CHAPTER – III

PLANNED U.S. DISENGAGEMENT: THE PARIS TALKS (13 MAY 1968 TO 27 JANUARY 1973)
PLANNED U.S DISENGAGEMENT: THE PARIS TALKS
(13 MAY 1968 TO 27 JANUARY 1973)

Introduction

After the elementary and procedural bottlenecks were removed, both Hanoi and U.S. government settled down to serious peace negotiations. During these negotiations, the U.S. government in a systematically planned manner tried to disengage itself from the Vietnamese soil in the thick of heavy warfare in the battlefield and in the midst of a series of limited (public), enlarged (public) and private talks on the negotiating table. In fact, it is quite interesting to note the different stages of planned U.S. disengagement while chronologically analysing the peace talks held in Paris. Except that at different stages of the talks and at different stages of the warfare there had been diplomatic hints and tactful steps from the U.S. side to respectfully disengage itself from the controversial Vietnamese issue, there had been no such apparent discussion nor any tacit attempt by U.S. government to disengage itself from Vietnam at all, during these four and a half years. Hence tactful and intelligent steps by U.S. towards disengagement need thorough investigation during the peace talks both on the negotiation table as well as inside the U.S. policy-making machinery.

U.S. Acceptance of Bombing Halt

The first ever tactful suggestion from the U.S. side came during the limited (public) talks from 13 May to 30 October 1968 in Paris when U.S. government after long deliberation suddenly accepted bombing halt as a precondition to serious peace talks and recognised both the NLF and Saigon government as independent political entities within South Vietnam.

It would be quite interesting to see how the U.S. conceded to the Vietnamese parties on such vital issues. However, such decisions by U.S. policymakers’ were not taken in haste.

The phase of limited talks between the governments of the U.S. and North Vietnam started from 13 May 1968. It continued for about five and a half months
with thirty formal sessions. The conference was held at the Hotel Majestic in the riot-torn French metropolis. The North Vietnamese government was represented by Xuan Thuy, an experienced diplomat who attended the Geneva Conference in Laos in 1962. The U.S. government was represented by Averell Harriman, a veteran American negotiator. The representatives of the NLF and Saigon government did not find place in such a setting of negotiations.

The main point of discussion at this stage was the question of U.S. acceptance of a complete bombing halt as a precondition to further talks. This issue was related to the problem of restoring the demilitarized zone between North and South Vietnams. It was meant to obtain the North Vietnamese approval to a permanent division of Vietnam so as to present Saigon government as the authentic representative of South Vietnamese people. In addition, it was used to bring both the U.S. and Hanoi to agree to the inclusion of the NLF and Saigon government as independent parties at the Paris peace talks. Related to this, another point of discussion which came up during this time was about the controversies associated with the concept of 'aggression'. The end of this phase of limited talks was marked by President Johnson’s dramatic call to end all bombings and shelling of North Vietnam. But Thieu’s manipulations negated the effect of this move by America.

Right since the beginning of the talks, there remained a cordial atmosphere at the conference between the two sides. At "recreation" breaks during the talks, Harriman, Thuy and their teams were seen chatting mainly about food and drink, and events in Paris. But the public sessions recorded only

---

2 Ibid.
3 Radio Hanoi on 3 April 1968 as quoted in *Asian Almanac*, vol. 6, no. 24, 15 June 1968, p. 2760; also see P.J. Honey, “Three Critical Years for Hanoi”, *Pacific Community*, vol. 2, no. 4, July 1971, p. 758. In fact, Hanoi delegation came to Paris only to decide with the U.S. side the unconditional cessation of bombing and all other acts against them so as to arrange the beginning of real talks.
7 Burchett, n. 5, p. 7.
two separate monologues rather than talks. Thus civility was only maintained. Both sides "had a tacit agreement to stick to it despite the apparent barrenness." 

Leaving aside this outward civility, there was nothing cordial about the activities of both sides. In fact, there was always a tense atmosphere at the conference. The U.S., however, was always found eager for a quick progress in the talks. The reasons, of course, were not quite far to seek. Hence it was Harriman rather than Xuan Thuy who always pressed for more frequent meetings. On the other side, Hanoi was always seen conscious about NLF’s anxiety towards the progress of Paris talks. The NLF was worried because the whole of Vietnam was represented only by the warriors of the North and not by any representative from South Vietnam. Hence Hanoi tried to keep the NLF satisfied as far as possible by both keeping NLF informed as to what was going on in Paris talks and by trying to get its demands accepted through bargain. A similar awareness was visible in the U.S. circles about South Vietnam.

In such a tense atmosphere, the main point of discussion i.e. bombing halt was first introduced. As the issue had already created an impasse before the summoning of negotiations, it emerged as a bottleneck at the beginning of the talks also. The Hanoi delegation chief, Xuan Thuy, after providing a long historical background to the war and the U.S. intervention, called for an immediate halt to the bombings so that the two sides could move on to discuss political settlement in South Vietnam. Harriman, of course, in reply, did not refer to the issue directly. Rather he repeated that bombings had been stopped in areas which included “almost 90 percent of North Vietnam’s population”. In exchange for bombing halt, he started putting such conditions that all external aid to the NLF should be stopped and that the U.S. should be given the right to control South Vietnam’s frontiers along with both sides respecting the DMZ (demilitarized zone). To this, Xuan Thuy retorted that the U.S. was “demanding ransom” for

---

10 Terrill, Ibid., p. 16.
11 Ibid., pp. 17-8.
12 Burchett, n.5, p.6.
13 Ibid.
14 Ibid., pp. 6-7.
its "flagrant aggression." He suggested that in response to U.S. bombing halt, Hanoi could abstain from bombing the entire territory of South Vietnam, which was not at all acceptable to the U.S. To Thuy's repeated questioning as to when would the bombing be halted, Harriman replied "under appropriate circumstances and at an appropriate time". To this, Hanoi reacted sharply and demanded that the scope of public peace talks in Paris be limited only to "bombing-halt" and "aggression" issues.

The controversy over bombing issue was the result of suspicion in both Hanoi and Washington circles. The U.S. felt that North Vietnam would take undue advantage of bombing-halt, whereas North Vietnam claimed that the U.S. would take advantage of bombing itself. North Vietnam condemned the U.S. bombing because the U.S. was bargaining from a position of strength. It pointed out that the U.S. had earlier taken advantage of its good will gesture in December 1966. Hence it was adamant on a bombing halt before anything was being further discussed. The U.S., on the other hand, because of its past experiences during the Korean negotiations, was convinced that the communists should be allowed minimum military capability before and during the peace talks. Hence, it felt that Hanoi should not be allowed to take undue advantage of bombing halt and an opportunity to amass men and material in the border areas. That is why the U.S. did not agree to a bombing halt.

The "ransom" which the U.S. demanded in reciprocation to the bombing halt, gave rise to another controversy regarding the restoration of the DMZ (demilitarized zone). The U.S. was aware that many external forces such as the Soviet Union and China (the so called communist brotherhood) were patronizing Hanoi and NLF and were providing them lots of sophisticated weapons for the

---

15 Ibid., p.7.
21 Roger Hilsman, "Must we invade the North?", Foreign Affairs, vol. 46, no. 3, April 1968, p. 346.
warfare. Hence it wanted to gain control of South Vietnam’s frontiers to stop the inflow of external aid. This could only be achieved by creation of a demilitarized zone between North and South Vietnams. To this, Hanoi’s reaction was that Harriman was “trying to recover at the conference table what Westmoreland had lost on the battlefield”. 22

Closely connected to this, the “ransom” also generated another important issue of ‘aggression’. North Vietnam did not agree to the provision of DMZ demanded by the U.S. simply because the U.S. was viewed as an “alien aggressor”. 23 However, Harriman repeated the Rusk-Rustow version of the origins of the war i.e. the only problem in South Vietnam was “aggression” against the South by the North. 24 To this, Xuan Thuy replied that they had the right and sacred duty to deploy troops in the South. 25 So it was the U.S. which was an ‘alien aggressor’ and not North Vietnam. The Vietnamese war was only a civil war and the U.S. had no right to intervene in the internal affairs of Vietnam. The U.S., on the contrary, held that South Vietnam was a separate political entity which was attacked by the North, and it was the duty of the U.S. as a friend and ally to come to its rescue and respond to ‘aggression’. 26

The U.S. demanded withdrawal of the North Vietnamese forces from South Vietnam. The DRV, on the other hand, demanded withdrawal of U.S. forces from South Vietnam. According to Mikheyev, the U.S. did not withdraw because it thought that its presence might help in establishing an independent government in South Vietnam which would ultimately end communist influence in the region. 27 As far as Hanoi side was concerned, initially there were no North Vietnamese troops in the South. It was only after the arrival of the U.S. marines and combat troops that NLF launched an offensive by retaining the troops in the South. 28

22 Burchett, n. 5, p.7.
23 Kahin, n. 16, p. 25.
24 Burchett, n. 5, p.7.
25 Ibid., p. 8.
28 Burchett, n. 5, p.9.
Meantime, the meeting between President Johnson and President Thieu in Honolulu on 19-20 July 1968 further accentuated hardline posture of the U.S. bargaining. President Johnson announced that only a reduction in activities on the communist side in South Vietnam could lead to a bombing halt. Both the Presidents agreed that there would be "no more concessions without reciprocity". Both the Presidents also devised a plan to present the Saigon government as the authentic representative of the South Vietnamese people.

There were several reasons behind the adoption of hardline posture by the U.S. in Honolulu. First of all, South Vietnamese political structure had developed several cracks, especially after South Vietnam invited Gen. Duong Van Minh back to Saigon. Hence in order to rescue Saigon from such political disintegration the bargaining was made tough. However, such a hardline was difficult to maintain for long. The talks remained suspended for a period of two months. At last, the U.S. agreed to a bombing halt, and invited both NLF and Saigon to join the Paris talks. There were certain reasons for such a drastic change in U.S. attitude. Firstly, Nixon, the Republican Presidential candidate in forthcoming election, condemned Johnson's use of terror and violence as a means of political change in South Vietnam. In was hoped that a bombing halt might help the Democratic candidate Humphry. The party workers also favoured a halt. To some like McGeorge Bundy, the costs of war were "plainly unacceptable". Besides, in South Vietnam, the political situation recorded a complete change and the NLF was seen as commanding a majority support of the people. Hence it was assumed that NLF would be able to compete with Saigon administration as far as

---

31 "Secretary Rusk's News conference of July 30". Department of State Bulletin, vol. LIX, no. 1521, 19 August 1968, p. 190. also see Burchett, n. 5, p.11.
33 Burchett, n. 5, p.11
34 Current History, n. 6, p. 372.
37 Ibid.
38 See footnote 32.
political control of South Vietnam was concerned.\textsuperscript{39} That was the reason why there was a widespread notion among all sections in the U.S. that their country had failed in Vietnam.\textsuperscript{40} Therefore, the U.S. agreed to a bombing halt so abruptly.

