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International Peace Initiatives

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Could the Vietnam War have been avoided, or ended significantly earlier and at substantially lower cost, through international peace initiatives? And, aside from that question – the answer to which, of course, ultimately depended on the positions and perspectives of the American and North Vietnamese leaderships – what did the peace initiatives reveal about the Vietnam War's interrelationship with other major aspects of the international scene at the time, such as the Sino-Soviet split, the Cold War, and US domestic politics?

This chapter centers on a crucial three-year span, from early 1965, when the administration of Lyndon Johnson massively escalated American military involvement in Vietnam, through both sustained aerial bombing and expanded ground operations, to the spring of 1968, when direct discussions (not formal "negotiations" but "talks about talks") between Hanoi and Washington finally began in Paris. During that period, the two sides – which lacked normal diplomatic ties, successive US administrations having shunned the Democratic Republic of Vietnam (DRVN) after Hồ Chí Minh announced its creation in September 1945 – refused to enter ongoing direct contacts. They remained divided by divergent positions about negotiations which neatly epitomized a "Catch-22," after Joseph Heller's eponymous novel: the DRVN declared that it steadfastly rejected talks until the United States unilaterally, unconditionally, and/or definitively stopped bombing North Vietnam; and Washington would stop bombing only after receiving assurances that North Vietnam would negotiate promptly and productively and/or commit to reducing or ending infiltration of South Vietnam – the exact formulation fluctuated, but it was a price Hanoi deemed a prior, unacceptable "condition."

As fighting escalated, into this breach stepped a panoply of international actors (nations, institutions, individuals, groups) that – aside from crasser motives such as fame and glory – sought to stop or limit the carnage, or at least start direct US–North Vietnam talks. Most of these hundreds of efforts – some would say *all* – were doomed to failure, since the combatants

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remained far apart, their ultimate aims intrinsically incompatible. Hanoi and Washington (and Saigon) hawks insisted that only battlefield victories could ensure accomplishment of the ends for which so much had already been sacrificed; moreover, the antagonists deeply distrusted each other, raising a barrier to compromise beyond inherent ideological, cultural, linguistic, historical, and other chasms.

Still, disagreement persists about whether a breakthrough might have been possible – if not peace itself, then at least the opening of direct, substantive, continuing US–DRVN discussions much earlier than actually occurred. A closer look, enhanced by important communist evidence released since the Cold War's end, can also improve understanding both of the war's dynamics and intersections with the broader international context.

For many years, perceptions of these events relied exclusively on official US accounts supplemented by press leaks – particularly a revealing 1968 account by *Los Angeles Times* reporters David Kraslow and Stuart H. Loory, *The Secret Search for Peace in Vietnam*.[1] More detail came with the declassification of much of the American record in the four negotiating volumes of *The Pentagon Papers – not* leaked by Daniel Ellsberg to the press in 1971, but later released in sanitized form through the Freedom of Information Act (FOIA); these records informed Wallace J. Thies's scholarly analysis and were published in 1983 with commentary by George C. Herring.[2] Combined with more US releases, the gradual opening of international sources – and, after the Cold War, of former Soviet bloc and Chinese archives – has enabled deeper inquiries into these episodes. Alas, North Vietnamese evidence remains lamentably incomplete, although some useful data has seeped out through limited archival openings, internal publications, and oral history interviews.[3]

Before examining international initiatives from 1965 to 1968, reviewing earlier attempts involving third parties to limit or resolve the Southeast Asian

1 David Kraslow and Stuart H. Loory, *The Secret Search for Peace in Vietnam* (New York, 1968). On their inquiry, see James G. Hershberg, *Marigold: The Lost Chance for Peace in Vietnam* (Stanford and Washington, DC, 2012), ch. 15.

2 Wallace J. Thies, *When Governments Collide: Coercion and Diplomacy in the Vietnam Conflict, 1964–1968* (Berkeley, 1980); George C. Herring (ed.), *Secret Diplomacy of the Vietnam War: The Negotiating Volumes of the Pentagon Papers* (Austin, TX, 1983) [hereafter cited as *SDVW:NVPP*]. The complete version, released in 2011, can be found at http://nsarchive.gwu.edu//NSAEBB/NSAEBB359/index.htm.

3 For the (North) Vietnamese perspective, selectively using internal DRV records, see Lưu Văn Lợi and Nguyễn Anh Vũ, *Tiếp xúc bí mật Việt Nam – Hoa Kỳ trước Hội nghị Pari* [Secret Interactions between Vietnam–United States before Paris] (Hanoi, [1990] 2002). For an oral history, see Robert S. McNamara, James G. Blight, and Robert K. Brigham with Thomas Biersteker and Col. Herbert Y. Schandler, *Argument without End: In Search of Answers to the Vietnam Tragedy* (New York, 2000).

conflict provides useful context. During the 1946–54 Franco-Việt Minh war, when Paris sought to restore colonial rule, outside mediation played relatively little part prior to the July 1954 Geneva Accord that ended the fighting and split Vietnam into "regrouping" zones north and south of the 17th parallel. However, shortly after fighting had erupted in 1946, Hồ Chí Minh sought to enlist one powerful potential mediator: the United States. The communist–nationalist revolutionary did so despite Harry Truman's failure to respond to multiple pleas for recognition and firm US political-economic support for France in the dual causes of rebuilding Europe and forging an anti-Soviet Western bloc. In 1947 exchanges with American diplomats in Bangkok, DRVN representatives vainly proposed that the United States broker peace contacts with France. Washington not only ignored this idea, but went on, after the communist victory in China in 1949, to actively back France's military effort.[4] Yet, the episode underlined an important, recurrent feature of mediation diplomacy: to open communication channels, a party desiring talks, or even cautious probing of the enemy, sometimes resorted to using ideological adversaries, not fully trusting them but valuing their comparatively intimate ties with the foe.

