CHAPTER – II

FOUNDATION TOWARDS U.S. DISENGAGEMENT:
PRELUDE TO PARIS PEACE TALKS (1960-68)
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Introduction

In spite of refusal of all parties to negotiate and to bring about a solution to the ghastly Vietnam war, peace became a necessity in course of time. Continuous battle in the Vietnamese territory, where dangerous weapons like napalm bombs were used, exhausted the general population of Vietnam to the extent of total annihilation. Still the spirit of nationalism never led them to surrender so easily. They fought and they suffered.

This peculiar situation was not to continue for long. The public opinion throughout world went against the continuance of such a devastating war. Jawaharlal Nehru in 1940 stated that “in the destruction and dissolution that grips the world, the great free Republic of the U.S. of America has a special responsibility to bear, for countless eyes from all over the world look up to it for leadership in the paths of peace and freedom. That peace and freedom will come only when Fascism and imperialism have ended and no nation or group dominates over another”¹. Many proposals came up from the belligerents as well as from other neutral nations and the UN for ending the war.² These peace proposals were self-contained and were spread over a period of almost eight years from 1960-1968, till all sides agreed to convene a peace conference to find a solution to the Vietnam war through negotiations.

Negotiations as the Only Solution to End the Conflict: Various Proposals (1960-68)

At the outset, proposal for the settlement of the conflict found place in the nine-point programme of the NLF issued on 20 December 1960. Point nine of the programme provided for re-establishment of normal relations between the two Vietnams and preparation for the peaceful re-unification of the country in stages.

² For a systematic chronology of all the proposals for negotiations, see Appendix of Donald S. Zagoria, *Vietnam Triangle: Mosco/Peking/Hanoi* (New York, 1967), pp. 151-59.
on the basis of negotiations. As explained earlier, pending the result of such negotiations, force was not to be used to settle differences. But this was just a proposal and no concrete step was taken in order to implement this plan.

In subsequent periods, many proposals came up for ending the war through either negotiations or through package peace plans from various neutral nations. On 20 May 1964, France gave a call for holding an international conference in Laos in August 1964. Soviet Union immediately gave its consent, but the U.S. rejected the proposal. Consequently, on 7 July 1964, the Soviet Union threatened to resign from the co-chairmanship of the permanent body of I.C.C. (International Control Commission) if that proposal was not accepted by other nations. In August, Hanoi was encouraged by the Soviet Union to take a similar stand. However, it relayed its message through U Thant, Secretary-General of the UN, to Washington to meet U.S. representative privately for talks. U Thant arranged the meeting in Burma. Washington, however, backed out at the last moment from a possible peace settlement.

Again in October 1964, the Cairo Conference of the Non-aligned Nations advocated a new international conference on Indo-China, but to no use. In January 1965, Washington again rejected the second invitation to meet Ho Chi Minh. At this stage, Kosygin of the U.S.S.R. conveyed to Hanoi the American message asking Moscow to try to persuade Hanoi to halt military aid to Vietcong and cease attacks on South Vietnamese cities as conditions for future peace talks. In response to this, Kosygin's delegation arrived in Hanoi on 6 February 1965 in the hope of persuading North Vietnam to seek negotiated settlement of war. During his stay in Hanoi, Kosygin again tried for an international conference on Laos and Indo-China in the month of February and issued a joint statement with Hanoi, which, of course, did not specifically mention reconvening of Geneva Conference, but emphasized on the settlement of international disputes through negotiations.

Douglas Pike, *VietCong* (Massachusetts, 1966), p.82.

On 12 February 1965, U Thant categorically appealed for "shifting the quest for a solution away from the field of battle to the conference table". Subsequently, Moscow, New Delhi and Pope Paul VI proposed for the end of hostilities especially through a conference on Indo-China. Soviet Union mainly emphasized on the convening of a conference, howsoever bleak the prospect of peace might have been.

Meanwhile, on 15 March 1965, the heads of states and governments of 17 non-aligned nations met in Belgrade and signed an appeal on 1 April 1965 calling for negotiations on Vietnam. It reaffirmed the "right of the peoples to self-determination" and recognized the "principle of inviolability of and respect for the Sovereignty" of Vietnam. Thus it showed much concern towards "foreign intervention in all forms" and called for a political solution through negotiations "without any preconditions". However, Hanoi and Peking seemed not to be very interested in Marshal Tito's proposals. There were some reasons behind this. Just one day before the release of Hanoi's four-point programme, President Lyndon B. Johnson advocated "unconditional discussions" on the one hand, and offered one billion dollars for Mekong river development projects, on the other hand, which communists interpreted as imposing conditions for talks.

The U.S., on the contrary, took exception to the aggressiveness of Hanoi regime. China, on the other hand, was critical of the appeal and complained against absence of any reference to U.S. aggression and intervention in the appeal. China held that preaching negotiations, "without preconditions" was tantamount to legalizing U.S. aggression.

Meanwhile, on 22 March 1965, the SVNLF (South Vietnam's National Liberation Front) released a five-point programme as the basis for a settlement. The programme provided for withdrawal of U.S. troops and called for foreign help

6 Zagoria, Ibid.
from friendly countries in order to drive out their enemy and attain the unification of their own country.\textsuperscript{9} U.Thant at this stage claimed to have presented “concrete ideas and proposals” for peace to “some of the principal parties directly involved in the question of Vietnam”. China asked the U.S. to accept these five points, but to no use.\textsuperscript{10}

On 8 April 1965, Premier Pham Van Dong of North Vietnam announced the four-point programme of Hanoi which was mostly similar to SVNLF’s five-point programme. In his statement, Pham Van Dong declared his government’s ‘unswerving’ adherence to the 1954 Geneva Agreement on Vietnam and promised for its implementation. The four-point programme of Hanoi envisaged:

a) Firstly, the U.S. must withdraw all its troops, military personnel and weapons, dismantle its bases in Vietnam, end its policy of ‘intervention and aggression’ and stop acts of war against North Vietnam.

b) Pending peaceful reunification of Vietnam, the military provisions of the Geneva Agreements must be strictly respected.

c) The internal affairs of South Vietnam must be settled by the South Vietnamese people themselves in accordance with the programme of NLF without any foreign interference.

d) The peaceful re-unification of Vietnam should be settled by the Vietnamese people in both zones, without any foreign interference.\textsuperscript{11}

As an immediate reaction to it, the U.S. halted bombing from 12 May to 18 May 1965, but no positive response came from the communist side. Meantime in June 1965, British Commonwealth sent a peace mission in order to promote Vietnam peace talks. Soviet Union along with China and North Vietnam outrightly rejected such a stand. On 26 June President Johnson took this as an excuse to resume bombing. On the 20\textsuperscript{th} anniversary of the U.N., the U.S. called all the nations of the world to use their influence in order to bring those to the negotiating table, who seemed determined to make war. Thus the U.S. had always been using ‘bombing’ as a measure to frighten the enemy before negotiations.

\textsuperscript{9} \textit{Asian Almanac}, vol. 3, no. 19, 31 October- 6 November 1965, p.1324.


