CHAPTER-IV

The Vietnamization of War

In the country where civilian leaders were loudly declared that their people had no desire to shed their blood to protect the interests of United States and where government troops viewed the war as belonging to Americans, therefore, how could the United States saved such a people. Opposition to the war rose to enormous proportions by 1967, especially on college campuses. The compulsory draft in the army and the growing casualty rates awakened the youth to the cost of war.¹

¹ Roger Hilsman, a former United States Assistant Secretary for Far Eastern Affairs, revealed that the President John F. Kennedy's policy was to meet the guerrilla aggression within a counter-guerrilla framework, with the implied, corollary that if Vietcong could not be defeated within a counter - guerrilla framework and the allegiance of the people of Vietnam could not be won then the United States should accept the resulting situation and would be free to enter negotiations without fatal consequences to our position in the rest of Asia.

The Johnson Administration came under considerable pressure to end the war which had taken over 16,000 United States lives and was costing over 55 million a day without achieving political results intended. Influential American and many Southeast Asian specialists all over the world urged the United States to accept the establishment of a coalition government in Saigon, including National Liberation Front (NLF) and other political forces, and the subsequent gradual withdrawal of United States military power. Such a solution could permit a disengagement of major powers from Indo-China peninsula. The Johnson Administration, however, kept on trying to keep South Vietnam safe for the free world.²

American's steps in the escalation of the war were taken in large part during the Administration of President Richard M. Nixon who assumed office in January 1969. He reduced the number of American servicemen from 543,000 in early 1969 to around 23,700 at the time of the cease-fire. The withdrawal was done carefully and related to the overall

² Ibid.
military, political and diplomatic situation. Indeed, the American withdrawal of military forces without loss of United States credibility abroad was one of the major accomplishment of the Nixon presidency. Vietnamization, a policy of preparing the South Vietnamese to fight their own war, was the rationale employed by the White House and Pentagon.³

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³ It should be observed that “Vietnamization” was not a new concept, for the French under the Navarre Plan in 1953 and even President Lyndon B Johnson, especially after March 1968 had tried to implement it.


It was stated that when Nixon came to power, he interested in getting out of Vietnam but without abandoning the objective of sustaining an independent South Vietnam. The Nixon approach, was to change the tactics, not the goal, so as to reduce the domestic dissent on Vietnam. As Henry A. Kissinger wrote in the prestigious journal of the United States opinion elite that :

“A new American administration must be given to benefit of the doubt and a chance to move towards a peace which grant the people of Vietnam what they have struggled so bravely to achieve : an opportunity to work out their own destiny in their own way.”

Nixon and his advisors believed that they could achieve what the previous administration could not (an American withdrawal with a guarantee that the Saigon regime would not be overthrown by communists). This was the promise of ensuing negotiations for peace and the policy of “Vietnamization of
On November 3, 1970, President Richard M. Nixon offered a strategy upon the twin approach of negotiations and Vietnamization of the war, accompanied by withdrawal of American forces. He was pessimistic about the outlook for negotiations and told that Vietnamization would permit the United States to disengage from the war even if negotiations failed. In the period since, the United States had further downgraded negotiations as an essential parts of any solution. The only subsequent hint that the government might

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war”. The United States ground troops were withdrawn to make the United States public happy but the air war was continued so as to undermine the NLF and Hanoi’s war efforts.

Lalita Prasad Singh, n. 1, p. 17.

Realizing the inevitability of United States withdrawal, and seeing an opportunity in the communists post Tet fall back, the United States had launched a three month - accelerated pacification programme in November 1968 and then prolonged it as fixed policy. Accelerated pacification, i.e. a rush to “clear and hold” territory as communist strength declined, coordinated and updated programme that previously had functioned separately and been given low priority. One programme financed by the CIA and headed by former Viet Minh Officer Ngu-Yen Be, trained 59 man teams to spearhead rural construction. Rural Development (RD) teams were sent out to help reorganize village administration, start construction projects, and train villagers to defend themselves.

not consider the Vietnamization strategy sufficient by itself was provided by the President’s speech on April 20, 1971 announcing future troops withdrawal, in which both the volume and tone of his discussion of negotiations implied a recognition that there was important. He stated explicitly that negotiations atleast provide a better, shorter path to peace. But there was no evidence following that speech of a change in the United States position in the Paris negotiations, and the President’s action in Cambodia 10 days later clearly gave priority to Vietnamization. This priority was reflected in the renewed emphasis upon the use of military means to end the war and in the justification of the Cambodian intervention on the grounds that it was needed to protect American lives and to guarantee the continue success of American withdrawal and Vietnamization programme.4

As the 1970s opened, both Washington and Hanoi were prepared to make new efforts to reach an agreement. The

Nixon Administration had been compelled to reformulate American policy towards Vietnam due to the impossibility of attaining a victory within the limit set by the domestic opposition to the war, the obstacles posed by a tenacious enemy, and the fear of courting a major confrontation with China and Soviet Union as well as alienating America's friends. The new strategy of Vietnamization consisted of unilaterally and gradually withdrawing American combat troops while simultaneously strengthening the Saigon government and its armed force. The Administration was still committed to maintaining an anti-communist stand in Saigon. But the change of means and the reduced importance of Vietnam to the American policy makers implied then to suggest an opening of negotiations with the North Vietnamese.  


