

# Our Longest War's

## Tortuous History

By Murrey Marder

Washington Post Staff Writer

The war in Vietnam, the longest in American history and second only to World War II in costs of blood and money, outlasted the rationale that led the United States into the conflict.

When President Nixon arrived in Peking on Feb. 21, 1972, to launch "peaceful coexistence" with China, American policy had come full circle.

In Asia, the post-World War II target of "containment" was not North Vietnam, a nation the size of the American state of Georgia, but China. For behind the less than 20 million North Vietnamese, American strategy through two decades was transfixed by the image of hundreds of millions of hungry, revolutionary Communist Chinese, threatening to burst across borders, literally or geopolitically, to engulf all Asia.

From the early 1950s until well into the 1960s, the world Communist challenge was perceived by American officials as a unified conspiracy, with the Soviet Union in the role of godfather, China the agent in Asia, and Ho Chi Minh the sub-agent in Indochina.

President Franklin D. Roosevelt had a simpler view of Indochina. He wrote Secretary of State Cordell Hull in 1944: "France has milked it for one hundred years. The people of Indochina are entitled to something better than that." But in the preoccupation with World War II, FDR did little more than irritate the French with his disdain of colonialism and his idea of international trusteeship for the area.

After FDR, American policy vacillated, out of deference to France and out of suspicion, pressed by France, that Communist Ho was Soviet-controlled. The alarm raised in Washington by the Communist victory in China in 1949, plus the priority on Allied unity in Europe, induced the Truman administration to announce, on May 8, 1950, that it would supply military and economic support for the French war to retain Indochina. The outbreak of the Korean war the next month, followed by China's entry into that conflict when it approached her borders, reinforced the decision.

That decision was based in part on the following rationale:

### "Outright Commie"

A 1949 cable sent over the signature of Secretary of State Dean Acheson concluded that Ho was an "outright Commie" as long as he failed to "repudiate Moscow." Therefore Ho was a puppet of the Kremlin, based on the "example" of Communist operations in "Eastern Europe." Even though "Vietnam out of reach Soviet army," the cable concluded, "it will doubtless be by no means out of reach Chi Commie hatchet men and armed forces."

Ho and Vietnam, in this manner, were spliced into the Truman-Acheson "containment" doctrine. This was the first overt American step into the morass of Indochina.

By 1954, the United States was paying 78 per cent of the French war burden in Indochina, supplying over a billion dollars of aid. This cost was to become almost insignificant in comparison to the ultimate price in Indochina.

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Secretary of State John Foster Dulles added their own doctrinal reinforcement, which the President described as "the falling domino principle." As he explained it, "If Indochina fell, not only Thailand but Burma and Malaya would be threatened, with added risks to East Pakistan and South Asia as well as to all Indonesia."

President John F. Kennedy later was to say of the domino theory: "I believe it, I believe it." Kennedy's successor, Lyndon B. Johnson, while still Vice President, escalated the rhetoric: the Pacific would be converted into "a Red Sea" if the United States were to "throw in the towel in the area and pull back our defenses to San Francisco and a 'Fortress America' concept."

A generation earlier, the Vietnamese who was to loom as the domino-striker, Nguyen Ai Quoc, wearing a bowler hat and a rented tuxedo, knocked at the door of the American delegation at the Paris peace conference of 1919. He came, along with scores of special pleaders, to seek fulfillment of Presi-

dent Woodrow Wilson's soaring words of self-determination for all peoples. The appeal is in the National Archives, apparently unanswered.

American agents sought the same man out toward the end of World War II, when he had adopted the *nom de guerre* of Ho Chi Minh ("He Who Enlightens") and was leading the Viet Minh guerrillas against the Japanese.

The Americans helped Ho recall phrases from the Declaration of Independence for his own declaration for Vietnam, on Sept. 2, 1945, after the surrender of Japan, which had overrun Indochina in the war. In early 1945 and 1946, Ho sent at least eight pleas for aid to President Truman and the State Department. Again there is no record of answer. In 1946, after aborted negotiations with Ho, the French set out to crush his forces. Ho counted that as a betrayal by the West.

Paradoxically, Ho's spurned appeal for "self-determination" for the Indochinese became the rallying cry for an American investment of more than a half-million troops in South Vietnam at the peak of involvement in 1968-69. In fact, "self-determination" never was the real American goal in Indochina. One of the first statements of U.S. policy in the post-World War II era, by the National Security Council in early 1952, defined the objective:

"To prevent the countries of Southeast Asia from passing into the Communist orbit, and to assist them to develop will and ability to resist communism from within and without and to contribute to the strengthening of the free world."

The death of Soviet ruler Josef Stalin in 1953 set off the crackup of always-tenuous Communist unity, but the strains on Soviet-Chinese cooperation were muffled until they grew explosive in the early 1960s. Slow to perceive them even then, the United States rushed to meet what it construed as a dual Soviet-Chinese threat to ignite "wars of national liberation" around the world.

## A Rueful Conclusion

The competitive investment of Moscow and Peking was minimal: inflammatory rhetoric but limited support. Ho Chi Minh was no supine agent of either. He was balanced adroitly between Moscow and Peking, levying requests on both, as tax for proof of their Marxist-Leninist virility.

Only very late in the war did President Johnson's council of "wise men" ruefully conclude, in 1968, that instead of enhancing American security, the Indochina investment was diminishing it, by consuming a disproportionate share of resources and thus reducing American ability to compete with Communism in more strategically significant sectors of the globe.

A few American strategists had reached the same conclusion in the early 1960s, many more as early as the end of 1965, when the buildup of U.S. military manpower in Vietnam was less than one-third up the ladder of escalation.

In a document disclosed in 1971 by unauthorized publication of the Pentagon Papers, an assistant secretary of defense, John T. McNaughton, secretly wrote for the benefit of fellow-strategists:

"The present U.S. objective in Vietnam is to avoid humiliation.

"The reasons why we went into Vietnam to the present depth are varied; but they are now largely academic. Why we have not withdrawn from Vietnam is, by all odds, one reason: (1) to preserve our reputation as a guarantor, and thus to preserve our reputation in the rest of the world. We have not hung on (2) to save a friend, or (3) to deny the Communists the added acres and heads (because the dominoes don't fall for that reason in this case), or even (4) to prove that 'wars of national liberation' won't work (except as our reputation is involved)."

## The "True Enemy"

The internal perception of what was happening in the war, and the public accounting, never matched. The credibility of the U.S. government was progressively crippled as the rationale for the war shifted from checkmating world Communism to "self-determination" for South Vietnam, to protecting American commitments, to saving American prestige, to averting "humiliation," to defending the presidency, to rescuing prisoners.

Ultimately, ending the war became the objective of the war itself.

Through the Kennedy-Johnson administrations, however, some of the most influential officials, including Secretary of State Dean Rusk, maintained fidelity to the original commitment.

With a conviction that never wavered, Rusk on Feb. 18, 1966, told the Senate Foreign Relations Committee, headed by Sen. J. William Fulbright (D-Ark.), who by then had turned arch-critic of the war, that the United States must defend in Asia, as it had done in post-World War II Europe, "the principle that the Communist world should not be permitted to expand by overrunning one after another of the arrangements built during and since the war to mark the outer limits of Communist expansion by force."

Richard M. Nixon, in or out of office, fully agreed. In December, 1965, he wrote that "the true enemy behind the Vietcong and North Vietnam is China."

Earlier, as Vice President in the Eisenhower administration, Mr. Nixon was one of the foremost advocates of the commitment of American air and sea power to prevent the collapse of French rule in Indochina, which President Eisenhower somberly considered. The Vice President told an audience of editors that if necessary "to avoid further Communist expansion in Asia and Indochina, we must take the risk now by putting our boys in . . ."

Lyndon B. Johnson, then the Senate's Democratic leader, was strongly opposed. He was "against sending American GIs into the mud and muck of Indochina on a blood-letting spree to perpetuate colonialism and white

man's exploitation in Asia." John F. Kennedy, then a junior senator, concurred with the dissenters: ". . . to send troops into the most difficult terrain in the world, with the Chinese able to pour in unlimited manpower, would mean that we would face a situation . . . far more difficult than even that we encountered in Korea."

President Eisenhower, when Britain refused to participate, abandoned any U.S. intervention. As the alternative, Secretary of State Dulles conceived and constructed the Southeast Asia Treaty Organization (SEATO). The alliance, as Dulles intended it, would provide an umbrella of legal justification for the United States to pursue the containment of Asian Communism at arms length, with equipment, money and the threat of American power, freed, hopefully, of the taint of colonialism or white man-yellow man struggle. In their own presidencies, Kennedy, then Johnson, exchanged their original forebodings for Dulles' premises.

Dulles quietly set out to build his alliance barrier in the middle of France's negotiations at Geneva in the summer of 1954 to extricate itself from the war, before the final French collapse in Indochina at Dienbienphu.