**U.S. Recognition of NLF and Saigon Government as Independent Parties to Peace Talks**

The demand for the representation of the NLF and the Saigon administration at the Paris Conference was accepted abruptly by U.S. government. There were several reasons behind this. First of all, as mentioned above, the South Vietnamese political structure was witnessing cracks from within.\textsuperscript{41} So, NLF representation both in Paris talks and in political forum was demanded from all quarters in South Vietnam. Meantime, differences also developed between Hanoi and NLF on few issues.\textsuperscript{42} North Vietnam, in fact, since the beginning recognized the NLF as the “sole genuine representative of the people of South Vietnam”, but gradually it was seen moving away from this stand. Secondly, although it demanded the NLF presence in the negotiations in the beginning; but gradually it started insisting on only its own political programme instead of NLF presence on the negotiating table. Thirdly, Hanoi reserved its prerogative to discuss the future of South Vietnam with the U.S., without involving the NLF at any stage. This made the NLF quite dissatisfied.\textsuperscript{43} Hanoi, no doubt, was well aware of the NLF dissatisfaction and hence urgently sought the NLF representation in the Peace Conference.\textsuperscript{44} The U.S., on the other hand, wanted to take advantage of this difference and suggested that the NLF should be included in the Paris talks along with the Saigon Government to make the talks more realistic. For the NLF, it was by all means acceptable.\textsuperscript{45}

But to the Saigon government, neither the NLF representation in peace talks nor a bombing halt was acceptable. Saigon complained against these two

\textsuperscript{41} See footnote 32.
\textsuperscript{42} Terrill, n. 9, p. 18.
\textsuperscript{43} Ibid.
\textsuperscript{44} The New York Times, n. 32, p. 8656..
\textsuperscript{45} Terrill, n.9, p.18
aspects because both Saigon and NLF government would have enjoyed the same status in peace talks and thus Saigon government would have been relegated politically to a secondary position.\(^{46}\) Hence Saigon demanded that the NLF should come as a part of the Hanoi delegation, whereas Saigon should go to talks as a full-scale delegation.\(^{47}\) Thieu also objected strongly to the U.S. decision of bombing halt. The U.S. government, on the other hand, compelled by the circumstances to halt bombing, took special steps to persuade Thieu to agree to bombing halt. Thieu softened his stand only after a month.\(^{48}\) On 18 October 1968 he presented a proposal to President Johnson according to which Hanoi should accept three conditions for a bombing halt. That included both sides’ respect for the DMZ (Demilitarised Zone), cessation of the shelling of South Vietnamese cities and inclusion of the Saigon government independently at the Paris talks.\(^{49}\) This showed that Thieu indirectly accepted the inclusion of the NLF in Paris talks as well as bombing halt in exchange of South Vietnam’s admission as an independent entity to the Paris talks. The DMZ and ‘aggression’ issues were seen gradually relegating to the background.

On 29 October 1968, reports from Saigon indicated that an agreement had been reached between the U.S. and Thieu to permit the NLF and the South Vietnamese representatives to participate independently in the talks without recognizing each other.\(^{50}\) On 30 October, informed sources in Paris said that the peace talks were nearing a breakthrough. At last on 31 October, a complete unconditional halt to bombing in North Vietnam was announced by President Johnson.\(^{51}\) He announced that the NLF and the Saigon government would join the talks on 6 November 1968. This helped the NLF to get recognition and enjoy an international stature.\(^{52}\) However, the talks were kept suspended for another two months due to petty disagreements on procedural matters.\(^{53}\) That included issues

\(^{48}\) Ibid., p. 15.
\(^{49}\) Current History, n. 6, p. 372.
\(^{50}\) Mustafa, n. 1, p.31.
\(^{52}\) Burchett, n.5, p. 16.
\(^{53}\) Mustafa, n. 1, p. 32.
such as the shape of the table and the sitting arrangement. To sum up, the period did not achieve anything substantial so far as the process of U.S. disengagement was concerned. This was mainly because the U.S. was unable to accept fact that it could ever lose militarily to a small country like Vietnam. Hence it kept on trying to record a military victory on North Vietnam till the end.\textsuperscript{54} Besides, the U.S. felt that NLF by then was at "its last gasp". Hence there was no need to bring about any solution through peace talks.\textsuperscript{55} Both militarily as well as politically the U.S. tried to browbeat the NLF through the infamous "Phoenix Plan" and through the CIA on the pretext of providing "self-determination" to the South Vietnamese people.\textsuperscript{56} This attitude prevented the U.S. from taking a strong measure to achieve something substantial in the Peace conference.

At this stage of the Paris talks, there was a clear indication that some agreement had been reached. In fact, the conditions preceding 1972 negotiations were quite similar with the conditions preceding 1968 negotiations. Many aspects such as cessation of bombing, approaching presidential elections in the U.S., 31 October as the deadline for signing agreements and the avoidance of Thieu by both sides from being informed about negotiation deliberations were common in both 1968 and 1972 deliberations.\textsuperscript{57} In such a favourable situation, no doubt, progress towards peace depended on the U.S. If the U.S. really wanted an "honourable withdrawal", then the DRV and the NLF were ready to help. If the U.S. wanted to hang on, then it was certain that no solution was possible.\textsuperscript{58} However, the U.S. opted for the latter, probably thinking that its 'Vietnamization' programme (to be introduced in near future) having roots in the famous Guam

\textsuperscript{55} Ibid., pp. 3-4.
\textsuperscript{56} Ibid., pp. 4-5.
\textsuperscript{57} Adam Yarmolinsky, "Some lessons of Vietnam -- Introductions for students of American government", \textit{The Round Table} (London), no. 245, January 1972, p. 90. Record by Assistant Secretary of Defence John Mc Naughton in Pentagon Papers show the helplessness of U.S.A. in winning the war and planning to withdraw. Also see Tad Szulc, "How Kissinger did it", \textit{Imprint} (Bombay), vol. XIV. no. 7, October 1974, pp. 63-5.
\textsuperscript{58} Wilfred Burchett, \textit{The Guardian}, 16 November 1968.
Doctrine of setting 'Asians against Asians' would work. Hence the peace prospects in the end of 1968 were not visible.  

Nevertheless, the utility of the limited talks was not far to seek. The talks remained as a mechanism "that might one day be useful for ratifying an agreement reached elsewhere, but would have to idle along in neutral gear until that day came". The other results of the talks included a difference of opinion between Hanoi and NLF as well as between the U.S. and Saigon. The differences of opinion between Hanoi and NLF have already been elaborated in previous pages. As regards differences between Saigon and the U.S., Saigon demanded withdrawal of all "communist forces", whereas the U.S. stood for "simultaneous and mutual withdrawal" of "external forces" in South Vietnam. Also the period witnessed Hanoi moving away from China and getting closer to the Soviet Union because Peking stood for ultimate military confrontation with the U.S., whereas both Hanoi and Moscow favoured negotiations with the enemy camp. The third net result was the world-wide recognition of NLF dominance in South Vietnam both militarily and politically. People started raising concerns with the "volatile political life" of Saigon regime and hence pinned their hopes on NLF. The last but not the least net result was that the U.S. government granted two very important concessions in the peace talks thereby opening the gates for gradual U.S. disengagement in Vietnam. This was really the second important development towards U.S. disengagement in Vietnam.

Here ended one phase of Paris peace talks which took almost five and a half months. However, with the bombing issue as its focal point, the period worked an introductory stage to the real phases of forthcoming peace negotiations.

---


61 Grant, n. 47, p. 15


63 Mustafa, n. 1, p. 36; see Honey, n. 3, p. 758.
Separation of the Political from the Military Solution in South Vietnam

The third important stage of U.S. disengagement during Paris peace talks related to U.S. government's deliberate attempts at separating the political solution of South Vietnam from that of the military. Due to certain internal political developments inside South Vietnam, the political solution of setting up a consensus political organization in the state became quite impossible. Hence U.S. government did not emphasize on 'aggression' and DMZ issues anymore. Besides, it did not want to interfere in political issues of South Vietnam henceforth and wanted to be involved in the military solution of Vietnam issue only leaving the political issue to be decided by the Saigon government and the NLF.64 This is how it tried to wriggle out of the Vietnam issue, without unnecessarily entangling itself on political controversies, which according to it were more complicated to be solved than the military one. The manner in which this suggestion came during the beginning of enlarged (public) talks (from 25 January 1969 to 27 January 1973) showed that U.S. government had been contemplating to get out of Vietnam's political scene since quite some time, but was looking for some way through which it could plan its departure honourably.

The enlarged talks in the Paris Peace Conference started from 25 January, 1969. It continued up to 175 sessions in all. The 175th session, however, was held only for signing the final documents.65 Four parties (the U.S., North Vietnam, South Vietnam and the NLF) took part in these enlarged talks. The U.S. was represented by Henry Cabot Lodge; Xuan Thuy and Le Duc Tho represented North Vietnam; Marshal Nguyen Cao Ky came to represent Saigon government and Nguyen Thi Binh (sometimes replaced by Tran Buu Kiem) represented the NLF.

Around ten weeks lapsed before all the four sides were seen discussing peace at the conference table. During this period, Saigon government opposed

---


the recognition of NLF as an independent political entity. President Thieu asked President Johnson to see that the NLF participated as a constituent of the Hanoi delegation and the Saigon Government as an independent entity. To this, the U.S. disagreed.\(^{66}\) Hence they reached an understanding that the participation in the debate would not imply political recognition of the NLF or the South Vietnamese government by either party. Under the formula "our side your side", each party was free to organize its delegation as it deemed fit.\(^{67}\)

The differences between the U.S. and Saigon government on the recognition issue was thus resolved. But several other points of difference arose between them in no time. Saigon's interests did not match with those of Washington. "The American character and the Vietnamese character were not necessarily meant to be compatible", according to Henry Kissinger.\(^{68}\) America's haste to achieve results in the Paris talks had continuously strained Saigon's patience and limited President Thieu's chances for manoeuvre.\(^{69}\) These differences of opinion led both sides to many difficulties during the talks. Besides, the wrecked political structure of Saigon also had a direct bearing on their lack of diplomatic success in Paris talks.\(^{70}\) These were thus the lackluster developments recorded during the initial period of two and a half months of the enlarged (public) talks.

Besides, there was an unusual delay in convening the Peace Conference due to the differences among delegations over procedural matters. These involved the shape of the table, the seating arrangements and other protocol items.\(^{71}\) Gradually, this controversy was raised more and more by Saigon with the intention of preventing the NLF to join the talks, which Saigon feared might help NLF to eventually share the political control of South Vietnam with them. The U.S. disagreed on this and hence the U.S.-Saigon differences widened.

\(^{66}\) Mustafa, n. 1, pp. 31-32.
\(^{67}\) Ibid., p. 31.
\(^{69}\) Ibid.
\(^{70}\) Ibid.
further. However, these debates on procedural matters disappeared in no time because Saigon accepted the realities. Then the "negotiations started after a decent time lapse to allow the South Vietnamese to fill the press with propaganda".73

The aims of the enlarged talks were to explore all avenues to end the 'communist aggression' and to reach a peaceful settlement as opposed to the limited talks which dealt only with the bombing issue.74 Besides, the NLF and Hanoi considered the Peace Conference as a four-sided affair in which all the delegates enjoyed equal status, whereas the U.S. and Saigon regarded it as a bilateral Conference.75 This difference in their respective stands brought about a big chasm among them right since the initial stages.

The discussion in these talks started with the same old U.S. demand of the enemy's (North Vietnam) restoration of the DMZ. Apart from this issue, the talks were extended to include issues of foreign troops withdrawal and prisoners of war (PoW) exchanges.76 Whatever might be the differences at the outset, the extension of the talks was highly commendable as it showed some signs of progress towards peace. The subsequent sessions witnessed the extension of the talks bringing about a political settlement of the Vietnam issue.77 The proposals for political settlement, of course, stood too wide apart for any compromise. The NLF's suggestion was replacement of Saigon government by "a cabinet for the restoration of peace",78 to which Saigon never agreed. Thus the enlarged session of peace talks separately took up military and political issues of South Vietnam thereby opening the room for separation of military issues from the political.

The first half of February witnessed heavy bombing of Saigon by Hanoi. Nixon did not retaliate because by then there was a hint from Moscow that the NLF would be prepared to talk to Thieu's delegation provided the latter came up

72 Mustafà, n. 1, p. 32.
73 Lenart, n. 71, pp. 311-12.
75 Ibid., p. 109.
77 "Chronology", Pakistan Horizon, n. 1, p. 77.
78 Ibid.
with a worthwhile offer. Besides, Nixon wanted to avoid an anti-war public opinion against him at home and abroad.\textsuperscript{79}

However, Marshal Ky of Saigon regime after fiddling quite sometime with the idea of initiating peace talks,\textsuperscript{80} came back after almost a month with a concrete six-point plan on 7 April 1969. The plan was put before the Peace Conference at its 12\textsuperscript{th} session on 10 April.\textsuperscript{81} The plan, in a nutshell, suggested halt to the communist aggression; withdrawal of North Vietnamese troops from South Vietnam; end of North Vietnamese military bases in Laos and Cambodia; a policy of national reconciliation in South Vietnam; reunification of North and South Vietnam by democratic process and an effective international control and guarantee against resumption of communist aggression. This plan, no doubt, was unacceptable to Hanoi and NLF.\textsuperscript{82} They never agreed to any North Vietnamese withdrawal of troops which was the main target of emphasis in the plan. Hence, the U.S. suggested simultaneous withdrawal of U.S. and DRV troops even in the face of strong opposition from Thieu. Still it was rejected by Hanoi and NLF.\textsuperscript{83} They stuck to their political solution i.e. formation of a 'peace cabinet', and did not agree to only military solution to Vietnam issue.