However, the Vietnamization programme was not welcome by everybody such as General Iran Van Don, the former chairman of the Senate and House Defence Committees, and finally Minister of Defence of South Vietnam had said that:
"I was an opponent of Vietnamization. I will tell just one story. I visited some unit in the field and tried to understand the programme of Vietnamization of war.... it was the head quarters of the 5th Division. I discussed the question with the commander of the division, General Minh Non Hieh, a most honest general and capable too. I was surprised by his answer; it opened my eyes. I ask him, "what do you think of Vietnamization? He said to me it is impossible to be implemented, why? He said, the 5th Division covers an area where there were two other divisions, Americans, and now with the departure of the two American divisions I have only my division to cover the whole area. I have three regiments for this area and must use one regiment to replace one division. How can I face the enemy like this? I have become weaker. He looked very disappointed. I was surprised; he was a quite man, polite man and he tried to do his best. But he said to me that this was impossible. How can I cover a bigger area with less units? So the Vietnamization of war means that we are becoming weaker."

Colonel Nguyen Huy Loi, a veteran staff officer with a military adviser to the South Vietnamese delegation to the Paris talks, thought that Vietnamization had not been approached properly; he started that:

"When I was in Paris, people came to ask me, How do you feel about the Vietnamization? I thought a Vietnamization Programme was possible, really, because we did it before in 1954 with the French. But the important thing is to Vietnamize the whole structure, right from the top, from those who conduct the whole war not just the small units. We had good officers who would stand and fight but we needed to put them in a right structure of force."

President Nixon's policy to vietnamize the war was first avowed during the spring of 1969. It involved the continuing but unscheduled withdrawal of American ground combat troops and the systematic strengthening of Army of Republic of Vietnam forces (ARVN). From the beginning the proposal was far from popular at Saigon. The political context of the Vietnamization proposal changed during the summer following the virtual abandonment of hope for progress in the peace negotiations and in broadening the political base of the Saigon government.6

The Vietnamization programme not only implied approval of the military suppression of any peace sentiment, but also the abandonment of deep seated demands for revolutionary social change, long denied by the French, by Diem, and successor governments at Saigon.7

7. Ibid., p. 602.
The new United States strategy required, the United States allies in Asia to take upon themselves the bulk of the defence burden. Washington assigned itself the role of good old uncle sam always willing to give its allies every help and support. However, this strategy was accompanied by systematic demonstrations of United States military might, such as resumption of the bombing of North Vietnam in late 1971 and the massive incursions by American and Saigon troops into the territory of Cambodia and Laos.


9. Cambodia won international recognition at the 1954 Geneva Conference on Indo-China. The Cambodian delegation told the conference that the new independent state would refrain from joining any military or political alliance and would pursue a peaceable foreign policy. Indeed, the Cambodian government did resist Western attempts to draw the country into the SEATO military bloc. In reply to blatant pressure Cambodia rejected all types of American aid and expelled some United States services from the country. Among other things, it prohibited the propaganda activity of the United States Information Agency (USIA) on its territory. At the same time the Cambodian government condemned the United States aggression in Vietnam and did all it could to help the government of the Democratic Republic of Vietnam (DRV) and the Provisional Revolutionary Government of the Republic of South Vietnam. It did its utmost to prevent the United States from involving Cambodia in the hostilities, which were gaining in scope and ferocity in neighbouring Vietnam and Laos. The Pentagon regarded Cambodia as a breach in the unstable
The new strategy of Vietnamization of war, while at the same time bringing greater military pressure to bear on Hanoi and steadily withdrawing United States forces, turned on the ability of the South Vietnamese to carry on the war on their own. In this sense this strategy was a gamble, betting that the South could hold its own with the North. With the adoption of the new Vietnamization strategy, it became paramount to make every possible disruptive effort against the enemy, particularly his logistic and troop reinforcement system, while substantial members of United States combat troops were still in the country.¹⁰

frontline in Indo-China The American Generals insisted that Washington should permit an extension of hostilities to the territory of Cambodia so as to gain one more sector from which to attack Vietnam

Ibid , pp 51-52

¹⁰ This basic purpose lay behind the cross-border operations into Cambodia and Laos Cambodia was more or less off limits to major operations by allies forces, however, until Sihanouk’s overthrow in March 1970 He had allowed the historically hated Vietnamese both North and South to use Cambodia as a forward base, yet he continued to proclaim his country’s neutrality

President Richard M. Nixon, however, put Vietnamization at centre stage in his plan to end the war, stating his strategic concept that:

“We have adopted a plan which we have worked out in co-operation with the South Vietnamese for the complete withdrawal of all U.S. combat ground forces and then replacement by South Vietnamese forces on an orderly schedules timetable. The withdrawal will be made from strength and not weakness. As South Vietnamese forces become stronger, the rate of American withdrawal can become greater.”

In the sense, Vietnamization had begun in 1968 with a general mobilization that had raised the total of armed forces under Saigon’s command to over 800,000 of which 380,000 were in the regular army. By 1970, the total was near one million, over half those troops were irregular territorial defence forces (see table 4.1).

Washington, D.C., Department of Army, 1975, p. 151.

Source: James Lawton Collins, Jr., The Development and Training of the South Vietnamese Army 1950-1972

Al all figures are approximate.

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Table 4.1: Republic of Vietnam Armed Forces Strength (a)
President Nixon's noteworthy November 3, 1969, speech was directed towards two critical situations, one growing out of the anti war demonstration in Washington and the other concerned with a serious political crisis emerging in late October 1969 in Saigon. The President declared that his programme of Vietnamization was the only feasible alternative to an abrupt American withdrawal from South Vietnam, which would betray long standing commitments to the people effected and would precipitate a blood both of incalculable dimensions. An American retreat from Southeast Asia would allegedly cancel existing restraints on the reckless endeavours of great powers intent on world conquest. President Richard M. Nixon affirmed that the successful termination of the Vietnam war was the last hope for peace and freedom of millions of people about to be suffocated by the forces of totalitarianism.  