Geneva's Legacies: ICC Intrigues and More

Geneva had several vital legacies for later negotiation attempts. One concerned the DRVN leaders' mindset. Despite scoring a decisive military blow at Điện Biên Phủ, the Vietnamese communists made significant concessions at Geneva, including a demarcation line farther north than they thought warranted, partly due to Soviet and Chinese pressure. Moscow desired better ties with Paris, hoping to impede a nascent (West) European military setup, the European Defence Community (EDC); Beijing, ratifying a Korean armistice, struck a moderate pose for Zhou Enlai's diplomatic debut. Some commanders preferred to fight on, but the Vietnamese accepted a political path toward unification. Exhausted, wanting to consolidate control over the North, fearing a US military intervention were no deal struck, the DRVN rulers were reassured by their patrons that the division was merely temporary. Embittered

4 Mark Philip Bradley, *Imagining Vietnam and America: The Making of Postcolonial Vietnam, 1919–1950* (Chapel Hill, NC, 2000), 146–76; Fredrik Logevall, *Embers of War: The Fall of an Empire and the Making of America's Vietnam* (New York, 2012), esp. 195–7; Mark Atwood Lawrence, *Assuming the Burden: Europe and the American Commitment to War in Vietnam* (Berkeley, 2005).

when the Geneva settlement hardened, the North Vietnamese concluded that they could not trust even communist allies to resolutely defend their interests; and that diplomatic pitfalls could imperil hard-won military gains.[5]

In the next war, convinced that aims not already conquered in combat could not be won "at the baize table," Hanoi would focus on attriting and ultimately vanquishing the enemy militarily and politically. It relegated diplomacy, *for the most part*, to a subsidiary front, not for serious bargaining (implying mutual compromise) but to ratify gains already won. Another legacy crucial for Vietnam War diplomacy was Geneva's creation of a body, delicately balanced between East and West, to monitor the accords' implementation. The three-nation International Commission for Supervision and Control (i.e., International Control Commission, or ICC) comprised communist Poland, Canada, and neutral India as chair. Despite modest early successes, the ICC soon predictably deadlocked. Yet, even as fighting resumed by the decade's end, no one wanted to pull the plug on this unique residual potential conduit between the parties. Though eventually headquartered in Saigon for logistical reasons, the ICC kept offices in Phnom Penh, Vientiane, and Hanoi, and Indian, Canadian, and Polish personnel could shuttle between the rival Vietnamese capitals (via neutral Cambodia and Laos, on dilapidated DC-3 prop planes) – a rare capability. The presence of a senior Polish diplomat (plus hundreds of troops) in Saigon was another ICC anomaly, since communist regimes shunned the Republic of Vietnam as an American lackey, instead maintaining embassies in Hanoi and fraternal contacts with the Lao Động (Vietnam Workers' Party, VWP).[6]

In the early 1960s, the ICC provided a mechanism for diplomatic bids to cool the Cold War's flaring Southeast Asian hot spot. In Dwight D. Eisenhower's last years and John F. Kennedy's first months in the White House, Laos, not Vietnam, preoccupied US officials. In spring 1961, the Geneva cochairs, the

5 Pierre Asselin, "The Democratic Republic of Vietnam and the 1954 Geneva Conference: A Revisionist Critique," *Cold War History* 11, 2 (May 2011), 155–95; Pierre Asselin, *Hanoi's Road to the Vietnam War, 1954–1965* (Berkeley, 2013); Lien-Hang T. Nguyen, "Vietnamese Historians and the First Indochina War," in Mark Atwood Lawrence and Fredrik Logevall (eds.), *The First Vietnam War: Colonial Conflict and Cold War Crisis* (Cambridge, MA, 2004), 41–55.

6 For an ICSC/ICC overview, written before major archives opened, see Ramesh Thakur, *Peacekeeping in Vietnam: Canada, India, Poland and the International Control Commission* (Edmonton, Alberta, 1984). Dissertations using declassified Polish, US, Canadian, and other sources include Margaret K. Gnoinska, "Poland and the Cold War in East and Southeast Asia, 1949–1965," Ph.D. dissertation (George Washington University, 2009); and Marek Wincenty Rutkowsky, "'Getting in the Ring with the Big Powers': India, Canada, Poland and the International Control Commission in Vietnam (1954–1964)," Ph.D. dissertation (National University of Singapore, 2017).

Soviets and British, summoned major participants back to the Swiss city to tackle the simmering Laotian conflict between (DRVN-backed) communist and anticommunist forces. In a rare moment of amity at their testy June 1961 Vienna summit, JFK and Nikita Khrushchev agreed to neutralize Laos. In July 1962, after a year of negotiations, the local and superpower actors – again including the United States and PRC despite the two lacking diplomatic relations – hashed out a coalition scheme formula to avoid a major war over Laos. (Washington felt it made more military and political sense to take a Southeast Asian stand against communism in Vietnam.)[7] Fleetingly, it seemed a precedent might be set for a broader accord. Neutral Burma's delegate even arranged a clandestine meeting between W. Averell Harriman, then assistant secretary of state for Far Eastern affairs, and North Vietnamese foreign minister Ung Văn Khiêm. (Harriman insisted on tight secrecy, fearful of upsetting Saigon.) The encounter opened with pleasantries (recalling FDR's support for Vietnamese independence from France, inquiring after Hồ Chí Minh's health) but soon devolved to charges of DRVN and American interference in Laos and Vietnam. Though Hồ Chí Minh around this time indicated (to analyst Bernard Fall) interest in a dialogue with the United States, this July 1962 conversation ended up being the highest-level US–DRVN contact until the 1968 Paris talks: Washington and Hanoi squandered a chance for an ongoing dialogue before stumbling into war.[8]

Kennedy had hoped the ICC might offer a means to deal with Vietnam and that India, which favored elections or unification, might help. But that idea faded after a dour late 1961 summit with Jawaharlal Nehru: India's leader mutely ignored JFK's invitation to suggest a path forward (possibly even including neutrality). Still, New Delhi, in an anticommunist mood due to its border dispute with China, voted with Canada in 1962, despite Poland's ire, to

7 A well-documented study of the Geneva conference on Laos is now possible, but still lacking. Soviet evidence can be found in Ilya V. Gaiduk, *Confronting Vietnam: Soviet Policy toward the Indochina Conflict, 1954–1963* (Washington, DC, 2003), esp. chs. 7–8; for recent accounts stressing US evidence, see Seth Jacobs, *The Universe Unraveling: American Foreign Policy in Cold War Laos* (Ithaca, 2012); William J. Rust, *So Much to Lose: John F. Kennedy and American Policy in Laos* (Lexington, KY, 2014); and Joshua Kurlantzick, *A Great Place to Have a War: America in Laos and the Birth of a Military CIA* (New York, 2017).