Accordingly, there was a marked difference in the objectives of either side during these initial days of enlarged talks. While the U.S. and the Saigon government had been trying only for a piecemeal military solution, the NLF and Hanoi were seeking a definite political solution. Hence, there was a deadlock. That was the stage where U.S. government wanted to separate the military solution of Vietnam from the political. However, Hanoi and NLF did not agree to such a proposal. According to them, both political and military solutions were inseparable in Vietnam. To them, political solution must follow the military solution and only after that a real solution to Vietnam issue could be considered complete.

\textsuperscript{79} Lenart, n. 68, p. 371.
\textsuperscript{80} Asian Almanac, vol. 7, no. 28, 12 July 1969, p.3432.
\textsuperscript{81} For the text of the six-point plan, see Asian Almanac, Ibid., p. 3385.
\textsuperscript{82} Lenart, n. 68, p. 371.
\textsuperscript{83} Asian Almanac, n. 80, p. 3432.
Policy of Vietnamization

At this stage the U.S. government had no other alternative but to devise such a strategy in the Peace Conference through which it would gradually get relieved of the burden of being involved both on the political as well as military solution to Vietnam problem.

Accordingly, at this juncture, it contemplated a two-track plan to bring about a compromise and at the same time to “Vietnamize” the conflict. Hence, the U.S. demanded simultaneous troops withdrawal. This recorded the fourth important step of U.S. disengagement in South Vietnam, the third being Henry Kissinger’s theoretical pronouncements to separate both military and political solutions in January 1969.

At this stage of peace talks, the NLF delayed the entire peace initiative. It announced that with the help of its five-point plan, it was prepared for the “discussions to make the Peace Conference move forward”. The five-point plan, in short, demanded the American troops withdrawal and suggested a much-elaborated political solution including formation of a National Assembly to draw up a new constitution and establishment of a coalition government representing all political factions. Besides, it suggested the re-unification of two Vietnams through negotiations and added an extra clause for introduction of a peaceful and neutral foreign policy.

This plan was too politically oriented to be accepted by the U.S. side. Hence, in order that the Vietnamisation policy of U.S. government is not affected, the NLF expanded these provisions into a ‘ten-point global solution’ on 8 May.

---

85 See footnote 64.
86 For the text of the plan, see, Facts on File, vol. XXIV, no. 1489, p. 281.
87 Ibid.
1969. This plan not only contained the political solutions, but included military solutions as well. Its objective was to end the war and restore peace.\(^9\) The military provisions included American withdrawal under "international supervision"; the solution to problems of Vietnamese armed forces by Vietnamese only; end of foreign military bases in South Vietnam by ending all foreign alliances; exchange of PoWs and post-war reconstruction. The political solutions comprised of the guarantee of Vietnamese fundamental rights; free elections for a coalition government in South Vietnam and non-imposition of either party's regime on the other during the interim period when elections were being held. The reunification and foreign policy clauses remained in tact, as they were in the NLF's five-point plan as before.

After the NLF's ten-point global solution was submitted in the Peace Conference, the U.S. found many favourable elements in this programme, which it thought might offer a possibility for exploring peace, apart from achieving its objective of Vietnamization. Therefore, it decided to study the plan carefully so that it might find some compromising elements towards the proposals already put forward by South Vietnam and the U.S..\(^9^0\) South Vietnam, on the other hand, announced that it was prepared to discuss only three proposals in the NLF plan, which were exchange of PoWs, restoration of neutrality of the DMZ and application of 1962 agreement on Laos.\(^9^1\) It neither agreed on Vietnamization of the military problem nor did it agree to the elaborate political package solution submitted by Hanoi and NLF in this ten-point plan.

However, at this stage, the U.S. preferred to submit its own peace plan rather than collecting the agreeable elements from the NLF proposals. Nixon's eight-point plan\(^9^2\) announced on 14 May 1969, brought out prominently the points of similarities between his peace plan and NLF peace plan, such as reunification of Vietnam, release of PoWs, elections in Vietnam under the supervision of an international body, restoration of DMZ, ceasefire under the

\(^9\) See Mira Sinha, "Elusive Peace", *Weekly Round Table* (New Delhi), vol. 1, no. 41, 12 November 1972, p. 17.
\(^9^0\) *Facts on File*, n. 86, p. 281.
\(^9^1\) Ibid.
\(^9^2\) For the text, see *Asian Recorder*, n. 88, pp.8999-9000; see also *Washington Post*, 15 May 1969.
supervision of an international body and mutual respect towards the provisional military demarcation line by both sides. But the main difference between both sets of peace plans was the emphasis given by U.S. on military aspects such as the troops withdrawal as compared to the NLF emphasis on political solution. However, both plans agreed to the U.S. troops withdrawal from South Vietnam and that too under international supervision.

Nixon's eight-point plan legitimized the policy of Vietnamization propounded by U.S. government. However, at this stage the U.S. preferred stagewise Vietnamization of military troops in South Vietnam. It stood for gradually shifting the responsibility of holding fort in the battlefield from the shoulders of American soldiers to the indigenous South Vietnamese soldiers. U.S. government made it clear that the conflict should be Vietnamized and the solution to the problems of Vietnamese armed forces should be sought by the Vietnamese only. No wonder, this suggestion came to the negotiation table for the first time through the "ten-point global solution" of the N.L.F. on 8 May 1969, but the policy of Vietnamization had already been formulated by the U.S. side by then. Rather than abruptly disclosing this tactful plan for disengagement on the negotiating table, lest the world might interpret it as abject surrender, the U.S. government gradually managed to set the stage to introduce this policy in such a manner that all the participants would accept it without imputing any motive to it. The first stage in which the U.S. introduced this policy was on 14 May 1969 when it advocated partial troops withdrawal through its eight-point plan. It was suggested that as soon as the U.S. troops would be withdrawn in batches, their places would be duly filled up by fully-trained Vietnamese forces, ready to hold fort in the South Vietnamese border.

But the proposal of system of partial withdrawal faced tremendous opposition from the NLF and Hanoi. Both Hanoi and NLF were worried that partial evacuation of American troops from Vietnam would be followed by

---

93 Asian Almanac, n. 80, pp. 3434-5.
94 Ibid.
95 Asian Almanac, n. 80, pp. 3434-5.
escalation of war in Laos and Cambodia in future along with fresh bombings on North Vietnamese territory.\textsuperscript{96}

The policy of partial troops withdrawal was a contribution of President Nixon to the settlement of peace in Indo-China. He resorted to this at last for making the anti-war movement in the U.S. quiet for a considerable period, so that within that period he would be able to reach an honourable settlement to end the Vietnam war which he had been contemplating since long.\textsuperscript{97} But there were two main hurdles in his way to end the war. Firstly, North Vietnam was still solidly supported by its allies and was receiving ample war material from them for keeping the war alive. Secondly, the gap between peace proposals of both sides was too wide to be quickly cemented.\textsuperscript{98} Of course, NLF’s ten-point plan was deliberately made “imprecise” and elaborate, but partial American troops withdrawal and holding of elections in South Vietnam remained for long as the bones of contention between two sides.\textsuperscript{99} U.S., Hanoi and NLF wanted partial American troops withdrawal from South Vietnam along with holding of elections. But Saigon regime wanted withdrawal of both American and North Vietnamese troops from South Vietnam simultaneously. This was a stand which U.S. abandoned tactfully and left the possibility of a future North Vietnamese troops withdrawal from South Vietnam to be settled by Vietnamese themselves, thereby holding that “the question of the Vietnamese armed forces in South Vietnam could be settled by the Vietnamese parties”.\textsuperscript{100} Secondly, the political solution to South Vietnam issue was left by U.S. as a secondary issue without needing any priority attention. Hence, only an oblique reference was made in the eight-point plan for a “free and democratic election”.\textsuperscript{101} With this ambiguous reference only, the political solution to Vietnam issue could not be reached. However, the Vietnamization programme took off with a flying start and continued satisfactorily.

\textsuperscript{97} “Where the Front Line is”, \textit{The Economist}, vol. 231, no. 6560, 17 May 1969, p. 18.
\textsuperscript{98} Ibid., p. 19.
\textsuperscript{99} Ibid.
\textsuperscript{100} Ibid.
\textsuperscript{101} Ibid. This phrase is found in the Final Agreement replaced by “genuinely free and democratic general election”.

111
Alienation of President Thieu

In this period Thieu was categorically pinpointed as the stumbling block to the peace-making process. Gradual and systematic alienation of President Thieu from involving him in peace efforts, from informing him about peace proposals and from taking his consent with regard to specific peace plans marked the fifth important stage of U.S. disengagement in Vietnam. By the end of 1969, it was made clear to the U.S. that it was Thieu who always stood as a stumbling block to peace-making process and hence a barrier to U.S. disengagement in Vietnam. Thus gradually Thieu was alienated and ultimately the October Plan of 1972 and the final agreement of 1973 were kept as closely guarded secrets from him for quite sometime, so that Thieu would not sabotage the peace-making process. Whenever he had been kept ignorant of the peace efforts, definite successes on the negotiating table were noticed.

This style of pursuing peace-making efforts on the negotiation table continued till the end of the signing of the Final Agreement and ultimately Thieu also had to adjust to the changing circumstances of subsequent periods. Thus the process of disengagement could be finally brought down to its penultimate stages of completion. Simultaneously Thieu was advised to adapt to the changing circumstances without suddenly exposing him to the new situations at any time during the negotiation period. In fact, the N.L.F. and Hanoi demand of his exclusion from the future coalition government could not be accepted upto the end of the signing of the Final Agreement and he remained a key figure in the South Vietnamese political chessboard nearly a month before the fall of Saigon to North Vietnamese forces on 30 April 1975. At the outset, in May 1969, Thieu’s idea of holding elections in 1971 as provided by the constitution of Saigon regime did not match with Nixon’s proposal and hence Nixon had to abandon the idea altogether.\(^{102}\) Similarly President Nixon had to omit the question of South Vietnam’s future ‘neutrality’ in his eight-point plan,\(^{103}\) as it was not acceptable to Thieu. Nixon had to abandon it in order to see that Thieu remained satisfied.


\(^{103}\) Ibid.
Accordingly, the prospects of political solution to the problem were left high and dry.\textsuperscript{104} However, on military issues, Nixon had a different approach towards Thieu. No doubt he was sufficiently convinced by Thieu at Midway Islands not to be pressurized into giving more ground to Hanoi and NLF demands when both met there on 8 June 1969.\textsuperscript{105} But it was here that Nixon convinced Thieu to agree to the phased U.S. troops withdrawal programme on the ground that South Vietnamese forces were then reaching a point where they could "assume an increasingly large share of the burden of combat".\textsuperscript{106}

In fact this Nixon-Thieu deal saved Saigon administration from being immediately wrecked. If Thieu would not have agreed to such a proposal by Nixon, U.S. most probably would have thought of abandoning its ally in Vietnam. However, Nixon's attitude here clearly indicated that one day Saigon would have to lose the U.S. military support totally. So it was high time that Saigon government should count on its own indigenous resources for defence (Vietnamization) or would perish ultimately.\textsuperscript{107} This was suggestive of the next phase of U.S. disengagement in South Vietnam.