The speech also discounted the prospects of a negotiated settlement. President Richard M. Nixon cited Ho

Chi Minh’s alleged rejection of a letter sent to Hanoi on July 15, in his reply dated August 25, just two weeks before Ho’s death. As subsequently disclosed, Ho’s reply had affirmed North Vietnam’s desire for a real peace with independent and freedom. He argued that the United States would have to agree to withdraw its troops and to respect the right of the population of the South and of the Vietnamese nation to dispose of themselves without foreign interference. Ho concluded that with good will on both sides, we might arrive at common efforts in finding a correct solution.¹³

President Richard M. Nixon concluded his address with an emotion laden denunciation of the vocal minority in the United States who were, he said ready to court defeat, humiliation, and disaster, and the massacre of Asian friends in order to gain their ends. The President’s temporary success in quieting American protests had no observable effect on bringing the war to an end. Neither the Hanoi nor the NLF representatives in Paris saw any point in seeking a

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¹³ Ibid., p. 603.
cease-fire in South Vietnam without an unequivocal promise of the withdrawal of the half-million allied troops assigned to support the unacceptable government in Saigon.\textsuperscript{14}

The task of improving the discipline and performance of the Army of Republic of Vietnam (ARVN) forces as part of the Vietnamization programme was critically important, but the plan also carried ominous political overtones. The admittedly superior fighting performance of the North Vietnamese troops and their Southern Vietcong allies was clearly attributable to better leadership and motivation. The anticipated economic impact of Vietnamization was also distributing. The continuance of large-scale American financial aid was an integral part of the laboured agreement reached between Saigon and Washington during 1969.\textsuperscript{15}

The Army Republic of Vietnam (ARVN) fire power was increased as departing United States units left behind their arms and equipments. The value of United States arms

\textsuperscript{14} Ibid.

\textsuperscript{15} Ibid., pp. 604-605.
transfers to Saigon rose from $775 million in 1969 to $925 million in each year of 1969 and 1970.\textsuperscript{16}

However, Saigon recognised that Vietnamization or self-reliance required substantial efforts to build up the government forces. The logic of Vietnamization gave Saigon a convincing rationale to press for increased military and economic assistance in compensation for the gradual withdrawal of American combat troops.\textsuperscript{17}

\textbf{Nixon Doctrine}

In 1969, the Secretary of Defence, Laird, said that the United States would ensure permanent control of Saigon government over South Vietnam. On November 3, 1969, President Richard M. Nixon revived the Domino theory. He held that American defeat in Vietnam would result in a worldwide loss of faith in its leadership and that its withdrawal

\textsuperscript{16} William S. Turkey, n. 3, p. 130.
\textsuperscript{17} Charles E. Morrison and Astri Sukrke, n. 5, p. 95.
from Vietnam would mean a collapse not only of South Vietnam but also of Southeast Asia.\textsuperscript{18}

The Nixon Doctrine flowed out of his various statements, starting with his informal Press Conference on July 1969 at Guam on November 3, 1969 and January 11, 1970 statements, and state of World Message of February 10, 1970. It does not involve any shift in the United States policy in Asia. The Nixon Doctrine enjoins on client states to provide the man power and the rest of the resources.\textsuperscript{19}


\textsuperscript{19} Ibid., pp. 149-150.

The Nixon Doctrine was a philosophical statement emphasizing reduced engagement for the United States and urging greater self-reliance upon others. And it was also abroad strategy dealing with the United States responses to various level of military threat. As a strategy, it seeks to shift primary responsibility for providing military man power to nations under threat, while at the same time reaffirming all existing treaty commitments. It therefore, leaves a large area of future policy in determinate. Finally, the Doctrine rationalize United States military withdrawal tactics in a fashion that provides wide latitude in responding, on the other hand, to the pressures of United States domestic public opinion and, on the other, to reactions of United States friends and forces.

If the Kennedy and Johnson Administration's proceeded on the assumption that saving South Vietnam was a vital national interests of the United States, the statements and actions of the Nixon Administration seem to suggest that the United States government no longer considers this to be so. In his 1971 report to Congress on United States foreign policy, President Richard M. Nixon made the following statement about the United States response to aggression which does not involve one of the nuclear powers that:

"we will continue to provide elements of military strength and economic resources appropriate to our size and our interests. But it is no longer natural or possible in this age to argue that security or development around the globe is primarily America's concern. The defence and progress of other countries must be first their responsibility and second, a regional responsibility."\textsuperscript{20}

In discussing the reasons why he had decided on a de-escalation of the Vietnam conflict, the President said:

"Some urged that we escalate in an attempt to impose a military solution on the battle field. We ruled out this approach because of the nature of the conflict and of the enemy, the cost of such a policy, the risks of a wider war, and the deeply held convictions of many of our people."

In effect, Richard M. Nixon once said that:

"the struggle in Vietnam was not vital to United States in the world and that seeking a military solution to the war was not worth the cost involved. Therefore, a diplomatic solution which did not abandon South Vietnam was seen as the objective. We sought above all a rapid negotiated solution to the conflict by progressively defining the terms of a settlement that would accommodate the legitimate interests of both sides. And in the absence of a settlement, we sought through Vietnamization, to shift American responsibilities to the South Vietnam."^21

21. Thus, within the span of only ten years, the United States government’s perception of its national interests in Asia had shifted dramatically. In the summer and fall of 1961, the mood in Washington was that China posed a growing threat to United States interests in Asia generally, and in Southeast Asia specifically, and that those interests were so vital that they had to be protected with United States arms if the South Vietnamese government was unable to do so itself. In 1971, another president representing another political viewpoint, decided that China may not be a military threat to United States interests in Asia and that the accommodation with China which included a political solution in Vietnam was more in America’s interests than trying to press for a military solution to that problem.