8 James G. Hershberg, "A Dialogue Aborted – The 1962 Geneva Encounter between Averell Harriman and North Vietnamese Foreign Minister Ung Văn Khiêm," in Christopher Goscha and Karine Laplante (eds.), *The Failure of Peace? Indochina between the Two Geneva Accords (1954–1962)* (Paris, 2010), 259–69. On FDR, see esp. Stein Tønnesson, "Franklin Roosevelt, Trusteeship, and Indochina," in Lawrence and Logevall (eds.), *First Vietnam War*, 56–73; and Stein Tønnesson, *The Vietnamese Revolution of 1945: Roosevelt, Ho Chi Minh, and de Gaulle in a World at War* (London, 1991).

condemn Hanoi's support for subversion in the South; though they balanced this charge with criticism of Saigon's military alignment with Washington, the rare ICC majority bolstered US claims that North Vietnam had stimulated the violence.[9]

With Geneva seemingly revived, Poland – which regularly consulted DRVN leaders – cautiously explored using its ICC status to mediate. During a January 1963 visit to New Delhi, in separate talks with Nehru and US ambassador John Kenneth Galbraith, Foreign Minister Adam Rapacki and aide Jerzy Michałowski (an ex-ICC delegate) promoted a Laos-like scheme to replace President Ngô Đình Diệm, neutralize South Vietnam (removing foreign, i.e., US, forces), and kick-start Hanoi–Saigon unification talks. No fan of Diệm, Galbraith liked the idea. So did the Soviets, who sensed an American desire to escape the Vietnam morass and lacked the desire of the People's Republic of China (PRC) for armed struggle. However, Hanoi balked, Washington demurred, and the matter lapsed.[10]

Far better known are the autumn 1963 intrigues surrounding Polish ICC commissioner Mieczysław Maneli. In September, amid tensions between Kennedy and Diệm after the Catholic-led Saigon regime's harsh crackdown on Buddhists, and swirling, well-founded coup rumors, columnist Joseph Alsop reported that Maneli was secretly conveying messages between Ngô Đình Nhu, Diệm's powerful brother, and Hanoi. Reports of an unusual Nhu–Maneli conversation fanned American fears that, with France's prodding and Poland's help, Saigon might improve ties with Hanoi, go neutral, and evict US forces. Alarmed, Washington intensified coup plotting against Diệm and Nhu to evade the supposed peril that South Vietnam might swerve toward neutralism and, inexorably, communism. (Of course, the United States might have been spared untold agony if such a deal *had* been cut.) After the military ousted the Ngô brothers in November, a few weeks before JFK's own murder, the mysterious "Maneli Affair" entered Vietnam War lore.

Decades later, Polish evidence revealed that Maneli's activities were inflated by reporters, suspicious US aides, and, perhaps, Nhu himself. Poland's ICC man had indeed conveyed Hanoi's interest in minor improvements in cultural, postal, and trade ties with Saigon, presumably to lure Diệm from Washington's orbit, but was not seriously mediating, nor had Warsaw even

9 Rutkowsky, "'Getting in the Ring with the Big Powers,'" ch. 5.

10 Margaret K. Gnoinska, *Poland and Vietnam, 1963: New Evidence on Secret Communist Diplomacy and the "Maneli Affair,"* Cold War International History Project, Woodrow Wilson International Center for Scholars [hereafter cited as CWIHP], Working Paper 45 (Washington, DC, 2005); Hershberg, *Marigold*, 24–5.

authorized him to see Nhu. Declassified American and Polish documents also expose hidden direct contacts in Saigon between Maneli and *US* officials (CIA operatives?) anxious to grasp his talks with Nhu and Hanoi and open a side channel to the only senior communist diplomat in South Vietnam's capital.[11]

The Maneli intrigue made no discernible progress toward peace, but suggested that ICC delegates, even if unable to fulfill their nominal mandate, might be critical communications links. Such channels remained vital, given the absence of normal US–DRVN relations and the communist insurgency's intensification, but Washington believed there was nothing to negotiate: Hanoi had no right to meddle in South Vietnam and should mind its own business – or suffer harsh consequences.

To transmit this blunt message, the ICC served well. In June and mid-August 1964, after US briefings, Canadian commissioner J. Blair Seaborn visited Hanoi, carrying an implicit threat of force and vague promises of economic aid should it desist. The formulation avoided the word "ultimatum," but the message was clear. Courteously receiving Seaborn, Premier Phạm Văn Đồng still insisted on a full US pullout from South Vietnam before any settlement; on Seaborn's second visit, Dong, angry after the Tonkin Gulf incident, declared that "aggression" could not cow Hanoi, rejected the de facto ultimatum, and forecast a communist victory. As Washington expected, the rebuff portended a military showdown. Ottawa concluded sourly that Washington had used it to threaten Hanoi rather than seek negotiations; Seaborn felt queasy at being Henry Cabot Lodge's "messenger boy." Seeing the exercise as futile, the Canadians flirted with ditching the ICC altogether, but gritted their teeth and awaited a more auspicious moment for diplomacy.[12]

In mid-1964, a push to reconvene Geneva went nowhere, blocked by Chinese and DRVN opposition. Still, as Washington plunged into Vietnam, the conference cochairs, the Soviets and the British, tried to restrain the

11 Gnoinska, *Poland and Vietnam, 1963*; James G. Hershberg, "'Dickering with Communists' and Pushing the Spaghetti in 'That Snake Pit Called Saigon': New Evidence on the ICC and the 'Maneli Affair,' 1963," for Vietnam, 1963 conference, co-sponsored by Vietnam Center and Archive, Texas Tech University, Lubbock, Texas, and US National Archives, Washington, DC, September 28, 2013.

12 *SDVW:NVPP*, 4–44; Andrew Preston, "Balancing War and Peace: Canadian Diplomacy and the Vietnam War, 1961–1965," *Diplomatic History* 27, 1 (January 2003), 73–111; Andrew Preston, "Missions Impossible: Canadian Secret Diplomacy and the Quest for Peace in Vietnam," in Lloyd C. Gardner and Ted Gittinger (eds.), *The Search for Peace in Vietnam, 1964–1968* (College Station, TX, 2004), 117–43. The "messenger boy" quote is from J. Blair Seaborn: telephone interview with the author, August 3, 2007.

burgeoning conflict – using differing means but with equal futility. The United Nations also, warily, got into the act.

The first and most controversial UN effort originated in the office of Secretary General U Thant in the summer of 1964. After (separate) summits with Khrushchev and LBJ, amid fears that Tonkin Gulf signaled a major war, the Burmese statesman quietly probed the North Vietnamese to see whether they might talk directly with American officials at a neutral site. (To transmit an "oral message," he used a Soviet aide, who passed it to Moscow.) Not belonging to the world body, the DRVN resisted direct UN involvement, but responded positively – in deepest secrecy – to Thant's inquiry, through the Soviet Embassy in Hanoi, expressing readiness to meet US officials.

