



UNITED STATES INSTITUTE OF PEACE

**Simulation on
The Paris Peace Talks of
December 1972 – January 1973**

This simulation focuses on a brief phase in the long-running Paris Peace Talks, a moment when the United States, North Vietnam, South Vietnam and the Soviet Union are meeting in Paris in an attempt to salvage the possibility of peace in Vietnam. Negotiations had fallen apart just two months earlier when the Government of South Vietnam announced its disagreement with a draft text, effectively blocking progress in the talks. Now, all the major parties have come together to revive the negotiations and try to achieve a peace agreement in the belief that this may be the last and best opportunity to do so.

In role-playing these four major stakeholders, participants will be asked to consider, among other difficult issues, how cooperation can best be achieved, how useful is the threat of force as a bargaining strategy, and how can such negotiations be expected to succeed when one of the major players has been left out of some of the more critical proceedings.



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Introduction

Prior to the beginning of the simulation, each negotiating team will circulate a brief of its negotiating position to the other teams. In addition, each team will draw up a separate brief in its interests are stated.

This statement of interests is to remain confidential until the end of the simulation when the achievement of the respective interests will be discussed at the debriefing of the simulation.



Materials

Each participant should receive the following materials:

- The Scenario and Background Documents (pages 5 - 10.)
- A simulation role (each participant should receive *only* his/her appropriate simulation role.)

Teachers may wish to provide the following items for this simulation:

- A classroom or conference room and sufficient breakout rooms or additional space for any needed teamwork
- An overhead projector or multimedia data projector and an overhead screen.
- Flip charts (one per team) and flip chart paper (or white boards) and markers
- 1 pad and pen per student
- Several computers with printers
- Internet access for additional research or access to a library.



Scenario

It is early December 1972. The United States, North Vietnam, South Vietnam and the Soviet Union are meeting in Paris to see if the possibility of peace in Vietnam can be salvaged. Less than two months previously, the United States and North Vietnam had concluded a draft agreement, and Henry Kissinger, President Nixon's National Security Adviser and negotiator for the United States with North Vietnam, declared triumphantly at a press conference that "Peace is at hand." Shortly thereafter, the negotiations fell apart.

Although the United States and North Vietnam had come close to an agreement in October, the Government of South Vietnam would not agree to the draft text at all. The talks between the United States and North Vietnam resumed in November but both sides dug in their heels and accused each other of bad faith and a lack of serious interest in an agreement and in peace. There was not even agreement to go back to the point where there had been agreement in October. Thus, all the major parties have come together in order to revive the negotiations and achieve a peace agreement in the belief that this may be the last, best opportunity to do so.

The first day of the simulation will take place in early December 1972, prior to the talks breaking down. The second day will be situated in January 1973. This will allow for the incorporation of the American bombing campaign (the 11-day Christmas bombing) in the negotiation process and the resumption of the talks in Paris after the bombing is halted.

General questions for the negotiating teams to consider:

- What are the sources of leverage that each of the parties has to win concurrence of the other sides in a peace agreement?
- How can cooperation and agreement be induced?
- How can such leverage be used?
- How useful is force or the threat to resume military operations as a bargaining strategy?
- Who are the weaker parties? Why?
- Has the fact that one of the major parties - South Vietnam – has not been a party to the discussions between North Vietnam and the United States been a negative or positive factor in the search for peace?
- Has the secrecy surrounding the talks between Hanoi and Washington been conducive to agreement or not?



Background

History of the Peace Talks

The negotiations to end the Vietnam War were a very long and involved process, going back as far as 1962 when the administration of John F. Kennedy secretly proposed negotiations to the Government of North Vietnam in Geneva. After considerable delay, official peace talks opened in Paris on May 10, 1968, between American negotiators led by Ambassador Averell Harriman and North Vietnamese diplomats headed by Xuan Thuy. The talks continued for a number of weeks but neither side moved from its opening position. The United States demanded the withdrawal of the North Vietnamese forces inside South Vietnam while the North Vietnamese rejected any consideration of removing their forces before an American withdrawal. In addition, Hanoi insisted that the government in Saigon include Viet Cong representatives. The talks broke down after a few weeks; and more American military forces would lose their lives in Vietnam after this point than had been lost before the beginning of peace talks.

