

U.S. Opening Statement  
Delivered by Ambassador Henry Cabot Lodge  
at the Twenty-ninth Plenary Session of  
the Paris Meetings on Viet-Nam

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Ladies and Gentlemen:

In Saigon, on July 30, President Nixon summarized in a few words the history of the repeated efforts for peace made by the Republic of Viet-Nam and by the United States. He said: "Our purpose is peace. We have respectively come forward with proposals which could lead to the beginning of the end of this tragic conflict."

Let me recall some of the most significant of these proposals and the concrete actions we have taken. On November 1, 1968, we stopped all acts involving the use of force against the entire territory of North Viet-Nam. The limited aerial reconnaissance that was continued is not an act involving the use of force. Only when our reconnaissance planes have been attacked have we responded in defense to protect our aircraft and pilots.

On January 25, 1969, at the first plenary session of these meetings, the United States and the Republic of Viet-Nam presented proposals aimed at reducing the degree of violence and at moving us all toward a negotiated peace. In particular, we made it clear that we and our allies were prepared to begin the immediate and mutual withdrawal of non-South Vietnamese forces from South Viet-Nam.

On March 25, 1969, President Thieu stated his readiness to hold private talks, without any prior conditions, with representatives of the National Liberation Front on the question of a political settlement.

On April 7, 1969, President Thieu proposed six principles upon which a peace settlement could be based and made it clear that those South Vietnamese who were bearing arms against the Government of the Republic of Viet-Nam would be welcomed as full members of the national community in a spirit of national reconciliation.

On May 14, 1969, President Nixon made an eight-point proposal aimed at bringing about: the withdrawal of all non-South Vietnamese forces, cease fires and free elections under international supervision. The eight points constituted a reasonable basis for negotiations. The President made clear the willingness of the United States to consider other approaches consistent with those principles.

On June 5, 1969, at these meetings, I discussed in considerable detail the ten-point program proposed by the NLF and pointed out areas in which there seemed to be common ground. I also asked questions about ambiguities in that proposal. I regret to say those questions have never been answered.

On June 8, 1969, President Thieu and President Nixon met at Midway Island and reviewed the proposals that had been made by both sides. They reiterated their determination to seek a just settlement in a spirit of patience and goodwill. They also observed that, despite the fact that the NLF ten-point proposal contained certain unacceptable provisions, there were certain points in it which appeared to be not too far from positions taken by the Republic of Viet-Nam and the United States.

At their Midway meetings, the two Presidents also announced a reduction by 25,000 in the number of United States military personnel in South Viet-Nam to be completed by the end of this month. They stated that further reductions would be considered on the basis of the following three factors: The progress in training and equipment of the armed forces of the Republic of Viet-Nam, the level of enemy activity, and the progress made in the Paris Meetings.

On July 11, 1969, President Thieu made a generous and unprecedented proposal for free

On July 20, 1969, President Thieu proposed direct discussions with North Viet-Nam on the question of unification of North and South Viet-Nam, with the object of bringing about unification through free and internationally supervised elections.

What has been the response by your side to these many proposals for peace? It has been flatly and consistently negative. You refuse to discuss and explore our proposals, much less negotiate about them. You denigrate our efforts to find common ground between our proposals and yours. You reject discussion of mutual withdrawal, including the withdrawal of North Vietnamese forces from South Viet-Nam, Laos and Cambodia, to North Viet-Nam. You reject consideration of proposals for early free elections that would be fair to all and would ensure early exercise of the right of self-determination by the people of South Viet-Nam.

We speak as persons who still desire to move from confrontation to negotiation. We are thus constrained to say that the record which I have just reviewed is a history of constant efforts to negotiate by our side and of constant rejection by yours. The lack of progress at these meetings is not the result of a lack of proposals by our side. It is because you have shown no inclination to negotiate on any of the many proposals which we have made.

You reject all thought of compromise, and you consistently reiterate your demands - which you have made ever since I arrived here in January - that we withdraw all United States and allied forces, while all North Vietnamese forces remain behind. You also demand that we overthrow the legitimate Government of the Republic of Viet-Nam and impose in its place a so-called "coalition" government. Your consistent position since January has thus been to refuse to negotiate and to insist on actions by us which will enable you to dominate South Viet-Nam.

We make reasonable proposals, which take into consideration the legitimate interest of all parties. We are not making demands - we are making reasonable proposals. We are prepared to discuss and examine both our proposals and yours. Our offers remain open, and we remain ready for serious negotiation.

But, until your side shows a similar readiness, we can expect no progress. We have done all that we can do by ourselves to bring a negotiated peace to Viet-Nam. Now it is time for you to respond.