Meanwhile, the Hanoi and NLF side, in order to pressurize Nixon, had increased American casualties through heavy bombing in South Vietnam. Secondly, they also announced the formation of the Provisional Revolutionary Government of the Republic of South Vietnam on 10 June 1969.\textsuperscript{108} Its Action Programme emphasized the need to liquidate the Saigon regime and to establish a 'genuinely democratic and free republican system' through general elections. It wanted to form a provisional coalition government representing the interests of all segments of population in South Vietnam.\textsuperscript{109} The U.S. reaction to this was not at all provocative,\textsuperscript{110} even though President Thieu reacted sharply to the

\textsuperscript{104} Ibid.
\textsuperscript{106} "A Little Way at Midway", \textit{The Economist}, vol. 231, no. 6564. 14 June 1969, p.43.
\textsuperscript{107} Ibid.
\textsuperscript{109} \textit{Asian Recorder}, Ibid. For details of PRG plans, see Bob Catley and Bruce McFarlance, "The Vietnamese Social Model", \textit{The Australian Quarterly}, vol. 46, no. 4, December 1974, pp. 31-37.
\textsuperscript{110} \textit{Asian Recorder}, Ibid.
formation of PRG in South Vietnam. China also reacted normally, even though it was felt world over that Peking might have a hand in the formation of the Provisional Revolutionary Government.\footnote{Lenart, n. 68, p. 371.} However, the formation of the PRG did not absolutely close the chances of negotiations. But the problem of creation of an autonomous South Vietnam, that would permit its people to determine their own fate, remained quite alive throughout the month of July in 1969 when the discussions on arranging free elections in South Vietnam were under way.\footnote{Asian Recorder, vol. XV, no. 35, 27 August-2 September 1969, pp. 9100-1; and Asian Recorder, vol. XV, no. 39, 24-30 September 1969, p.9152; also Washington Post, 11 July 1969.} However, the non-interference of the U.S. in the formation of PRG, in spite of Thieu’s objections, confirmed that the U.S. was increasingly ignoring Thieu on several important issues.

At this juncture, Nixon’s visit to Saigon on 30 July 1969 seemed to harden “the determination of the North Vietnamese people in their struggle against American aggressors and their agents.”\footnote{Asian Almanac, vol. 7, no. 47, 22 November 1969, p. 3662.} So Hanoi demanded a written assurance from the U.S. that the Americans would completely withdraw by a specific date. The policy of phased troops withdrawal was condemned as a “complete sham”. It was seen as not a withdrawal but a tactic to mounting massive attacks elsewhere in Indo-China.\footnote{Harold Munthe-Kass, “Waiting for Hanoi”, Far Eastern Economic Review (Hong Kong), vol. 65, no. 34, 21 August 1969, p. 441; Washington Post, 12 July 1969; New York Times, 26 July 1969.}

Meanwhile, the sudden death of President Ho Chi Minh on 3 September 1969 affected the current peace efforts and a solution to the Vietnamese problem was eventually postponed due to the mistrust created by the mutually suspicious super power camps in the Indo-Chinese region.\footnote{“Pre-Empitive Strike”, Far Eastern Economic Review, vol. 65, no. 37, 11 September 1969, p. 639. For details of détente among all nations involved in Vietnam war and peace, see Dennis J. Duncanson, “South Vietnam: Detente and Reconciliation”, International Affairs, vol. 49, no. 4, October 1973, pp. 554-566; and for the extent of reverence shown to Ho Chi Minh, see Alexander Cassett, “South Vietnam : Unity ‘only a matter of time’”. Far Eastern Economic Review, vol. 85, no. 27, 8 July 1974, p. 25} Secondly, after his death, Hanoi obviously was weakened in its bargaining capability. So they moved away from their demand of total U.S. troops withdrawal to a “rapid large scale
withdrawal of American forces”, in order to get the peace talks moving.\textsuperscript{116} Ho’s death thus softened the Hanoi stand to a considerable extent.

A recent study by William Burr, senior scholar at the National Archives and Jeffrey Kimball, Professor Emeritus of History, Miami University of Oxford, Ohio has revealed that in November 1969 both President Nixon and Henry Kissinger had discussed the option of using tactical nuclear weapons as part of preparations for operation “Duck Hook” to end an unpopular war that had killed thousands of marines. According to the researchers, a memorandum from Kissinger aides Anthony Lake and Roser Morris to Pentagon military planner Captain Re brandt Robindson said that the President would need to decide in advance “how far he would be willing to go...”, that is whether the President would be willing to use tactical nuclear arms.\textsuperscript{117}

When Lodge resigned as the head of U.S. delegation on 20 November 1969 and Phillip C. Habib became the acting chief, a peculiar problem brewed up at the Peace Conference. At this stage, Hanoi complained that the U.S. government was “downgrading” the peace talks by not sending a chief negotiator to the Paris talks.\textsuperscript{118} This issue featured more prominently than anything else during the subsequent deliberations. Hence, the third batch of phased troops withdrawal on 15 December 1969 went unnoticed by both sides in the process.\textsuperscript{119} However, after six months David E. Bruce was appointed as chief delegate on 1 July 1970. Thus this problem was addressed.\textsuperscript{120} This problem, however, had never directly affected peace-efforts nor had it slowed down the process of U.S. disengagement throughout these seven months. Gradual troops withdrawal was taking place without any problem at all.

Meanwhile, France’s attitude changed with changing circumstances resulting from American troops withdrawal and the ongoing peace negotiations. In an era of escalating American involvement in Vietnam, the French found much

\textsuperscript{117} The Times of India (New Delhi), 2 August 2006.
\textsuperscript{118} Mayevsky, n. 96, p. 30.
\textsuperscript{120} Ibid., vol. XXX, no. 1549, 2-8 July 1970, p. 481.
to criticize in American behaviour. On the other hand, an entirely different response was warranted in the period from 1968 until 1973 when the US was withdrawing its ground troops and participating in negotiations to end the conflict. French demands for a bombing pause and for American troop withdrawal became superfluous as the Nixon administration implemented these two policies. Moreover, the North Vietnamese offensive in the spring of 1972 clearly placed the remaining U.S. troops and those of the Saigon government on the defensive. The French sympathized with the American position in these circumstances.

A crucial element in France's more favourable assessment of U.S. policy in Vietnam after 1968 was the conviction that the U.S. truly intended to extricate itself from the war. Less than one month after his meeting with President Nixon early in 1969, President de Gaulle met with his ambassador to Peking, Etienne Manac'h, former Director of the Asian Division at the French Foreign Ministry. De Gaulle asked Manac'h to convey to the Chinese two points: first, that the Americans had firmly decided to withdraw from Vietnam and negotiate a peace settlement; and second, that President Nixon intended to seek an improvement in U.S. relations with China. Manac'h conveyed his message directly to the Chinese Prime Minister, Chou En-lai on several occasions.

President Pompidou shared de Gaulle's belief that President Nixon intended to end US participation in the Vietnam conflict. During a visit to the Soviet Union in October 1970 he said, "President Nixon ... has convinced me of his desire to withdraw from Vietnam and to end the war". The public expression of such sentiments by the French President in a Soviet city impressed President Nixon who, according to the former French Foreign Minister, Maurice Schumann, "spoke of it many times to me".

---

121 For an account of de Gaulle's meeting with Manac'h, see James Reston, New York Times, 1 August 1971, p. 11E. Reston's version was confirmed by Ambassador Manac'h in an interview in Paris on 27 July 1972.
France's belief that the U.S. planned to negotiate a settlement in Vietnam explains the mild French reaction to American actions, which might have been viewed as escalatory, such as the Cambodian crisis in the spring of 1970. The French were alarmed when Lon Nol overthrew Prince Sihanouk and when, shortly afterward, the U.S. and South Vietnamese troops invaded Cambodia in support of the new regime. First, the French were worried about their economic interests in Cambodia and, second, they were apprehensive about the escalation in war. Nevertheless, they refrained from any direct criticism of the U.S.. In September 1966 in Phnom Penh, General de Gaulle had accused the U.S. of "increasingly extensive escalation in Asia".124 In May 1970, a terse French statement (which referred to the "principles" of the Phnom Penh address) merely regretted "that which aggravates, prolongs and widens the conflict".125 There was no mention of who was responsible for these acts, nor was there any direct comment by the President of the French Republic. Pompidou himself did not refer publicly to the U.S. action until 2 July, the day after American troops withdrew from Cambodia. At that time he made the following observation in his speech before the U.S. Congress on 25 February 1970:

I cannot help repeating what, by the way, I have already said to the United States Congress, that is, that there will be prospects for peace in Indo-China only when the United States has taken, by itself, and voluntarily, the firm resolution to evacuate Indo-China.126

The discreet timing and mild tone of this admonition indicates the progress in French-American relations from the days when General de Gaulle was charging the U.S. with primary responsibility for the continuation of the Vietnam conflict. French policy no longer required the sharply critical attitude with which General de Gaulle had greeted previously escalatory moves by the U.S. in Indo-China.


Gradually the Vietnam conflict expanded both horizontally and vertically. Horizontally it expanded to embrace Cambodia and Laos. As a result the problem of peacemaking became more complicated. Vertically, the conflict expanded from the military field to the political field. The political situation in South Vietnam was getting polarized. As a result, both Saigon and NLF tried to win over the favour of maximum number of South Vietnamese people. Land reforms and delegation of powers to the local governments were the popular measures taken by the Thieu government to obtain maximum popular support. Besides, these measures were intended to attract the loyalty of the people towards Thieu government rather than towards the communists. The emphasis was now on bringing about three revolutions – in production, in technical field and in ideological and cultural sphere. Thus apart from whatever happened in the battlefield and in the conference table, there started a competition in the political sphere between the two sides in South Vietnam for outbidding the other in obtaining popular support. Hence the peace prospects in Paris became less bright as all efforts of NLF and Saigon regime were now concentrated on the countryside and not on the conference table.

**Reinterpretation of the Domino Theory**

The next policy through which the U.S. government tried to end its involvement in Vietnam was through a complete reinterpretation of the domino theory. By the middle of 1970, President Nixon asserted that if South Vietnam

---

127 Fact on File, n.120, no. 1531, p. 120, and no. 1534, p. 177; also see Bundy, n. 84, pp. 81-3; And Max Coiffait, “Laotian Leaders Search for Peace”, Pacific Community, vol. 2, no. 1, October 1970, p. 188; See Sim Var, “Restoring Peace to Cambodia”, Pacific Community, ibid., p. 161; Washington Post, 26 Feb 1970 and Washington Post, 19 March 1970.


freely elected a communist government, its domino effect on Southeast Asia would not be as great. This reinterpretation of domino theory provided ample opportunity for U.S. side to shift the burden of solving the political issue in Vietnam to Vietnamese themselves. This democratic stand provided a sound platform for the U.S. to raise its prestige in the eyes of the world public on the one hand and on the other, it left the South Vietnamese political tangle without involvement of the U.S. with it. No doubt, serious objections were raised by Saigon regime against these so-called tactful steps for U.S. disengagement as being mere eyewash. They started apprehending that the U.S. would leave them in the lurch one day. Still, without losing sight of its main objective (total disengagement), the U.S. government continued to try its level best to pursue the matter vigorously with its allies in Vietnam to end the conflict.

At this juncture, on 1 July 1970, President Nixon went a step forward to hint at his long-term plan of disengagement from the area. He announced that he would never fix a date for complete U.S. withdrawal as it would have substantial effect on the dominoes in the region. However, he asserted that if South Vietnam freely elected a communist government “the domino effect would not be as great”. To furnish further proof of his strength and success of his “Vietnamization” policy, he announced on 3 June 1970 that 50,000 more American troops would be pulled out by 15 October 1970. Thus Nixon suggested that the U.S. had to leave South Vietnam some day, but till then it would not allow the communists to occupy Saigon forcibly.