Secretly, the Pentagon Papers revealed, the United States raced against the impending deadlines of Geneva to try to disrupt Viet Minh operations in Vietnam as much as possible, anticipating that Geneva would produce "French acquiescence in a Communist takeover of Indochina." On June 1, 1954, Col. Edward G. Lansdale entered Saigon to assemble a secret team "to undertake paramilitary operations against the enemy and to wage

political-psychological warfare in North and South Vietnam.

At the same time, Dulles instructed Under Secretary of State Walter Bedell Smith at Geneva, on July 7, 1954, to work for a delay in the timetable for bringing the impending Geneva accords into force:

" . . . Since undoubtedly true that elections might eventually mean unification Vietnam under Ho Chi Minh this makes it all more important they should be only held as long after cease-fire agreement as possible and in conditions free from intimidation to give democratic elements best chance."

President Eisenhower wrote in his memoirs that experts agreed that if "elections had been held at the time of fighting, possibly 80 per cent of the population would have voted for the Communist Ho Chi Minh as their leader rather than Chief of State Bao Dai."

## "Disaster" at Geneva

The accords concluded at Geneva on July 21, 1954, were described in confidential National Security Council records in Washington as a "disaster." Neither the signed cease-fire agreements for Vietnam, Laos and Cambodia, nor the unsigned "final declaration" projecting elections, were joined in by the United States.

Under Secretary Smith affirmed at Geneva, however, and President Eisenhower later reaffirmed, that while the United States was not "bound" by the accords, "the United States will not use force to disturb the settlement," although "any renewal of Communist aggression would be viewed by us as a matter of grave concern."

Subsequent American commitments to an "independent" South Vietnam invoked these ambiguities even though the Geneva accords specified that "the military demarcation line" between North and South Vietnam "is provisional and should not in any way be interpreted as constituting a political or territorial boundary."

The general declaration pledged that "free general elections by secret ballot shall be held in July, 1956," under international supervision, to determine "the national will of the Vietnamese people."

Ho Chi Minh accepted the demarcation line at the 17th Parallel in the full expectation, shared by most participants in the conference, that the two-year interlude before elections was only a fig leaf for French prestige. The Soviet Union and China joined in inducing Ho to sign.

Chinese Premier Chou En-lai ruefully told a group of visiting Americans on June 16, 1972, "I made a mistake in signing the (Geneva) agreements" in 1954 because "we were not experienced." Chou said he later emotionally told North Vietnamese Premier Pham Van Dong, "We were both

taken in. We believed in international agreements."

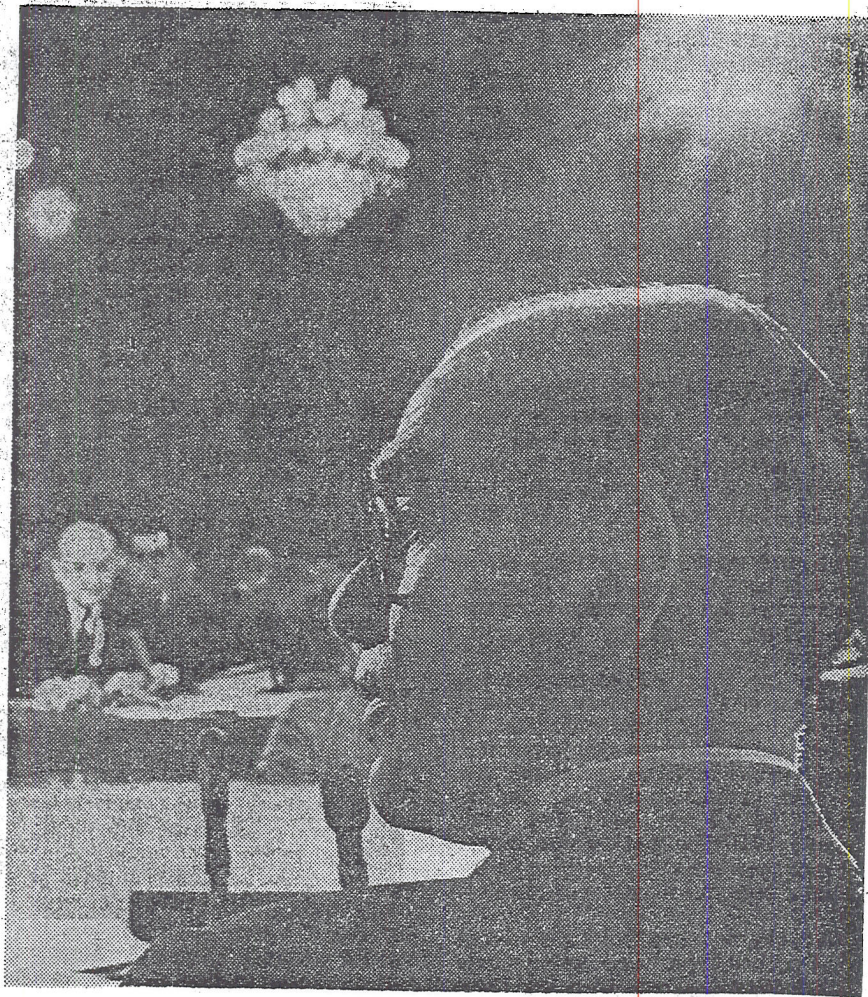
Chou said only later did he realize that Dulles, even then, was preparing to "violate" the accords by converting the temporary division of Vietnam into a permanent division.

The SEATO treaty announced on Sept. 8, 1954, at Manila, contained a protocol extending the alliance to Laos, Cambodia, "and the free territory under the jurisdiction of the State of Vietnam."

The chosen instrument of the United States for keeping the South out of Communist hands was Ngo Dinh Diem, a Vietnamese nationalist and Catholic who lived in the United States between 1951 and 1953, mostly at Maryknoll seminaries, and was befriended by Francis Cardinal Spellman who introduced him to many influential Americans, including John F. Kennedy.

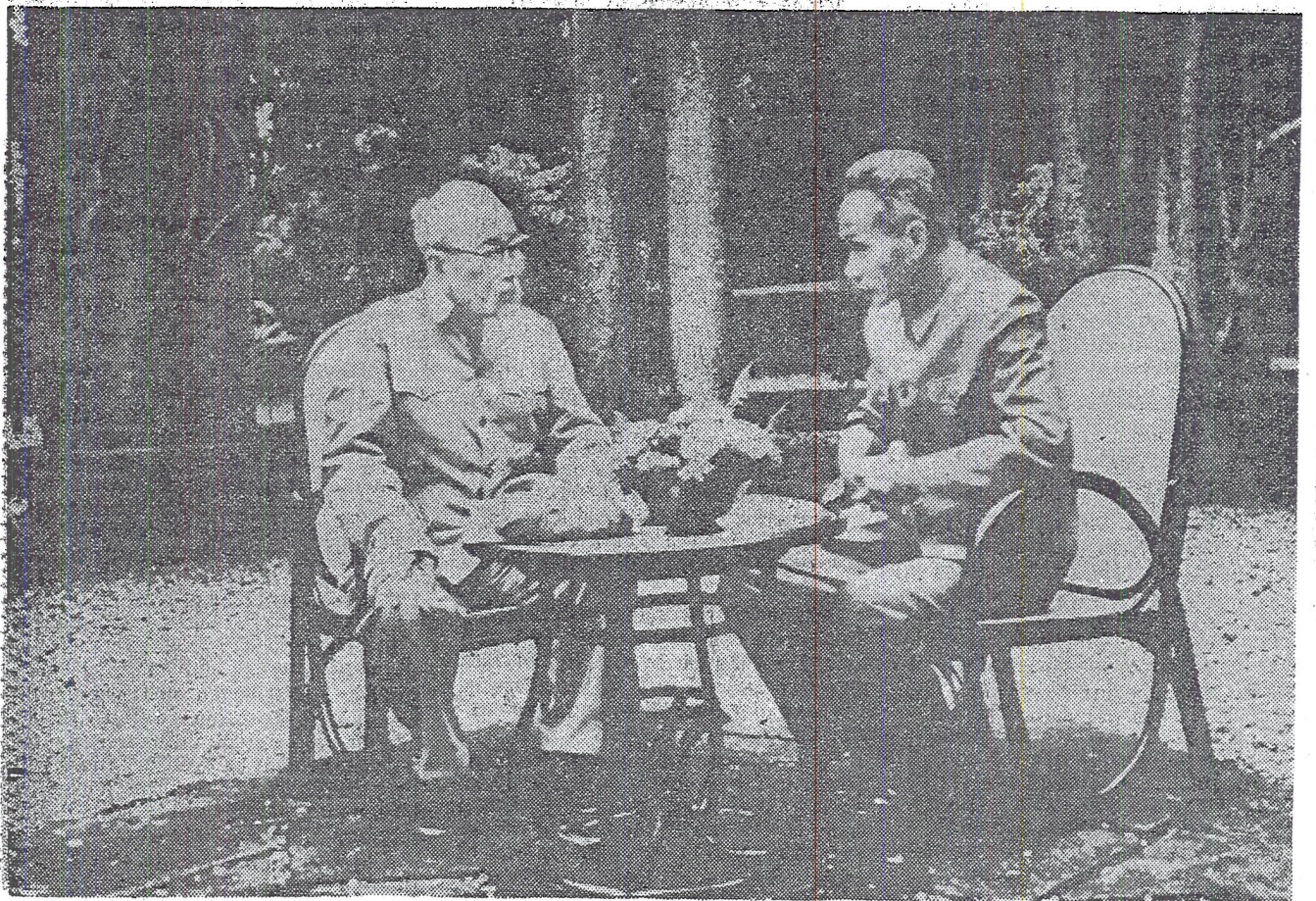
## Commitment to Diem

Diem, before the end of the Geneva conference, was appointed premier of Vietnam on July 7, 1954, by Emperor Bao Dai (whom Diem eliminated in 1955, by a "referendum,") with Diem insisting on, and obtaining, a free hand from the United States against the French. On Aug. 20, 1954, a secret National Security Council document stated that "the French were to be disassociated from the levers of command" in South Vietnam.



