

# VIET-NAM

## INFORMATION NOTES

OFFICE OF MEDIA SERVICES, BUREAU OF PUBLIC AFFAIRS, DEPARTMENT OF STATE  
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### THE PARIS PEACE TALKS

"We should be confident that an honorable peace is possible if we here at home remain steady."

—President Nixon

#### INTRODUCTION

The search for peace in Viet-Nam and Southeast Asia is a matter of the highest priority to the United States. No other question so engages the time and attention of the President and his principal advisers.

The U.S. delegation to the Paris Peace Talks on Viet-Nam has used the weekly meetings since January 1969 to lay out an extensive program for peace. This program provides for a mutual withdrawal of all non-South Vietnamese forces, supervised cease-fires, free elections under international supervision, and the early release of prisoners of war on both sides. The United States endorses the proposals of President Nguyen Van Thieu of the Republic of Viet-Nam for the conduct of free elections in which all political parties and groups can participate. Both we and the Government of the Republic of Viet-Nam have stated we will abide by the results of those elections.

Our objective at Paris is meaningful negotiation and compromise, leading to a resolution of the crucial issues which divide us, and not rigid insistence upon one's own individual position. While the other side's 10-point proposal contains certain unacceptable provisions, some points appear negotiable, and our delegation has tried to examine these at the Paris sessions to find common ground between our respective positions. Neither the U.S. Government nor the Government of the Republic of Viet-Nam poses any precondition for such discussions. But the other side has never tried to find in our proposals common elements on which we might agree or which we might even further examine. On the contrary, the other side always flatly rejects them.

The United States has taken a number of important steps to reduce the level of violence, beginning with the partial cessation of bombing in North Viet-Nam in March 1968 and the total cessation of all acts of force against North Viet-Nam in November 1968. Our air operations in South Viet-Nam have been reduced by over 20 percent. The emphasis has been shifted from maximum military pressure on

the enemy to holding U.S. combat losses to a minimum while undertaking operations consistent with our mission to protect allied forces and the civilian population. We have begun to reduce our presence in South Viet-Nam by setting in motion the replacement of over 60,000 U.S. troops. On September 16, 1969, President Nixon ordered a reduction of the troop ceiling in Viet-Nam to 484,000 by December 15, 1969.

To date, all U.S. efforts to get serious negotiations underway at Paris have failed for two reasons:

- (1) the other side's insistence that its proposals can be the only basis for discussion; and
- (2) its adamant refusal to negotiate with the Government of the Republic of Viet-Nam on any basis whatsoever.

In spite of this, the United States and its allies continue to press for meaningful discussions at Paris. We have made it very plain that we consider all the points at issue negotiable except the basic right of the South Vietnamese to determine their own future.

#### HISTORY OF THE PARIS TALKS

The Paris talks represent the culmination of a long process of diplomatic negotiation and maneuver.\* Since 1965 the United States has sought peace in conferences with hundreds of world figures, undertaken many public initiatives for peace, and participated in hundreds of high-level private talks with friends and adversaries throughout the world. North Viet-Nam rejected all these proposals until President Johnson announced on March 31, 1968, a unilateral reduction of the level of hostilities—an end to the bombing of 78 percent of the territory of Viet-Nam, restricting it to the area north of the demilitarized zone (DMZ) where the enemy buildup threatened allied forward positions. At the same time, the President proposed bilateral talks with the North Vietnamese to bring the war to an end.

\*See Viet-Nam Information Notes, No. 2, "The Search for Peace" (Dept. of State pub. 8196).

On April 3, 1968, North Viet-Nam indicated its readiness to establish preliminary contact with U.S. representatives to arrange for an "unconditional" end to American military operations against the North. After exchanging numerous proposals of possible sites for the talks, the two sides agreed to meet at Paris. On May 10 the representatives of North Viet-Nam, headed by former Foreign Minister Xuan Thuy, and the representatives of the United States, headed by Ambassador Averell Harriman, met for the first time in the International Conference Center at the Majestic Hotel, Paris.

During the bilateral talks the North Vietnamese negotiators pressed for an unconditional end to the bombing of North Viet-Nam. U.S. representatives offered a complete bombing halt if the other side would agree to reduce its war effort. On November 1 President Johnson ordered a halt to all bombing of the North, with the understanding that North Viet-Nam would not abuse the DMZ or carry out indiscriminate attacks against the major cities of South Viet-Nam. At the same time it was agreed that a new series of expanded meetings to discuss a peace settlement would follow, with the participation of representatives of the Government of the Republic of Viet-Nam and the so-called "National Liberation Front."