Close on its heels, came the Bruce era in the history of enlarged (public) talks in Paris, which recorded another significant development in the process of peace-making and U.S. disengagement. The NLF and the Hanoi government demanded the exclusion of President Thieu and Marshal Ky from the future coalition government which they proposed to form in South Vietnam. This


point featured prominently in the subsequent peace plans as well. However, the U.S. government never agreed to such a proposal till its total disengagement in 1975, however insignificant might have been the domino effect.

On 17 September 1970 the NLF submitted its eight-point plan. The new proposal suggested a fixed date i.e 30 June 1971 for complete U.S. troops withdrawal in exchange of PoWs release; solution of North Vietnamese troops withdrawal problem by “the Vietnamese parties themselves”; expulsion of Thieu, Ky and Kiem from future Saigon administration; free elections by an interim government; formation of a provisional government including three segments (PRG, Saigon and neutralists); reunification of two Vietnams and at last ceasefire only after aforesaid agreements had been reached. As compared to the earlier NLF’s ten-point plan, the only significant change which this plan suggested was that the PRG agreed indirectly on the withdrawal of the North Vietnamese troops from South Vietnam (Vietnamese parties themselves had to arrange the withdrawal process). Secondly, the PoWs’ release was assured and its procedure was laid down. But the NLF demand for the purge of Thieu, Ky and Kiem was not acceptable to the U.S. and so it stood as a barrier to peace-making. Ceasefire proposal of the NLF plan, however, was rewritten and was thus made compatible with that of Nixon’s eight-point plan of May 1969.

Following this, Nixon proposed a five-point plan on 7 October 1970, calling for a “ceasefire in place” throughout Indo-China; an expanded peace conference to end the war in Laos, Cambodia and South Vietnam; a “time table” to be negotiated for America’s total troops withdrawal; a political settlement suitable to all South Vietnamese parties and immediate and unconditional release of all

---

135 See footnote 182.
137 Facts on file, Ibid.
138 Ibid.
140 Facts on File, n. 136, p. 674.
PoWs.\textsuperscript{141} The plan, by itself, was quite a unique step towards U.S. disengagement in Vietnam. First of all, a fixed date for total troops withdrawal was indirectly agreed.\textsuperscript{142} Secondly, the political settlement of South Vietnam was left to be decided by the South Vietnamese themselves.\textsuperscript{143} Thirdly, the release of the PoWs which had been since long used as a bait by Hanoi, was ultimately settled for ever so as to show the world that America did not lose much in the process.\textsuperscript{144} But the main hurdle to peace was the U.S. demand of ceasefire throughout Indo-China which remained unresolved for long. The U.S. deliberately demanded such a ceasefire as it would leave the communists in possession of only a small area in Indo-China.\textsuperscript{145} But according to Pham Van Dong’s speech in September 1970, Hanoi wanted a general settlement of the whole of Indo-China region only after the fear of the U.S. troops’ presence was removed from the region.\textsuperscript{146} Thus both sides agreed that a military solution to the Vietnam problem could be achieved only through a general political settlement of the Indo-Chinese region.\textsuperscript{147} The point of difference between both sides in the solution to the political problem in Indo-China centered on the method “to create a situation where the people of South Vietnam get a free choice”.\textsuperscript{148} The U.S. thought that a general ceasefire in Indo-China would narrow down the influence of communists and Hanoi wanted such a ceasefire only after withdrawal of all U.S. troops from the area, thereby giving a free hand to South Vietnamese to elect their own government freely. Thus there was a complete change in the U.S. interpretation of domino theory, which favoured leaving the entire Indo-Chinese region to indigenous hands and not only to Vietnam.


\textsuperscript{142} Thompson, n. 139, p. 455.

\textsuperscript{143} Ibid., also see Milton Osborne, “Hanoi’s aims: Vietnam or Indo-China?”, \textit{Pacific Community}, vol. 2, no. 2, January 1971, p. 332.

\textsuperscript{144} \textit{Facts on File}, n. 141, p. 725.

\textsuperscript{145} Thompson, n. 139, p. 455.


\textsuperscript{147} Osborne, n. 143, p. 337.

Meanwhile, the extended (public) peace conference lost much significance it used to enjoy initially due to its lack of any positive contribution towards peace. This was because by June 1971, a tendency among both groups to submit peace plans in the already-introduced secret peace talks and not in public peace conference had been quite apparent. Besides, when simultaneous secret and public peace talks were introduced for negotiations, much of the peace deliberations were covered by secret talks and not by public peace talks. However, all such peace plans after being elaborately discussed in the secret meetings used to come back to the public meetings for further discussions. It was only at this stage that the extended (public) talks had an opportunity to contribute its share towards finalization of peace plans. In this way, on 1 July 1971 PRG’s seven-point peace plan was introduced in the public talks,\textsuperscript{149} and widely discussed. Similarly after President Nixon’s announcement to the nation on 25 January 1972, the eight-point peace programme attracted criticism in the public conference.\textsuperscript{150} Similar was the fate of the North Vietnamese nine-point peace programme after it was announced publicly on 31 January 1972.\textsuperscript{151} On 3 February 1972, a revised version of the PRG’s seven-point plan was introduced in the public session.\textsuperscript{152} These plans were extensively discussed in the public peace conference. However, they did not contribute anything substantial towards either the negotiations or towards U.S. disengagement in Vietnam.

The public sessions under the leadership of Bruce and Porter (William Porter replaced Mr. David E. Bruce on 1 August 1971 as the chief of U.S. delegation) witnessed frequent cancellations of their scheduled sittings.\textsuperscript{153} Hence the importance of these sessions gradually diminished. Still, President Nixon’s announcement on 8 May 1971 of the same old peace proposal along with the mining of Hanoi and Haiphong harbours came under severe criticism in the public meeting.\textsuperscript{154} On the other hand, his trips to Peking and Moscow in February and

\begin{footnotes}
\footnotetext{149}{Asian Recorder, vol. XVII, no. 36, 3-9 September 1971, p. 10350; and Washington Post, 2 July 1971.}
\footnotetext{150}{Keesing’s Contemporary Archives, vol. XVIII, 17-24 June 1972, p. 25318; and Washington Post, 1 February 1972.}
\footnotetext{151}{Keesing’s Contemporary Archives, ibid., pp. 25317-8; and Washington Post, 8 July 1971.}
\footnotetext{152}{Keesing’s Contemporary Archives, ibid., vol. XVIII, no. 6, 5-12 February 1972, p. 25079.}
\footnotetext{153}{Mayevsky, n. 96, p. 30.}
\footnotetext{154}{Facts on File, vol. XXXII, no. 1645, 7-13 May 1972, p. 337.}
\end{footnotes}
May in 1972 were welcomed in the public session. Then Porter reported in the public session that there had been a “slight improvement” in the negotiation process.\textsuperscript{155}

In fact, the very process of neglecting the public sessions by U.S. side also attracted sharp criticism from Vietcong side. Their accusations included the escalation of war by the U.S., its Vietnamization policy and destruction of dykes and dams in Vietnam.\textsuperscript{156} Sometimes, certain developments in the secret talks like agreement on three-segmented coalition government were hailed in high esteem in the public sessions.\textsuperscript{157} Nixon’s reiteration in October 1972 that the secret talks had reached a “sensitive stage” where he was not allowing any communist government to be imposed on Vietnam was also patiently heard and discussed. But the real nature of progress towards peace was never disclosed in these public meetings.\textsuperscript{158}

Meanwhile, on 8 October 1972 Hanoi Radio disclosed the nine-point peace plan and the public session debated this in detail.\textsuperscript{159} When deadline for signing the Agreement passed without the US paying much attention, the issue became the main point of discussion also.\textsuperscript{160} The resumption of bombing by the U.S. on Vietnam territory on 18 December 1972 was vehemently criticized by Xuan Thuy.\textsuperscript{161} On 21 December 1972 Hanoi and NLF delegations walked out of the public session as a protest against bombing.\textsuperscript{162}

Without the knowledge of the public peace session, the final agreement was reached among various parties before long on 24 January 1973. The four-party delegates to the Paris peace talks were only asked to witness the ceremony of signing the Agreement. They, however, humbly did that on 27 January 1973.


\textsuperscript{156} Facts on File, Ibid., no. 1659, p. 622.

\textsuperscript{157} Ibid., no. 1663, p. 712.

\textsuperscript{158} Ibid., no. 1667, p. 798.

\textsuperscript{159} Keesing’s Contemporary Archives, vol. XIX. no. 8, 19-25 February 1973, p. 25744.

\textsuperscript{160} Ibid., pp. 25745-6.

\textsuperscript{161} Ibid., p. 25747.

\textsuperscript{162} Ibid., 19-25 March 1973, p. 25781.
at the same International Conference Centre at Avenue Kleber where they had already met for 174 times. Thus ended the public session deliberations, without contributing much towards peace negotiations. These were not very useful towards U.S. disengagement in Vietnam.

**Grant of Concessions in the Private Talks**

The peace plan of 7 October 1970 marked the watershed in the history of U.S. disengagement. It provided for many concessions from the U.S. side to end the war. The time bound total U.S. troops withdrawal and a political settlement suitable to all South Vietnamese were the two important concessions suggested by the U.S. in this plan. Close on its heels, came several more concessions on the negotiation table from the U.S. side when the stage shifted from the enlarged (public) talks to private talks which continued from 4 August 1969 to 27 January 1973. It was here that the real success in peace-making process was achieved. Its principal actors were Henry Kissinger, the then Principal Security Advisor to President Nixon and subsequently U.S. Secretary of State, and Le Duc Tho of North Vietnam. These private talks provided a very congenial atmosphere, away from public propaganda and criticisms, in which there was enough opportunity for the U.S. to come down to compromises and concede as many concessions as possible without affecting their image in the eyes of the American public. These concessions were thrown as baits from one side to the other. In the midst of such an interesting atmosphere of political 'angling', several concessions such as abandonment of the demand for mutual troops withdrawal, economic help towards Vietnamese reconstruction, elections in South Vietnam within six months of the signing of the agreement, grant of political status to NLF, abandonment of the demand for PoWs return as a pre-condition to bombing halt, and a three-part electoral commission to hold elections in South Vietnam were offered by the U.S. side. And from Hanoi side, some compromising baits such as abandonment of the demand for Thieu's resignation as a pre-condition to any negotiation were also offered on the conference table. Thus the shifting of the talks from the public to the private conference table was a major tactful step by the U.S.

---

163 Ibid., p. 25789.
towards disengagement through which it could show enough concessional postures and get away with a peace plan in order to disengage itself from Vietnam.

The private talks had their genesis in the proposal of President Thieu long back in February 1969 when he presented his six-point plan.\(^{164}\) The idea of holding secret deliberations towards peace-making came to the mind of U.S. government and President Thieu when the war was escalated in February 1969 and it became difficult either to check the war or to hold public talks.\(^{165}\) So both the U.S. and Saigon suggested holding of private talks between the North and South Vietnamese officials to which Hanoi and NLF delegates were initially opposed.\(^{166}\) Still the U.S. Defence Secretary, Melvin Laird announced on 3 April 1969 that private peace talks had already shown "some sign of progress" only to refute it on 23 April 1969.\(^{167}\) Meanwhile, at Midway Islands, President Thieu reiterated his willingness on 8 June 1969 to talk directly to the NLF about the future efforts for a peaceful settlement.\(^{168}\) In fact, the plan to hold private talks was finally accepted by all the parties after Nixon's visit to Saigon on 31 July 1969.\(^{169}\) Since then till the end of 1969, the proposal to commence private peace talks had been reiterated many times in the public sessions, without knowing the fact that private talks had already started since 4 August 1969.\(^{170}\)

However, the initial round of secret talks was arranged by a retired French diplomat Jean Sainteny who had good American and North Vietnamese contacts. In fact, the first session of the private talks was held in his own apartment on 4 August 1969.\(^{171}\) The U.S. side was represented by Henry Kissinger and the North

---


\(^{165}\) Lenart, n. 164.

\(^{166}\) "The Month in Review", *Current History*, vol. 56, no. 334, June 1969, p. 373.

\(^{167}\) Ibid.