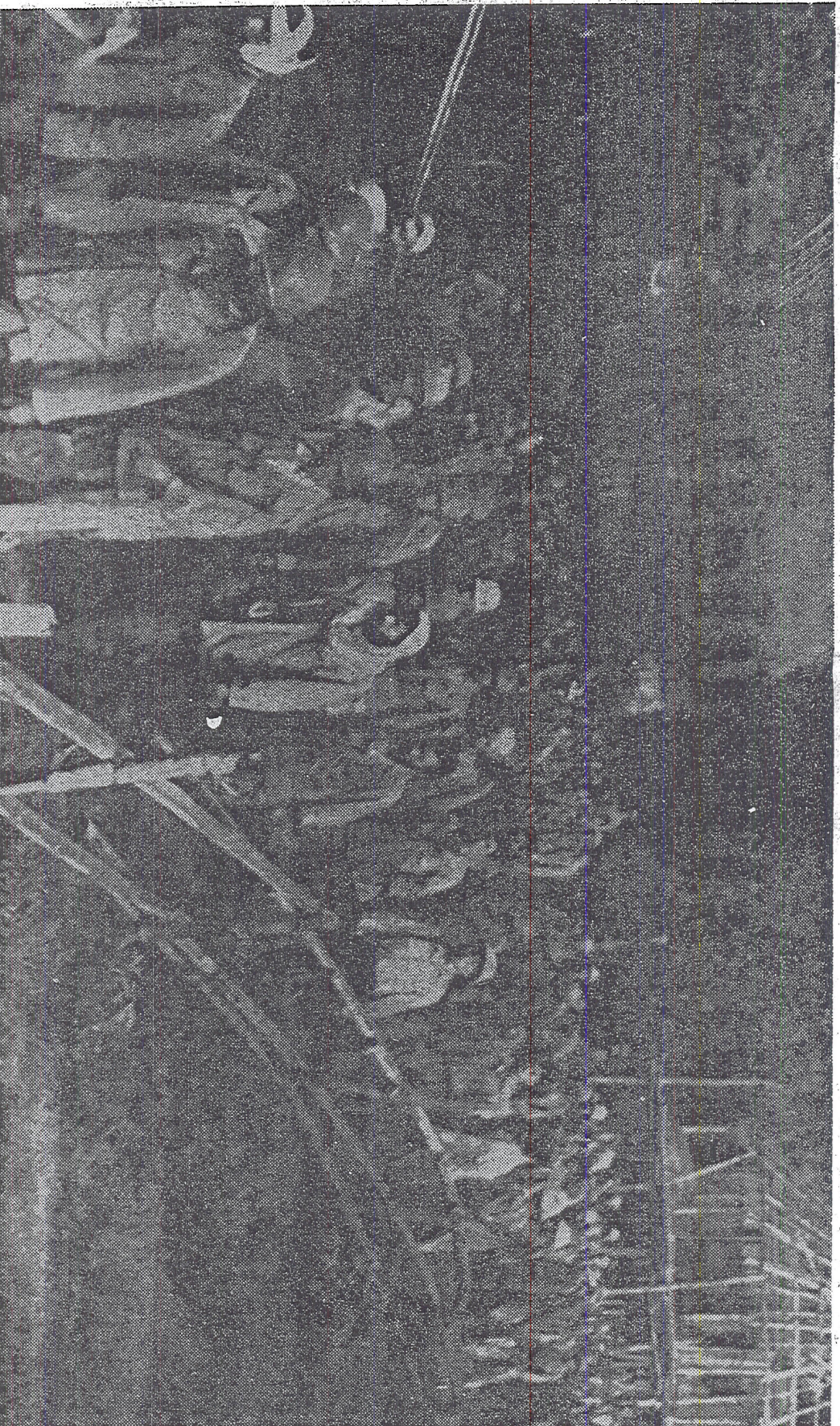
By Wally McNamee.

***Rusk vs. Fulbright: Was Congress "hornswoggled"?***



United Press International

***Ho and Pham: Appeals to two American Presidents went unanswered.***



*Defeat at Dienbienphu: The beaten French struggled out of Indochina and the United States secretly slipped in.*

United Press International

On Oct. 25, 1954, President Eisenhower made his public commitment in a letter to Diem. The United States would supply aid for "maintaining a strong, viable state, capable of resisting attempted subversion or aggression through military means." The next sentence added that the United States "expects that this aid will be met by performance on the part of the government of Vietnam in undertaking needed reforms."

It was the Eisenhower aid pledge that President Johnson always cited as the initial "commitment" to South Vietnam; it was the defaulted pledge on "reforms," however, that President Kennedy invoked for withdrawing support to Diem, which paved the way for the coup that killed him.

Diem in 1955, with American acquiescence, refused to talk with the Communists about elections; he refused to hold them in 1956 on grounds that he did not sign the Geneva accords and no "conditions of freedom" for elections existed in the North.

Neither Moscow nor Peking was wringing its hands; the Soviet Union, in 1957, even proposed admitting both Vietnams to the United Nations. Ho this time was convinced he had been betrayed by everyone; that suspicion permeated all of North Vietnam's subsequent diplomacy.

Diem, with U.S. support, was crushing all opposition in the South. Hanoi's left-behind cadre mounted an insurgency, and appealed for help. North Vietnam formally decided, at a meeting of the Lao Dong (Communist Party) Central Committee in May, 1959, to take control of the insurgency. Until 1964, most of the infiltrators it sent down were among 90,000 to 150,000 southerners who went north after the 1954 Geneva accords, when nearly 900,000 Vietnamese, mostly Catholics, went South.

As North Vietnam saw it, Hanoi was obliged to use force to take what it had fought to win, and what it was earmarked to receive at Geneva—the other half of Vietnam—which the United States "conspired" to deny it.

As the United States saw it, North Vietnam was engaging in what Washington later labeled "open aggression" across an established "international border."

Yet Laos, not South Vietnam, President Eisenhower told incoming President Kennedy, on Jan. 19, 1961, "was the key to the entire area of Southeast Asia," and American "intervention" might be required to hold it.

## Kennedy's Plunge

The new President, already gravely concerned by Soviet Premier Khrushchev's Jan. 6, 1961, pledge to support "national liberation wars," took office the next day seeing challenge everywhere, and plunged to meet it.

April brought disaster to President Kennedy's attempt to modify and carry out the Eisenhower administration-conceived intervention at Cuba's Bay of Pigs. The President was simultaneously being pressured to send combat troops to Laos, and more U.S. military advisers to South Vietnam. He felt compelled to display strength, despite misgivings; "I can't take a 1954 defeat today," he told White House adviser Walt W. Rostow, one of the earliest proponents of intervention in Southeast Asia.

President Kennedy refused to commit U.S. combat troops to Laos and sent military advisers instead. An enthusiast for counter-guerrilla warfare, he clandestinely ordered 400 new Special Forces troops and 100 more military advisers into South Vietnam—thereby breaching the Geneva accords' 685-man limit on military missions there; he also covertly authorized sabotage operations into the North by American-trained South Vietnamese.

The Laotian crisis was eased in May, 1961, by the convening of a new, 14-nation conference in Geneva; in 1962 the conference produced an accord on a coalition government for Laos and a cease-fire. The cease-fire was immediately violated by North Vietnam's continued use of the Ho Chi Minh trail network to send infiltrators through Laos into South Vietnam.

By October, 1963, the United States had 16,732 men in South Vietnam, but instead of stability, turmoil. A Buddhist uprising, smashed by Diem, convinced President Kennedy that the regime had become too despotic under Diem, influenced by his manipulative brother, Ngo Dinh Nhu, to justify further American support. With the secret approval of the Kennedy administration, South Vietnam's generals deposed Diem on Nov. 1; to President Kennedy's shock, they also killed Diem and his brother.