Another reason the talks had gone nowhere was the refusal of the Saigon government to join the negotiations. The South Vietnamese believed that this was a communist trap and a pretext to give recognition to the Viet Cong, the communist guerilla force in South Vietnam that was supported and aided by Hanoi, and augmented by North Vietnamese army regulars after 1965.

In January 1969 the Paris talks were finally expanded to include the South Vietnamese government and representatives of the Viet Cong guerilla forces. Henry Kissinger's approach was to separate the military issues from the political issues. The United States and North Vietnam had to negotiate such things as a cease-fire and a mutual withdrawal of forces from South Vietnam, while the Saigon regime and the Viet Cong would have to negotiate a political agreement. The United States wanted to give South Vietnam the chance for major input into the negotiations without effectively giving them a veto. But neither the South nor the North moved from their antithetical positions.

Hampered by South Vietnamese distrust of the negotiation process, and frustrated by the public intransigence of Hanoi, in August 1969, Kissinger met secretly with North Vietnamese negotiator Xuan Thuy. By the end of the year the United States began the first major reduction of U.S. troop strength with the withdrawal of some 60,000 troops. On February 20, 1970, Kissinger began secret talks with Xuan Thuy's successor Le Duc Tho in Paris. Kissinger's secret negotiations with the North Vietnamese were not revealed until January 1972. In 1970, Kissinger had proposed a "face-saving" compromise to the North Vietnamese. The North Vietnamese combat units in the south would be given "legal" status separate from that of the American forces. They could be repatriated to the north without a public announcement from Hanoi as long as they were actually withdrawn. Hanoi considered its military presence in the South as critical since Viet Cong forces were too weak to stand alone against the South Vietnamese troops.

After the war, North Vietnamese officials revealed that this proposed compromise by Kissinger indicated to them a softening of the U.S. position and made them believe that the United States would, over time, back down from its condition that Northern troops be withdrawn from the south. In addition, as the size of the U.S. forces in Vietnam declined, there was a parallel loss of negotiating leverage. The Nixon administration knew this and thus felt that a new negotiating strategy was needed and other means of demonstrating resolve and power would be necessary. By the end of 1970, American troop strength had been reduced to 280,000 from a high of 540,000 at the end of 1968. The Americans faced North Vietnamese intransigence (some would call it patience) on the one side and, on the other side, domestic American pressure to withdraw American forces (or at least set a date by which they would return).

In October 1970, Nixon proposed a "standstill cease-fire," which called for both sides to stop shooting and remain in place while an international conference created a settlement. President



Thieu was strongly opposed to this for fear that it would lead to the North Vietnamese remaining in territory they now controlled. Others were concerned that such a plan could lead to the partition of South Vietnam. But the plan had great support in the United States, particularly among those who were clamoring for American withdrawal. While the Americans claimed that the proposal was a de facto move away from the long-standing American position of mutual withdrawal, Hanoi rejected it, stating that no progress could be made until the Thieu administration turned over authority to a coalition government in Saigon. And, the North Vietnamese did not believe that the Americans had given up their demand for mutual withdrawal because 3 days later, Nixon claimed a complete U.S. pullout was, in fact, contingent upon mutual withdrawal. Since the administration did little to convince Hanoi of its sincerity, it seems that the offer was made solely for American public opinion. Thus, from 1968 to 1972, neither side made any meaningful changes to their opening positions.

In fact, in 1970, it seems that both sides were looking for ways to strengthen their negotiating positions and battlefield positions, neither wishing to negotiate from weakness. The major obstacle to any progress remained the ultimate status of the regime in Saigon. South Vietnamese President Nguyen Van Thieu was a major obstacle, but the United States could not abandon him. First, U.S. credibility was at stake, and second, they had no proven alternative to him as a leader. The last time the United States had a hand in the removal of a leader in Saigon, the assassination of Ngo Dinh Diem, chaos ensued in South Vietnam. So the United States continued to support Thieu, and there is also evidence that the U.S. helped bankroll his presidency. While the Americans found Thieu insecure, difficult to deal with and personally dislikeable, he represented a kind of stability in their eyes.