One may conclude from this shift in policy by Nixon Administration, and the apparent willingness of the American people to support it, that the United States no longer perceives any vital interests at stake in South Vietnam. Furthermore, the two factors cited above, on which Kennedy advisors justified
The principle which President Richard M. Nixon enunciated that, certainly was a change from the policy followed by his immediate predecessors. Let the principle be described in Nixon's own words:

"It central thesis is that the United States will participate in the defence and developments of allies and friends, but that American cannot - and will not - conceive all the plans, design all the programme, executive all the decisions and undertake all the defence of the free nations of the world. We will help where is considered in our interests. America cannot live in isolation if it expects to live in peace. We have no intention of withdrawing from the world. The only issue before us is how we can be most effect in meeting our responsibilities, protecting our interests and thereby building peace.”

the view that Vietnam was vital - the Asian balance of power and United States world wide prestige - Nixon seemed prepared to take care of those remaining balance in Asia - Peking - while reassuring American allies Taiwan-Thailand and South Vietnam - that he would not abandon them as part of an accommodation with China. In the summer of 1971, it was not certain whether Nixon would succeed in extricating the United States from what he believed to be an over commitment of United States resources and prestige in South Vietnam. However, the American people were clearly in the mood for a searching re-examination of United States national interests in Asia, including the normalization of relations with China.

Ibid., p. 1067.

It was interesting that the genesis of this principle, according to Nixon himself was learnt by him from a leader of an Asian country. He said in his nation-wide television address on November 3, 1969 that:

"When you are trying to assist another nation defend its freedom, United States policy should be to help them fight the war but not to fight the war for them. In accordance with this wise counsel, I laid down in Guam three principles as guidelines for future American policy towards Asia: First, the United States will keep all of its treaty commitment. Second, we should provide a shield if nuclear power threatens the freedom of a nation allied with United States or of a nation whose survival we consider vital to our security. Third, increase involving other types of aggression, we shall furnish military and economic assistance when requested in accordance with our treaty commitments. But we shall took to the nation directly threatened to assume the primary responsibility of providing the manpower for its defence."

23. Ibid.

When President Lyndon B. Johnson decided not to stand for re-election. Underlying the decision was the American frustration over its role in Southeast Asia. Increasing losses in men, money and material in Vietnam so demolished the United States that its desperately sought an honourable withdrawal. The widespread intellectual unrest, a situation approximating a rebellion on diverse American campuses, and a severe rift in democratic ranks had played the Johnson administration. The effects on the United States economy were more telling: it could not provide for both guns and butter. A later MIT study estimated the comprehensive cost of Vietnam war up to 1971
Peace initiations

The realization of futility of the war in Vietnam came to a number of high Government officials as early as 1967, though such were then in minority. Thus on May 19, 1967 in a memo to the President, Defense Secretary McNamara stated that:

"The picture of the world's greatest superpower killing or seriously injuring 1,000 non-combatants a week while trying to pound a tiny backward nation into submission on an issue whose merits are hotly disputed, is not a pretty one."

at $753 billions, or equal to the gross national product of the United States for one year. Richard M. Nixon, appeared metamorphosed as he got himself elected on a platform of disengagement promising massive troops withdrawal and rapprochement with China.


24. After McNamara resigning. His successor, Clark Clifford (from March 1968) soon came to the similar conclusion. He had stated that:

"I was convinced that the military course we were pursuing was not only endless, but hopeless. A further substantial increase in Americanization of the war, and thus leave us even further from our goal of a peace that would permit the people of South Vietnam to fashion their own political and economic institutions."

The situation in Vietnam during 1970 could be summed up in one sentence: it had been a year of progressive military de-escalation and growing political confrontation. To every combatant - the United States, South Vietnam, North Vietnam, the National Liberation Front-it had become undeniably obvious that military victory was unattainable. But it was equally obvious that no one was prepared to accept defeat either. Everyone was tired of an endless war, but no one was prepared to call a halt to it. The blood and suffering of the hundreds of thousands of lives thrown into battle had to be justified by some concrete results, however, meager. Thus, the struggle for South Vietnam had shifted to another sphere. Fighting had been replaced by negotiations, propaganda and the manipulation of popular opinion.25

The choice for the United States in Vietnam, therefore, was between unattainable victory and unacceptable defeat. Both negotiation and escalation were beset with many

imponderables. If the limited escalation of 1963 had any lesson it was an exercise in futility. The United States had to blame herself for such a state of affairs.\textsuperscript{26}

The misadventure in Vietnam had invited the conclusion that United States arms and technical advisors cannot in themselves provide national cohesion or build a nation, even in opposition to an externally assisted guerrilla enemy, and that without such cohesion United States efforts may prove futile and debilitating both at home and abroad.

\textsuperscript{26} Ibid., p. 19.

It was a mistake to think that a viable state can be built in South Vietnam without a requisite political base and it was a blunder on the part of the United States to take over the war. How easy it was for the communist-dominated National Liberation Front (NLF) to convince the countryside that the current war was a continuation of the war of independence. As a prominent Buddhist leader one said that:

“The more American troops sent to Vietnam, the more the anti American campaign led by the NLF becomes successful, Anger and hatred rise in the hearts of peasants as they see their villages burned, their compatriots killed, their houses destroyed by American soldiers holding guns with bayonets, make people think of Indo-China war between the French and the Vietnam and cause pain even to anti Communist Vietnamese.”

This conclusion was implicitly expressed in both the Nixon Doctrine and President Ford’s Pacific Doctrine.  

However, the sequence of events that led to negotiations probably started with General Westmoreland’s visit to Washington in November 1967. On that occasion, General Westmoreland told a joint session of Congress that the war was being militarily won. He outlined indicators of progress and started that a limited withdrawal of United


During the post-1968 period, the main strategic problem was to sustain enough pressure on the battle field to support the negotiations in Paris and definitely bring an end to the limited war. As the Vietnamization strategy became the main focus of United States policy and withdrawal of American troops proceeded, the defeat of the Saigon forces became the main focus. While the purely military balance of forces had not been a major preoccupation of Hanoi during the period of greatest United States involvement. During the 1969-70 period the issue was what level of military activity was necessary to support the Paris negotiations and counter pacification and Vietnamization while waiting for the United States to complete its troop withdrawal.