Twenty-one days later, President Kennedy was assassinated in Dallas.

In its brief time in office, the Kennedy administration had deeply intensified the complicity and the commit-

ment of the United States in Indochina. Diem, who Vice President Johnson once hailed as "the Winston Churchill of Southeast Asia," was gone, and with him the mandarin-style of control of South Vietnam, leaving a vacuum that produced a revolving door of military juntas which the United States groped through, seeking a firm leader who could rally the nation.

## Johnson Redoubles

President Johnson took office pledged to continue the "commitment," which he in turn redoubled, and redoubled again. According to Lester Pearson, when he was Canada's Prime Minister in mid-1963, however, President Kennedy privately reflected grave doubts, retrospectively, about being drawn into even a limited involvement in Indochina. Pearson said, years later, in 1968, that when President Kennedy asked for his advice, Pearson said the United States should

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"get out." President Kennedy replied: "That's a stupid answer. Everybody knows that. The question is: How do we get out?"

The convinced, and the doubters, ended up expanding American power in Vietnam for opposite reasons: one group, out of loyalty to the original commitment; the other, to avoid "humiliation."

President Johnson ruled out compromises very early. He cabled to Ambassador Henry Cabot Lodge in Saigon on March 20, 1964: ". . . Your mission is precisely for the purpose of knocking down the idea of neutralization (of South Vietnam) wherever it rears its ugly head. . ."

The Johnson administration was convinced that if it could make Hanoi realize it was prepared to put military pressure directly on North Vietnam, Hanoi would either abandon its reach for the South through negotiations, or allow the war to subside. "Contingency planning" for that purpose proceeded in secret during the 1964 presidential campaign, while selective, covert military operations against the North were intensified.

Starting on Feb. 1, 1964, the United States began what the Pentagon Papers described as "an elaborate program of covert military operations against North Vietnam," including U-2 "spy plane" flights over the North, parachuting in sabotage teams, conducting commando raids from the sea. Simultaneously, the United States sent destroyer patrols into the waters off

North Vietnam as a show of force and also to collect intelligence information on North Vietnam's coastal and electronic defenses.

## The Tonkin Affair

For U.S. strategists, the first opportunity to confront North Vietnam with American air power came from the Gulf of Tonkin incidents of Aug. 2-4, 1964. The United States charged that it was the victim of unprovoked attack on the high seas when North Vietnamese torpedo boats began hostile runs on the U.S. destroyer Maddox, and on Aug. 4 returned to attack the Maddox and the USS Turner Joy.

To North Vietnam, the appearance of the Maddox in waters where covert, American-sponsored, South Vietnamese raids had just taken place on North Vietnamese islands, was enemy provocation, in which the claimed distinction between Saigon's forces and American forces were specious. The second attack, Hanoi insisted, never took place at all, and that incident is still clouded in dispute.

The Gulf of Tonkin affair, which was presented as a clear-cut case of unjustified attack, enabled the Johnson administration to whip through Congress with only two dissenting votes a sweeping resolution authorizing the President "to repel any armed attack against the forces of the United States and to prevent further aggression."

The Johnson administration concealed from Congress the full range of its pre-Tonkin Gulf operations—the complex of covert military actions conducted against North Vietnam, the secret intelligence-gathering mission of the destroyer Maddox, the preparation in the State Department as early as March 25, 1964, of a "contingency draft" of a congressional resolution to be used as a basis for justifying overt use of force, and the fact that for months Pentagon planners had been scrutinizing potential air targets in North Vietnam.

With these plans available, President Johnson within six hours of the reported second attack on U.S. destroyers in the gulf, on Aug. 4 sent U.S. air strikes against air bases in North Vietnam as a "reprisal." The Gulf of Tonkin resolution, provided ex post facto congressional endorsement of the order and blanket authority for future action, with Congress completely unaware of what was contemplated as President Johnson went on to win in November a landslide victory over Sen. Barry M. Goldwater, whom he portrayed as a reckless war adventurer. Sen. Fulbright, who unwittingly piloted the Gulf of Tonkin resolution through the Senate, later was to cry out that he had been "hornswoggled."

## Open Warfare

The secret war turned into an open war in early 1965. A Vietcong guerrilla attack on a U.S. military advisers' compound at Pleiku on Feb. 7 brought a quick U.S. air strike against the North. On March 2, the United States began sustained air assault on the North, operation "Rolling Thunder." Two Marine infantry battalions landed at Da Nang in the South on March 8; Army units followed. The buildup of American forces was underway. President Johnson had crossed over from defensive to offensive warfare.

Before and during the buildup, the Johnson administration repeatedly tried to use the threat of vast American power to convince North Vietnam that it was in for a hopelessly lopsided struggle for South Vietnam.

Starting in June, 1964, the United States advised North Vietnam that it was facing a costly contest if it persisted. Canadian envoy J. Blair Seaborn, a member of the International Control Commission, carried first

warnings to Hanoi's leaders, who brushed them aside. When Seaborn went back again, on Aug. 13, after the Gulf of Tonkin affair, he reported that Premier Pham Van Dong indignantly charged that the United States had hit the North "in order to find a way out of the impasse . . . in the South," and "if war comes to North Vietnam it will come to the whole of Southeast Asia."

According to the Pentagon Papers, the first organized North Vietnamese army units were dispatched from the North in August, 1964. North Vietnam was now joining in open warfare without publicly admitting it.

Another Canadian diplomat, Chester Ronning, who went to Hanoi March 7-11, 1966, to try to convince North Vietnam to accept U.S. terms for a bombing halt, ruefully said he had "traveled 10,000 miles to present a feather."

The basic American demand for a settlement was the equivalent of U.S. objectives in the war: abandonment of North Vietnam's infiltration into the South, which the United States called "foreign aggression."

In turn, the demands of North Vietnam and its agent in the South, the National Liberation Front, required surrendering American objectives in South Vietnam:

"Strict" respect for the 1954 Geneva accords; withdrawal of all U.S. forces and bases from South Vietnam; an end to all acts of force against the North; and the key demand—"the internal affairs of South Vietnam must be settled by the South Vietnamese people themselves in accordance with the program of the NLFSV (National Liberation Front of South Vietnam) without any foreign interference."

To U.S. officials, that meant wiping out the American-supported South Vietnamese government opening a path to "a Communist takeover."

## The Negotiations Ploy

Neither side, in fact, seriously expected negotiations on these terms until one side or the other concluded that a military-political victory was beyond reach.

Assistant Secretary of State William P. Bundy wrote in an internal memorandum on Aug. 11, 1964: "We must continue to oppose any Vietnam conference. . . Negotiations without continued pressure, indeed without continued military action will not achieve our objectives in the foreseeable future. . ."

His counterpart in the Defense Department, McNaughton, the next month reported this consensus: "Should pressures for negotiation become too formidable to resist . . . the United States should define its negotiating position 'in a way which makes Communist acceptance unlikely.'"

As a result, the United States sidestepped early attempts to stop the conflict, including efforts by United Nations Secretary General U Thant in 1964 to start peace talks.

Halts in the bombing of North Vietnam, such as the first five-day pause in May, 1965, and a 37-day interruption at the end of the year, served a dual purpose. As McNaughton explained in a confidential memorandum:

" . . . First, we must lay a foundation in the mind of the American public and in world opinion for . . . an enlarged phase of the war and, second, we should give North Vietnam a face-saving chance to stop the aggression."

During bombing pauses, American diplomats and intermediaries probed around the world, secretly or with deliberate fanfare, for any sign, as Rusk often expressed it, that Hanoi will "stop doing what it is doing against its neighbors."

The United States, was asking North Vietnam to end or curb its input into the war as a prerequisite to negotiations. North Vietnam had its own adamant condition: the United States must "unconditionally" cease all bombing and other acts of war against the North prior to any negotiations.

Multiple, futile diplomatic efforts were made to break the stalemate. The code-names are spread through the diplomatic volumes of the Pentagon Papers, including: the XYZ Channel; Marigold, the Polish Channel; Packers, the Romanian Channel; Ohio, the Norwegian Contacts; Killy, the Italian Channel; Sunflower, the Wilson-Kosygin Channel, and Pennsylvania, Kissinger and the French, intermittently arousing and deflating peace hopes from 1965 through 1968.

## Diplomatic Ritual

The diplomatic ritual encircled fine semantic shadings and tenses of words, an art that North Vietnam played out with great subtlety; for example, shifting a "could," in "could there be talks" after a cessation of American bombings, to a more enticing "will."

Parallel subtleties were attempted on the American side. To try to circumvent Hanoi's demand for a bomb halt and its refusal to admit that its own forces were fighting in the South, U.S. expert Chester L. Cooper devised a "Phase A—Phase B" formula. Phase A—the bombing of North Vietnam would stop, ostensibly without conditions; Phase B—by prior, private assurance, soon afterward the infiltra-

tion of North Vietnamese troops would stop, and also the reinforcement of American forces in South Vietnam.