\(^{168}\) *Asian Recorder*, n. 108, p. 9081.

\(^{169}\) *Asian Almanac*, n. 113.


\(^{171}\) Tad Szule, "How Kissinger did it", *Imprint* (Bombay), vol. XIV, no. 6, September 1974, p. 89.
Vietnamese side by Xuan Thuy and Le Duc Tho. No details were available about the first seven of these meetings.

The whole period of secret talks provided an interesting study of the manner in which both sides gradually conceded their past hardened stands and the reasons behind such concessions. Both sides (more often than not Kissinger) started throwing their baits and the respective parties, either accepted or rejected them. In this process, the whole edifice of the Final Agreement was built. The whole construction work towards peacemaking was shrouded in secrecies.

First of all Kissinger set his mission to Paris on 31 May 1971 with the first concession i.e. an agreed time limit (nine months) for the American troops withdrawal in exchange of a ceasefire and return of the PoWs. In spite of Nixon's recent announcement not to withdraw troops until Hanoi committed itself to a final political settlement, Kissinger took the risk of abandoning the "mutual withdrawal" demand for the first time with a view to encourage Hanoi to give up its insistence on Thieu's removal from South Vietnamese political scene. Hanoi, however, failed to grab the concession in time.

Instead, Hanoi came up with its nine-point secret peace programme which basically demanded U.S. troops withdrawal by 1971 in exchange of PoWs; a political solution without U.S. intervention and ceasefire only after the political solution of Vietnam issue. In July 1971, the PRG submitted its seven-point secret peace programme (it was also made public) which covered only the problems of Vietnam as against the Hanoi’s secret plan covering problems of whole of Indo-China. The fundamental points of PRG demanded complete US troops withdrawal within a fixed time in exchange of PoWs; grant of right to self-determination to South Vietnamese people and solution of Vietnamese armed

172 This was revealed by President Nixon in his broadcast to the nation on 25 January 1972. *Washington Post*, 26 January 1972.
173 *Keesing's Contemporary Archives*, n. 150, p. 25317.
174 Szulc, n. 171, p. 93.
176 Szulc, n. 171, p. 93; and Rai, n. 164, p. 2015.
177 Osborne, n. 143, p. 332.
179 For text, see *Keesing's Contemporary Archives*, vol. XVIII, no. 6, 5-12 February 1972, p. 25079.
forces problem by Vietnamese themselves. The difference between both the plans was that the former asked U.S. forces to leave by 1971 and the latter asked for a fixed date for withdrawal. Secondly, the PRG plan deliberately avoided ceasefire issue which suited Hanoi. Thirdly, these two programmes insisted no more on the end of Saigon regime excepting the removal of individual leaders like Thieu and Ky before any type of negotiations got under way. Fourthly, the deadline for troops withdrawal was to remain a secret affair and was not publicly announced. Lastly, these plans also established a clear-cut demarcation between political and military solution to the problem, while the latter was given preference. Accordingly, they almost approached Kissinger’s earlier theory of mutual withdrawal.

These two plans, even though suggested a little insincerity on the part of Hanoi and PRG towards striving for an agreement, were taken supportively by Kissinger. Meantime, he was approached by Le Duc Tho to give preference to the Hanoi plan over the PRG one, which indicated that a political problem was certainly brewing up in Saigon between PRG and Hanoi over Thieu’s re-election. Still, he continued the programme of phased withdrawal of troops and awaited the prospect of a détente with Moscow and Peking. In addition, he came to Paris on 16 August 1971 with another peace plan. This included an undefined political settlement and a provision for economic help which both Hanoi and PRG were demanding. Along with that, the three points of 31 May 1971 peace plan were retained in this plan. This time Kissinger’s intention was to clearly admit of his conceding the demand of the North Vietnamese troops withdrawal from South Vietnam in exchange for Hanoi’s acceptance of Thieu’s...
continuance of office. But Hanoi wanted to trouble Thieu in the coming elections in October 1971 and hence rejected the plan.  

At this juncture Thieu's re-election fomented a serious controversy and the way he was re-elected necessarily touched upon U.S. prestige in an alien land. In fact, U.S. objective of enlivening democracy in South Vietnam was seriously affected by this. Meanwhile, pressures from both the public in U.S. as well as from the U.S. military compelled Nixon to accelerate his peace-making process. At this stage, Hanoi agreed to accept Ky in the proposed coalition government instead of Thieu as its head. This step of compromise was well-received by Washington and Nixon submitted his 11 October 1971 plan which introduced further compromises.

The October 1971 plan lowered the nine-month deadline to six months for troops withdrawal and set a concrete plan for election in South Vietnam according to which Thieu would resign one month before elections. It also provided for an Indo-China-wide ceasefire. However, the plan for elections received many objections from all quarters as the NLF and North Vietnamese people were not prepared to agree to the continuance of Thieu in power for five months more than they wanted because they felt that during this long period, he might get ample time to rig the elections. Secondly, the ceasefire throughout Indo-China was rejected by Hanoi because they would lose a lot of territorial control over a vast stretch of land. Hence they declined to allow Saigon to win diplomatically while losing on the military front. Anyhow, by this plan, the NLF was given a

---

188 Ibid.
192 The Economist, n. 189, p. 48; also see Das, n. 181, pp. V-VI.
193 Das, n. 181, p. VI; and Mayevsky, n. 96, p. 32.
194 Clifford, n. 178, p. 55.
place in the political structure of South Vietnam, even though it enjoyed an opposition’s role initially.\textsuperscript{195}

The October plan was not revealed to Thieu because it did not carry any clause for North Vietnamese troops withdrawal. Besides, the proposal for Thieu’s resignation would have disturbed him. So Kissinger wanted to reveal this plan to Thieu after receiving assurance from him that he would resign before elections.\textsuperscript{196} In addition, the plan kept both the controversial aspects, i.e. North Vietnamese troops withdrawal and the structure of the future coalition government, most ambiguous. These two clauses acted as baits dangling in front of Hanoi and the PRG. Hanoi failed to take advantage of the ambiguities and so rejected them.\textsuperscript{197}

For a period of three months, both Hanoi and the U.S. kept on postponing the dates for convening secret sessions. Meanwhile, Hanoi engaged itself in mounting forces on the military front.\textsuperscript{198} This continued reluctance of Hanoi at last compelled the U.S. on 25 January 1972 to “go public” with the October plan and to disclose that Kissinger had been holding secret peace talks since 4 August 1969. At least this satisfied the U.S. public.\textsuperscript{199} Hanoi then made its nine-point of 1971 public on 31 January 1972.\textsuperscript{200}

The announcement of the October 1971 plan by the U.S. brought about the worst verbal tussle between Thieu and Washington.\textsuperscript{201} Close on its heels, came the foot-dragging of both the U.S. government and Hanoi in fixing the date for holding further talks. The main reason behind this was Hanoi’s planned military offensive scheduled to be launched on 30 March 1972.\textsuperscript{202} Meantime, Nixon’s trip to Peking on 17 February 1972 also brought no concrete dividend as China declined to exert pressure on Hanoi and NLF to end the war. Rather

\textsuperscript{195} The Economist, n. 189, p. 54.
\textsuperscript{196} Szulc, n. 171, p. 97.
\textsuperscript{197} Ibid., p. 98.
\textsuperscript{198} Keesing’s Contemporary Archives, n. 173, p. 25318.
\textsuperscript{199} Ibid., p. 25317; also see “Nixon tells world about behind scenes offer to Reds”; U.S. News & World Report, vol. LXXII, no. 6, 7 February 1972, p.59; and Asian Almanac, vol. 10, no. 7, 1972, p. 5043.
\textsuperscript{200} Keesing’s Contemporary Archives, n. 173, p. 25317.
\textsuperscript{201} Szulc, n. 171, p. 98.
\textsuperscript{202} Mayevsky, n. 96, p. 31; and The Economist, n. 189, p. 54.
Peking asked Nixon to early withdraw from Vietnam. All these pressures from Hanoi and China forced Nixon to take strong military offensive against the Vietcong. However, he did not want to spoil his much-awaited trip to Moscow which was supposed to help him in solving the Vietnam problem.

Kissinger's trip to Moscow on 20 April 1972 and subsequently President Nixon's trip in May 1972 at last broke the ice. It was here that Kissinger in April 1972 extended the concession of not insisting on total North Vietnamese troops withdrawal. He suggested that only those North Vietnamese troops coming after 30 March 1972 to South Vietnam would go back to North Vietnam. Thus this proposal about which he had hinted in 31 May and 11 October plans was confirmed by him. In exchange, Thieu's continuance was demanded in order to avoid projecting that a communist government was being imposed on Saigon. But if a "genuine political solution" resulted into a red government, he might not have much to complain. Kissinger asked Brezhnev to convey this idea to Hanoi which it had failed to grasp so far in the peace table. After being informed of this, Hanoi readily responded and sent its delegates to meet Kissinger on 2 May 1972 for talks after a long recess of seven and a half months.

But the meeting was preceded by heavy fighting and bombing from both sides in spite of clear apprehension that it might affect the coming Moscow summit of Nixon in May 1972. However, by then it was already well-established that a breakthrough in negotiations would come only after a final paroxysm of battle. Hence on 8 May 1972 after a long discussion, Nixon ordered the mining

---


206 Singh, n. 133, p. 22. See also footnote 133.

207 Facts on File, n. 132, p. 481. See footnote 132. This was the first axiom on which the settlement was built upon, i.e U.S. had to leave Vietnam sooner or later even at the expense of break up with Saigon (Szulc, n. 171, p. 89).

208 Szulc, n. 171, p. 105.

of Hanoi and Haiphong harbour in North Vietnam. This, however, did not affect the Moscow summit as Kissinger had already extended the concession regarding North Vietnamese troops withdrawal in last April.

Regarding Chinese attitude towards Vietnam issue, one may ask as to why did China react militarily in 1950 and not in 1972. North Korea touches China's border and the U.S. was China's enemy number one in 1950. Moreover, Peking was then taking directives from Moscow, and it was probably certain of timely Soviet intervention on its behalf. These factors were no longer operative in 1972. Instead, the Soviet Union had now replaced the U.S. as China's enemy number one. Second, the bombing of North Vietnam must have looked less threatening to China than the "ground invasion" of North Korea in 1950. Third, China was in need of American protection against the Soviet nuclear threat and Nixon had reportedly offered such protection during his Peking trip. Nixon had also considerably changed the American stand on Formosa, much to Peking's advantage.

Regarding the attitude of the USSR towards Vietnam at this juncture, one may ask as to why did the USSR welcome President Nixon when the U.S. was bombing and mining North Vietnam. First, there was the implicit Super-Power understanding in the context of détente for avoiding direct military confrontation. Second, Moscow wanted Nixon to make a trip to Russia as a counter-weight to his trip to China. Third, it wanted assurances from Nixon that he had not entered into any secret understanding with China aimed against its security. Fourth, it needed American help in different economic and technical fields. Indeed such help was offered and accepted both during and after Nixon's trip. On 8 July, the U.S. agreed to sell grain worth $750 million to the Soviet Union. On 18 October, the two countries signed a trade pact which settled the lend-lease debt incurred by the Soviet Union during the Second World War and sought to expand trade between the two countries.

---

The Nixon-Kissinger team thus successfully used incentives to make both China and the Soviet Union adopt a "reasonable attitude" towards the efforts by the U.S. to extricate itself from Vietnam. It made both China and the Soviet Union to realize the fact that further progress in the normalization of their relations with the U.S. might be contingent on their support to America's moves towards peace in Vietnam.