\textsuperscript{11} \textit{Asian Almanac}, vol. 6, no. 12, 23 March 1968, p. 2617; and George Herring (ed), \textit{The Secret diplomacy of the Vietnam War: the negotiating volumes of the Pentagon Papers} (Austin, 1983), pp. 140-42.
The South Vietnamese government announced its four-point peace plan on 23 June 1965. They considered it as the basis for settlement. In this programme, they demanded withdrawal of North Vietnamese troops; dissolution of SVNLF, solution to internal problems by South Vietnamese people only; withdrawal of foreign troops and end of hostilities in the South only after the end of North Vietnamese aggression and guarantee of peace in South Vietnam.12

In July 1965, the U.S. sent Ambassador Harriman to Moscow for informal talks with Premier Kosygyn on Vietnam issue. President Johnson, at this juncture, emphatically proclaimed American willingness to begin unconditional discussions, simply because throughout the period, the U.S. had an upper hand over its enemies in the battlefield.

Meanwhile, on 24 December 1965, President Johnson halted the bombings for complete 37 days. During this period, the U.S. issued a 14-point programme for peace. In this programme the U.S. denied that it sought bases in Southeast Asia or desired to retain American troops in South Vietnam after peace was restored. Further, it stipulated that the U.S. would welcome a conference 'on Southeast Asia or any part thereof' and would be prepared to hold 'unconditional discussions' and 'negotiations without preconditions' during which Hanoi's four points could also be discussed. Representation of Vietcong, they agreed, would not be an 'insurmountable' problem.

The main points of the 14-point peace plan were the following:

a) The Geneva Agreements of 1954 and 1962 were an adequate basis for peace in Southeast Asia;

b) A cessation of hostilities could be the first order of business at a peace conference or could be the subject of preliminary discussions;

c) There should be 'free elections' in South Vietnam to give South Vietnamese a government of their own choice;

d) Withdrawal of U.S. bases from Southeast Asia;

e) Withdrawal of troops from South Vietnam after peace is restored;

f) If there were peace, North Vietnam could participate in a regional effort of economic reconstruction to which the U.S. would contribute at least one billion dollars;

12 Asian Almanac, ibid., pp. 2616-17.
g) Representation of Vietcong after cessation of Hanoi’s aggression;

h) America could stop the bombing of North Vietnam as a step towards peace.\textsuperscript{13}

On 24 January 1966, Ho Chi Minh in a letter to heads of state of many countries hinted for the first time at the possibility of peace talks if U.S. bombing stopped. But just after a week’s time, President Johnson resumed bombing of North Vietnam. As a result, another impasse propped up in the commencement of peace talks. On 2 February 1966, the UN Security Council met in an emergency session at the request of U.S. to try to end the Vietnam War. But it was of no avail at all. China rejected the 14-point peace plan because its first point contradicted all the rest thirteen points as it was none other than the U.S. which induced Ngo Dinh Diem to ignore the Geneva Agreements. China wanted negotiations only on condition that the Geneva Agreements were fulfilled.\textsuperscript{14} It claimed that since the U.S. had not given up its aggressive aims, “any peace talks, initiatives, were bound to help the United States prolong her occupation of South Vietnam”.\textsuperscript{15}

Meanwhile on 7-8 February 1966, Air Vice-Marshal Nguyen Cao Ky, the Prime Minister of Republic of South Vietnam along with the head of state General Nguyen Van Thieu met President Johnson and his senior advisers after the Honolulu Conference and renewed the pledge for a new democratic constitution to be followed by elections.

Subsequently, all Moscow, Peking, London, New Delhi and U.Thant tried sincerely to start the peace talks at the earliest possible. On 6 March 1966, U. Thant proposed a three-point formula. It included:

a) bombing halt.

b) reduction of military activity by both sides.

c) participation of NLF in peace talks.


\textsuperscript{14} Jen-min Jih-pao, editorial (17 January) also printed in Peking Review, vol. IX, no. 3, 14 January 1966, p. 5.

\textsuperscript{15} Asian Almanac, vol. 4, no. 10, 4 March 1966, p.5.
This proposal was made public on 22 September 1966 by U.N. Ambassador Arthur Goldberg. However, both Moscow and Peking rejected the peace offer. Moreover, Soviet Union as in the past, awaited indications from Hanoi for going ahead with negotiations, as all along it had been supporting the cause of Hanoi. It had been holding the view that the Vietnamese should decide their own fate without any outside interference. On occasions the Soviet Union seemed to have frustrated peace prospects by rejecting the peace offers from the U.S.

The three-point formula of U.Thant was reiterated in October 1966 and also in March 1967. But North Vietnam rejected the last two points and accepted only the first point as the basis for settlement. Thus bombing halt had always been the pre-requisite for peace talks so far as North Vietnam was concerned. The U.S., on the contrary, had resorted to bombing of North Vietnam in order to acquire an upper hand in peace talks on the conference table. As such, this problem could not be solved till confidence among concerned parties reached to the extent that each side was satisfied that no one would take undue advantage of bombing halt.

At this stage, the U.S. Air Force Chief of Staff General John McConnell noted at a meeting of the National Security Council on 29 January 1966 that “Our bombing is ineffective because of the restrictions placed upon the Air Force. We should lift these restrictions and we would then get results”.

However, the hope for negotiations grew in September 1967 when it appeared that Kissinger would be able to talk directly with North Vietnamese representative in Paris and Johnson made the offer of bombing halt public in a speech in San Antonio, Texas on 29 September 1967. When North Vietnamese refused to recognize Kissinger, the channel was shut down on 20 October 1967 and after two days bombing resumed.

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Meanwhile, British Foreign Secretary George Brown and India presented a six-point peace plan and a seven-point peace proposal respectively. The British plan envisaged:

a) Conference of all parties involved in Vietnam including the NLF,
b) Peace talk should be preceded by bombing pause and halt to both U.S. and North Vietnamese military build-ups,
c) Cease-fire during the conference,
d) Conference should provide for free elections in both Vietnam,
e) Eventual re-unification of the country after free elections and amnesty,
f) Vietnam to be neutralized after the withdrawal of both American and North Vietnamese troops from South Vietnam.

On this peace proposal, the Soviet Union sought Hanoi's opinion which outrightly rejected it as evidence of Anglo-American collusion on Vietnam question. Britain was always suspected by the communists as an ally of American imperialist designs. As a result, its role in peace-making in Vietnam had been quite limited.

India proposed a seven-point peace plan for ending the Vietnam war. The main emphasis was given on reconvening of a Geneva type conference; bombing halt in North Vietnam, regular functioning of the ICSC; withdrawal of foreign forces from Vietnam; reliance on Geneva accords of 1954; and a rehabilitation plan to repair the ravages of war. India, however, was not sure of the acceptability of the proposals by the contesting parties. Evidently China as well as North Vietnam summarily rejected the proposals because anything less than American withdrawal was not acceptable to them. China branded these proposals as being designed to sap the fighting will of the Vietnamese and to help the U.S. The proposals thus failed to make any effect because neither U.S. nor North Vietnam was interested at that time to move away from the war. China was happy to see U.S. exchequer being exhausted day by day without a single Chinese life

19 *Times of India*, 8 July 1966.
20 Ibid, 10 July 1966.
being lost. The U.S., evidently, was more interested in forcing a military solution and then signing an advantageous agreement with North Vietnam. Hence no progress could be achieved.21