This circuitous approach, or variations on it, became the new pattern of Vietnam diplomacy. It was tried unsuccessfully in negotiations in February, 1967, in London between Soviet Premier Alexei N. Kosygin and British Prime Minister Harold Wilson. These talks collapsed when President Johnson ordered the phases switched, asking President Ho Chi Minh for assurance that North Vietnamese infiltration would stop first.

A variation on the Phase A—Phase B idea, later made public as President Johnson's "San Antonio" formula, was secretly explored at length later that year by Henry Kissinger, then a Harvard professor, operating through two French intermediaries.

North Vietnam stood firm. The full reason for its adamancy became clear only with the lunar new year, Tet. On Jan. 31, 1968, North Vietnamese and Vietcong forces struck with shock impact throughout South Vietnam.

Allied leaders later labeled the Tet offensive a military disaster; but the offensive shattered the claims of stability and success in South Vietnam. It collapsed American support for an expanding war, producing, on March 31, 1968, President Johnson's surprise decision to halt the bombing of North Vietnam above the 20th Parallel unilaterally in order to stimulate "early talks" on peace. With that order came President Johnson's more startling announcement that he was taking himself out of the 1968 race for re-election.

Hanoi boasted that it had "defeated" the American President and his war. But Secretary Rusk secretly cabled U.S. missions abroad that "we are not giving up anything really serious," as bad weather would limit U.S. air power, which could be shifted to Laos and South Vietnam; "Hanoi is most likely to denounce the project and thus free our hand," and this would "put the monkey firmly on Hanoi's back for whatever follows."

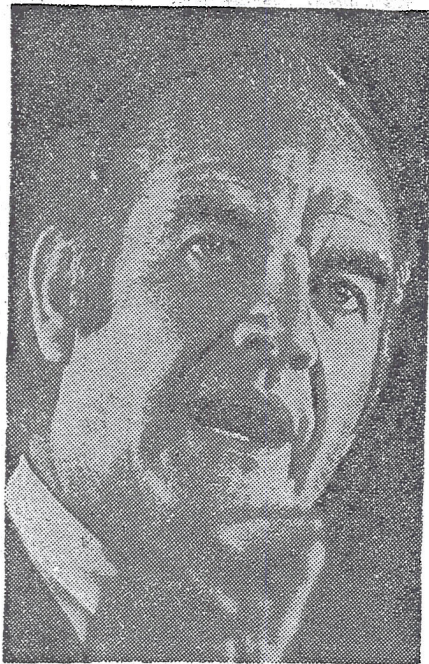
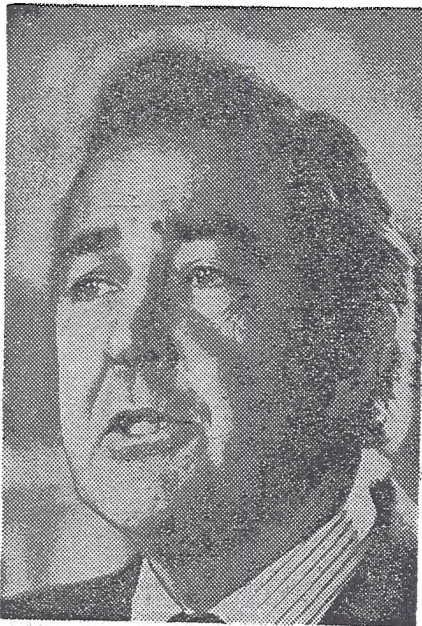
North Vietnam surprised Washington on April 3. It would agree to a meeting, but only to discuss "unconditional cessation" of all bombing as a precondition to any peace negotiations. Washington and Hanoi jockeyed for a month over a meeting place, finally settling on Paris, starting May 10.

## The Paris Talks

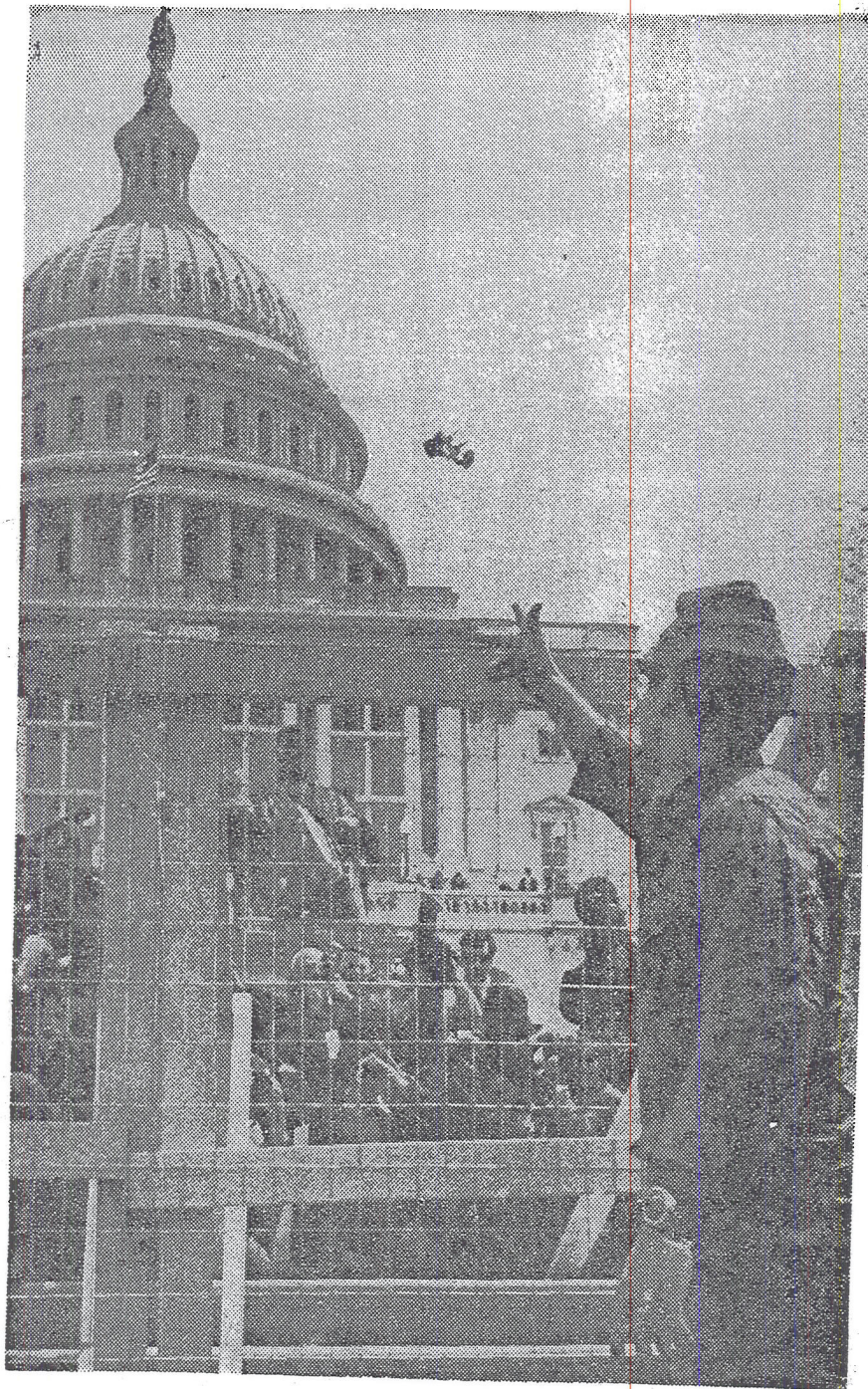
The United States sent to Paris veteran diplomat W. Averell Harriman, seconded by Cyrus R. Vance, former deputy secretary of defense. Ambassador Xuan Thuy led North Vietnam's delegation.

The first formal session, May 13, 1968, marked the opening of the world's longest war-peace propaganda battle in any continuing diplomatic forum. The war was in the dual "fight-negotiate" phase that Hanoi had long projected; South Vietnamese President Nguyen Van Thieu made his own plans to try to forestall a premature conclusion of either phase, at the expense of his regime.

From President Johnson at Honolulu in July, 1968, Thieu extracted a pledge that echoed through all negotiations afterward: the United States "will not support the imposition of a 'coalition government' or any other form of government on the people of South Vietnam," and "the Republic of Vietnam should be a full participant playing a leading role" in the political settle-



Peace candidates: McCarthy and McGovern took the war to the voters.



By Frank Johnston—The Washington Post

*Veterans' march: Some would revile their medals.*

ment of the war. North Vietnam's stand in Paris reinforced Thieu's hand, ironically. It would negotiate on nothing until there was a total bombing halt.

After five months in Paris, the United States and North Vietnam secretly came to terms in private talks. Then, President Johnson wrote in his memoirs, "as we reached accord in Paris, our agreement (on the terms) with President Thieu fell apart."

Thieu could not block the total bomb halt, but he could forestall further negotiations under the terms the United States agreed upon, which it said Thieu initially accepted.