The first substantive meeting of the expanded talks was held on January 25, 1969, at the Majestic Hotel. Ambassador Henry Cabot Lodge replaced Ambassador Harriman as chief of the U.S. delegation. He was joined by Pham Dang Lam of the Republic of Viet-Nam. On the Communist side, Xuan Thuy was joined by Tran Buu Kiem of the Viet Cong's National Liberation Front (NLF). Kiem was replaced in June by Madame Nguyen Thi Binh, the "Foreign Minister" of the so-called "Provisional Revolutionary Government" of the Viet Cong. Plenary sessions have been held nearly every week since that time.

#### PROPOSALS OF U.S. AND SOUTH VIET-NAM

The United States and the Republic of Viet-Nam have presented a comprehensive program for peace at Paris, based on proposals announced by President Nixon on May 14 and by South Vietnamese President Thieu on July 11. Those proposals include provision for:

- Phased, mutual withdrawals of all non-South Vietnamese forces—North Vietnamese, United States, and allied. The withdrawal would be carried out on a specified timetable and verified by an international supervisory body acceptable to both sides. We have proposed the complete withdrawal of all outside forces within one year. We have said we would settle for a de facto removal of North Vietnamese forces so long as

there are reliable assurances that they will not return.

- A supervised cease-fire arranged with the participation of an international supervisory body.
- Internationally supervised elections, with provision for an electoral commission including representatives of the NLF to assure equal opportunity for all candidates to campaign and to enable all parties to join in watching the polls and counting the ballots. The United States and South Viet-Nam have pledged themselves to abide by the result of these elections, whatever this might be, and have challenged the other side to do likewise.
- Political amnesty for all those who renounce the use of force, with no reprisals.
- Release of prisoners of war at the earliest possible time.
- Observance by all parties of the basic elements of the Geneva accords of 1954 regarding South Viet-Nam and Cambodia, and the Laos accords of 1962.

The United States has repeatedly emphasized that it does not oppose the reunification of Viet-Nam, provided that this is freely decided upon by the people of South and North Viet-Nam.

The United States has said that we do not seek a military victory in Viet-Nam. We have stated repeatedly that we want no permanent military base in South Viet-Nam, and insist on no military alliance with that country.

#### U.S. ACTIONS

The United States has carried out its part of the understanding which preceded the expanded peace talks at Paris. There has been no bombing of North Viet-Nam since November 1, 1968.

We have also taken other actions to reduce the level of violence. Our air operations against Communist forces in South Viet-Nam have been reduced. We have emphasized to our military commanders that losses be held to a minimum consistent with their basic mission to protect allied forces and the civilian population.

We have reduced the number of our troops in South Viet-Nam. By December 15, 1969, we will have withdrawn 60,000 men. The fact that most of the troops being withdrawn are combat soldiers, not support personnel, underscores our desire to reduce the violence.

President Nixon, in a speech September 18 to the U.N. General Assembly at New York, appealed to all members of the United Nations to persuade Hanoi to begin serious negotiation. He noted that "the steps we have taken have

been responsive to views expressed in this room."

The United States has not limited its peace initiatives to public forums and public statements. Ambassador Lodge has met with North Viet-Nam's chief negotiator at Paris in 11 private sessions. President Nixon, in his November 3 address to the nation, disclosed some of our more recent private initiatives for peace. These include:

- Two offers for a rapid, comprehensive settlement which President Nixon made soon after his election through an individual who was directly in contact on a personal basis with the leaders of North Viet-Nam.
- Personal meetings which the President, Secretary of State Rogers, and the President's assistant for national security affairs, Dr. Henry Kissinger, had with representatives of the Soviet Union to enlist their assistance in getting meaningful negotiations started.
- Extended discussions with representatives of other world governments.
- A private and personal plea by President Nixon in a letter to North Viet-Nam's President Ho Chi Minh on July 15, 1969, "to move forward at the conference table toward an early resolution of this tragic war." The President's initiative was rejected.

In addition, the United States has worked diligently with the International Committee of the Red Cross and with other countries to persuade North Viet-Nam that it should abide by the Geneva Convention on the Treatment of Prisoners of War, to which it acceded in 1957. Under this convention a nation involved in an armed conflict is required to allow neutral access to prisoners, to return sick and wounded prisoners, to provide lists of names of those being detained, and to allow mail to and from the prisoners—requirements which Hanoi is ignoring. (Personnel of the other side held prisoner in South Viet-Nam are held in camps open to neutral inspection and maintained in accordance with the Geneva convention regulations.)