Within a period of next one year, three proposals from three countries - France, Ceylon and Canada - were put forward to solve the Vietnam problem. On 30 August 1966, President de Gaulle of France asked the U.S. to set a definite date for troops withdrawal as a condition for opening negotiations; called upon China not to pressurize North Vietnam and the Vietcong; and asked the U.N. to condemn U.S. action.22 Ceylon, on 10 April 1967 proposed for solution of internal problems by two South Vietnamese parties only such as NLF and Saigon; and solution of the union of the country by the two parties such as South Vietnam and North Vietnam.23 Canada on 11 April 1967 issued a four-point plan which emphasized on disengagement in the demilitarized zone; and return to 1954 proposals of cease-fire.24 All these three proposals were met with initial approvals from the U.S. and South Vietnam. But North Vietnam rejected all these proposals as they failed to condemn the aggressive policy of the U.S.25

In order to help the U.S. to agree to bombing halt, the NLF on 1 September 1967 revised its previous nine-point plan of 20 December 1960 in a new political programme. It replaced the four-points of North Vietnam and five-points of the NLF issued before. The programme contained four parts with an introduction and conclusion. The introduction reiterated that the NLF was the sole genuine representative of the South Vietnamese people. Part one dealt with the overthrow of U.S. forces and Saigon government; part two contained the basic 14 tasks and objectives; third part was concerned with the proposals for reunification; and the last part elaborated foreign policy deliberations.26 The programme, however, fell through due to the same reasons as the 1960 agreement.

21 Das, n. 18, pp.69-70.
24 Ibid., p.2103.
25 *Nhận Dan* (Hanoi), 17 April 1967.
26 *Asian Almanac*, vol. 6, no. 12, 23 March 1968, p. 2614. For the full text see pp. 2613-16.
Factors Guiding U.S. Towards Peace Efforts

Gradually, U.S. involvement in Vietnam deepened further owing to the prevailing global strategic environment in 1963-68. It encompassed each and every sphere of Vietnamese life, be it political institutions, economic upliftment, social and cultural mores, or military warfare in Vietnamese hinterlands.

By the second half of 1967, a few developments in the domestic as well as international scene brought about some change in the attitude of the U.S. towards its involvement in Vietnam. For the first time, the failure to achieve objectives for which the war was waged, led the U.S. to consider path to peace. Along with that a debate ensued in the whole of the U.S. on the balance sheet of profits and losses due to the continuation of the war. On 10 January 1967, President Johnson remarked, “The question is whether we have the staying power to fight a costly war when the objective is limited and the danger to us seemingly remote. Our test is not whether we shrink from our country’s cause when the dangers to us are obvious and close at hand, but whether we carry on when they seem obscure and distant – and some think it safe to lay down our burdens”. He asserted that he must reaffirm his allegiance to freedom and must ask as President Lincoln said, “where we are and whither we are tending”.27

On the question of foreign policy, he stood for a suitable change. However, he pointed out “abroad, as at home, there is also risk in change. But abroad, as at home, there is greater risk in standing still. No part of our foreign policy is so sacred that it remains beyond review. We shall be flexible where conditions in the world change – and where man’s efforts can change them for the better”28. He was of the opinion that as the first post-war generation gave way to the second, they were in the midst of a great transition from narrow nationalism to international partnership; from the harsh spirit of the Cold War to the hopeful spirit of common humanity on a troubled and threatened planet.29 Gradually thus,

28 Ibid., p. 21825.
29 Ibid.
a distinct change in the attitude of U.S. policy-makers was visible in various policy
statements of the government.

Secondly, the U.S. began to realize that an outright victory in Vietnam or
any military solution to the problem was far from being possible. For the first time
a consensus emerged in the U.S. that a super power has also its limitations. The
military reverses of 1967 proved this. In the 1967-68 dry season the NLF, after
a new offensive, negated the notion that the U.S. at all would win the war. On
top of this, the Tet offensive of 1968 also confirmed the fact that the "myth of
'military progress', so sedulously propagated from Saigon and Washington" would
be impossible to achieve. No wonder, Hanoi's constant victory in the battlefield
with strong military support from its allies and strong moral support from the
international community broke down the U.S. morale to win the war. In fact,
this doubly confirmed the worldwide belief that the U.S. had already lost
confidence in much of its Asian policy.

Quite a few intellectuals and scholars challenged the premise on which the
U.S. policy of 'containment' was based. They argued that communists had their
own national interests which caused confrontation and clashes. Hence they had
little time to expand. Secondly, the policy of 'containment' involved the risk of
an all-out war with China. It was also thought that winning a guerilla warfare in
Vietnam was quite difficult.\textsuperscript{37} Besides, U.S. containment policy failed to keep China isolated in trade relations. Hence the policy needed a revision.\textsuperscript{38}

Economically, the war caused disaster to the U.S. Heavy U.S. casualties and an annual expenditure of 30 billion dollars for South Vietnam were much resented in U.S. circles. The unbearable tax burdens on U.S. citizens due to a war fought in foreign land compelled the U.S. to try for peace.\textsuperscript{39} In his speech on 10 January 1967, President Johnson admitted that there were around five lakh U.S. servicemen in Vietnam and the cost of the war was mounting on U.S. exchequer. However, he wanted to sustain the war till the time it was realized that the war was costing more than one could hope to gain.\textsuperscript{40}

The general public opinion in the U.S. could be exemplified by the mass denunciation of the war. The growing popular feeling after the failure to win, even after the escalation of war, was that the war should be abandoned.\textsuperscript{41} Many felt that it was the U.S. which isolated China and made it aggressive and intransigent.\textsuperscript{42} So a policy of compromise was to be introduced to the Vietnam problem which staked mostly the Sino-US relations till then, and the U.S. was ready to take the risk. In addition, the American economy declined considerably due to a run on gold. The civil rights disturbances occurred in the U.S. on a large scale just after the death of Dr. Martin Luther King. The American public called for more focus on domestic issues.\textsuperscript{43}

The U.S. election in 1968 played a more important role to disengage from Vietnam. The Democrats had to fight against the Republican candidates, who demanded bombing halt, negotiations with the Vietcong and new South Vietnamese elections opened to the NLF. In such a situation, the Democrats could

\textsuperscript{38} Rhoderic MacFarquhar, \textit{Sino-American Relations 1949-7/} (New York, 1972), p. 239.
\textsuperscript{40} Keesing’s Contemporary Archives, n. 27, p. 21826; Also see \textit{U.S. News & World Report}, vol. LXX, no. 24, 14 June 1971, p.52.
\textsuperscript{42} Progressive, vol. 30, no. 5, May 1966, pp.4-5.
not afford to sit idle. So, Johnson administration sought a quick solution to the problem so that it would have some positive implications for the Democratic party campaign.44

Towards the end of 1967 and the beginning of 1968, the tide decisively turned against the policy of the Johnson administration in Vietnam. The American casualties in Vietnam reached nearly 300 a week. This led to a widespread and occasionally violent anti-war movement in several American university campuses. The American public started questioning the efficacy of American policy in Vietnam. The New York Times launched a vigorous campaign against the Johnson administration's Vietnam policy. It urged the government to start negotiations with Hanoi.45 The anti-war elements in the Congress also grew in strength. Presidential aspirants from the Democratic Party — Senator Eugene McCarthy (Democrat, Minnesota), Senator McGovern, and Senator Robert Kennedy (Democrat, New York) vehemently criticized Johnson's policy. All of them appeared as "peace candidates". Richard Nixon, a Republican front-runner, attacked the President's Vietnam policy. Nixon, who had all along been a "hawk", adopted a "dovish" attitude by calling for a negotiated settlement through non-violent means.46