### Saigon Balks

On Oct. 31, 1968, President Johnson went ahead without Thieu's agreement to order a total halt in air and naval attacks on North Vietnam, effective Nov. 1, on the basis of an "essential understanding." The "understanding(s)" were a more limited version of the old Phase A—Phase B device, permitting North Vietnam to claim that the bombing halt was "unconditional," although private conditions were attached to it.

These "understandings" provided for four-delegation talks, which the Saigon government and the National Liberation Front would join; North Vietnam would "respect" the Demilitarized Zone dividing North and South; there would be no large-scale Communist attacks on major cities such as Saigon, Hue and Danang, and the United States reserved the right to fly unarmed reconnaissance flights over the North. Hanoi never literally "accepted" these conditions; it only said it "understood" what the United States was saying; officially it denied there were any "understandings."

For President Johnson, it was "a grave disappointment" that South Vietnam balked at the terms. The President said later that he "had reason to believe" that Thieu was urged to do so by members of presidential candidate Nixon's camp, in the expectation of receiving firmer support from the prospective President later. President Johnson speculated, with others, that the pre-election balk helped to deprive Sen. Hubert H. Humphrey of the presidency.

South Vietnam delayed nearly four weeks in sending its delegation to Paris, and then spun out procedural wrangling over table shapes and seating order until Jan. 16, 1969, delaying the first substantive meeting of the expanded conference to Jan. 25, after President Nixon's inauguration brought in Saigon veteran, Henry Cabot Lodge, who had the confidence of South Vietnam's generals, as delegation chief to replace Harriman, who had infuriated Thieu—and vice versa—by his eagerness to end the war.

The Johnson administration, like the Kennedy administration, was scourged by the war. Former Defense Secretary Robert S. McNamara who shifted to the World Bank in mid-1968, despairingly had concluded privately years earlier that the war would not yield to his mathematical expertise in applying military power. His successor, Clark M. Clifford, swiftly switched from hawk to dove and openly assailed Thieu for blocking negotiations.

Rusk remained loyal to the war objectives, although he acknowledged after he was out of office that he had "underestimated the persistency and the tenacity of the North Viet-

namese." That one miscalculation, however, which was widely shared, flawed every other calculation by two administrations.

President Thieu had his own brand of tenacity, and his belief that the Nixon administration would be more responsive to his regime was not misplaced. Henry Kissinger, before entering the White House, deplored "the public rift" between Saigon and Washington, on grounds that it played into Hanoi's hands.

In a penetrating critique of U.S. war strategy, written while he was still a Harvard professor, and published in the January, 1969, issue of Foreign Affairs, Kissinger projected what became the basic themes of Nixon administration policy. He started, however, by describing the war in terms directly counter to official American doctrine: "a civil war," extended to involve the great powers.

What was important, said Kissinger, was to get out of it without destroying "confidence in American promises" that could rebound elsewhere, by trying to bring about "a staged with-

drawal of external forces, North Vietnamese and American," leaving a political settlement to the South Vietnamese.

Kissinger acknowledged, however, that "it is beyond imagination that parties that have been murdering and betraying each other for 25 years could work together as a team giving joint instructions to the entire country."

### Kissinger's Terms

He foreshadowed the Nixon administration's offers: "a coalition government is undesirable" but there could be a "mixed commission to develop and supervise a political process," including free elections. Kissinger knew that such a commission amounted to a form of coalition, and he also wrote that "negotiating a cease-fire may well be tantamount to establishing the preconditions of a political settlement."

In addition, Kissinger called for "an international presence to enforce good faith," and "an international force . . . to supervise access routes." If Hanoi

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"proves intransigent," the United States should adopt a military strategy to reduce casualties, strengthen the South Vietnamese army to permit gradual withdrawal of American forces, and "encourage Saigon to broaden its base so that it is stronger for the political contest with the Communists which sooner or later it must undertake." The latter objective, held out by every administration since President Eisenhower's, equally failed for the Nixon administration.

The United States, in Vietnam, was always confounded by its attempts to prop up a regime and induce it to reform itself; the government could always threaten to collapse on that issue or on negotiations, impaling the prestige of the United States in the crash.

Kissinger, in 1969, acknowledged that constant dilemma, which ultimately entrapped the Nixon administration, too.

"Clearly," he wrote, "there is a point beyond which Saigon cannot be given a veto over negotiations." But the United States, he said, must not "begin"—and he italicized the word for emphasis—with "a public row" with Saigon.

The United States, said Kissinger, must adopt "a less impatient strategy." Privately, he later told associates, Harriman had appeared "too eager" to settle the war. Harriman was to charge that the Nixon administration had looked in its strategy to the fate of Thieu, the charge that Sen. George McGovern carried into the 1972 campaign: "the dictatorship in Saigon . . . is vetoing American foreign policy."

### Who Shall Rule?

Both sides in the deadlocked Paris peace talks flung at each other four, five, seven, eight or nine-numbered peace plans, but the central issue of the war never changed: who shall rule in Saigon?

The main changes that the Nixon administration made in U.S. strategy were unilateral. President Nixon, meeting with President Thieu at Midway Island on June 8, 1969, launched the American troop withdrawal program, with an initial withdrawal of 25,000 men, and the start of the "Vietnamization" program to turn the fighting back to the South Vietnamese in controlled stages.

When the Nixon administration was evolving the "Nixon Doctrine," first outlined by the President at Guam on July 25, 1969, reporters were told that Vietnam was an exception to the doctrine that allied nations facing less than nuclear war threats must now take primary responsibility for their own defense. At that time there were still over a half-million U.S. troops in South Vietnam.

Later, as American force levels were run down, Vietnam was labeled a prime example of the doctrine, which supplanted the thesis of rigid, Communist containment, principally by U.S. might. Now that the doctrine that took the United States into Indochina was gone, the war appeared to lack any doctrinal rationalization. President Nixon offered one: the war was the spearpoint of test for American resolve to meet its commitments as it moved away from "confrontation" into "different challenges and new opportunities" in "the emerging polycentrism of the Communist world . . ."

Before conceptual formulations pervaded administration language, a simpler explanation was given for the U.S. troop withdrawal program in Vietnam.

"Time is running out on our side in Vietnam," Army Secretary Stanley Resor told a closed session of a House subcommittee on Oct. 8, 1969. "Therefore," he said, "if we can just buy some time in the United States by those periodic, progressive withdrawals, and the American people can just shore up their patience and determination, I think we can bring this thing to a successful conclusion."

In administration theory, as American troops withdrew from the war and South Vietnamese troops were strengthened, the United States could disengage from the war even without negotiations. But the weakness in the strategy was almost transparent: if the Communist forces chose to do so, they could attack at a low ebb of American strength to try to topple the Thieu regime while U.S. prestige was still tied to it.

The American-South Vietnamese assault into Cambodia, ordered in April, 1970, to show, in Mr. Nixon's words, that the United States was no "pitiful, helpless giant," was an attempt to close this hole in U.S. strategy by pro-





By Frank Johnston

*Westmoreland: No victory parades.*

protecting the Allied flank from Communist "sanctuaries" there. In the process, Cambodia was added to the list of dependent, American-client states in Cambodia.

In addition, the 1968 bomb halt "understandings" were progressively whittled away by renewed, limited bombing of North Vietnam under the euphemism of "protective reaction" to protect air reconnaissance missions over North Vietnam.

South Vietnam was gaining strength, but the war was neither "withering away" as some officials projected, nor bending to negotiations on administration terms, and Congress was increasingly threatening to set its own date for termination the war.

On Jan. 25, 1972, to counter his critics, the President disclosed that since Aug. 4, 1969, unknown to even almost all State Department officials, Kissinger had met secretly 12 times with North Vietnamese Politburo member Le Duc Tho or Hanoi's Xuan Thuy in Paris.

Kissinger said all but two issues had been "narrowed to manageable proportions," but these were the central issues in the war: U.S. withdrawal, and "the political evolution" of the South.

In the secret talks the United States had offered many variations for a settlement, including a \$7½-billion, five-year postwar reconstruction program for Indochina, with \$2½ billion of it for North Vietnam as a roundabout response to its demand for "war reparations." North Vietnam insisted on total withdrawal of all American forces and support for the Thieu regime, plus, said Kissinger, a political settlement "in which the probability of their taking over (control) is close to certainty."



Associated Press & United Press International

*Commanders-in-chief and the grunts: 2½ million went to war.*

The U.S. eight-point peace plan, made public Jan. 25, and later to be used to bargain out the ultimate settlement, included a new feature: an offer by President Thieu to resign from office a month before a "presidential election" conducted "by an independent body representing all political forces in South Vietnam . . ." North Vietnam, by then, had broken off the

secret talks, which in mid-February Hanoi indicated it was prepared to resume at a later date. Counter-dates were suggested, and talks finally were set to resume April 24.