The sporadic negotiations made little progress in 1971 and were revived in the summer of 1972. For a number of reasons, 1972 was a watershed year. First, each side finally made a major concession. The United States dropped its demand for mutual withdrawal and Hanoi dropped its demand that Thieu be ousted as a precondition to an agreement. Continued troop withdrawals reduced the U.S. negotiating position as Kissinger was deprived of negotiating assets. By the spring of 1972, the United States would have only 6,000 combat troops out of a total of 70,000 American personnel in South Vietnam; most of American strength lay in providing air power and air support for South Vietnamese military operations. In addition, the troop withdrawals implied that eventually U.S. economic aid would also be drastically cut, as Congress could no longer justify massive appropriations for Vietnam in the name of supporting "our boys in the field." Thus, desirable or not, the U.S. position and goals were increasingly dependent on the Saigon regime. There was also an election campaign to consider. The ongoing war and the lack of progress on the negotiation front could undermine the election prospects of President Nixon and those in Congress who supported the war effort.

Finally, Nixon's foreign policy was turning to dramatic changes in policy toward China and the Soviet Union with the advent of the policy of détente. This was also a concern in Hanoi because for most of the previous decade the North Vietnamese had been very successful in playing Moscow and Beijing off each other in order to continue the much-needed military, financial and diplomatic support the North Vietnamese needed. But with the growing rapprochement with the United States, Chinese and Soviet priorities were changing and relations with the Americans could soon be more important than support for the communist struggle in Vietnam. By 1972, China was concerned that U.S. failure in Vietnam would weaken a necessary counterweight to growing Soviet power. Thus, China wanted a quick end to the war but in a way that wouldn't drive Vietnam into the arms of Moscow.

The new U.S.-China relationship led Hanoi to fear another sellout by the Chinese as had occurred in Geneva in 1954. After defeating France militarily, North Vietnam was forced by China and the west to stop fighting with the promise of nationwide elections that would determine the political status of Vietnam. No elections ever took place. So the North Vietnamese leadership was wary in 1972 when China advised Hanoi to change its negotiation stance by urging the North



Vietnamese to defer the question of Thieu's status, and then get an agreement that would at least get the U.S. forces out of Vietnam. When Mao made the comparison between China's inability to achieve its desire to re-unify Taiwan with Mainland China and Hanoi's quest to re-unify south and north, North Vietnamese officials suspected that Beijing was urging Hanoi to give up its quest to unify north and south. At the same time, China increased its aid to Hanoi in order to maintain pace with greater Soviet aid. In addition, Hanoi was concerned that the Soviet Union's major priority was the improvement of its relations with the United States in the course of the détente process. Overall, Hanoi was feeling more isolated even as the United States was continuing to withdraw.

Hanoi was quite right in its assessment because the Vietnam War and the growing détente between the United States and the Soviet Union and the rapprochement with China were clearly linked. The seriousness with which the Soviet Union was taking détente and its role in pressuring Hanoi to negotiate seemed evident after the April 1972 bombing raid on the Hanoi and Haiphong areas. The renewed bombing resulted from Nixon's growing frustration at the lack of talks with Hanoi; he felt that only the unbridled use of military force made any impression on the North Vietnamese leadership. The intensified bombing campaign did considerable damage to North Vietnamese infrastructure and also hit four Soviet ships in Haiphong harbor. The Americans were concerned that Moscow would cancel Nixon's upcoming visit to the Soviet Union and perhaps move away from some of the Soviet-American agreements on the verge of being concluded as part of détente. Quite the opposite occurred. The Soviets not only re-emphasized their commitment to détente but were themselves concerned that the bombing was an indication of growing U.S. impatience with Hanoi, which could jeopardize the same U.S.-Soviet agreements that Moscow was very keen on concluding. Then the United States mined the sea approaches to North Vietnam striking at the heart of the route through which most Soviet supplies passed on the way to their Vietnamese allies. Again, the Soviet Union did not take any action other than a rhetorical condemnation. In fact, Soviet foreign minister Andrei Gromyko reiterated that Moscow was eager to help find an end to the war.

As part of its strategy of détente and linkage, the United States expected Soviet assistance in arranging an acceptable end to the Vietnam War. This, along with other Soviet concessions such as limiting Soviet strategic nuclear weapons, acknowledgment of American, British, and French rights in West Berlin, and joint action to keep Third World crises from escalating, were necessary for the Soviet Union to change its relationship with the United States. What the United States was offering Moscow were recognition of post-World War II boundaries in Central and Eastern Europe, the acceptance of Moscow's position as a superpower with global, not just European, interests, and considerable economic and trade concessions such as agricultural exports, technology transfers, and credits.