The Johnson administration, however, responded diffidently. US ambassador to the UN Adlai Stevenson strongly supported starting talks, but later said privately that higher-ups told him to defer the matter until after the 1964 election. When Thant raised the idea again after LBJ had trounced Barry Goldwater, Stevenson found, to his frustration, that Washington remained uninterested, afraid that talking with Hanoi would rile Saigon, and the proposal died. The matter remained secret, an unexploded landmine, but Thant publicly hinted at his vexation in February 1965. Americans would realize that peace in Vietnam was possible, through "discussions and negotiations," he said, if they only knew the "true facts," but, alas, truth was war's "first casualty." The comment infuriated LBJ.[13]

1965: The Diplomacy of Escalation

By then, Johnson had resolved to – in the words of the famous January 27, 1965, "fork in the road" memorandum expressing the views of McGeorge Bundy and Robert McNamara – "force a change of Communist policy."[14] As hostilities intensified in early 1965, diplomacy took a back seat. Ottawa asked whether Seaborn might aid in communicating with Hanoi, but Washington declined.[15]

13 Mario Rossi, "U Thant and Vietnam: The Untold Story," *New York Review of Books*, November 17, 1966; Kraslow and Loory, *Secret Search*, 91–109; Walter Johnson, "The U Thant–Stevenson Peace Initiatives in Vietnam, 1964–1965," *Diplomatic History* 1, 3 (July 1977), 285–95; Bernard J. Firestone, "Failed Mediation: U Thant, the Johnson Administration, and the Vietnam War," *Diplomatic History* 37, 5 (November 2013), 1060–89. U Thant, *View from the UN* (Garden City, NY, 1978), 67. (See Soviet evidence in n. 24.)

14 McGeorge Bundy to Lyndon Johnson, January 27, 1965, *Foreign Relations of the United States, 1964–1968* [hereafter cited as *FRUS* with volume and year], vol. II, Vietnam, January–June 1965 (Washington, DC, 1996), doc. 42.

15 Preston, "Balancing War and Peace," 104–5.

In February, Johnson's decisions to bomb North Vietnam and send troops alarmed UK prime minister Harold Wilson, who tried vainly to resuscitate Geneva – to curb the violence, ensure London's involvement, and dampen discontent in his own Labour Party. Moscow briefly mused reprising its cochair role, but Beijing and Hanoi shot the notion down. Like his predecessor Clement Attlee, who had hurried across the Atlantic in December 1950 out of fear that Truman might use the atomic bomb in Korea to counter China's intervention, Wilson volunteered to cross the pond to see LBJ – only to be told over the phone, "with some sharpness," to mind his own business ("we ought not to run back and forth across the Atlantic with our shirttails hanging out").[16] Pressured domestically, Wilson promoted a British Commonwealth peace initiative, which included important nonaligned countries, but it fizzled, envisioning but never actually sending a mission to Hanoi.[17]

Separately, in the spring of 1965, seventeen nonaligned countries, including Algeria, Egypt, Ghana, India, and Yugoslavia – but not Sukarno's Indonesia, which vocally backed Hanoi – proposed a ceasefire and negotiations. Outside the ICC purview, New Delhi suggested stopping the violence and sending Afro-Asian troops to patrol the demilitarized zone along the 17th parallel; visiting Moscow in May, Nehru's successor as premier, Lal Bahadur Shastri, also urged a bombing halt, irking Washington (LBJ vainly hoped India, still hostile to China, would support him in Vietnam). These plans went nowhere, but reflected and exacerbated sharp divisions in the nonaligned movement between those prone to conciliate between East and West, and others, like Sukarno, inclined toward a more militant, Maoist-style stance against imperialism, colonialism, and US "neo-colonialism." (In 1966–7, historian Robert Rakove recounts, Washington's refusal to unilaterally stop bombing alienated even comparatively moderate nonaligned leaders such as Egypt's Gamal Abdel Nasser, Yugoslavia's Josip Broz Tito, and India's Indira Gandhi.)[18]

China stridently backed the Vietnamese communist armed struggle, but was not eager to clash militarily with the United States again as it had in Korea – and in April–May 1965 quietly used international diplomacy to "signal" Washington. The PRC message, conveyed most effectively through Britain (Beijing also tried to use Pakistan, Tanzania, and Indonesia), was carefully

16 Lyndon Johnson–Harold Wilson telecon, February 10, 1965, *FRUS, 1964–1968*, vol. II, doc. 103.

17 For the Commonwealth initiative, see FO 371 files, The National Archives, Kew, Richmond, UK. For British diplomacy, see Sylvia Ellis, *Britain, America, and the Vietnam War* (Westport, CT, 2004), and Nicholas Tarling, *The British and the Vietnam War: Their Way with LBJ* (Singapore, 2017).

18 Robert B. Rakove, *Kennedy, Johnson, and the Nonaligned World* (New York, 2013), ch. 7.

calibrated: China did not seek war, but would fight, responding asymmetrically, if the United States expanded its bombing onto Chinese territory (or, implicitly, if it invaded North Vietnam). Told of the Chinese stand, LBJ limited US escalation accordingly, and the two countries avoided repeating the Korean disaster. The evasion of another major Sino-American war, despite Washington and Beijing strongly backing rivals and China's geographical proximity, was a rare Vietnam-related diplomatic success, an essential precondition for the impending Sino-American opening, and a striking case of enemies learning from, rather than repeating, grim history.[19]

Amid the escalation, Washington and Hanoi engaged in a substantive secret direct dialogue in Paris in the summer of 1965, between DRVN diplomat Mai Văn Bộ and retired State Department official Edmund Gullion. But Hanoi mysteriously cut short these "XYZ" exchanges (as US officials codenamed them), which *The Pentagon Papers* dubbed a "most serious mutual effort to resolve matters of substance." After four talks, Bộ "did not show up for an arranged fifth meeting," for unclear reasons.[20]

As the United States entered the Vietnam maelstrom in late 1965, two controversies over international diplomatic failures embarrassed LBJ – and foreshadowed the "credibility gap" that would increasingly dog him. In November, the previously hidden abortive U Thant initiative surfaced, when a *Look* magazine article by CBS commentator Eric Sevareid revealed off-the-record comments Stevenson had made shortly before he died a few months earlier. Sevareid quoted him as saying, in his "final troubled hours," that Washington had spurned Hanoi's offer through Thant to open direct talks before and after the 1964 elections.[21]

Stevenson's posthumous revelations, coinciding with the bloodiest combat yet (in the Ia Đrăng Valley), rattled LBJ. Aides scrambled to deny that Washington had blithely ignored a real overture. Secretary of State Dean Rusk, who groused privately that Sevareid had "probably received a very substantial fee" and Stevenson was a "scintillating conversationalist," especially

19 James G. Hershberg and Chen Jian, "Reading and Warning the Likely Enemy: China's Signals to the United States about Vietnam in 1965," *International History Review* 27, 1 (2005), 47–84; James G. Hershberg and Chen Jian, "Informing the Enemy: Sino-American 'Signaling' and the Vietnam War, 1965," in Priscilla Roberts (ed.), *Behind the Bamboo Curtain: China, Vietnam, and the Cold War* (Washington, DC, 2006), 193–257; Lorenz M. Lüthi, "Reading and Warning the Likely Enemy – A Commentary: Signaling across Four Continents," *International History Review* 35, 4 (2013), 807–16.

