise to withdraw from Laos. Now, Mr. Nixon is grimly determined to accept nothing less than literal compliance with every promise embodied in the cease-fire agreement. That is the real object of Kissinger's journey to Hanoi, and it is also an important object of his trip to Peking.