North Vietnam was convinced that the United States was in a rush to conclude an agreement before the presidential elections in November. In August 1972, after a round of talks with little progress, the politburo in Hanoi voted to authorize a negotiated settlement. North Vietnam believed that the United States would be much more forthcoming due to the pressures of time and domestic weariness with the war. In August 1972, North Vietnam, for the first time, gave up its insistence on an unconditional U.S. withdrawal as a precondition for agreement on all other issues. In addition, Hanoi gave up its demand for a veto over all non-communist elements of a coalition government. The United States, long opposed even to the idea of a coalition government, no longer rejected the idea. With this impetus for moving forward on an agreement, in early October the United States and North Vietnam concluded the following framework for a draft agreement:

- A cease-fire would immediately follow the signing of an agreement;
- All U.S. troops would be withdrawn within 2 months of the signing, and both sides would simultaneously release their prisoners;



- The 2 South Vietnamese political groups (the Government of South Vietnamese President Nguyen Van Thieu and the communist Provisional Revolutionary Government) would "do their utmost" to reach a settlement in 3 months;
- A "National Council of Reconciliation and Concord" (NCRC) would be set up, based on the agreement of the South Vietnamese parties, to supervise elections;
- All North Vietnamese infiltration of personnel into South Vietnam would cease; and
- The United States would pledge to contribute to the economic restructuring of Indochina.

Hanoi demanded acceptance of the agreement by October 31. The North Vietnamese leadership was concerned that PRG forces were vulnerable in the South and that the longer the delay the more time the United States had to build up Saigon's military capabilities. And, the Americans hoped to secure an agreement before the presidential election. There is disagreement regarding this, as Kissinger was pushing for an agreement before the elections while Nixon wanted to wait. He believed he could gain more by waiting because he would have more leverage and because he believed that the anti-war forces would be discredited by a landslide victory against Democratic presidential candidate George McGovern. In particular, it seems that North Vietnam was anxious to wrap up an agreement before the elections because of a fear that the United States would adopt a much harder line and might well use more military force (in particular, bombing) to extract further North Vietnamese concessions.

In order to reassure Hanoi, Kissinger called a press conference to claim "peace is at hand." The North Vietnamese actually compromised on 2 final points insisted by the Americans. When informed of this, Kissinger sent them back a cable stating that the secured agreement was now "complete." Yet he had not even consulted Saigon yet, much less secured Thieu's agreement. Kissinger had made no allowances that Thieu might want to change some of the language. Because of Kissinger's proclamations to Hanoi the North Vietnamese felt betrayed when the deadline for signing the agreement passed. And the South Vietnamese had long since felt betrayed by the Americans.

After considerable delays, the negotiations resumed in Paris on November 20. The atmosphere was hostile and full of mistrust. North Vietnam felt that Kissinger could not be trusted because he could not deliver on an agreement. Le Duc Tho believed that Kissinger had negotiated an agreement in October that exceeded his instructions so that neither Nixon nor Thieu were prepared to accept it. The United States, for its part, was concerned that Hanoi was simply delaying so to build up military force in the south and use the time immediately after an agreement was signed to attack and undermine the Saigon regime. In addition, Kissinger felt greatly weakened by the prospects of a likely congressional cut-off of any more funds for the war. He was convinced that Hanoi would use congressional deadlines against Kissinger in order to pressure him into agreement. Finally, Kissinger had been, in effect, representing both Washington and Saigon—two allies, who had, it turned out, increasingly different needs and goals.



Suggested Background Reading

General history of the Vietnam War:

Herring, George C. *America's Longest War*. New York: John Wiley and Sons, 1979.

Karnow, Stanley. *Vietnam: A History*. New York: The Penguin Press, 1983.

Kattenberg, Paul. *The Vietnam Trauma in American Foreign Policy, 1945-75*. New Brunswick, New Jersey: Transaction Books, 1980.

Materials on the peace negotiations:

Goodman, Allan E. *The Search for a Negotiated Settlement of the Vietnam War*. Berkeley, CA: Institute of East Asian Studies, 1986.

Kissinger, Henry A. *White House Years*. Boston: Little Brown, 1979.

Nguyen Tien Hung and Jerrold L. Schechter. *The Palace File*. New York: Harper & Row, 1986.