20 Leslie H. Gelb and Richard K. Betts, *The Irony of Vietnam: The System Worked* (Washington, DC, 1979), 128; *SDVW:NVPP*, 74–115.

21 Eric Sevareid, "The Final Troubled Hours of Adlai Stevenson," *Look*, November 30, 1965.

off the record, with "a touch of Hamlet," acknowledged to Johnson that behind the tepid response to Thant was fear the South Vietnamese would be irked if it leaked that "the US was dickering for a settlement behind the[ir] backs."[22] Officials confirmed the story's outlines but denied politics had interfered or that Hanoi had wanted "serious" talks.[23]

Decades later, after the USSR expired, Russian archival evidence found by Norwegian scholar Mari Olsen confirmed that in August 1964 Hanoi *had* secretly agreed to rendezvous with a US representative in a neutral country.[24] Whether such contacts might have led anywhere is doubtful, but Washington had no real desire to find out: Seaborn's vain missions had sated its curiosity. The incident further poisoned dealings between the UN head and LBJ's administration: "Thant lied like a sailor," Rusk fumed.[25]

The Thant–Stevenson brouhaha had barely diminished when, in mid-December, a sequel erupted, involving Italy and a recent trip to Hanoi by Florentine ex-mayor Giorgio La Pira. A flamboyant, eccentric figure who did not inspire American confidence, La Pira told the Italian government that Hồ Chí Minh had said he was "prepared to go anywhere, to meet anyone," to negotiate peace; Rome's foreign minister, Amintore Fanfani, duly relayed the report to Washington. After Rusk skeptically demanded evidence of Hanoi's "real willingness for unconditional negotiations," Fanfani tried to clarify Hồ Chí Minh's position – but before getting a reply Washington bombed a power plant near Hải Phòng (the first major DRVN industrial target hit since the war began) and, after a garbled newspaper account, released secret Rusk–Fanfani correspondence. When Hanoi denounced the "peace hoax" as "sheer, groundless fabrication," US aides cited the comment as proof no opportunity was missed, but critics called it a predictable response to the bombing spike, perhaps gauged to reassure Beijing; Fanfani stewed.[26]

22 Rio de Janeiro embtel, November 18, 1965, *FRUS, 1964–1968*, vol. III, *Vietnam, June–December 1965* (Washington, DC, 1996), 572–5.

23 *New York Times*, November 16, 17, and 27, 1965.

24 On August 29, 1964, in Hanoi, eight days after relaying the direct talks idea to Phạm Văn Đồng, USSR chargé P. I. Privalov was told the North Vietnamese were "not against such a proposal but underlined that from their point of view the best solution was to meet at a conference in Geneva or in a neutral country that both agree upon." DRV deputy foreign minister Hoàng Văn Tiến treated the matter so warily that he banished everyone else from the room before providing the handwritten answer. See Mari Olsen, *Soviet–Vietnam Relations and the Role of China, 1949–1964: Changing Alliances* (London, 2006), 133, 190 n. 84.

25 Dean Rusk as told to Richard Rusk, *As I Saw It*, ed. Daniel S. Papp (New York, 1990), 463.

26 Vietnamese records indicate Hồ Chí Minh told La Pira that Hanoi was ready "to roll out the red carpet and strew flowers in their path to let the Americans withdraw," but they must first "stop their aggression" before negotiations could start. See Hershberg,

LBJ's 37-Day Bombing "Pause," 1965–1966

On the defensive, pressured to show his earnestness in seeking negotiations, LBJ in late December suspended bombing North Vietnam – a "pause" that would last thirty-seven days, until January 31, 1966 – and dispatched emissaries around the globe to explain US peace conditions, which Rusk publicly defined in fourteen points (a Wilsonian touch). Johnson fully anticipated the North Vietnamese would reject those terms, thereby justifying more escalation – "knocking Hell out of 'em" after he had "walked the last mile" for peace. Kraslow and Loory likened the frenetic "peace offensive" to a Texas hill country "fandangle," more boisterous entertainment than serious diplomacy.[27]

Aside from a polite exchange of aides-mémoires between US and North Vietnamese diplomats in Rangoon (code-named PINTA), American officials took most seriously a covert endeavor to transmit US positions to Hanoi via communist Hungary. After Rusk spoke with Budapest's top diplomat in Washington, Hungary, after duly consulting Moscow, promptly informed North Vietnam through its Hanoi embassy – but then delayed relaying the DRVN's negative reply, received in early January, hoping to extend the US bombing "pause" as long as possible.[28]

Though less appreciated at the time, communist sources disclose that a different Warsaw Pact nation, Poland, made a more senior, personal approach to Hanoi to relay US terms and even advocate, fraternally, entering direct negotiations. A late December stop in Warsaw by LBJ envoy Averell Harriman (who would then see Tito and Nasser, among others) prompted the Polish gambit. In a "stormy" encounter with Harriman, Poland's communist leader, Władysław Gomułka, excoriated US conduct – "You are behaving like bandits" – but authorized cooperation. Secretly, his foreign minister, Rapacki, sent Michałowski to hand-carry the US proposals to Hanoi. His communist odyssey (which Warsaw code-named Operation Lumbago after the ailment Michałowski faked to explain his absence) illuminated complex connections between sharpening Sino-Soviet tensions and the Vietnam War. Stopping

Marigold, 16–20; Kraslow and Loory, *Secret Search*, 126–36. For Italy and Vietnam War diplomacy, see Giovanni D'Orlandi, *Diario Vietnamita, 1962–1968* (Rome, 2006); Mario Sica, *L'Italia e la pace in Vietnam (1965–1968)* (Rome, 2013).

27 For LBJ's "pause," see Hershberg, *Marigold*, prologue; Kraslow and Loory, *Secret Search*, 137–57 (for "fandangle," see 137); and *Pentagon Papers*, VI.C.1 (*SDVW:NVPP*, 116–58).