The Johnson administration passed through a serious internal crisis over the question of Vietnam. Defence Secretary Robert McNamara in a Kafkasque metamorphosis turned into a "dove" and was leading the "peace faction" within the administration. The "war faction" included the Joint Chiefs of Staff, Walt Rostow, the Presidential Adviser on National Security; and the Secretary of State, Dean Rusk. This internal tussle resulted in the resignation of Secretary McNamara in 1968. Clifford, who succeeded McNamara as Defence Secretary also became a "dove" before long. These developments must have had an impact upon the decision that the President took on Vietnam in March 1968.47

45 New York Times, 14 January 1968, sec. 4, p.16; also ibid., 11 February 1969, sec. 4, p. 12.
46 Ibid., 6 March and 2 August 1968; and Clark Clifford (with Richard Holbrooke), Counsel to the President: a memoir (New York 1991), pp.503-5.
There were many external pressures as well. The most important among them was the effort of U Thant, Secretary-General of the UN. U Thant visited many countries and talked to their leaders on Vietnam. After his return to New York on 24 February 1968, he made a statement, saying that if the U.S. unconditionally ended the bombing of North Vietnam, it could reasonably be claimed that North Vietnam would deal "in good faith" with the issue of ground fighting.\textsuperscript{48} The Gandhi-Tito communique of 27 January 1968 regretted the continued bombing.\textsuperscript{49} The Gandhi-Kosygin communique of 31 January 1968 also called for "unconditional stoppage of bombing".\textsuperscript{50} These diplomatic pressures also played a role in influencing President Johnson to change his mind on Vietnam. Neither North Vietnam nor the Vietcong displayed any desperate anxiety about resuming peace talks.

The will of the U.S. to continue the war had gradually weakened, and what the Occidental Power now anxiously sought was, ironically enough, some means of "saving face". The spirit of nationalism was strong among the Vietnamese people both of the North and of the South. Equally fervent was the spirit of opposition to the kind of alien domination represented by the massive presence of U.S. forces in South Vietnam. U.S. military power employed in support of its hand-picked proxies proved ineffective in the situation. It took a long time indeed for American policy-makers to come to terms with this fact.

On 1 January 1968, the North Vietnamese Foreign Minister, Nguyen Duy Trinh said in a statement broadcast by Radio Hanoi that Hanoi "will talk" with the U.S. after the bombing of the North had stopped. The use of the word \textit{will} was very important; for, on 28 January 1967, Trinh had said that "only after the unconditional cessation of U.S. bombing and all other acts of war" against North Vietnam could there be talks between the two nations.\textsuperscript{51}

President Thieu, for different reasons, did not seem interested in peace talks. Militarily he was in a disadvantageous position and he knew that he did not

\textsuperscript{49} Ibid., 28 January 1968.
\textsuperscript{50} Ibid., 1 February 1968.
enjoy the support of the majority of the South Vietnamese people. However, after the victory of Richard Nixon in the 1968 Presidential election, Thieu apparently calculated that it would be more advantageous to him than a Democratic victory. Thus, neither Hanoi nor Saigon was in need of an immediate cessation of fighting and beginning of negotiations.

President Johnson, however, had different compulsions. Time was running out for him. If he wanted re-election, he had to offer hope of a possible American disengagement from Vietnam. But his hope of re-election was unexpectedly dashed by the result of the New Hampshire primary held on 12 March 1968 which recorded 40 per cent support for the peace candidate Senator McCarthy.

Against this background President Johnson surprised everyone on 31 March by announcing his decision not to seek re-election. In the same speech he announced that he had ordered a halt to the aerial and naval bombardment of most of North Vietnam and had invited Hanoi to join the peace talks. On 3 April, Washington and Hanoi exchanged public statements in which they agreed to establish contacts through their representatives.

Moscow and Peking responded differently to the above agreement between Washington and Hanoi. Moscow endorsed this agreement on 5 April. Peking, on the other hand, criticized the Johnson’s offer as a “smokescreen” and asked Hanoi to continue fighting.

Factors Guiding other Interested Nations towards Peace Efforts

Many factors contributed in drawing both sides (U.S. and Hanoi) towards peace talks. Both sides, in the actual sense, involved many a group of interests. The superpowers (US and USSR) and China had their own interests in it. The indigenous Vietnamese parties (Hanoi, Saigon, NLF) obviously were directly

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Footnotes:


53 Ibid., 4 April 1968.

54 Ibid., 6 April 1968.
involved in the tussle. Hence different sets of factors impelled these six sides (US, USSR, China, Hanoi, Saigon and NLF) to push the U.S. and Hanoi for negotiations.

The reasons why the U.S. agreed to disengage itself from Vietnam through negotiations have already been mentioned in the last sub-section of this chapter. As regards China, the Cultural Revolution in 1966 grown out of the Sino-Soviet rift, compelled it to change its isolationist policy and bring about a rapprochement with the U.S. as well as with other nations. Of course, the Cultural Revolution was criticized by all the nations as a ploy for supporting the Vietnamese people to fight U.S. imperialism. Still, these were only verbal criticisms and China gradually moderated its stand towards the U.S. in Vietnam affairs after the Cultural Revolution.

On the domestic front, South Vietnam witnessed the formation of many new political units such as the "League of National and Peace-loving forces" in Hue and Saigon, the Buddhist Association, the South Vietnamese Council of Roman Catholic Bishops, the South Vietnamese intellectuals, which demanded immediate end to war and commencement of negotiations. They demanded American withdrawal as well as formation of a coalition government with the NLF in South Vietnam, for NLF was controlling four-fifth of the territory and two-third of the population in South Vietnam. The Thieu-Ky regime was hated and mistrusted by almost everyone. In order to keep such a corrupt regime in power, the people were subjected to coercion and that too at the cost of their economy. It also created social tension. Hence, they demanded that the war must be stopped at any cost.

The NLF along with South Vietnam was also seen to be quite anxious to end the war because their country was being devastated by the war. Of course, it was Hanoi's concern to see that the NLF's eagerness to end the war was being

57 Burchett, n. 31, p. 16.
58 Smith, n. 39, pp.6-7.
60 Terrill, n.33, p.17.
realized into reality as the U.S. was conscious about ending the war from South Vietnam side. More than the NLF or South Vietnam, it was the responsibility of both Hanoi and the U.S. to bring about peace in the region.\textsuperscript{61}

In addition, Hanoi could import food stuff from South Vietnam only when peace was restored.\textsuperscript{62} Hence, peace was desirable. But Hanoi became quite disheartened when a democratically representative government with Thieu at its head was set up in Saigon with mandate to bring about stability and order. This shattered the hope of Hanoi and it realized that South Vietnam would not compromise politically so quickly.\textsuperscript{63} The economic devastation due to heavy American bombing in North Vietnam also compelled Hanoi to come to the Conference table.\textsuperscript{64}

On top of all these, the world public opinion also played an important role in bringing both sides to negotiations in order to reach a settlement.\textsuperscript{65} Thus, both sides agreed at last to negotiate a settlement despite the fact that they were against any peace talks before.\textsuperscript{66}

If there was anything obvious with respect to Vietnam, it was the fact that American ideology failed to persuade majority of the population to support the war. The reasons for this were extremely complex and still poorly understood. A whole array of social, political, educational and generational factors were probably involved and it would be a long time before one can fully comprehend what really happened.