States combat forces might be undertaken beginning late in 1968.

A new phase in the conflict began and Washington recognized that it was manifestly impossible to clear South Vietnam of communist forces, as the United States Central Intelligence Agency (CIA) report had noted the growing menace of communist militants on March 1, 1968. The North Vietnamese and the National Liberation Front (NLF) discerned in this a long awaited opportunity to exploit American hesitation. The proposal presented by the NLF delegate, Tran Bun Kien to the Paris talks in May 1969 contained concessions designed to give the talks momentum, instead of unconditional American withdrawal, the NLF now called for unilateral withdrawal. The previous demand of political settlement must be achieved by the time of the military cease-fire was modified. Although, the principle was maintained in order to avoid a repeat of events

following the Geneva Accords, the NLF was willing to accept an interim government at the time of cease-fire thus leaving elections and the eventual settlement to a future date. But the NLF stood firm on its demand that the interim government must be a peace cabinet, the existing Saigon establishment headed by President Nguyen Van Thien, whom the NLF regarded as an American puppet, could not be represented. 29

The American response to the NLF plan subsequently gave rise to a lost opportunity thesis. President Richard M. Nixon on May 14, 1968 called for a partial military withdrawal of all non-South Vietnamese forces. An International Control Commission (ICC) would supervise the remaining withdrawals. 30

Whichever the case, the American position was soon classified. A joint Washington - Saigon proposal in June 1969 called for an election formula whereby the NLF would

29. Charles E. Morrison and Astri Suhrke, n. 5, p. 76.
30. Ibid., p. 77.
be integrated into the existing Saigon government. This was totally unacceptable to the NLF which saw it as a prelude to its own destruction. Moreover, the establishment of a Provisional Revolutionary Government for South Vietnam (PRG) in June 1969 demonstrated its willingness to accept any compromise that would be little its prestige and power in an eventual settlement.  

However, a partial bombing halt and preliminary negotiations with the communists would be continued, the pressures on the Saigon government to adjust were rapidly mounting. Thus, Thien was in quick order to accept the American conditions for a bombing pause, sent a delegation

31. Stalemate was also evident on another level. When the secret talks between Hanoi and Washington commenced in August 1969, Henry A. Kissinger proposed to Hanoi’s chief negotiator, Le Duc Tho, that both states should withdraw their forces from the South as part of an overall settlement. Le Duc Tho rejected this. Hanoi did not publicly admit that there were Army of Republic of Vietnam (RAVN) regulars in the south, and continued to maintain that Vietnamese forces in Vietnam and the American aggressors could not be equated. Le Duc Tho also reiterated, the demand for Thien’s exclusion from any coalition government in Saigon as a pre-condition for cease-fire.

Ibid., p. 78.
to Paris to negotiate with the Northern Vietnamese and the NLF, to formulate a policy on the question of a political settlement in the South which at least had the appearance of flexibility, and acquire in gradual American troops withdrawal without reciprocal actions by the North Vietnamese. The contrast between there demands and Thien's desires was demonstrated by Saigon's five-point proposal of June 23, 1968.\footnote{Those were (1) the communist must stop all military and subversive activities in the South (2) North Vietnam must disband the NLF "puppet organization" and withdraw their troops from the South. (3) the RNV must determine its domestic political affairs without outside intervention. (4) The United States should remain in the South until peace is restored; and (5) The independence of the RVN must be effectively guaranteed.}

Thien initially stuck to a maximalist position and referred to send a delegation to the first plenary session of the Paris talks scheduled for November 6, 1968. He stated that:

"We do not and will not accept the participation of the so-called South Vietnam National Liberation Front (NLF) as a valid participant at any stage of the peace talks, even in the

\textit{Ibid.}
While United States engagement and Vietnamization were in train, the Nixon Administration was also attempting to get serious negotiations underway with North Vietnam. President Richard M. Nixon had written to Ho Chi Minh in late December 1968 on the subject as a gesture of good will from the newly elected United States government, but received a brutal, totally negative response on December 31. In February 1969 Henry Cabot Lodge replaced Cyrus Vance as the United States representative in the largely open talks in Paris, and in August 1969 Henry Kissinger tried to initiate meaningful secret talks with the North Vietnamese, but to no avail. Although serious secret negotiations were resumed between Henry Kissinger and Le Duc Tho in February 1970, it was not until October, 1972, when their Eastern 1972 offensive ran out of steam, that the North

Ibid., pp. 92-99.

34. Ho Chi Minh died in September of the following year, but the Hanoi regime continued its unrelenting and uncompromising outlook without a change in beat.

General Bruce Palmer Jr, n. 10, p. 119.
Vietnamese finally indicated that they were ready to make a political settlement.\textsuperscript{35}

In the meantime, President Richard M. Nixon had sought to bring increasing pressure on the North Vietnamese to negotiate by seeking separate talks with the Soviet Union and China. The strategic arms limitations talks with the USSR, which began in mid November 1969 and led eventually to SALT I, were initiated partly for this purpose. Likewise, the President’s trip to China in February 1972, which reopened contact between the two countries, was also intended to put pressure on Hanoi.\textsuperscript{36}

\textsuperscript{35} Ibid.

\textsuperscript{36} Ibid.