In May 1972, President Nixon also showed the first conciliatory gesture by agreeing that PoWs return was not a pre-condition to bombing halt. Secondly, he agreed that a three-part electoral commission could also escape U.S. censure.212 Thus, except on the question of Thieu's removal, both the U.S. and Hanoi stands were found almost similar. This proved that the U.S. private negotiating position was more flexible than its public posture. Inside a closely-guarded private atmosphere, the U.S. government could concede many hardened stands, whereas it was not possible within a public peace session. The major pronouncement made by Kissinger in private in Peking after this was that American disengagement should take place first and then it was up to history to decide as to what political structure would follow in South Vietnam.213

These concessions were granted by the U.S. within two months only, hence this confirmed its willingness to get away from the Vietnam tangle as soon as possible. In fact, Washington since long had been raising a diplomatic tussle against Saigon to end the war.214 Besides the military devastation there was an ecological destruction in Vietnam. The economy of Vietnam had almost crumbled. So there were demands from all quarters to end the war.215 The U.S. Congress adopted a strong resolution to end it.216 The student revolt in the U.S.

212 Szulc, ibid., p. 109.
213 Ibid., p. 111.
214 Ibid., p. 113.
and elsewhere strengthened due to their protests against war in Vietnam.\textsuperscript{217} Besides, several other factors in international politics in 1972 compelled the U.S. to change its policy. The U.S. morale and conscience suffered a blow after such destruction in Vietnam.\textsuperscript{218} On top of this, the bureaucratic revolt within top military officials (the differences of opinion among U.S. military generals in pursuing the war in Vietnam and their varied calculations regarding its outcome) at last led the U.S. to suffer defeat in the hands of Vietnam in the battlefield.\textsuperscript{219} The prospects of a détente in international politics persuaded the U.S. to count its last days in the area.\textsuperscript{220} The U.S. hopes that economic needs would compel the communists to slowly change their stand had to be ultimately abandoned.\textsuperscript{221} In fact, the two top most U.S. objectives behind its presence in Vietnam i.e. to stop the expansion of communism and implant democracy in Vietnam seemed to be irrelevant after October 1971 elections in South Vietnam and March 1972 offensive.\textsuperscript{222} The unproductive negotiations themselves irritated Washington and it was compelled to bring about a solution at last through conceding its previous stands in the secret negotiations parlour.\textsuperscript{223} In this manner, the U.S. sacrificed many interests during secret talks and opened the road towards disengagement.

**Negotiations through Force – “Peace with Honour” Policy**

The last but not the least step towards U.S. disengagement was the unique but very successful carrot and stick tactic of President Nixon to bring the enemy down to its knees through heavy offensives on the battlefield. He was under the impression that by this process he would prove to the world that U.S. disengagement in Vietnam was not something which was imposed on him by the enemy side, but on the contrary he himself opted for U.S. disengagement in Vietnam and forced the enemy side to sign the peace agreement. Attempt

\begin{itemize}
  \item \textsuperscript{217} David L. Warren, “A State of Quiet Calamity”, *Commonwealth*, 3 March 1972, as quoted in *Current*, no. 138, April 1972, p. 3.
  \item \textsuperscript{218} Yarmolinsky, n. 57, p. 90.
  \item \textsuperscript{219} The Economist, n. 189, p. 50; and Yarmolinsky, n. 57, p. 91.
  \item \textsuperscript{220} Bowie, n. 203, quoted in *Current*, April 1972, p. 57; and Yarmolinsky, n. 57, p. 91.
  \item \textsuperscript{221} Mochtar Lubis, n. 40, p. 93; and Vu Thanh, “Some Points Needing Attention in Supervision to Complete The Plan to Mobilize Food in the 1973 Spring-Summer Harvest”, *Cong tac Ke hoach*, no. 31, April 1973, pp. 6-7; and *Vietnam Courier*, no. 15, August 1973, p. 18.
  \item \textsuperscript{222} The Economist, n. 189, pp. 51-3.
  \item \textsuperscript{223} Clifford, n. 178 and Mayevsky, n. 96, p. 28.
\end{itemize}
towards peace-making through negotiation, thus according to him, was not a face-saving device, but something which President Nixon himself embraced as his own policy on Vietnam and thus disengaged the U.S. forces from this region and granted independence to Vietnam out of his own will without being compelled by the surge of xenophobic nationalism in this country. But the fact remained that the U.S. was to disengage itself from Vietnam’s internal affairs and that was the fact of history even though Nixonian interpretation of disengagement might vary from any other standard interpretation of the manner in which it took place.

Quoting former U.S. Defence Secretary Melvin Laird, one Saigon legislator pointed out that the U.S. was not going to relinquish its responsibility in Vietnam having invested billions of dollars and 50,000 American lives.

According to most observers, President Thieu’s recent outbursts owed to the fact that one year from now, more likely than not, he would still have to ask for U.S. aid to finance a devastating and inconclusive war which benefited no one and with which the U.S. was becoming increasingly impatient.

The Saigon government had been conscious of the media war, especially since a debate was now going on in the U.S. Congress over cutting further aid to South Vietnam. Many Congressmen were saying that Thieu’s government was corrupt and repressive and that his National Police, a private army of 110,000 men under his personal control, was a terror. Senator Edward Kennedy had already pressed for a ban on all aid to the National Police and other Senators wanted further cuts.

As the military situation deteriorated, Thieu also faced growing political unrest over the collapse of the economy. Inflation had forced up the price of petrol to U.S. $1.8 per gallon and it might be as high as $2.70 by the end of the year. Soldiers of the South Vietnamese army could no longer live on their salaries and many regiments now existed only on paper. Thieu himself was angry over what he called “flower soldiers”, a Vietnamese term for “paper” units for which a commander pockets the pay of non-existent troops.
After this the U.S. decided to grant substantial concessions in the negotiation table, the other sides were then pressurized to bend a little. In this respect, China's contributions were worth-mentioning. China, in fact, advised Madam Binh (PRG delegation chief) in July 1972 to desist from making demands for Thieu's resignation as a pre-condition to any negotiations. Hence the negotiations by 19 July 1972 got a clear tinge of optimism.

Thieu was then persuaded to grant a few concessions as the U.S. had already conceded a few. However, he was not informed about U.S. agreement on tripartite electoral commission clause. Only the arrangement of North Vietnamese troops continuance in South Vietnam in exchange for his stay in office was informed to him for seeking his approval. Besides, Thieu was also pressurized to concede a few demands due to Nixon's need for peace for his forthcoming re-election. Gen. Alexander Haig was sent to Saigon to persuade Thieu but he outrightly rejected all these agreements as unacceptable. Gen. Haig had to come back empty-handed.

At this juncture, Henry Kissinger's responsibility of persuading others increased three-fold. He had to keep persuading Hanoi and ask it not to mind the delay in drawing out an agreement. Secondly, he had to convince Nixon to concede those "agreed bargaining chips" and asked him to put pressure on Thieu to accept those terms. Thirdly, he himself had to persuade and convince Thieu to agree to those negotiated terms. Through his contacts in Moscow, he persuaded Hanoi to wait. Ambassador Bunker was sent to Saigon to persuade Thieu. And he himself was able to persuade President Nixon. As Nixon agreed, Kissinger took a historic decision to go ahead without Thieu's concurrence. The rationale was that they could not risk the collapse of the peace efforts with elections only seven weeks away.

224 Szulc, n. 171, p. 113; also Washington Post, 21 April 1972.
225 Szulc, n. 57, p. 41.
226 Ibid.
228 Szulc, n. 57, p. 43.
229 Ibid., p. 45.
At this stage, Kissinger had to introduce his "peace with honour" policy. He had to increase the U.S. military attacks on North Vietnam "to reduce Hanoi to its knees". On the other hand, he had to arrange sufficient peace talks, along with introduction of new peace plans with more and more concessions, with Hanoi and NLF, as part of the carrot and stick policy. It is quite interesting to note that the introduction of new agreeable peace plans and major military offensives in the battlefield were simultaneously pursued by the U.S. till hardly a month before the signing of the final agreement in January 1973.

Meantime, on 11 September 1972 Vietcong submitted a peace plan for ceasefire without any reference to the removal of Thieu. On 15 September 1972 the U.S. submitted its own proposal with a provision for tripartite electoral commission and without any demand for North Vietnamese troops withdrawal. Out of the synthesis of these two came out the famous 8 October 1972 plan for peace, which was submitted by Tho at the secret talks in Paris. The highlights of the plan included a ceasefire in Vietnam, release of the PoWs within sixty days, withdrawal of U.S. troops within sixty days, re-unification of Vietnam, four-party and two-party joint military commissions, formation of international commission for control and supervision, international conference within thirty days, recognition of Cambodian and Laotian integrity, post war reconstruction programme and "an administrative structure" to solve Vietnam's political issue. Kissinger accepted this document as the basis for subsequent negotiations as it separated the political problem from the military. But he coined his own words like "National Council of National Reconciliation and Concord", instead of "administrative structure" and hammered out the language of the agreement, suitable to his own concept of peace. Except some hitches on two issues i.e.

230 Ibid., p. 41; and "Comrade Le Duan, addressing the 19th Party Plenum", Tuyen Huan (Hanoi), July-August 1972.
231 Szulc, Ibid., p. 45; and Liberation Radio, 19 December 1972; Principal Reports from Communist Sources, no. 23 (Saigon: U.S. Mission, 9 January 1973).
232 See Appendix for the full text of the peace plan.
234 Szulc, n. 57, p. 47; also see Mira Sinha, n. 89, p. 17.
235 Szulc, n. 57, p. 47.
236 Ibid.
the release of aviation prisoners from South Vietnam and cessation of foreign military aid to both South Vietnam and NLF, the agreement was made ready by 26 October 1972.\textsuperscript{237}

But the delay in signing the Agreement started another set of controversy at this stage.\textsuperscript{238} The official version of the reason behind U.S. delay in signing was that Washington wanted sometime to persuade Thieu.\textsuperscript{239} But Thieu disagreed to sign in spite of Kissinger’s persuasive efforts at Saigon for complete four days. Thieu’s grudge was that he was ignored right from the beginning and was never consulted about such developments happening in secrecy.\textsuperscript{240} However, due to this delay, the U.S. was accused of deliberately delaying the process with the objective of wresting more concessions from Hanoi, rushing arms to South Vietnam, showing to the public its sincerity towards peace-making before forthcoming Presidential elections, etc.\textsuperscript{241} Some critics commented that the U.S. had no desire to reach any settlement and the prospect of a final agreement at this stage seemed remote.\textsuperscript{242} To some critics, it seemed as if the U.S. was busy devising a “face-saving” stunt and nothing else.\textsuperscript{243} The U.S. was also accused of giving more importance to its puppets. It was asked by the international community not to wait till Thieu was pacified.\textsuperscript{244}

On the other hand, North Vietnam demanded the signing of the Agreement to take place as quickly as possible even though they conceded some important bargaining chips like non-insistence on issues such as the removal of Thieu and end of U.S. aid to Saigon.\textsuperscript{245} This was because North Vietnam was afraid that this prospect of peace would strengthen Nixon at home and he would get ample

\textsuperscript{237} Facts on File, n. 233, p. 837.
\textsuperscript{239} Facts on File, n. 233, pp. 839-40.
\textsuperscript{241} \textit{Frontier}, n. 233, p. 1; and Singh, n. 133, p. 24.
\textsuperscript{242} Menon, n. 238, p. 20.
\textsuperscript{243} Ibid., p. 21.
\textsuperscript{244} Ibid.
\textsuperscript{245} “Vietnam’s Prospect of Peace”, \textit{The Economist}, vol. 245, no. 6741. 4 November 1972. p. 16 and Singh, n. 133, p. 23.
finances from the Congress to divert them to wage the war again.\textsuperscript{246} Besides, with the prospect of a super power détente hanging over its head, Hanoi could not sit idle but wanted to hurry up for an early settlement.\textsuperscript{247} The plan, however, remained without being signed till 31 October 1972.

The October agreement, according to Nixon, fulfilled all three fundamental objectives pronounced by him on 8 May 1972 such as ceasefire, return of the PoWs and the right to self-determination of the South Vietnamese people.\textsuperscript{248} In the process, the U.S. also conceded many points. Hence the agreement was hailed as “highly favourable” to Hanoi and NLF.\textsuperscript{249} The Agreement prescribed non-intervention by the U.S. in elections in South Vietnam. But both military and political stalemate was implicit in other provisions according to the manner one would interpret them.\textsuperscript{250} The U.S., it seems, deliberately accepted such an ambiguous agreement so that its own involvement would end in Vietnam, but the U.S. military stronghold would shift to Thailand.\textsuperscript{251} So the U.S. felt that Hanoi should not by force, but by vote remove the Saigon government.