Whatever their sociological, psychological and political origins might be, the central thrust of those who came to oppose the war was that it was immoral. Instead of defending Western traditions of morality, American power was being deployed in such a way as to make a cruel mockery of those traditions. A large

\begin{thebibliography}{99}
\bibitem{} \textsuperscript{61} Ibid.
\bibitem{} \textsuperscript{62} Ibid., pp. 17-8.
\bibitem{} \textsuperscript{63} Dean Rusk, "Interview to American Broadcasting Company, September 10, 1967", \textit{Department of State Bulletin}, (Washington), vol. 57, no. 1475, 2 October 1967, p. 413.
\bibitem{} \textsuperscript{64} "The Chances for Peace - Talk stage begins" \textit{U.S. News & World Report} (Washington), vol. LXIV, no. 16, 15 April 1968, pp. 50-1.
\bibitem{} \textsuperscript{65} Chester L. Cooper, "The Complexities of Negotiations" \textit{Foreign Affairs}, vol. 46, no. 3, April 1968, pp. 454-55.
\end{thebibliography}
number of writers, publicists, professors, student and others who turned against American policy in the mid-1960s seemed disturbed by the war’s ethical aspects. In the first place, there was the shaky legal status of the American intervention in the light of the Geneva accords. In addition, the problems of supporting an unpopular regime in the face of what seemed to bear many of the characteristics of a popular uprising caused serious concern. The open corruption of the South Vietnamese government and the dismal record of its rapidly changing leadership in ensuring basic civil liberties also caused some disillusion. And finally the war itself, Roosevelt had condemned the Nazis in 1937 because “civilians, including vast numbers of women and children, are being ruthlessly murdered with bombs from the air”. The use of napalm; the systematic destruction of human settlements; the creation of a population of wretched refugees; the persistent reports of torture and execution of “suspects or hostile civilians” and prisoners of war; marines setting huts ablaze with cigarette lighters or U.S. allies’ generals executing captured Vietcong in the streets with their pistols; defoliation; and the reported use of gas – these matters were widely reported in America’s media and were the daily fare of the evening news. To many it seemed that this was not the sort of foreign policy the US ought to be pursuing. It was inevitable that it would lead to a debate.

From this perspective, what had happened was simple: an ideology which had since 1935 successfully intertwined considerations of national interest with considerations of traditional morality was rapidly unraveling. American power in pursuit of a national interest (unequivocally defined as such by the White House) was being used, not only without reference to basic morality, but in open contradiction to its fundamental principles.

It is hard to imagine, a more basic human dilemma. Two ideals – national defence and decent behaviour – both of which were valued highly seemed now to be in hopeless contradiction. A contradiction which was not envisaged by the shapers of the ideology now confronted Americans in starkest reality. Everyone who had subscribed to the Roosevelt ideology had now to decide which strand of it was more important to him; and for the first time, the U.S. realised that some
who had supported that ideology were inspired by the realistic pursuit of national security while others were drawn by their commitment to the professed American idealism.

This analysis appears to be too simple. If the core question was one of national security versus national morality, then it was not the core question which was most often debated in public. The reason for that was a kind of psychological need for integration — both collectively and personally. It becomes a complex psychological problem when men (or societies) pursue two divergent goals, both of which are highly valued. However, there are some intellectual tools to address this kind of dilemma, and two of them were used frequently in the debate over Vietnam.

The first and most obvious response to an unraveling rope was to vigorously deny that it had unraveled, to deny that there was in reality an irreparable conflict. In short it was to insist that the opposition's contention was unreal.

And so, in the debate over Vietnam the simplest and most often used arguments were intended to deny the central thrust of the core question. Those who defended American involvement, therefore, tried to project that Americans were not behaving immorally. Far from being barbaric, Americans were the harbingers of a better life for the people of Vietnam. They did not desire an inch of territory. Rather they provided medical, agricultural, technical and economic assistance and their efforts were devoted to "winning the hearts and minds" of the Vietnamese. Far from being immoral, Americans were the guarantors of peaceful freedom and the defenders of a nation's right to map its own destiny despite the cruel designs of powerful and aggressive neighbours. Thus, if one were to ask President Johnson or Secretary Rusk how they felt about the agonizing choice between the two strands, it seems that they would have denied any separation: the U.S. was not behaving immorally at all. The rope of American ideology was still right and strong.
Similarly, if one were to ask Professor Morgenthau or Ambassador Kennan how they felt about the agonizing choice between the two strands, they too would have responded that there had been no separation: the U.S., they would contend, had no national interests in the area. "The first point I would like to make", Kennan told the Fulbright Committee in February 1966, "is that if we were not already involved as we are today in Vietnam, I would know of no reason why we should wish to become so involved, and I could think of several reasons why we should wish not to. Vietnam is not a region of major military, industrial importance. It is difficult to believe that any decisive development of the world situation would be determined in normal circumstances by what happens on that territory". In short, there was no dilemma because the security of the U.S. was in no way threatened and their involvement in Vietnam had no relation to the strand of national interest.

If the first response to the problem – national interest versus national morality – was to deny that such a problem existed, the second way to avoid the difficult choice was to assert that there were "higher" values involved.

And so those who favoured U.S. policy in Vietnam contended that to focus on battlefield brutality was to see the moral questions at their lowest possible levels – there would always be brutality on both sides in every war. The real moral questions, i.e. the moral questions at the "highest" level, were concerned with the validity of American commitments, the hopeful promises of U.S. objectives for the region once peace was attained and, above all, the "higher" morality of maintaining in the world a trustworthy force for freedom, a force which those who loved freedom could count upon to keep its word and to defend its friends despite the temptations of easy retreat, despite the cost in sacrifice, despite the immense national patience which such an effort must involve. These "higher" moralities were being ignored by the so-called "moralists" who opposed the war.

Conversely, those who opposed US policy in Vietnam leveled similar charges against their opponents. There were "higher" interests involved than those the administration was talking about. Where was the self-interest in
continuing escalation? What was the rationale of an ever-widening conflict? There were genuine American interests in reaching an understanding with the Soviet Union and China - perhaps that was the central task of the diplomacy of the present generation; but how was the continuing conflict in Vietnam helping to serve that transcendent interest? The discontentment with U.S. policies in Japan and in Western Europe, the tendency of U.S. policies to drive the Soviet Union and China closer together, the awesome threat of nuclear power and a third World War - these "higher" interests were being ignored by the so-called "realists" who advocated war, and history would condemn their shortsightedness.

It is important to note that the American debate over Vietnam has, like some other important policy debates in U.S. history, been less intellectually rigorous than philosophers would like it to be. The reason was that the debaters devoted their best efforts to avoid the core question. The central dilemma, the one which required careful examination was the question as to what extent a nation's foreign policy should be guided by considerations of self-interest and to what extent by considerations of moral behaviour. That was the tough question because it demanded examination of ideological foundations of U.S. foreign policy. It was only the American college youth that initiated the debate on that difficult level.