28 For the Hungarian overture, see Hershberg, *Marigold*, 20–3, 59–61; Zoltán Szöke, "Delusion or Reality? Secret Hungarian Diplomacy during the Vietnam War," *Journal of Cold War Studies* 12, 4 (Fall 2010), 119–80; James G. Hershberg, "Peace Probes and the Bombing Pause: Hungarian and Polish Diplomacy during the Vietnam War, December 1965–January 1966," *Journal of Cold War Studies* 5, 2 (Spring 2003), 32–67.

in Moscow, he obtained Soviet foreign minister Andrey Gromyko's wary approval for his journey but, when the Pole reached Beijing, the Chinese blasted his mission (privately and even more nastily, though not by name, in public). Unimpressed by Michałowski's contention that Poland's "duty" was to relay the US message to Hanoi, the Chinese denounced anyone aiding Washington's "debauched activities," "lies and deceits," and "blackmail." Worse, they stalled Michałowski in south China (on the pretext of US bombing in northern North Vietnam) to leap-frog their own man to Hanoi to (the Pole recalled) "get ahead of my mission to prepare the grounds for its rejection." "God damn those Chinese," he grumbled on returning to Warsaw.[29]

The North Vietnamese needed little convincing, having just secretly ratified a decision to press for military victory.[30] After enduring a stern, Chinese-style lecture from DRVN foreign minister Nguyễn Duy Trinh, Michałowski was warmly received by Phạm Văn Đồng, who nevertheless rejected the US proposal to talk even when the Pole said this would be a "political failure," incomprehensible even to progressives and communists around the world. Yet Hồ Chí Minh himself – still DRVN president and symbol of Vietnam's revolution, even as party head Lê Duẩn increasingly controlled day-to-day decisions in Hanoi – rebuffed the Pole's appeals most stridently. "Ho growing old, obstinate, sermonizing, unrealistic," Michałowski cabled Warsaw after their talk, contrasting Đồng's thoughtfulness with the 75-year-old Hồ Chí Minh's rigid insistence on inevitable military victory.[31] Internal Vietnamese records confirm Hồ Chí Minh's brusque dismissal of the Pole's arguments and single-minded determination to evict the foreign invader:

> Why must the Americans go sticking [their] nose in others' business? The American government has sent their military forces here and now they must stop the invasion. That's all they need to do to resolve the problem. The Americans must piss off [*cút đi*]! No matter what we may suffer, the Americans must piss off! They must stop the invasion. Johnson's mouth says "peace" but his hand gives the order to mobilize troops. We are not rejecting anything. But our people must have peace and stability. We don't want to become the victors; we just want the Americans to piss off! Goodbye! [*Gút bai!*][32]

29 For the Polish overture and the Michałowski mission, see Hershberg, "Peace Probes and the Bombing Pause"; Hershberg, *Marigold*, esp. 39–59.

30 Pierre Asselin, "'We Don't Want a Munich': Hanoi's Diplomatic Strategy, 1965–1968," *Diplomatic History* 36, 3 (June 2012), 547–81.

31 Polish Embassy, Hanoi (Michałowski), sz. 299, January 6, 1966, Archiwum Ministerstwa Spraw Zagranicznych (AMSZ), Warsaw (obtained and translated by Leo Gluchowski).

32 Quoted in Lưu Văn Lợi and Nguyễn Anh Vũ, *Tiếp xúc bí mật Việt Nam – Hoa Kỳ trước Hội nghị Pari* (2002 ed.), 134–5 (trans. Jason Hoai Tran).

The Soviets also sent a mission to Hanoi in January 1966, headed by ex-KGB head Aleksandr Shelepin, but, sensing the prevailing Beijing-friendly hard line, did not pressure the Vietnamese toward negotiations. As Gromyko explained secretly to his Polish and Hungarian counterparts in late January, "The American proposals have honest elements to them, and they are looking for a way out, but for us the last word is with our Vietnamese comrades." Moscow likewise refused to deliver US messages when Soviet premier Aleksey Kosygin saw Vice President Hubert H. Humphrey in mid-January at Indian prime minister Shastri's funeral in New Delhi.

The predictable failure of the ballyhooed "pause" augured ferocious military escalation in 1966. Washington doubled its troop deployment to almost 400,000 and, in June, loosened restrictions on bombing North Vietnamese targets, including near Hanoi; casualties, both US and Vietnamese, correspondingly soared. With the war dominating the global agenda, international diplomacy persisted. In March and June 1966, in the modestly code-named Operation Smallbridge, Canada sent a new emissary to Hanoi: former envoy to China and India Chester A. Ronning. Phạm Văn Đồng received the "old Asia hand" politely, and Ronning (and Ottawa's ICC delegate, Victor C. Moore) reported *hints* of DRVN flexibility on talks, but Washington rebuffed Canada's pleas to respond positively, reinforcing its cynicism and resentment. "I hope you Americans are not escalating to a new peace offensive," Moore wryly told the US ambassador in Saigon, Henry Cabot Lodge.[33]

Marigold, 1966: A Chance for Peace – Or at Least Direct Talks?

Lodge, the former Republican senator, UN ambassador, and vice presidential candidate who had also been JFK's man in Saigon, soon became enmeshed in perhaps the war's most serious, tantalizing, and controversial international peace initiative: the Polish–Italian channel that Washington dubbed "Marigold." In late June 1966, Lodge received an excited urgent summons from his friend, Italian ambassador Giovanni D'Orlandi, to secretly rendezvous at his apartment with Polish ICC commissioner Janusz Lewandowski. Based on a recent trip to Hanoi (and talk with Phạm Văn Đồng), Lewandowski described surprisingly moderate DRVN stands, including a willingness to tolerate a separate, noncommunist South Vietnam for a prolonged period

33 For Ronning's missions, see *SDVW:NNVP*, 159–208; Preston, "Missions Impossible," 129–38; Hershberg, *Marigold*, esp. 88–9, 114–17.

before eventual national unification, and an apparent readiness to negotiate. Hearing the report, LBJ called it "the most realistic, the most convincing, the most persuasive peace feeler I've had since I've been president." On instructions, Lodge sent some probing queries northward in a meeting with the Pole (and Italian) on July 9 but, as it awaited Hanoi's reply, Washington began bombing of "POL" (petroleum, oil, and lubricants) sites around Hanoi and Hải Phòng – and the North Vietnamese angrily told the Poles to sever the exchanges with the Americans, which Lewandowski did, to a deflated Lodge (and D'Orlandi), on July 24.[34]

So ended Marigold's first act; its second, more serious phase occurred in the fall amid intensifying fighting, and after initiatives involving Poland's Warsaw Pact comrades Romania, Czechoslovakia, and Hungary sputtered.[35] At Italian urging, US officials had Lodge give Lewandowski in mid-November slightly softened American terms, including the so-called Phase A/Phase B gimmick for starting negotiations (Washington would stop bombing North Vietnam, seemingly unconditionally, but actually in exchange for mutually pre-agreed DRVN compensation) and potential toleration of a neutral South Vietnam. The Pole then went to Hanoi, and returned a fortnight later with the stunning news, delivered to Lodge on December 1 in another tryst at D'Orlandi's, that if the Americans really adhered to the stands Lewandowski described (reduced to ten discrete points) they could confirm them officially to Hanoi's ambassador in Warsaw; implicitly, the Pole's distillation of the US position could undergird peace talks.[36]