But the huge gap in perception and principle still divided the two sides. Hanoi's terms had not changed since April 8, 1968, when Premier Pham Van Dong had enunciated "four points" based on the 1954 Geneva Agreements. The four points called for (1) recognition of Vietnam's national right to peace, independence, sovereignty, unity and territorial integrity, and cessation of all United States military activity in both the North and South. (2) strict implementation of the 1954 prescription against military alliances with foreign countries and foreign military bases while Vietnam was still temporarily divided into two zones. (3) Settlement of South Vietnam's internal affairs in accordance with the program of the South Vietnam National Front for liberation and (4) Peaceful
While the United States and the Democratic Republic of Vietnam (DRV) would negotiate a military settlement of the war, the Saigon government would seek a political solution with the National Liberation Front (NLF) American forces would be gradually withdrawn the Vietnamization of the balance of the war would leave Saigon as a strong and friendly government. The new policy was also based on rapprochement with China, which seemed eager to grasp the American hand of friendship progressively in the hope of using it against the Soviet Union.\textsuperscript{37}

\begin{quote}
reunification by the Vietnamese people in both zones without foreign interference. The third point required establishment of a coalition government that would have to include the NLF. The Johnson administration had insisted on withdrawal of North Vietnamese troops in advance of United States withdrawal and had refused to discuss political arrangements except in terms of the South’s self-determination. Nixon and Kissinger persuaded to propose a mutual troops withdrawal and restoration of the demilitarized zones as a boundary. But this proposal by implying that North Vietnamese as well as United States troops were “foreign” to South Vietnam and that Vietnam was two countries ran directly counter to Hanoi’s non-negotiable position that Geneva had affirmed Vietnam’s juridicial unity.

William S. Turkey, n.3, p.119.
\end{quote}

\textsuperscript{37} D.R. Sardesai, n.24, p.417.
The plan for gradual withdrawal of United States troops was not achieved without further bloodshed. Efforts to make the operation compatible with the achievement of peace with honor involve more saturation bombing of Vietnam - North and South - than ever before, mining of Hai-Phong Harbour, escalation of the clandestine war in Laos and an overt invasion of Cambodia. From 1970 to 1973, the Vietnamese conflict became truly an Indo-China war.\textsuperscript{38}

For the President, the peace package was a means to extricate United States ground forces from Vietnam while simultaneously buying an understanding from the communists not to force the demise of Nguygen Van Thien’s regime before a decent interval that would undoubtedly be kind to American prestige in the world and Richard M. Nixon in the history books.\textsuperscript{39}

\textsuperscript{38} Ibid.
\textsuperscript{39} Far Eastern Economic Review, (Hong Kong), Vol. 80, No. 16. p.27
Factors led to the Peace Agreement

International circumstances at that time were of course unfavorable to any wider war, whereas in 1970 there were no such obstacles, the Vietnam war was being wound down, the American's withdrawing, bombing of North Vietnam had ceased, the non-aligned Sihanonk was in exile and the Lon Noi government in Cambodia was desperately seeking help. The Soviet Union, maintaining its embassy in Phnom-Penh, had not recognized Sihanouk's government in Peking. The Chinese, for their part, had been confidentially negotiating for nearly two months with Lon Noi. They were urging the new regime to revive Sihanonk's policy of accommodation of North Vietnam and the NLF in return for China's friendship and non-recognition of the Sihanouk. But the confusion in Cambodia following the overthrow of Sihanouk - North Vietnamese pressure on Lon Noi to see reason, the uncertain nature of support for Sihanouk among officials, towns people and peasantry, the historic Cambodia fear of the Vietnam invader - all conspired to drive the Khmer regime, toward
neutrality or a new alignment with the communist powers, but into the arms of the West.\textsuperscript{40}

By 1967, more and more Americans were coming also to the conclusion that the war was at least unwinnable if not totally wrong. The first anti-war demonstrations had already taken place in Washington, and on many United States campuses in April and May 1965, and in October 1967, 35,000 demonstrators descended on Washington. Increasing number of government officials as well were beginning to wonder as reportedly had Assistant Secretary of Defence John McNaughton as early as December 1964, if they were on the wrong side.\textsuperscript{41}

The discordant voices in the American administration had been proceeded by a nation wide student concern. By 1968, an election year, the anti-Vietnam war protest

\textsuperscript{40} J.L.S. Girling, "Nixon's Algeria Doctrine and Disengagement in Indochina," \textit{Pacific Affairs}, (Vancouver), Vol XLIX, No. 4, winter 1971-72, p.532.

movement had widened to include most of the intellectuals and created a severe rift in the Democratic Party’s ranks. After the initial benefits to the war, the economy had began to deteriorate and thus causing concern to the United States authorities. The recession, growing unemployment and the declining dollar boasted public clamour to end the war. Both the sides in the Vietnamese war had an eye on United States political situation. North Vietnam and the NLF’s decision to launch a major offensive on all the main cities and towns of South Vietnam around the time of the Tet offensive in January 1968 must had been taken with a view to exploiting the American electoral politics. The attack would be followed by negotiations in which the Americans would be at a distinct advantage.42

42. D.R. Sardesai, n. 24, p.416.

The Tet offensive, however, produced a military stalemate, though it had a tremendous impact on American politics. The NLF was not successful in holding any of the cities and towns except Hua for a short period. The NLF’s expectations of major popular risings in its favour in the urban centres were not fulfilled its losses were heavy, about 40,000 killed, with many more casualty. The impact of the offensive on United States and South Vietnamese forces was disastrous. In
Moreover, there had been tremendous pressure on the United States from all over the world to stop bombing of North Vietnam unconditionally. At the 22nd Session of the United Nations General Assembly, even though Vietnam was not on the agenda, most of the members who participated in the general debate spoke on the Vietnam situation. An analysis of the speeches provides an interesting insight into world opinion on American bombing of North Vietnam. Out of 109 members who participated in the debate, only six countries, including the United States supported the bombing policy. America had the support of Australia, New Zealand, the Philippines, Nationalist China and Thailand. Eight countries demanded mutual de-escalation of hostilities in Vietnam or as some of them put it, there should be reciprocal action or that all the parties should stop fighting. Countries

Washington, a major debate on the potential costs of continuing the war took place based on the assumption that only a quarter of North Vietnam’s forces were involved in the Tet offensive. From that point of view, the United States seemed resolved to disengage from Vietnam with honour. Bombing and other forms of warfare would be continued to secure the best terms in the preferred course of negotiations. An immediate result of all this was Johnson’s decision not to seek office again. By the end of the year, the former Cold War hero, Richard Nixon, was elected the Presidency platform of disengagement from Vietnam.