The young people who raised the core question had not felt the central ideological experience of their parents - the intellectual response of the late 1930s to Hitler. They had never felt, with the same emotional intensity as their parents, a justification for war which could convincingly unite considerations of national interest with those of basic morality. Insofar as the Vietnam debate was a debate between generations, it was between a younger generation which had difficulty accepting any war (and this one in particular) as moral and an older generation who had difficulty imagining the absence of any war. Youth, free from the memories of Roosevelt, Truman and Marshall, confronted the Vietnam War in terms of its central dilemma. While the rest of the US sought ways of denying
that the dilemma existed, they kept trying to show that the old ideology was still valid.  

**Negotiations for total Withdrawal of U.S. Forces: Stage-wise Changes in the Aims of Negotiations**

The main objective of the U.S. in the beginning was ‘containment’ of communism in Indo-China. But subsequently its objective in the 1960s and the 1970s changed over to exploiting the fertile region economically by maintaining a sphere of influence in the area. This, the U.S. thought, would help it in enjoying some prestige in the international scene and would help capitalism to mushroom all over the world. In order to implement these underlying policies, it sought to overthrow the North Vietnamese forces from South Vietnam and keep the puppet Thieu regime intact in Saigon. But externally the U.S. projected its immediate objective as guaranteeing “freedom to South Vietnamese people” to determine their own form of government and to ensure territorial integrity and sovereignty of South Vietnam. However, Hanoi had always claimed that the Vietnam problem was an internal issue and China’s help, if at all had been accepted, was “fraternal assistance”.  

To the general public, the North Vietnamese objectives had been the end of American military intervention and its support to Saigon regime, unconditional ceasefire, political settlement by South Vietnamese people and removal of Thieu. Hanoi’s demands included recognition of the NLF as the “sole genuine
representative of the Vietnamese people".\textsuperscript{75} and reunification of North and South Vietnams "without foreign interference".\textsuperscript{76}

The NLF objectives were given expression in their different plans and programmes such as the nine-point programme of 20 December 1960, five-point plan of 22 March 1965 and political programme of 1 September 1967.\textsuperscript{77} Similarly South Vietnam outlined its own objectives in its four-point programme of 23 June 1965 which were reiterated subsequently on 19 February 1966 and on 29 October 1966 with the omission of foreign troops withdrawal from the original plan. U.S. objectives similarly found expression in its 14-point programme of 24 December 1965.

While China was not in favour of peace, Soviet Union had different objectives. The difference in the responses of the Soviet Union and China reflected the compulsions of the Sino-Soviet dispute as well as the pace of détente. For Soviet Union, an end to the war in Vietnam would eliminate the risk of possible confrontation with the U.S. that might endanger the course of détente to which it attached considerable importance. Vietnam was not an area of central and decisive importance to the global objectives of the Soviet Union. Continued drain of resources in support of a war in that theatre would also not yield sufficient dividends to the Soviet Union. Since the peace talks, according to all indications, were likely to result in the withdrawal of American forces from South Vietnam, the Soviet Union could justifiably feel that it had honourably discharged its obligation towards the Vietnamese people and had made a further contribution to peace in the world.

Both Nixon and Kissinger believed in the balance of power diplomacy. This is clear both from their speeches and from their practice. According to this view, world peace hinges upon the equilibrium maintained among the five centres of power – the United States, the Soviet Union, China, Western Europe and Japan.

\textsuperscript{75} Ibid., pp. 22-3.
\textsuperscript{76} U.S. News & World Report, n. 64, p. 49.
\textsuperscript{77} See footnotes 3, 9 and 26.
The interests of small powers may be ignored or sacrificed if they do not fit in with those of the big five. Kissinger’s “tilt” in favour of Pakistan during the Bangladesh crisis – clearly to win China’s friendship – is a good example.

“Balance of power” was the broad strategy that the Nixon-Kissinger team employed in conducting American diplomacy. At different points of time, they made use of different tactics to maneuver events to the advantage of the U.S.. Secrecy, surprise and shock were some of the tactics. They preferred to conduct their diplomacy in secret and then to spring surprises upon the rest of the world by disclosing “accomplished facts”. Kissinger’s secret mission to Peking in 1971 was the most spectacular instance of these tactics. Some of the Asian allies of the U.S. were reportedly unhappy that they were not informed in advance of President Nixon’s China diplomacy. Similarly, the European allies of the U.S., especially France, were displeased with Washington’s secret deal with Moscow.

The China diplomacy was perhaps a good enough shock for Japan, which had seemed to threaten American economic interests. The Nixon-Kissinger team used similar tactics against their European allies when they threatened to withdraw American forces from Europe. The U.S. appeared to have applied similar tactics to secure President Thieu’s consent for the Paris accord that Kissinger had worked out with Le Duc Tho. Another Kissinger trick was to keep up all the balls in the air. He hardly allowed any ball to come to rest. While preparing for the China trip, he also sprang a surprise by announcing his Moscow trip. While talking to Tho in Paris, he also arranged for simultaneous talks with Russia (Strategic Arms Limitation Talks or SALT) and with China (in Warsaw). While going to Moscow to participate in SALT, he halted on the way in Bonn to discuss Trans-Atlantic diplomacy. While shuttling between Cairo and Tel-Aviv, he announced his plan for a trip to Syria. This momentum - tactic had two advantages. It gave the impression to other governments that the U.S. was very much at the top and was, therefore, a force to reckon with. Secondly, it kept the bureaucrats in Washington busy and hardly left them the time needed to create obstacles.
Both Nixon and Kissinger expressed their views regarding Vietnam after consulting each other. During his election campaign in 1968, Nixon had given the impression to the voters that he had a plan to end the war. When pressed to elaborate the plan, he had dwelt on some aspects of his plan which, in fact, he subsequently used in ending the American war in Vietnam. On 5 March 1968 he had said that unlike the Johnson administration, he would, if elected, avoid placing exclusive reliance on the use of military pressures, but would apply both military and "non-military" pressures. He had also spoken of the possibility of using "leverage" to get the Soviet Union on the side of peace. On another occasion, he had revealed two more important elements of his future plan: a new strategy that would permit a "phasing out" of U.S. troops and a "negotiated settlement". He had declared that he would "move decisively" and that war would be carried out more effectively and at less cost. This is exactly what he did later by escalating the air war and winding down the ground war in Vietnam. He had also alleged that Johnson's "gradualism" was mainly responsible for the continuance of the war.

Kissinger had published an article on the Vietnam negotiations in the January 1969 issue of *Foreign Affairs*. Some of his observations in that article were very significant from the point of view of his subsequent role in the Vietnam negotiations. He had complained that in the Johnson administration, diplomacy and strategy were conducted in isolation from each other. Kissinger's Vietnam diplomacy was mainly based upon the Nixon-Kissinger strategy. He had stated that the U.S. should not attempt to deal with the future internal structure of South Vietnam. According to him, the primary responsibility for negotiating the internal structure of South Vietnam should be left for direct negotiations among the South Vietnamese. To quote him, "the subject of a coalition government is the most thankless and tricky area for negotiation by outsiders". Though opposed to a coalition government, Kissinger favoured a "mixed commission" which would develop and supervise a political process to reintegrate the country – including free elections. He also foresaw the necessity of an "international force" to

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effectively supervise the ceasefire and the implementation of some other provisions of the agreement.