For a few days, to the handful of informed US, Polish, and Italian officials, a breakthrough seemed imminent: the opening of direct US–North Vietnamese conversations as early as December 6, based on mutually accepted outlines of a settlement. Then, after a week or so of limbo (and near-daily maneuvering between Rapacki and the US ambassador in Warsaw, John A. Gronouski), the effort collapsed, for reasons the two sides would angrily dispute, first secretly to each other, then in mutual leaking (to the pope, U Thant, and various governments, then reporters), later in historical arguments. Warsaw would claim that Washington ruined an authentic, promising peace prospect by bombing

34 Hershberg, *Marigold*, ch. 2.

35 For Kissinger and Czechoslovakia, see James G. Hershberg, "'A Half-Hearted Overture': Czechoslovakia, Kissinger, and Vietnam, Autumn 1966," in Gardner and Gittinger (eds.), *Search for Peace*, 292–320; and Niall Ferguson, *Kissinger*, vol. I, *1923–1968: The Idealist* (New York, 2015), 736–40. For Hungary, see Szöke, "Delusion or Reality?"; for Romania, Larry Watts, *Mediating the Vietnam War: Romania and the First Trinh Signal, 1965–1966*, CWIHP Working Paper 81 (Washington, DC, July 2016).

36 Hershberg, *Marigold*, chs. 4–5.

the Hanoi area for the first time in five months, despite repeated Polish warnings, on December 2, 4, and 13–14, trying to coerce the North Vietnamese to the table. Conversely, Johnson administration officials would contend that no real chance of peace ever existed; there was no evidence Hanoi ever even authorized the Poles to arrange direct talks; and the whole business was communist disinformation, scripted by Poland or the KGB.[37]

The dispute sank into history, unresolved. In 1983, commenting on the (sanitized) *Pentagon Papers* record of Marigold, the "most intriguing" and "most controversial" of all Vietnam peace efforts, Herring doubted the truth would ever be determined.[38] The Cold War's end, however, offered an unprecedented opportunity to probe the story's communist side. The present author investigated the case for more than a decade, using new Polish, Vietnamese, Soviet, Italian, Chinese, and other sources, culminating with the publication of *Marigold: The Lost Chance for Peace in Vietnam* (2012).

Marigold conclusively resolved the initiative's main mystery: did North Vietnam, in fact, authorize Poland to arrange direct US–DRVN exchanges in Warsaw, to confirm American adherence to the terms Lodge gave in Saigon to Lewandowski, which he then delivered to Hanoi? New Polish and Vietnamese evidence authoritatively established that Hanoi *had* done so (as Phạm Văn Đồng told Lewandowski on November 25 and 28 after reportedly stormy VWP Politburo meetings), and contrary to Johnson administration insinuations that Rapacki or Moscow had contrived the "breakthrough" as disinformation, to entice Washington into a bombing halt and expose its negotiating posture.[39] Moreover, evidently authentically interested, Hanoi secretly sent a courier to Warsaw bearing instructions for DRVN ambassador Đỗ Phát Quang and to interpret the talks with his US counterpart, Gronouski.[40]

However, disagreement persists on the "so what?" question. If United States–DRVN discussions in Warsaw *had* started in December 1966, might they have helped end the war sooner? Did DRVN leaders take the initiative seriously? Scholarly reactions to *Marigold*'s evidence, and arguments that

37 Ibid., chs. 5–17.

38 *SDVW:NVPP*, 211–13.

39 James G. Hershberg, "Cracking a Vietnam War Mystery," National Security Archive Electronic Briefing Book 369 (January 15, 2012); Hershberg, *Marigold*, ch. 4.

40 Mysteriously, the courier recalled that on December 6, 1966, DRV ambassador Đỗ Phát Quang expected Gronouski to appear at Hanoi's embassy in Warsaw, but he never arrived. The US record indicates no such meeting was arranged; Gronouski spent the day negotiating with Rapacki: interview of Nguyen Dinh Phuong by the author, June 1999, Hanoi; Hershberg, *Marigold*, chs. 6–7.

Hanoi *was* serious and the initiative a genuine "lost" chance for progress (direct talks, if not actual peace), have varied. Some experts seem convinced the initiative's failure may have been a significant squandered opportunity; others, including several fluent in Vietnamese sources, remain skeptical, stressing that both Hanoi and Washington hawks remained intent on military victory.[41] More conclusive answers await the opening of still-closed Vietnamese archival evidence, especially VWP Politburo records, DRVN Foreign Ministry–Warsaw embassy communications, and Foreign Minister Trinh's report on the affair.

Whether or not Marigold could have yielded progress, its failure, worse than a nonevent, seriously damaged any slim prospects for real negotiations. Each side blamed the other for acting in bad faith. Even if some in Hanoi, such as Đồng, had flirted with direct talks to explore allowing US troops to leave Vietnam "on a red carpet" – the better to reduce the costs of ultimately unifying the country under Northern, communist control, a sort of DRVN analogue to the "decent interval" concept attributed later to Richard Nixon and Henry Kissinger – the US bombing of Hanoi on the eve of scheduled bilateral talks seemed to vindicate hardline opponents' decision not to meet in Warsaw; they could now say "I told you so" and push for renewed stress on the military and political fronts in South Vietnam even while launching a "diplomatic offensive" within the "fighting while negotiating" framework (as refined in resolutions at the 13th VWP Central Committee Plenum in late January).[42]

When Marigold collapsed, the Johnson administration turned, in January 1967, to another international actor to probe Hanoi: France. Since Charles de Gaulle condemned the US intervention in Vietnam, Washington hoped to enlist the help of former French Indochina colonial administrator Jean Sainteny, who was friendly with Vietnamese communist leaders. After his last visit to Hanoi, in July 1966, Sainteny had discreetly passed word that the DRVN would not try captured US pilots as war criminals, a prospect that had alarmed Washington. His potential utility as a conduit had been underlined in September when he told Kissinger, then a Harvard professor, that Phạm

41 See, e.g., *Marigold* forums in H-Diplo (roundtable 14:16, November 1, 2012); and *Journal of Cold War Studies* 17, 1 (Winter 2015), 153–80; Lien-Hang T. Nguyen, *Hanoi's War: An International History of the War for Peace in Vietnam* (Chapel Hill, NC, 2012), 78; Pierre Asselin, "A Missed Opportunity for Peace in Vietnam?" *Diplomatic History* 38, 2 (April 2013), 473–5; Preston, *International Affairs* 88, 5 (2012), 25–6; Ang Cheng Guan, "'The Vietnam War from Both Sides: Revisiting 'Marigold,' 'Sunflower,' and 'Pennsylvania,'" *War and Society* 24, 2 (November 2005), 93–125.