Ibid.
like the United Kingdom, Belgium, Austria, Iceland, Israel, Japan, Argentina and Uganda belonged to this group. Fifty-five countries including some allies of the United States and the NATO partners, like Canada, Denmark, Norway and the Netherlands, demanded an unconditional end the American bombing. A total of thirty seven countries either did not mention Vietnam or express no definite opinion on the question of bombing, four countries Equador, Mexico, Barbados and Jamaica extended full support to U. Thant’s proposals, and eight more hoped for achieving peace in Vietnam on the basis of the Geneva Agreements. Pakistan, Iran, Italy, Lebanon, Laos, Singapore and Madagascar came under this category.

43. Added to this world opinion, there had been a great deal of criticism within the United States itself which almost forced President Lyndon B. Johnson to revise his bombing policy. On September, 29, 1967, President Johnson, in an address to the nation from San Antonio in Texas said that:

“The United States is willing immediately to stop aerial and naval bombardment of North Vietnam when this will lead promptly to productive discussion. We would assume that while discussions proceed North Vietnam would not take advantage of the bombing cessation or limitations.”

Undoubtedly, this offer went further than any of his previous offers. He was not anymore insisting on prior commitment or promise by Hanoi about reciprocity. Instead, he seemed to leave it to Hanoi to reciprocate suitably while the talks were in progress. However, his offer did not go for enough to promise
The cost of war also was enormous as well as the casualty. In 1968 it was estimated that United States was spending about $22 billion a year. The exact figures were debatable but no doubt about the huge sum had been spent. In early 1971, President Richard M. Nixan had reduced the cost but it was still huge. Economic assistance to South Vietnam also was costly. The heavy burden of the war contributed to a rise in the United States taxes and facilitated inflation in the country.44

The casualty figures of the war mounted on both sides. With January 1, 1961 American battle deaths came to 45,665 and American wounded numbered 302,774 through March 18, 1972 as shown in table 4.2.

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The Cease-fire

It looked as if the Paris Agreements of 1973, like the Geneva Accords of 1954, had merely transferred the struggle from military to the political plan. Several Statements from the spokesman of the Nixon Administration indicated that the United States would continue to assist Saigon in its struggle for survival.\(^45\) Concerned about the possibility of re-entry into the Vietnam war, and distrustful of Nixon in view of the Watergate revelations, the United States Congress adopted, overriding the President's authority to use troops only in the event of a war declared by Congress or if sanctioned by a Congressional statutory authorization.\(^46\)

\(^45\) It was revealed later that Nixon had actually written to Thien promising military support if Hanoi attack South Vietnam again.

Lalita Prasad Singh, n.1, p.18.

\(^46\) Ibid.

During the past three years British and United States governments had consistently stressed the importance of getting talks with North Vietnam start. Two statements from North Vietnam raised hopes that such talks would at last begin. The first North Vietnamese statement to inspire hope of talks was the assurance by Foreign Minister Nguyen Duy Trinh in December 1967 that, if the United States stop the bombing
In the conference on January 30, 1969 Ambassador Xuan Thuy indicated that the problems of South Vietnam must be solved by the population of the South on the basis of self-determination. Consequently, the Americans had

of the North, North Vietnam would talk with the United States. But when the President Johnson wrote to Ho Chi Minh in February 1967, he had shown no signs of being troubled about the will issue, and asked for no clarification on it. He appeared to accept that if the United States bombing of North Vietnam stop, North Vietnam would be ready to talk. Neither in February 1967, not ten months later whom Nguyen Duy Trinh said: "will" was the United State prepared to end the bombing of North Vietnam unconditionally and permanently in return for talks.

Two months later, in response to President’s Johnson speech of March 31, the second statement came to arouse hopes of peace and stated that:

“The Government of the Democratic Republic of Vietnam declare that it is ready to have its representative meet with representatives of the United States to decide on the unconditional cessation of the bombing and other war acts against the DRV so that discussions could start.”

Up to the mid April these were no indications that either side seriously envisaged an early settlement. As the debate about the site for the Vietnam talks dragged on, the North Vietnamese demonstrated their continuing distrust of President Johnson by pointing out, with obvious relish that the American President’s of expressed willingness to meet his adversaries any time and anywhere did not mean what it appeared to mean. On April 8, United States and South Vietnamese forces launched the largest allies offensive of the Vietnam war. This operation gave North Vietnam its heavy bombardment for more than three months - though all the action, was south of the 19th parallel.

apparently accepted the principle of self-determination for a considerable time. At the time of the Honolulu meeting on July 19, 1968, President Johnson spoke to President Thien about an honourable peace which would allow the people of South Vietnam to decide their own future. Moreover, the Americans also declared that they had no desire to retain military bases or alliances with South Vietnam, thus accepting the principle of neutrality.  

47. By the end of January 1969, therefore, the character of the Paris conference had been clearly defined it had in fact become the follow-up of the 1954 Geneva Conference. The goal was the definite decolonization of South Vietnam on the basis of the self-determination of its people and the diplomatic and military neutrality of the country. The problem was to find out what self-determination meant to the participants. From the start, it appeared that their interpretations were contradictory. The Americans, convinced that only North Vietnamese military help allow the NLF to impose its rule on the South Vietnamese, demanded first the withdrawal of Northern troops. In return, Washington was prepared to withdraw its own forces once the Saigon army was in position to take over the struggle. Hence, the Americans Paris had demanded the mutual withdrawal of non South Vietnamese forces from South Vietnam since the beginning of February.