Roles

The simulation roles include representatives from the following governments:

The United States

The Government of the Democratic Republic of Vietnam (North Vietnam)

The Government of Vietnam (South Vietnam)

The Soviet Union

(Note: the Soviet Union was not an actual participant in the Paris peace talks nor was it a signatory to any agreements. It was, however, an important player and a major consideration for two of the parties to the actual talks, the United States and the Democratic Republic of Vietnam.)



Democratic Republic of Vietnam (North Vietnam)

North Vietnam strongly insists that a peace settlement must simultaneously resolve both the military and political issues. They well remember that 1954 Geneva conference in which the major powers (including China) compelled the communists to stop fighting with the promise of nationwide elections that would settle the political situation. It was clear to most that the communists would win and assume control over all of Vietnam. Those promised elections never occurred. So Hanoi is not about to repeat the same mistake.

America's success in creating a stronger relationship with the Soviet Union while at the same time opening up to China has led to an increased isolation of Hanoi. As a result, Hanoi is more likely to accept a negotiated settlement than at any time in the past. In addition, with reduced help from China and the Soviet Union, there seems less likelihood of defeating South Vietnam's 1.2 million man army (supported by U.S. air power). North Vietnam has about 150,000 troops in the South who are providing support for another 150,000 or so Viet Cong guerrillas. But, North Vietnam is not about to give up its ultimate goal of a completely unified Vietnam under communist control. The presence in the South of North Vietnamese forces is very important because the Viet Cong alone cannot stand up to the million-man South Vietnamese army.

Even though North Vietnam is in no position to dictate the terms of peace, it is dealing with a foe—the United States—that is weary of further military engagement except for the use of air power. And, domestic political support continues to weaken regarding any further American involvement in the war. Tactically, Hanoi faces two options. It can revert back to guerilla warfare and continue to press for the ouster of Thieu and the establishment of a coalition government, or concede to a temporary compromise by waiving its insistence on Thieu's removal, in which case the American forces would withdraw completely, leaving open the chance to resume the military struggle at a later date. Hanoi has chosen the latter and so began in August to negotiate to establish a peace that would allow North Vietnam to put into place the means to gain South Vietnam in the end. The key was American withdrawal, with North Vietnamese forces remaining in place in the South.

The underlying belief behind much of North Vietnam's military initiative is that military success dictates diplomatic success. The communists need military successes in order to improve their position at the negotiating table. And, Hanoi believes it is closer than ever to success, because it seems clear that the United States, because of domestic disaffection with the war, will be compelled to withdraw sooner or later. Hanoi can wait. And, because of the weakening American position, the communists feel they do not need the Soviet Union as much as in the past. The Russians still remain important for the vast amounts of military equipment that they have been providing to the North, but they are also increasingly preaching patience and conciliation. So Hanoi feels more and more confident about ignoring Soviet and Chinese urgings to compromise. In August, North Vietnam strongly condemned both the Soviet Union and China, accusing them of preferring "peaceful coexistence over proletarian internationalism, serving their own immediate interests at the expense of the revolutionary movement....We communists should persist in revolution and should not compromise."

Hanoi wants to have the most vague definition possible of the DMZ and less supervision of the cease-fire so that if a political agreement between the PRG and the Saigon government that is specified in the agreement fails to materialize, Hanoi can easily resume military operations.

When the talks resumed in November, Hanoi's position had hardened. Hanoi reintroduced demands for the removal of Thieu as South Vietnam's president, the simultaneous release of political prisoners with the prisoners of war and a significant strengthening rather than weakening of the power of the National Council of Reconciliation and Concord, the body on which the PRG would have equal voice with the GVN over future political evolution in South Vietnam.



From December 4 to 14, Le Duc Tho became even more intransigent, calling not only for the simultaneous release of political prisoners jailed in the South but also demanding the withdrawal of American civilians from South Vietnam which would make maintenance of the South Vietnam air force impossible. He withdrew concessions made the week before. Le Duc Tho even refused to allow a meeting of the experts to negotiate the detailed protocols even on provisions not in dispute. He said the only thing that would make him change was to go back to the October agreement with no changes by either side.

The leaders in Hanoi feel they do not need to compromise unless it is solely in their interests to do so. North Vietnam is interested in improving relations with the United States only insofar as this helped Hanoi gain a free hand in all of Vietnam and Indochina.

There is, however, a concern that since no deal was reached before the presidential elections, Nixon will adopt a much harder line because he was re-elected with a large majority. Nixon might also feel little hesitation in unleashing greater bombing raids.