\textbf{Two Harbingers of Disengagement}

It has been claimed that Henry Kissinger and “time” were the two harbingers who brought about the process of U.S. disengagement in Vietnam. Time gradually pacified both the sides’ strong attitudes and made either side mature enough to agree to the concessions granted by the other side and offer concessions in return. Henry Kissinger was the person who seized this opportunity and through his extraordinary persuasive qualities converted these concessional postures of either side into a framework of peace settlement, thereby bringing about the U.S. disengagement in Vietnam. Besides, the U.S.


\textsuperscript{247} \textit{The Economist}, Ibid.


\textsuperscript{249} \textit{The Economist}, n. 245, p. 16; Patel, n. 240, p. 16.

\textsuperscript{250} Sinha, n. 89, pp. 17-8; and Singh, n. 133, p. 23.

\textsuperscript{251} Sinha, n. 89, p. 18; “Military or financial support from sources like France and Japan as third country aid were not forthcoming,” \textit{Dan Chu}, 21 August 1973; \textit{Dai Dan Toč}, 23 and 27 August 1973.
had to concede at last as events had already overtaken Thieu and rural population in the Delta, and its real supporters were disenchanted by then.²⁵² U.S. disengagement in South Vietnam was thus a product of time. It was badly needed by the people of the region for their mutual co-existence.²⁵³

Kissinger’s efforts at peace-making were abandoned with the October agreement still suffering from some important textual differences and still incomplete without provisions for civilian prisoners’ release and without cessation of sending military equipment to Saigon.²⁵⁴ However, the October plan was made public first by Hanoi on 25 October 1972 and Kissinger confirmed it on 26 October that “peace is within reach in a matter of weeks or less”.²⁵⁵ This served as a warning to Saigon, assuring Hanoi and smoothening the U.S. public that a final agreement, anyhow, would be soon signed.²⁵⁶

At this stage, two tasks remained unfulfilled for Kissinger. First, Thieu was to be further persuaded and Nixon was to be convinced not to change this stand after elections.²⁵⁷ Gen. Haig helped him in persuading Thieu.²⁵⁸ But another development in the meantime worried him more and that was North Vietnam’s “perfidy” in showing on-and-off attitude and presenting the texts of the peace plan to the public on 14 December 1972 which were quite unacceptable to the U.S..²⁵⁹ The differences gradually widened on the PoWs issue, the Demilitarized Zone issue, the truce supervision mechanism and replacement of the term “administrative structure” in the peace plan.²⁶⁰ Hence, bombing was resumed on 18 December 1972 and continued till the finalization of the agreement. This was a part of his “peace with honour” policy. Secondly, the bombing was essentially

²⁵³ Singh, n. 133, p. 24. It was clear that the U.S. had also the objective of abandoning both Cambodia and Laos in mind as Kissinger induced them at this stage to agree to this October plan since Hanoi had promised to leave these two countries after final Agreement. Szulc, n. 57, p. 53.
²⁵⁴ Szulc, n. 57, p. 51.
²⁵⁶ Szulc, n. 57, p. 53.
²⁵⁷ Ibid., p. 56; and New York Times, 4 November 1972.
²⁶⁰ Szulc, n. 57, p. 59.
meant to inform Thieu that such brutalization on North Vietnam could no longer continue in the face of heavy internal and domestic odds. On 21 December, Thieu showed his helplessness to Nixon in a letter saying that he never believed that U.S. President would deal in such a manner with one of his allies. So it seemed Nixon then gave an assurance to Thieu that the U.S. would "react immediately and vigorously" to any large-scale North Vietnamese offensive. Thus he persuaded Thieu to agree to the final Agreement which was then under serious consideration. This assurance was also repeated in Paris one week before the final agreement was signed on 27 January 1973. There was nothing secret about it. Moreover, at this stage Leonid Brezhnev of Soviet Union and U.N. Secretary General Kurt Waldheim expressed serious concern over the war and called for peace. Kissinger, however, on 24 January 1974 denied that there had been any such secret understanding with Saigon.

Meanwhile, Hanoi, after the heavy bombardment, proposed to meet the U.S. and Saigon in the first week of January 1973. On 7 January 1973 both sides met and by 13 January the agreement was reached mostly on the basis of American terms. The agreement on the PoWs, the DMZ, the National Council of National Reconciliation and Concord, etc. followed the U.S. lines. The reference to military help to Saigon was skillfully avoided. A truce on Laos was scheduled to be reached within twenty days and not within thirty days as proposed earlier. Nothing was mentioned on Cambodia. By 23 January 1973 the agreement was ready and Tho and Kissinger signed it. The text of the agreement was published in Washington on 24 January 1973. But on 27 January 1973 only the four parties (U.S., Hanoi, South Vietnam and NLF) signed the agreement. The Agreement

261 Ibid.
262 Ibid.
263 "Saigon leader denies secret pact with U.S.". Hindustan Times (New Delhi), 15 April 1975.
265 Newsday (Long Island), 16 April 1975 as quoted in "Kissinger's resignation demanded". Hindustan Times, 18 April 1975.
266 Szulc, n. 57, p. 59.
267 Ibid.
came into force from the midnight of 27 January 1973 which “marked the end of a century of foreign military intervention”. 268

This is where the first phase of U.S. disengagement in Vietnam ended. In this manner, a very big hurdle in the path of U.S. disengagement was removed with the signing of the peace agreement. The negotiating table could achieve what the strongest guns of the U.S. failed to do.

As to why the U.S. and Hanoi agreed to come to a settlement of peace, it is held that the US had three options. First, it could have rejected Saigon’s stand, left it to its own fate, and withdrawn its troops from South Vietnam within an announced time frame, giving Thieu hardly any chance to plan a strategy of his own. Or it could have endorsed Saigon’s position and continued the game of diplomacy supported by the “Vietnamization programme”. Third, in support of Saigon, it could have repeated the “hard squeeze” on North Vietnam. The first option might have been interpreted as an American “defeat”, and as such it might have undermined America’s credibility among its allies and invited a Rightist backlash in the US itself. The second option was manifestly favourable to Hanoi; for the Saigon regime alone could hardly have tackled the communist offensive. With more and more American troops being withdrawn from South Vietnam, the military scale would have tilted progressively in favour of the communists. The seizure of Quang Tri by the communists in December 1972 must have made that clear to Washington. Moreover, there was little possibility of Moscow and Peking agreeing to persuade Hanoi to accept Thieu’s demands; for that would have been tantamount to a victory for Thieu. And Hanoi was in a strong position to exploit the Moscow-Peking rift. The third option did not seem to present any unacceptable risk to Washington. After the May experience, Moscow and Peking were not expected to intervene militarily in support of North Vietnam. And Nixon was hardly likely to face any serious opposition at home, considering his landslide victory in the November 1972 Presidential election. Hanoi came back to the negotiation table in spite of Nixon’s “hard squeeze” because it was uncertain of

---

the implications of the compromise that Moscow and Peking had separately made with Washington and also because of the absence of active support from them. It felt that the most pragmatic course for it was to try to win the best results possible without war. And that was exactly what Hanoi did.

There were various reasons as to why other countries agreed to reach peace efforts successfully. Among the communist countries, China seemed initially to be less interested in peace than the Soviet Union. Indeed it looked forward to an escalation of the war and a direct confrontation between the Soviet Union and the U.S. Although it had a more direct politico-military interest in Vietnam than the Soviet Union, it provided Hanoi much less assistance by way of arms than the Soviet Union. It perhaps hoped that the Americans would suffer a humiliating defeat and change their attitude towards the question of Formosa. It, therefore, went on encouraging Hanoi to continue the war against the U.S. However, the help it offered often took the form of copious ideological rhetoric and virulent anti-United States propaganda rather than much-needed military hardware. Finally, in the beginning of 1972, it managed to win a big concession from the U.S.: Nixon promised to withdraw all U.S. forces from Formosa and dismantle all U.S. bases there; and he also guaranteed U.S. help in dealing with any (obviously implying Soviet) nuclear attack. This brought about a perceptible change in China’s Vietnam policy.

Soviet interests were never directly involved in Vietnam. The Soviet objective in Vietnam was obviously to inflict a defeat on the U.S. through a concerted effort of the communist states and so to undermine U.S. credibility. Nixon successfully contained the Soviet role in Vietnam by playing the China card and by offering trade concessions to the Soviet Union. The welcome accorded to Nixon in Moscow in May 1972 in spite of the heavy U.S. bombing and mining of North Vietnam clearly showed that the Soviet Union was guided more by a desire to pursue its own national interests than by any ideological consideration. This was equally true of China. Following the Nixon visit to Moscow, the Soviet Union persuaded Hanoi to resume the peace talks and reach some accord.
North Vietnam's primary goal was to reunify Vietnam. It felt that the main obstacle in the way of the achievement of this goal was the American presence in South Vietnam. It, therefore, kept on making the demand for a unilateral American withdrawal from South Vietnam. Even when, in the later stages of the war, China and the Soviet Union scaled down their support, it did not compromise on this objective of securing a unilateral American withdrawal. Of course, it also demanded the immediate ouster of the Thieu-Ky-Khiem regime from power. However, the overthrow of Thieu was only a secondary objective which it sought to push in through the bargaining game.

All along President Thieu sought to frustrate the peace moves as they came one after another. He knew that he could not face the communists without American help, but there was a limit beyond which he could hardly expect the Americans to go with him. The growing discontentment in the U.S. forced President Nixon to call it a day in Saigon. Probably, at the last moment, Washington did threaten Thieu with a U.S. walk-out if he did not accept the accord within a deadline.

President Nixon's policy in Vietnam was largely determined by the compulsions of U.S. domestic politics. He began the U.S. pull-out to pacify the "Left". He said that Thieu would get a "decent interval" which would neutralize the attack from the "Right". He resorted to the Bismarck-type balance-of-power diplomacy to contain both Moscow and Peking and to pressurize Hanoi into agreeing to the provision which would allow Thieu a "decent interval." Kissenger's diplomacy was marked by secrecy, momentum, shock and hard squeeze.

**Conclusion**

The Vietnam settlement, like most other settlements, was based on a mutual give and take. Whatever one may call them—"bargaining" or "changed perceptions"—the fact remains that both parties came down from their original positions. This movement from the extremes towards the centre is one of the
prerequisites of successful diplomacy. The US dropped the demand for the pull-out of North Vietnamese forces from South Vietnam. Hanoi dropped the demand for the immediate ouster of the Thieu-Ky-Khiem regime. The two also reached a compromise on the question of a three-segment coalition government in Saigon and with regard to the International Supervisory Commission. However, there was a point beyond which various parties engaged in negotiations could not move: they must stick to their "irreducible minimum". In the present case, the "irreducible minimum" for Hanoi was the ultimate unification of Vietnam and sanction for the continued presence of North Vietnamese forces in South Vietnam; and for Saigon, it was the continuance of Thieu in power for as long as possible.

One of the most important variables which influenced the Paris talks was the role played by the main negotiators on both sides—namely, Henry Kissinger and Le Duc Tho. Everyone knows a good deal about the personality of Kissinger—his intellectual brilliance, his flair for articulation of ideas, his ability to anticipate what the other side would accept, and, above all, his close rapport with President Nixon. Tho showed himself to be no less brilliant. Though not much is known about his background and present position in Hanoi, he is a member of the powerful politbureau of the North Vietnamese Communist Party and reportedly ranks fifth on the list. The present case is in line with Arthur Lall's hypothesis: "The extent to which a negotiator is in direct touch with or can approach the sources of authority in his government—rather than the formal level of his position in the government hierarchy—has a significant bearing on his effectiveness in negotiation and, therefore, on the results he obtains."