#### PROPOSALS OF THE OTHER SIDE

The representatives of North Viet-Nam and the Viet Cong have rejected all our proposals. They have refused even to discuss them seriously, despite the fact that they profess to share some of our objectives, such as:

- Respect for the Vietnamese people's national rights as recognized by the Geneva agreements.
- Self-determination for the South Vietnamese through free and democratic elections.

- Respect for the independence, neutrality, and territorial integrity of Cambodia and Laos.
- Non-participation in any military alliance for North or South Viet-Nam.

The other side has demanded, in effect, our surrender before negotiations. It has called for:

- Unilateral, unconditional withdrawal of U.S./allied forces. The other side does not admit that North Vietnamese troops are in South Viet-Nam, despite massive evidence to the contrary. They refuse to entertain any discussion of "mutual" withdrawal. They have denounced President Nixon's withdrawal of 25,000 U.S. troops as a "fraud," and the more recent Presidential order for the withdrawal of an additional 35,000 or more men as "a perfidious trick."
- The replacement of the legitimate, elected government of the Republic of Viet-Nam by an imposed "provisional coalition" of their own choosing. This "provisional coalition" would rule South Viet-Nam during the interim between the restoration of peace and the holding of general "elections" (which the Communists would obviously control if carried out by a "coalition" of this nature).
- General elections for a constituent assembly which would write a new constitution and would be obliged to install a permanent "coalition" government.

#### ACTIONS OF THE OTHER SIDE

North Viet-Nam continues to maintain massive forces in South Viet-Nam and to exhort its followers to total military victory. Over two-thirds of all combat forces facing the Republic of Viet-Nam and its allies in the South are North Vietnamese. Eighty-five percent of the enemy combat forces in the five northern provinces of South Viet-Nam are North Vietnamese. In the Saigon region, North Vietnamese personnel make up over 80 percent of all enemy combat forces. North Vietnamese troops have recently been sent into the southern Delta area for the first time, while U.S. forces in that area have been pulled out.

Despite the deescalation of the fighting in recent months, the other side's campaign of terror and assassination against South Vietnamese civilians continues at a high level. This includes indiscriminate rocket attacks against civilian targets—wounding and killing women and children, destroying hospitals, schools, and homes in Saigon and other cities.

North Viet-Nam has violated the 1954 agreements on Cambodia and the 1962 agreements on Laos by infiltrating men and supplies into these countries and by establishing military bases along their eastern border regions.

The North Vietnamese and Viet Cong also have blatantly disregarded the Geneva convention on prisoners of war. They have specifically refused to provide a list of prisoners they hold, to permit mail and packages to and from the prisoners, or to allow the International Committee of the Red Cross to visit the prisoners and check on conditions in the camps. They have also refused to discuss the exchange of sick and wounded prisoners.\*

#### U.S./ALLIED GOALS

The United States and its allies are participating in the Paris meetings because we want the war in Viet-Nam to come to a negotiated end. We will continue to search for common ground between the two sides. To us, the search for common ground involves examination of each other's position, exchange of views, and a willingness to reach a compromise through serious negotiation.

Our objective in Viet-Nam is limited. We seek the opportunity for the South Vietnamese people to determine their own political future without outside interference.

President Nixon has said, "The only item which is not negotiable is the right of the people of South Viet-Nam to determine their own future

free of outside interference . . . .The time for meaningful negotiations has . . . arrived."

President Nixon also said: "In pursuing our limited objective, we insist on no rigid diplomatic formula. Peace could be achieved by a formal negotiated settlement. Peace could be achieved by an informal understanding, providing that the understanding is clear, and that there were adequate assurances that it would be observed."

#### THE NEED FOR RESPONSE

Our proposals at the Paris talks embody the President's suggested formula for a peaceful settlement in Viet-Nam. We believe these proposals are reasonable and fair, and that they indicate our willingness to negotiate a settlement rather than dictate one. What has been missing at the talks so far is a similar willingness on the other side.

"We have gone as far as we can or should go in opening the door to peace," President Nixon stated on July 30 at Saigon, "and now it is time for the other side to respond."

In his November 3 address, the President pointed out: "It's become clear that the obstacle in negotiating an end to the war is not the President of the United States. It is not the South Vietnamese Government. The obstacle is the other side's absolute refusal to show the least willingness to join us in seeking a just peace."

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\*See Viet-Nam Information Notes, No. 9, "Prisoners of War" (Dept. of State pub. 8275).

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