### Easter Offensive

Easter weekend, March 30, 1972, produced a forceful explanation for the delay. Three North Vietnamese divisions swept across the Demilitarized Zone, in a frontal attack on the South, with massed tanks, artillery and troops, the strongest Communist assault since the 1968 Tet offensive.

North Vietnam was making an all-out drive to seize what it could in the South, at a time when it was facing ominous diplomatic encirclement by the United States, which was reaching over North Vietnam's head with overtures to its two major allies, China and the Soviet Union.

According to intelligence data later disclosed, North Vietnam had decided at least as far back as the end of 1970

that the 1972 election year was its time of reckoning with President Nixon, as the 1968 election year had been with President Johnson. The following year, the North Vietnamese Central Committee's 20th Plenum, December, 1971-January, 1972, reportedly confirmed plans for a prolonged offensive, which cadre in the South were told would decide the fate of the war.

In early 1972, instructions were given to Communist cadre to prepare for total military-political struggle, that might culminate in a cease-fire. The possibility of a cease-fire discussed in many orders later found in the South, suggests that Hanoi's strategists contemplated a cease-fire with Thieu still in office if they could not topple him.

By then, the intended U.S. diplomatic approaches to North Vietnam's allies were becoming apparent. For Hanoi, the threat raised bitter memories of Geneva, 1954, when Moscow and Peking joined in ending the Indochina war short of Ho Chi Minh's objectives.

Hanoi held off its offensive until it took measure of President Nixon's trip to Peking in February, then struck in advance of the President's scheduled May 22 trip to Moscow.

Planners in Hanoi, subsequent documents indicate, did forecast President Nixon's first actions to counter their offensive, but not his ultimate move. North Vietnam appears to have calculated that election year pressures on President Nixon would limit his responses, as they limited President Johnson after the 1968 Tet offensive.

President Nixon faced the risk that the North Vietnamese offensive could be slicing through South Vietnam, "humiliating" the United States just before, or during, the Moscow summit. On April 15, after charging Hanoi with "flagrant violation" of the 1968 bomb halt "understandings," President Nixon also tore them up by ordering B-52 air strikes on the Hanoi-Haiphong region.

### Mining and Bombing

The President on May 8 made his surprise move. He ordered the mining of North Vietnam's harbors to cut off the flow of "tanks, artillery, and other advanced offensive weapons supplied to Hanoi by the Soviet Union and other Communist nations." At the same time, Mr. Nixon offered a total U.S. troop withdrawal from South Vietnam four months after an Indochina-wide cease-fire and the return of prisoners.

The mining order was the boldest gamble of President Nixon's first term. Before taking it, he sent Kissinger to Moscow April 20-24 for secret talks with Communist Party leader Leonid I. Brezhnev and other Soviet officials, to cushion in advance the consequences of his May 8 decision.

The Nixon administration, long before, shrewdly had knitted a web of overlapping U.S.-Soviet interests for expanded ties in many fields, including a prospective nuclear arms limitation pact, to be capped at the Moscow summit. Now all these prospects were at stake, and the Soviet Union, said the President, "must recognize our right to defend our interests" in Vietnam.

To allay the strain on the Soviet Union's relations with its North Vietnamese ally, the United States agreed, at Soviet "urging," to resume secret negotiations between Kissinger and Le Duc Tho in Paris on May 2.

From all subsequent indications, that was a "diplomatic duty" meeting that only re-recorded the existing stalemate. Six days later the President ordered the mining of North Vietnam's harbors, boldly challenging all Communist shipping.

The risk of an American-Soviet confrontation at sea froze world attention for days, but only verbal denunciation came from Moscow and Peking. The Soviet Union put a higher priority on its own vital interest than on North Vietnam's, swallowing the affront of the mining order, and ordering summit plans to proceed. President Nixon's gamble had paid off.

In extended private talks about Vietnam during the May 22-29 summit conference, Soviet Communist Party General Secretary Brezhnev and other ruling officials, focused on this question: was the United States prepared for a total severance of its intervention in South Vietnam, militarily and politically, without retaining, as North Vietnam charged, "a pro-Western puppet administration in South Vietnam."

President Nixon said his administration was prepared for a complete withdrawal that would leave South Vietnam's political future to be contested by the opposing forces there, but the Communist side must be prepared for a competitive process that would permit the United States to withdraw from the war with "honor."

The Soviet Union privately agreed to

help produce the result through negotiations.

North Vietnam, on the eve of the President's trip to Moscow, had assailed the visit as a "dark and despicable political-diplomatic attempt to undermine the solidarity" of Hanoi's supporters in the war. The suspicion was justified; in mid-June, Soviet President Nikolai V. Podgorny headed for Hanoi, and Kissinger went to Peking, to solicit China's support for a negotiated end to the war.

### The Jockeying Continues

Diplomatic maneuvering continued through the summer, while the Communist offensive failed to achieve any dramatic breakthrough. Kissinger and Tho met in Paris again on July 19, Aug. 1 and Aug. 14, and the presidential envoy then turned his attention in the triangular bargaining on Saigon, while Tho returned to Hanoi. In the midst of diplomatic jockeying, Hanoi itself revealed the Soviet-Chinese weight upon it by denouncing those who succumbed to the "Machiavellian policy" of "U.S. imperialism" by "throwing a life-buoy to a drowning pirate" when "we Communists must persist in revolution, and should not compromise."

Kissinger was in the position of a negotiator attempting to thread three needles thousands of miles apart. The United States was trying to bring North Vietnam into a compromise, and each time they moved forward, South Vietnam reared back. The pattern of 1968 frustration was recurring. President Thieu, in Saigon, was determined to drag his feet on negotiations, past the Nov. 7 presidential elections, his danger point for U.S. "flexibility." Hanoi was trying to do just the opposite, to use the election date as leverage to extract maximum concessions from the Nixon administration.

President Nixon, in turn, sent warnings through diplomatic channels to Hanoi that once re-elected he would be freer to inflict unlimited damage on North Vietnam if it resisted a war settlement.

On Sept. 11, Hanoi broadcast an "important statement." It said that "a solution to the internal problem of South Vietnam must proceed from the actual situation that there exist in South Vietnam two administrations, two armies, and other political forces." North Vietnam and the Vietcong agreed "that neither a Communist regime nor a U.S.-stooge regime shall be imposed on South Vietnam."

In another slide toward compromise, North Vietnam on Sept. 25 "dared" the United States and other "parties concerned" to join in guarantees that "neither side dominates the political life in South Vietnam" during a "transitional period." North Vietnam was surfacing overtures it made in the secret talks to accept the transitional existence of the Thieu government.

The diplomatic pace quickened. Kissinger had gone back to Moscow in early September, stopped off in Paris Sept. 15 to meet with returned Le Duc Tho, then back to Paris Sept. 26-27. On Oct. 8, the white-haired Tho formally unveiled in secret what North Vietnam called "a new, extremely important initiative."

As Kissinger later described it, the Hanoi offer, with subsequent elaboration, finally abandoned the essential link between military and political terms on which all earlier negotiations foundered, providing for American disengagement from the war with a political solution left to the Vietnamese parties.

Said Kissinger, "They dropped their demand for a coalition government which would absorb all existing authorities." The coalition concept, however, was not completely gone.

North Vietnam's proposal included a cease-fire, a total U.S. troop withdrawal, a release of American prisoners, and a temporary continuance of the Thieu regime, but with a "National Council of National Reconciliation and Concord of three equal segments" to "promote the implementation" of agreements between the Provisional Revolutionary Government and the Thieu regime, and "to organize . . . general elections."

No explicit requirement was included in the Hanoi plan for any withdrawal of North Vietnamese forces in South Vietnam, whose presence never had been officially admitted by Hanoi. The oblique Hanoi summary language on this key point only stated that "the question of Vietnamese armed forces in South Vietnam shall be settled by the two South Vietnamese parties . . ."

The United States, evidently anticipating North Vietnam's Oct. 8 offer, immediately responded to it in secret on Oct. 9, according to the uncontested Hanoi account.

That day, the Hanoi record states, "at the proposal of the U.S. side, it was

agreed that on Oct. 18, 1972, the United States would stop the bombing and mining in North Vietnam," on Oct. 19 the two parties "would initial the text" of the accord in Hanoi, and on Oct. 26, foreign ministers would formally sign in Paris for the two sides.

### "Stretching" Saigon

But the timetable immediately began to slide, even while the secret Kissinger-Tho exchange in Paris was still underway, Oct. 8-11. The United States on Oct. 11 proposed, and North Vietnam agreed, to push the schedule forward at each stage for a signing on Oct. 30. Kissinger returned to Paris briefly again on Oct. 17, then turned to Saigon for the expected, formidable task of gaining President Thieu's concurrence.

According to official U.S. sources speaking privately, the Nixon administration never planned for an agreement that it would risk putting into force by election day, Nov. 7. "We never intended to wrap this up by election day," said one source.