The Nixon administration started work with an initial disadvantage in that it had to face Democratic majorities in both the Houses of Congress. And opposition to U.S. involvement in Southeast Asia came mainly from the members of the Democratic Party. "Dovish" Senators like Fulbright, Church, Mike Mansfield and McGovern carried on their regular campaign against U.S. involvement in Vietnam. They were worried that the Vietnam War might spread to other parts of Southeast Asia, especially Laos and Thailand. Late in 1969, therefore, Senator Church introduced an amendment to prohibit the use of American combat troops in Laos and Thailand. The anti-war student movement gained further momentum. The October Moratorium and the nation-wide agitation of 14 November showed student disenchantment with the Vietnam War. The Nixon administration had to deal with this anti-war sentiment. But there were also strong pressures from the Right. The "hawks" viewed unilateral American withdrawal as amounting to "surrender" and "defeat" and as a signal for return to "isolationism".79

Within the Nixon administration itself, contradictory forces seemed to be in motion. Defence Secretary Melvin R. Laird, both because of his long training in defence and foreign-policy matters as a member of the House Appropriations Defence Subcommittee and because of his general political background, seemed to be more influential than Secretary of State, William P. Rogers, who was almost a novice in foreign-policy matters. Laird had always been a "hawk" and that might have influenced Nixon's policy in Vietnam. Kissinger's balance of power approach was another variable in Nixon's Vietnam policy.

**General, Elementary and Procedural Bottlenecks before the Start of Negotiations**

The commencement of negotiations witnessed some minor problems. The first was the question of 'bombing halt'. Right from the beginning Hanoi had

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been demanding “permanent bombing halt” as a precondition to any talks. It stood as a bottleneck to the early commencement of negotiations. On 30 December 1967 at a dinner party, its Foreign Minister, Nguyen Duy Trinh announced that if the US stopped the bombing unconditionally, Hanoi was willing to talk with the U.S. government. Thus Hanoi changed its stand from a conditional bombing halt to stoppage of bombing unconditionally. The first hurdle to peace talks was thus removed. This also dispelled the American fear that Hanoi would take undue advantage of such a bombing halt.

Secondly, the U.N. mediation in the talks was never acceptable to Hanoi. The U.N. attempted to mediate through its three-point plan of 14 March 1967. However, U.S. involvement in the U.N. initiative angered the Hanoi government. This step was abruptly abandoned and the floodgates of negotiations were opened.

The next problem involved prior recognition of the NLF and the participation of both NLF and South Vietnam in peace talks. At their meeting in Canberra on 21 December 1967 both President Johnson and President Thieu agreed that “South Vietnam government was willing to discuss relevant matters with any individual now associated with the so-called NLF while making it clear that it did not regard the Front as an independent organization in any case.” They categorically declined any constructive discussion with any organization in South Vietnam committed to violent methods to achieve its political ends. Besides, the U.S. on 15 January 1968 made it clear that without the South Vietnamese participation, decisions on possible future peace talks would not be possible. President Thieu confirmed this in Saigon. However, the issues related to NLF recognition and South Vietnamese participation were kept in abeyance in the initial stages of negotiations, and were not allowed to disrupt the

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80 U.S. News & World Report, n. 64, p.49.
84 Ibid., no. 39, 30 September 1967, p. 2319.
85 Asian Recorder, n. 82, p. 8222.
86 Ibid.
87 Dean Rusk in Department of State Bulletin, n. 63.
peace-making efforts. In the subsequent periods, these problems posed serious bottlenecks to negotiations.

The next problem which stood on the way to peace-making was the U.S. way of "negotiations" through use of strength. For a considerably long period America bombed North Vietnam on the ground that the latter might take undue advantage of a bombing halt. North Vietnam, on the other hand, remained adamant that unless the U.S. unconditionally stopped bombing, the chances for talks did not arise at all. The U.S. Defence Secretary, Robert McNamara, however, announced that since 18 January 1968, there had been virtually no bombing near Hanoi or Haiphong in an effort to encourage peace talks. But North Vietnam did not relent. In such a tense atmosphere, for reason best known to him, President Johnson announced a unilateral cessation of all air and naval action against North Vietnam on 31 March 1968. Further, he nominated W. Averell Harriman assisted by Llewellyn Thompson as his personal representative for peace talks with North Vietnam at any place. Thereafter, North Vietnam on 3 April 1968 responded immediately with the declaration of its readiness to meet American envoys to "arrange an unconditional and total U.S. bombing halt so that peace talks could be begun". Before that President de Gaulle congratulated American President for "an act of reason and of political courage". This was the first time Hanoi agreed to meet American representatives while American bombs were unofficially still falling on North Vietnamese soil. On 8 April 1968, President Johnson disclosed that he had received a message from the North Vietnamese government and he had promised "to work out promptly the time and place for

90 Burchett, n. 31, p.17.
94 Asian Recorder, ibid.
Gradually bombings on areas south to the 19th parallel in North Vietnam were restricted. In addition, Cyrus R. Vance was named to assist Harriman in preliminary talks with North Vietnamese officials. Thus the way to convene the conference for peace talks was smoothened.

On choosing the venue for the peace talks, controversies erupted. On 6 April 1968 North Vietnam proposed Phnom Penh as the place for talks. On 8 April U.S. government rejected it because Phnom Penh could not handle communications if there were many press representatives covering the talks. On 10 April 1968, the U.S. and North Vietnamese representatives met in Vientiane where the U.S. suggested five places - Rangoon, New Delhi, Jakarta, Vientiane and Geneva. On 11 April 1968, Warsaw was rejected by the U.S. because it wanted a "neutral" site. On top of that, President Johnson announced four conditions for the selection of site. These were accessibility to other governments involved in the war, adequate communication facilities, adequate facilities for press coverage and immunity from psychological or propaganda advantage for either side. On 18 April 1968, ten additional sites were proposed by the U.S. as a sign of flexibility. They were Ceylon, Japan, Afghanistan, Pakistan, Nepal, Malaysia, Italy, Belgium, Finland and Austria. But North Vietnam stuck to its proposal of either Phnom Penh or Warsaw. Meantime, on 24 April South Vietnam proposed Paris as the venue. North Vietnam accepted it formally on 25 April and the U.S. accepted it on 26 April 1968. The venue controversy ended.

The French also tempered their earlier criticism of American policy in Southeast Asia because they believed that, as hosts to the peace talks, they were required to act impartially. However, military and political developments in Vietnam complicated the task of maintaining impartiality. Hence, French policy was not entirely acceptable to any of the four parties to the Paris talks. Conversely, each approved some elements of France's stance.

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96 Asian Almanac, vol. 6, no. 24, 15 June 1968, p. 2761.
97 Ibid.
98 Ibid.
99 Ibid.
One example of impartiality was France's refusal to consider any change in the 1968 level of diplomatic representation each of the four parties maintained in Paris. Although the NLF/PRG (National Liberation Front, or after 1969, Provisional Revolutionary Government) was permitted to open an information office in October 1968 in accordance with previous negotiations, there were no other exceptions. Hanoi's permanent representative in Paris was a delegate-general (accredited to the French premier) and Saigon retained its consular representation. The U.S. was the only one of the four to have a permanent diplomatic mission at the ambassadorial level.