The United States

The United States has finally agreed not to press its demand that North Vietnam withdraw its troops from South Vietnam, while finding a way to allow Thieu's government in Saigon to remain in power, at least for the short term. It is important for the U.S. negotiators to craft an agreement that could give some meaning to the loss of over 55,000 American lives. Ultimately, as Henry Kissinger later noted, the U.S. goal is to give a non-Communist South Vietnam the "chance to survive."

Because of the withdrawal of most U.S. forces, the United States does not have much negotiating leverage. It wants to protect its client and secure the release of its POWs. When Richard Nixon was elected president he pledged to bring "peace with honor." The key to achieving such a peace is, in his view, the Soviet Union. By forging a new relationship with Moscow through a policy of détente and linkage, the United States wanted to compel the Soviet leadership to pressure its client in Hanoi to end the war in a way that would allow the United States to withdraw honorably. As part of its strategy of détente and linkage, help with the North Vietnamese, along with other Soviet concessions were necessary for the Soviet Union to change its relationship with the United States. Nixon wants the Soviets to help bring peace in Vietnam (as well as reduce tensions in the Middle East, Berlin and other global hot spots) in return for greater cooperation with the United States (particularly with the Soviet Union's desire for increased trade with the west, access to technology and agricultural goods as well as a need to control the burgeoning arms race).

The United States is convinced of Soviet sincerity in desiring détente because intelligence sources report that the one Politburo member, Pyotr Shelest, who objected to continuing the Nixon-Brezhnev summit meeting after the mining in North Vietnam was promptly demoted.

U.S. intelligence reports (including captured communist documents and interrogations of prisoners) also indicate that Hanoi has begun to instruct communist forces and leaders in the South to prepare to compete politically with the Thieu government; thus, they will not accede to power by force of arms. In addition, the military leadership in Hanoi, in concert with the Viet Cong leaders, carried out a series of military operations in the fall that were meant to gain as much land as possible in anticipation of a cease-fire-in-place. These seem strong indications of a willingness by Hanoi to compromise. So, Kissinger has now stated to the Soviet Union that the North Vietnamese troops that had invaded the south for the current offensive must be withdrawn. The implication is that those northerners who were already in the South could remain there. But North Vietnam wanted this spelled out in specifics and publicly.

Kissinger is not sure how much the Soviets can actually influence the North Vietnamese positions nor is he sure he wants to push them too far lest the Soviets make their cooperation on arms control contingent upon U.S. concessions on Vietnam. But, at least he and Nixon realize, unlike many of the top officials in the Johnson administration, that key decisions are made in Hanoi not Beijing or Moscow. While Nixon strongly believes that he has to gain an honorable end to the war in Vietnam for domestic reasons, ultimately he and especially Kissinger, do not believe Vietnam is significant enough to endanger greater global interests and goals. Kissinger recently told the Chinese that the "war in Vietnam would not affect the improvement of our relations."

But, the major question for Nixon is how to end the war in a way that will allow the United States to save face and retain its credibility. In particular, the President believes that only through the use of force will the North Vietnamese be compelled to negotiate. As in the past, he is willing to use air power to compel them to change their behavior or come to the negotiating table.

Kissinger is concerned that Thieu might leak details of the North Vietnamese plan in order to rally public opinion against it and to denounce Hanoi. Thus, Kissinger was reluctant to inform Thieu of the plan and simply presented it to him in October after it was a done deal while sugarcoating the bitter medicine with additional aid and supplies. Kissinger did not keep Thieu informed of the



Hanoi draft proposal because he wanted to frighten Thieu with the prospect of an even worse agreement and then take advantage of his relief when he discovered that the plan was not so bad.

Kissinger told Thieu that there were enormous domestic pressures that wanted to end U.S. involvement in Vietnam at almost any cost. The only issue most Americans care to negotiate is the return of American prisoners of war. The United States cannot afford to reject a reasonable proposal. Hanoi has finally accepted a number of U.S. conditions and the United States has to provide the perception to its domestic constituents that it had explored every opportunity for peace. The Nixon administration would have to go to Congress for additional money to stay in Vietnam. That support was unlikely.

At a minimum, the United States requires that a cease-fire supervisory mechanism be in place and be able to function effectively when a peace agreement is signed. This is considered critical to prevent communist military operations from extending its territorial control.