The Nixon administration officially has denied this report by The Washington Post: that it engaged in "stretching" North Vietnam over the Nov. 7 election date in order to complete the accord at a less hazardous date that could prevent North Vietnam from exploiting a pre-election cease-fire, avoid danger to the Thieu government, and risk a backfire on President Nixon's re-election. The record of developments, however, shows that this "stretching" of dates did occur.

Kissinger, in Saigon Oct. 18-22, engaged in an admitted "stretching" process of bargaining, to try to move President Thieu toward the terms Kissinger negotiated with Tho. Thieu, before the draft accord was publicly unveiled, launched a public and private attack on any settlement that amounted to installing a "disguised coalition" in Saigon, permitted North Vietnamese forces to remain in the South unhindered, or failed to recognize the existence of South Vietnam as an "independent" state.

On Oct. 20, while Kissinger was still in Saigon, the United States proposed changing the settlement timetable again, moving the signing date forward to Oct. 31 in Paris. Two days later, on Oct. 22, President Nixon, in one of a series of private messages to North Vietnamese Premier Pham Van Dong, "expressed satisfaction" with the negotiations, and according to Hanoi, agreed that "the formulation of the agreement was complete." But next day, Oct. 23, the United States, citing "difficulties in Saigon," asked for further negotiations.

In suddenly making that sequence public, with a summary of the nine-point draft accord, in the early morning of Oct. 26, North Vietnam charged that the United States had engaged in "pretexts" to "drag out the talks so as to deceive public opinion and to cover up its scheme of maintaining the Saigon puppet administration" in power.

The North Vietnamese disclosure and accusation brought emergency conferences at the White House. The day before, the White House had leaked out a partial version of the draft accord, with no mention of the repeated exchanges of timetables for bringing it into force.

### Partial Bomb Halt

Kissinger, in a dramatic White House news conference on Oct. 26, acknowledged that the proposal had been "correctly summarized" by Hanoi, but "the deadline" for concluding it, he said, "was established by Hanoi and not by us." Kissinger said "we did agree that we would make a major effort to conclude the negotiations by Oct. 31," but he said, "It was always clear that we would have to discuss anything that was negotiated first in Washington and then in Saigon."

Only a partial bomb halt was put into effect by the United States, north of the 20th Parallel of North Vietnam.

The bulk of the negotiating work was now complete for a total accord, said Kissinger, except for "six or seven very concrete issues" that could be resolved in "one more negotiating session with the North Vietnamese" of "no more than three or four days."

"We believe," said Kissinger, "that peace is at hand . . . peace is within reach in a matter of weeks or less."

That was the posture in which the Nixon administration went into the Nov. 7 election as the proposed Oct. 31 "signing" deadline slipped by with indignant words from North Vietnam, angry counter-demands from South Vietnam, and the White House projecting optimism that what Kissinger

called "blips" of discord would soon dissolve in a settlement of the most anguishing war in U.S. history.

The pre-election optimism proved premature. Early in December, Kissinger's "final talks" with the North Vietnamese were broken off and he reported to the American people that a stalemate had been reached. On December 18, President Nixon ordered all-out bombing attacks on Hanoi and Haiphong, using the B-52s of the Strategic Air Command. Millions of tons of explosives were dropped on the North. The intensity of the bombing provoked widespread criticism of the United States at home and abroad. The raids were halted on December 30 and talks were resumed with North Vietnam in Paris on January 2. The accords were then worked out and initialed on Jan. 23.

They provided:

- A cease-fire throughout Vietnam beginning at 7 p.m. EST, Jan. 27.
- Complete withdrawal of all U.S. troops and military advisers and the dismantling of all U.S. military bases in South Vietnam within 60 days.
- The return of all captured American servicemen and civilians throughout Indochina and the release of captured North Vietnamese and Vietcong troops within 60 days.
- A ban on the introduction of new troops and munitions into South Vietnam on behalf of either the Vietcong or the Saigon government—except for the periodic replacement of existing armaments.
- Negotiations between the Saigon government and the Vietcong to settle the return of "Vietnamese civilian personnel" detained in South Vietnam by both sides.

- A pledge to maintain the Demilitarized Zone at the 17th parallel as a provisional dividing line — with the question of eventual reunification of North and South Vietnam to be settled "through peaceful means".

- Creation of an International Control Commission staffed by Canada, Hungary, Indonesia and Poland to supervise the cease-fire and help enforce other provisions. A joint military commission, composed of parties to the conflict, also will be created to help implement the agreement.

- An international conference will be convened within 30 days to supervise the Control Commission and the implementation of the agreement.

- Withdrawal of all foreign troops from Laos and Cambodia and a prohibition against use of those territories as base areas for encroachments on South Vietnam.

- Consultations between the South Vietnamese government and the Vietcong on general elections—with each side holding a veto. A non-governmental National Council of National Reconciliation and Concord will be created to discuss elections and to "promote conciliation and implementation of the agreement."

Long before the final agreement was concluded, it was hailed by many as a "brilliant" negotiating victory that supplied the United States with the goal it had long sought in vain: an exit from the war with "honor."

Others, while commending the Nixon administration's skill in diplomatically encircling North Vietnam through its allies, remain totally skeptical that anything approaching "peace" in Vietnam has been achieved.

The odds are overwhelming, many pessimistic experts believe, that in a relatively short time, perhaps as little as two years, the more highly organized pro-Communist forces will dominate South Vietnam through political

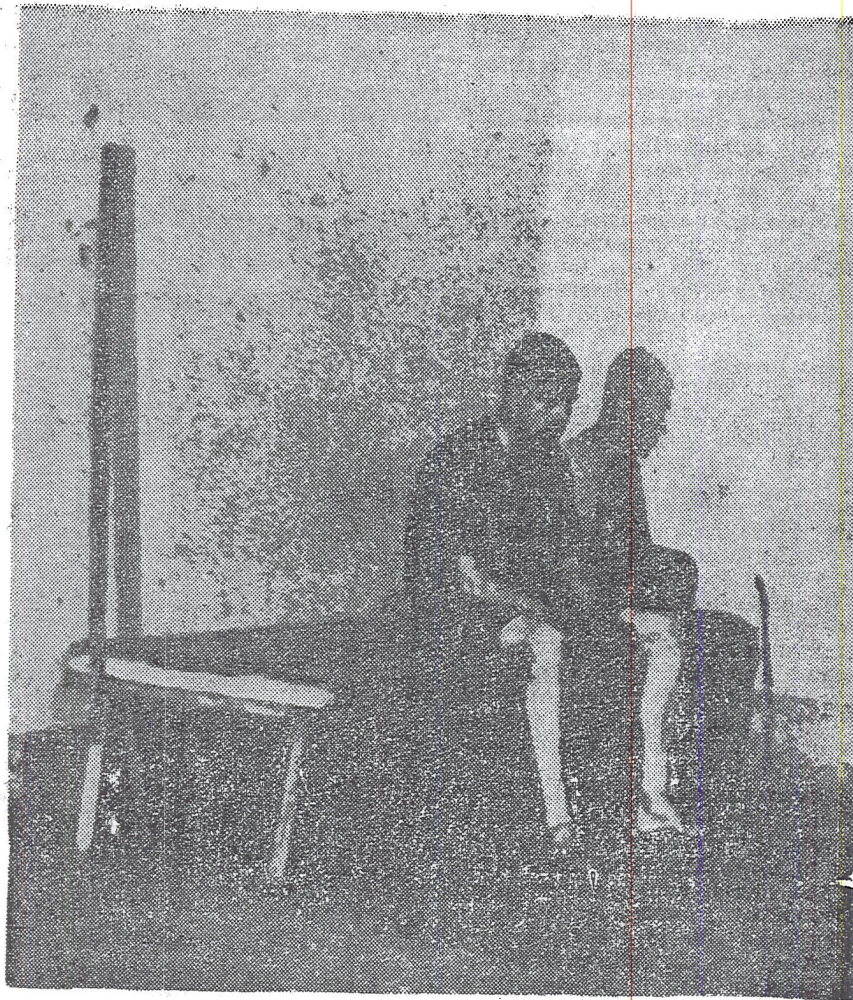
struggle, even if open warfare is averted.

The optimists believe this takeover threat can be checked by a continuing U.S. role in supplying U.S. aid for the reconstruction of Vietnam, and by Soviet and Chinese rival interest in preventing any single power from dominating Southeast Asia.

One skeptic told Kissinger at a Washington party that, on balance, all that has been achieved is a reversion to the status of Vietnam at the time of the 1954 Geneva accords. "What's wrong with that?" countered Kissinger.

The United States indeed had come full circle in Vietnam.

"In the final analysis," the late President Kennedy once said, speaking of the Vietnamese stake in the war before the Americanization of the struggle, "it is their war. They are the ones who have to win it or lose it . . ." So it is once again. But neither Vietnam, nor the United States, will ever be quite the same. □



Life Magazine Photo

*Prisoner of war: Bargaining chip*



Valley Daily News, Kent, Ohio

*Death and anguish at Kent State: Some would turn rifles on their own countrymen.*