The French were less successful in their efforts to provide a neutral atmosphere for the talks by limiting protest demonstrations against the war. Public manifestations against U.S. policy had occurred frequently in Paris during the period of major American escalation in Vietnam and some American officials accepted the French capital as the site for negotiations only with great reluctance. The opening of the peace talks coincided with the outbreak of a student-worker revolt in Paris and the French government had two reasons for frustrating public displays – reasserting its own authority domestically and providing a peaceful climate for negotiations. Therefore, the French invoked an old regulation of October 1935 which prohibited street demonstrations that threatened the public order. The ban was defied in November 1969 and the police broke up a demonstration organized by several leftist groups, detaining 2651 people. Then onwards the demonstrations were "tolerated" although those that risked upsetting the public order were not "authorized". The Interior Ministry, which normally would have taken a hard line with dissenters of any sort, adopted the more "liberal" position on demonstrations so as not to give political mileage to the Communist party, the Gaullists' best-organized opposition.

During the five year negotiations, the French were largely successful in confining demonstrations and rallies to locations indoors or outside Paris. However, occasional gatherings were noisy enough or close enough to the conference site to annoy US officials who routinely protested against them. As one American official on condition of anonymity said: "Periodically, the U.S.
needed to remind the French of their responsibility to remain impartial.⁠ The most important lapse in this regard occurred before the formal signing of the ceasefire accord on 27 January 1973. A group of noisy demonstrators, who were allowed very close to the entrance of the old Hotel Majestic where the ceremonies were held, cheered the arrival of the North Vietnamese and PRG contingents and booed the American and Saigon delegations. The Paris police were quite capable of restricting access to the sidewalks in front of the hotel, as they did throughout the four-year of meetings. However, they were reluctant to use harsh measures which might have given the opposition parties an issue in the legislative elections to be held in March 1973. Both the American embassy and the Saigon consulate registered protest against that incident.

American and South Vietnamese diplomats did not regard the French government's policy on demonstrations as the most convincing proof of its impartial stance. Since the demonstrations were directed against them, they would have preferred a complete prohibition. However, the French did not attempt a total ban because of the domestic political considerations and because a more restrictive policy would have incurred the resentment of Hanoi and the PRG. The French thus found it impossible to please all sides on the issue of demonstrations.

Similarly, the French tried to maintain impartiality in their public comments about the war. The Pompidou government also tried to retain the policy initiated by General de Gaulle. This was important for two reasons: first, domestically, Pompidou was dependent on the political support of the Gaullists; second, France's important role as host to the talks resulted from de Gaulle's Vietnam policy which had made Paris, capital of an American ally, acceptable to Hanoi and the NLF/PRG. It was difficult for Pompidou to deviate from de Gaulle's Vietnam policy without displeasing both the Gaullist majority and the opposition (who sympathized with Hanoi and the PRG). Nevertheless, the evolving situation in Indo-China necessitated an adaptation of French policy to new conditions, which the Pompidou government sought to do while avoiding a sharp departure from the Gaullist past.
Pompidou’s emphasis on continuity between his Vietnam policy and that of de Gaulle necessarily tempered France’s more positive attitude towards American policy after 1968. The French repeated their views that the US bore the responsibility for ending the conflict and the settlement should be consistent with the political realities in Vietnam taking into account its future independence. These French assessments did not always coincide with those of the U.S.. Thus, while their comments might have been less harsh than in the past, the French did not abandon their well-known views about the war. In the words of Henri Froment-Meurice, chief of the French Foreign Ministry’s Asian Division: “We didn’t sacrifice our character, our personality, our interest.”

Private and public French support for a settlement more in line with the demands of Hanoi and the PRG than with those of the U.S. or Saigon, prompted mistrust of French among American and South Vietnamese diplomats. “The French think they are neutral”, one American source stated, leaving no doubt that the U.S. diplomats thought otherwise. When asked to describe the French role in the peace negotiations, another American official said that it was “to encourage Hanoi to hold out for its demands”.

As hosts to the negotiations, the French provided conference facilities and security for the public and some of the private meetings. They made all the necessary arrangements with strict impartiality and complete discretion, to the satisfaction of all the delegations. They particularly took pride in that there were no leaks with respect to the secret meetings between Henry Kissinger and Le Duc Tho during the two-and-a-half year period (from August 1969 until January 1972). French discretion in this matter was possible because the arrangements were made at the highest level and involved only a few individuals including Jean Sainteny, former French delegate general to Hanoi; Foreign Minister Michel Jobert, then an aide to President Pompidou; former Foreign Minister Maurice Schumann; and Pompidou himself.

France’s political role was not unimportant. Etienne Manac’h, the then France’s ambassadress to Peking and from 1960 to 1969 Director of Asian Affairs at the French Foreign Ministry, was an active participant in the maneuvers both
before the Paris talks began in 1968 and during the first eleven months of deliberations. His views on Indo-China paralleled those of General de Gaulle, to whom he had direct access while he was at the Foreign Ministry. His role in the pre-conference maneuvers consisted of frequent meetings with Mai Van Bo, chief of North Vietnam's general delegation in France from 1961 to 1970 and Hanoi's highest-ranking diplomat permanently stationed in the West. Many awaiting peace feelers between Hanoi and Washington were transmitted through Mai. Manac'h's regular contacts with Mai and with John Dean of the American Embassy enabled him to help move the two sides towards the conference table.¹⁰¹

Manac'h acted on his own initiative and he and de Gaulle understood that he was not to assume the post of mediator on behalf of the French government. De Gaulle realized that the parties could talk directly to each other if they were willing to settle and, in his words, "if they don't want to settle, why should we get involved"?¹⁰²

From 10 May to 13 May 1968, the discussions centred around procedural arrangements at the International Conference Centre, made available by the French Foreign Ministry. The second-ranking members of both the delegations (U.S. and North Vietnam), Cyrus R. Vance and Col. Ha Van Lau were first engaged in the discussions. By 11 May 1968, the procedural details of the meeting had been catalogued.¹⁰³

**Conclusion**

But the real theoretical problems behind negotiations stood out prominently as the most elementary bottleneck to progress towards peace. It goes without saying that negotiation itself presupposes a certain amount of toleration for either side; adequate mental communication between both sides; mutual trust; adequate understanding of each other's signals for compromise; and no misunderstanding

¹⁰³ "The Month in Review", *Current History*, vol. 55, no. 323, July 1968, p. 54.
or suspicion. But in this case, all these aspects were missing initially. Gradually, as the talks advanced, both sides showed signs of these elementary requirements. Secondly, both sides “never came to negotiations with the prospect of being on the wrong end of a surrender ceremony”. So bargaining was expected to be tough and negotiations were expected to be hard to reach at any agreement. This tense situation gradually disappeared as they themselves saw that neither party engaged in the talks wanted to bully the other. Thirdly, the U.S. always suspected that Hanoi was being continuously influenced by Peking and Moscow and the NLF was being influenced by Hanoi and Peking. In subsequent periods, the U.S. over came this feeling of suspicion as both China and the USSR moved away from direct intervention in Vietnam affairs.

All these created hurdles in the negotiation process. But gradually, these hurdles were removed and peace talks started in a cordial manner.

104 Cooper, n. 65, p. 458.
105 Ibid., pp. 455-56.
106 Ibid., pp. 461-62.