In later November, Nixon told his negotiators to begin warning Hanoi that a failure to negotiate seriously would lead to renewed bombing. That meant, in particular, the United States expected Hanoi to stay within the framework of the October draft. Kissinger came to the conclusion that the only way to avoid a collapse of the talks was to appeal to Moscow and Beijing. He even stated to both countries that the United States would have to resort to force to break the deadlock. The Chinese never responded, but the Soviets counseled patience and claimed that Hanoi was interested in an agreement within the October framework. But if Moscow has tried to influence Hanoi there is no evidence of that in North Vietnam's continued intransigence.

Finally, time is not on America's side. The North Vietnamese can talk endlessly in order to try to win at the negotiating table what they couldn't on the battlefield. They can outlast the United States because of domestic pressures on the United States to withdraw ultimately.



The Soviet Union ¹

The war in Vietnam has greatly benefited the Soviet Union. It weakened the United States and preoccupied American foreign policy during most of the 1960s so that Moscow could pursue a more aggressive global policy, such as its political penetration into the Middle East and Africa. And, in contrast with China, which had been paralyzed by the Cultural Revolution, the Soviet Union gained an image as a steadfast ally by consistently supporting the communists in Vietnam.

But in 1972, the USSR is now growing tired of the war in Vietnam. There seems little progress for its allies in Hanoi despite the massive financial and military aid provided by Moscow. This assistance has been an increasingly large drain on its economy. In addition, the Soviet Union is beginning to realize, as have many in the United States, that Vietnam is not a vital strategic interest. The war is also a major obstacle in the desire of the Soviet Union to improve its relations with the United States. It is now time for the Soviets to cash in on their gains of the last decade and re-make the relationship with the west and pre-empt any rapprochement between China and the United States.

Even when the United States bombed North Vietnam prior to the scheduled summit between Brezhnev and Nixon in the Soviet Union, Moscow merely voiced disapproval. As one senior Soviet official noted, "we have done a lot for those Vietnamese, but we're not going to let them spoil our relations with the United States." Moscow was clearly in favor of détente over almost anything else. North Vietnam condemned Nixon's trip to Moscow, attacking the Moscow for betraying the world revolutionary movement and betraying its internationalist duties.

While the Russians used their good offices to arrange secret talks between North Vietnam's representatives and Henry Kissinger, they insisted that they could not dictate to Hanoi what they should or should not do. Rather, Moscow has continually claimed that an overall American-Soviet agreement would be the best spur to a mutually satisfactory peace in Indochina.

Nixon has made it clear that Vietnam alone would determine America's relations with the Soviet Union. Kissinger was less clear that the Soviet Union had much influence with North Vietnam. The USSR does not want Vietnam to sidetrack or delay discussions of arms control and other more global matters. The United States is determined to keep the Soviet Union involved in the Vietnam negotiations. Kissinger seems to be making a concession when he states that the North Vietnamese troops that had invaded the south for the current offensive must be withdrawn. The implication is that those northerners who were already in the South could remain there. But North Vietnam wanted this spelled out in specifics and publicly. For the Soviets, Kissinger's continued discussion of items of mutual interest other than Vietnam has led them to believe that it would not have to lean too hard on Hanoi to save détente.

To achieve the goals of détente and improve its position vis-à-vis the West, the Soviet Union certainly needs to give the appearance of working to influence Hanoi, even if there is little that it can do. If nothing else, because the Soviet Union feels it has to compete with China for the favor of Washington, it must do at least as much as the Chinese to influence North Vietnam. The bottom line is that Moscow is not going to let, inasmuch as possible, a fellow communist country undermine the potentially vast rewards of détente. However, by the summer of 1972, the Soviet Union can already point to some significant gains from détente—a signed strategic arms limitation treaty (SALT I) and the four powers agreement on Berlin that acknowledged its division—without having extracted any concessions from Hanoi.

¹ The Soviet Union was not an actual participant in the Paris peace talks nor was it a signatory to any agreements. It was, however, an important player and a major consideration for two of the parties to the actual talks, the United States and the Democratic Republic of Vietnam.