Preliminary talks between the United States and the DRV began on May 13, 1968 in Paris. The Government of the DRV
The Paris Accords finally signed by the four parties concerned the Democratic Republic of Vietnam (DRV), Provisional Revolutionary Government of South Vietnam (PRG), the Thien Government and the United States - on January 27, 1973 brought about a cease-fire in Vietnam, Cambodia and Laos. The Accords provided for withdrawal of all American troops, the return of prisoners of war, a cease-fire in place without demarcation lines. A democratic solution for the South was envisaged. The PRG and the Thien government were to resolve their conflicts through mutual consultation. A Council of Reconciliation and Concord was to be established for organizing elections in the South. Thereafter, a tripartite coalition government of Thien,

nominated Mr. Xuan Thuy former Foreign Minister of the Government of DRV, as its representative at the Paris talks. This preliminary talks constitute only a beginning in the settlement of the complex problem. The time taken to decide Paris as the venue for talks, despite President Johnson's repeated statement that he was ready for talks at any place and at any time, was a clear indication of the difficulties involved. Both sides appeared anxious to keep the dialogue going till they were able to settle the preliminaries and pave the way for the convening of the Geneva Conference.

BSN Murti, n.43, p.63.
the PRG and neutralist would be established. Reunification of Vietnam could be considered though consequent consultations between the North and the South. As for Laos and Cambodia, the Paris Accords confirmed the provisions of the Geneva Agreements of 1954 and 1962. An unwritten clause of the agreement was the United States promise to pay $3.2 billion towards the reconstruction of the DRV. This was never paid - Hanoi’s march against Saigon in March 1975 had, in Washington’s view, absolved it of that promise.  

It had been evident for several months that the United States and the Democratic Republic of Vietnam considered the 1954 Geneva Agreements to be a basis of a possible settlement. However, it had been clear for some time that Washington and Hanoi did not interpret these Agreements in the same way. From the start it appeared that the object of the American tactics was to push first and foremost the military clauses of the Agreements and especially those

which seemed advantageous for Saigon: the re-establishment and control of the demilitarized zone, the mutual withdrawal of external forces, and the reactivation of the International Control Commission. On the other hand, the delegates from Hanoi, insisted that the political aspects of the Agreements were the fundamental one and should have preference that most of the military clauses were temporary and aimed only at permitting the political settlement.49

The Agreement also provided for a cessation of all acts of war against the Democratic Republic of Vietnam (DRV), the withdrawal of all the arm forces of the United States and its allies from South Vietnam within a two-month period, and


The Accords brought the Nobel Peace Prize jointly to Le Duc Tho, Chief North Vietnamese negotiator (who did not accept it) and Henry Kissinger, but no peace to states of Indochina. The three Vietnamese parties to the Accords viewed the agreement as a temporary truce, giving time to each to prepare for the final phase of the conflict. The Accords had implicitly allowed the DRV to station about 140,000 troops in the South until a political solution was reached. The cease-fire left south Vietnam with pockets of PRG rule. The withdrawal of United States forces left the South Vietnam exposed to an eventual invasion by the North.

D.R. Serdeșai, n.24, p.428.
for the interference of the warring states in the domestic affairs of the Vietnamese people. The signatories to the Paris Agreements came to an understanding on a political settlement of South Vietnam's internal affairs, based on the principle of recognition of the actual alignment of forces in that country.50

The cease-fire agreement and implementing protocols relative to Vietnam ended the words of presidential proclamation issued May 7, 1975 active participation conflict. President Nixon on January 26, 1973, issued a proclamation stating that the United States had achieved its goal of peace with honour in Vietnam and calling the next day for a "National Moment" and "Thanks giving". The next year President Nixon issued a proclamation on February 26, in which he designated March 29 as Vietnam Veterans Day, observing that the departure of the last United States Combat Soldier from Vietnam on that day in 1973 marks the final

50. Alexander Laurentyev, n. 8, p. 53.
conclusion of America's longest, and without question its most difficult war.\textsuperscript{51}

Moreover, this agreement retained main principles of the October draft agreement. It recognized, although not as explicitly as the PRG and the DRV had demanded, the existence of two administrations and two armies in South Vietnam (the PRG and the Thien government) and three political tendencies (the PRG, the Thien forces and a neutral third force). It ended direct American military pressure on the North and finalized the withdrawal of American forces from the South. The United States even made a conditional promise over five billion dollars in reconstruction aid to the DRV, although this was much less important and at any rate did not materialize. The agreement did not provide for a peace cabinet even on an interim basis in which, and Thien had promised of continued American economic and military equipments assistance. Hanoi did not exclude the possibility of renewed American bombing, or even of the reintroduction

\textsuperscript{51} Russell H. Fifield, n. 2, p. 685.
of ground troops, if the Saigon government were seriously threatened. Still, it was not an unfavourable agreement if viewed as a transition to the final phase of the conflict. The central committee of the Lao Dong Party hailed it as the basis for their people to march forward and win new victories and achieve independence and democracy in the South and proceed to the peaceful reunification of their fatherland. The PRG similarly claimed that a new period was opened very advantageous for the completing of the national and democratic resolution. Of most importance for destiny of the Vietnamese people was Article 15 of the Paris Agreements, in which the signatories recognized the principle of unity and territorial integrity of the whole of Vietnam.

The world opinion welcomed the Paris Agreements. It was regarded as a historic victory of the Vietnamese people. It guaranteed the political and legal bases for the Vietnamese people’s fundamental right and self-determination as well.

52 Charles E Morrison and Astri Suhrke, n. 5, p. 88.