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## Stumbling Block

The prospect of further heavy bloodshed in South Vietnam and of a dangerous new escalation of the Indochina conflict—including the possible reintroduction of some American fighting men—places a heavy burden on leaders of every nation involved to leave no stone unturned in the effort to achieve a negotiated settlement.

It is by no means clear that the two sides are as far apart as the American delegate indicated when the United States and South Vietnam broke off the public Paris peace talks on Thursday. The United States has indicated a willingness to discuss the Communist demand for some kind of coalition arrangement in Saigon in advance of the elections to which both sides are committed. The Communists in turn deny that they seek a "monopoly of political control" in South Vietnam. The Vietcong delegate in Paris, Mrs. Binh, reiterated last week that her side would accept members of the present Saigon regime as well as representatives of other non-Communist elements in a proposed "three-segment government of national concord."

A principal stumbling block to agreement appears to be allied resistance to the long-standing Communist demand for immediate resignation of President Thieu, who has become a symbol of military resistance with his resolute commitment to the "Four No's"—no land concession, no Communist political parties in South Vietnam, no neutrality and no coalition.

President Thieu had already offered to step down one month before elections in the context of proposals put forward by the United States in secret talks last year. Secretary of State Rogers last February indicated that the United States was "flexible" on the timing of a Thieu resignation. Why not now?

With his government enjoying only the dubious loyalty of its people, his military forces retreating and his country faced with interminable civil war, it seems apparent that the greatest service President Thieu could render South Vietnam would be voluntarily to step aside for a less intransigent leader. There are able men waiting in the wings who are in a far better position to rally South Vietnam's substantial but fragmented non-Communist elements for the essential political confrontation with the Communists.