South Vietnam

President Thieu does not trust Hanoi at all. He believes that, as he said in a speech in August 1972, "There is only one way to force the Communists to negotiate seriously, and that consists of the total destruction of their economic and war potential. At the same time, he does not trust the Americans whom he believes simply want to end the war and take their POWs home. In his mind, the Americans are willing to sell out Saigon if necessary. Kissinger had not been forthcoming with Saigon in October. Thieu had not even been informed that a draft agreement existed. Kissinger went to Saigon on October 17th in hopes of prevailing on Thieu to agree to the proposal by October 22nd, the deadline imposed by Hanoi. But this was tantamount in the minds of many in the South to the United States selling out Saigon. It would be a huge psychological blow and even if the Thieu government signed off on the agreement it would take weeks if not months to prepare the people of South Vietnam. The public perception of the agreement in South Vietnam is as important as any agreement's details. To some, it seems like the death knell for the South.

No matter what the Americans claim, Saigon believes that the change in Hanoi's position is a trick. The communists simply want to get the Americans out so they can take over all of the country. This proposal allows them a foot in the door through the Provisional Revolutionary Government, and with armed forces authorized to remain in South Vietnam.

Saigon is demanding significant changes in language before agreeing that the proposal is acceptable. In addition, the idea of a cease-fire-in-place greatly concerns the South Vietnamese. It seems to guarantee that there will be continued fighting over the location of the front lines. In addition, there is no provision for inspections to guarantee the status of the demilitarized zone nor any measures in place in case a political settlement cannot be reached after the proscribed 90 days.

Thieu's biggest nightmare is that the United States will cut a deal behind his back and then quickly try to impose it upon him. In addition, Thieu is personally affronted by the way Kissinger and the Americans have treated him. Supposedly, they are allies, yet he was ignored as Kissinger and the communists labored in secret to come up with an agreement that could be rammed down South Vietnam's throat. He also does not feel that he is being treated as a head of state and a strong American ally should. In addition, before October 8th, South Vietnamese intelligence had captured a copy of the draft peace agreement—an agreement that Kissinger had yet to tell Thieu that he was even negotiating. Not only is Saigon not treated as a partner but it is not even consulted. Thieu has often asked the Americans to allow him to negotiate directly with Hanoi so as not to reinforce the perception that Saigon is nothing but an American puppet. But Hanoi wants Saigon to negotiate with the Provisional Revolutionary Government.

In October, Kissinger had cabled Thieu to seize as much territory as possible and the United States began to pour military arms, spare parts and supplies into South Vietnam. American installations were secretly transferred to South Vietnamese ownership. All of this was in anticipation of an agreement. The United States wanted South Vietnam to have control over as much territory as possible and have as much materiel as possible before the United States withdrew.

On October 24, Thieu publicly denounced the agreement as a ruse designed to provide the North Vietnamese military forces with time to regroup and provide the communists with a clear opportunity to gain political control of South Vietnam. He demanded a withdrawal of all North Vietnam Army (NVA) forces in the south and a dismantling of the communist (PRG) infrastructure.



Thieu accused the United States of colluding with China and the Soviet Union in hopes of subverting his regime. Nixon shortly cabled Thieu to say that his lack of cooperation with the United States "would have the most serious effects upon my ability to continue support for you." Nixon was sending many mixed messages; one minute he was particularly hard on him, the next he was pledging America's assurance for the government in Saigon and promising swift and severe retaliation if North Vietnam violated the potential agreement.

Thieu has two major objections to the agreement Kissinger worked out with the North Vietnamese. It permits the communists to keep control of the territory they held, and it creates a powerless electoral commission that seems the first step to a coalition government with the communists. In addition, the language used in the draft implies that Vietnam was one country and that the DMZ (demilitarized zone) was not, as South Vietnam and the United States had proclaimed, an international border. Ultimately, Thieu did not want any agreement at all. Complete U.S. withdrawal, on any terms, seemed to portend disaster.



Related Web Links

Selected documents regarding the signing of the "Paris Peace Accord"

http://www.ibiblio.org/pub/academic/history/marshall/military/vietnam/policies.and.politics/paris_peace_1973.txt

StudyWorld: The United States Antiwar Movement and the Vietnam War

http://www.studyworld.com/Antiwar_Movement.htm

Chronology: Nixon & Vietnam

<http://history.acusd.edu/gen/20th/nixon-vietnam.html>

Gilder Lehrman Institute of American History
Chronology: Vietnam War

http://www.gliah.uh.edu/database/article_display.cfm?HHID=515

George Washington University: Transcripts of interviews with policymakers/officials on U.S. foreign policy in Vietnam and on Paris Peace Talks.

<http://www.gwu.edu/~nsarchiv/coldwar/interviews/>