42 Hershberg, *Marigold*, esp. 236–9, 540–54.

Văn Đồng had indicated that North Vietnam would pay "an important price" for a bombing halt; and that, as the "white man most trusted in Hanoi," he, Sainteny, could undertake a "private" mission to discern more concretely the DRVN position. Harriman, who met Sainteny in Paris in early December, believed that the latter could be an excellent candidate to make a *sondage*, and with Rusk's approval dispatched aide Chester L. Cooper to formally ask Sainteny to return to Hanoi. But de Gaulle, despite approving Sainteny's prior trip, now vetoed any such mission – mostly because he doubted LBJ's sincerity in seeking peace, a view reinforced by his awareness of Poland's contention that US bombing had sabotaged a promising peace effort in December (unbeknownst to Washington, Warsaw's version of Marigold had reached Paris via a secret leak to U Thant).[43]

Moscow as Mediator?

Marigold's failure, coinciding with Beijing's reduced influence in Hanoi as China sank into the chaos of the Cultural Revolution and Sino-Soviet friction grew, produced an important shift in Vietnam peace diplomacy: Moscow, after earlier squeamishness, was finally willing to directly mediate between Washington and Hanoi. An overture the Americans code-named SUNFLOWER initially involved, in January, direct US–DRVN diplomatic encounters in Moscow to trade positions and messages, but the first real sign of the changed Soviet approach came during Kosygin's February 1967 visit to Britain for a summit with Harold Wilson, which overlapped with a Tết holiday US bombing stoppage. To the surprise of Wilson and American diplomats in London liaising with him during the summit, the Soviet premier, "obsessed" by the frenzied Chinese hostility, seemed ready to pass to Hanoi the US stand conveyed by Wilson, including the so-called Phase A/Phase B formula to finesse the bombing negotiations Catch-22. "The British were first startled, then delighted, to find Kosygin eager to play [a]n active role as intermediary between the US and Hanoi," *The Pentagon Papers* note.[44] Hopes briefly soared, then collapsed – after LBJ, influenced by Walt Rostow, hardened the US terms Wilson had given the Soviets, then resumed bombing

43 James G. Hershberg, "Collateral Damage? 'Marigold,' Franco-US Relations, and Secret Vietnam Peace Diplomacy, 1966–1967," *Diplomacy and Statecraft* 28, 3 (September 2017), 403–30.

44 First revealed in Bernard Gwertzman, "Pentagon Papers Tell of Soviet Peace Role," *New York Times*, June 28, 1972.

North Vietnam hours after Kosygin left London. Feeling burned – and already furious at Washington for failing to inform him of Marigold when he sent his own foreign secretary, George Brown, to Moscow in late November 1966, thereby undermining his credibility with the Soviets – Wilson blamed the Americans for scuttling a genuine chance for a breakthrough: "I believe peace was almost within our grasp."[45]

With North Vietnam focused on military, not diplomatic, progress, the ever hopeful British leader undoubtedly overstated any opportunity that might have existed – yet the episode represented an important Soviet shift: Kosygin was also willing to convey to Hanoi US conditions for stopping the bombing received during his June 1967 encounter with LBJ in Glassboro, New Jersey.[46]

Despite Kosygin's cooperation, however, SUNFLOWER failed to elicit any reply from Hanoi, none Moscow considered worth reporting. Nineteen sixty-seven was a year for war in Vietnam: Washington further eased limits on Rolling Thunder bombing and upped troop levels from nearly 400,000 to almost half a million, and US casualties doubled. As peace hopes dimmed and global protests surged, international peace efforts yielded "little more than diplomatic shadowboxing," Herring noted.[47] Those pushing peace included Thant, who repeatedly called for a bombing halt and in March met North Vietnamese representatives in Burma; India, which attained the code name but not state of NIRVANA in fitful contacts with a DRVN diplomat in New Delhi, and led together with Canada a futile effort to spark a new ICC initiative; Algeria, which after receiving a visit from Harriman tried vainly to arrange a US rendezvous with the local National Liberation Front representative; the Scandinavians, whom Washington enlisted to sound out the North Vietnamese through Swedish and Norwegian diplomats in Warsaw and Beijing (ASPEN and OHIO); a retired Mexican diplomat who met Hồ Chí Minh (AZTEC); and assorted activists, organizations (Center for the Study of Democratic Institutions, Pacem in Terris, et al.), and journalists (radical

45 For "Sunflower" and the Wilson–Kosygin summit, see Ilya V. Gaiduk, *The Soviet Union and the Vietnam War* (Chicago, 1996), 96–107; Ellis, *Britain, America, and the Vietnam War*, ch. 5; John Dumbrell and Sylvia Ellis, "British Involvement in Vietnam Peace Initiatives: Marigolds, Sunflowers, and 'Kosygin Week,'" *Diplomatic History* 27, 1 (January 2003), 113–49; and Tarling, *British and the Vietnam War*, ch. 7.

46 Kosygin's Glassboro conversations with LBJ on June 23 and 25, 1967, can be found in *FRUS, 1964–1968*, vol. XIV, *Soviet Union* (Washington, DC, 2001), docs. 232, 235; and Gaiduk, *Soviet Union and the Vietnam War*, ch. 6.

47 *SDVW:NVPP*, 521.

Australian Wilfred Burchett waltzed in MATILDA) able to secure visas to Hanoi or contacts with DRVN agents such as Mai Văn Bộ in Paris.[48]

1967–1968: Approaching Tet – And Paris

However, from June to October 1967 the international diplomatic initiative that garnered the most sustained high-level attention from Washington (and later historians) involved France. This PENNSYLVANIA channel to Hanoi engaged not the de Gaulle government (he remained skeptical of LBJ but gave the initiative his "discreet approval"), but two French scientists, Raymond Aubrac and Herbert Marcovitch, with personal ties to Hồ Chí Minh, who agreed to mediate after meeting Kissinger at a Paris "Pugwash" session. Over several months, as Aubrac and Marcovitch visited Hanoi in late July, met Hồ Chí Minh and Đồng, and proposed further contacts aimed at a bombing halt and opening negotiations, the North Vietnamese seemed to dangle the prospect of a meeting in Paris between Kissinger and Mai Văn Bộ; the Frenchmen ferried messages between them. Within the Johnson administration, PENNSYLVANIA inspired more support from Defense Secretary Robert S. McNamara (who was fast losing faith that military force, in particular bombing, could produce victory) than Secretary of State Rusk, who doubted diplomacy could move Hanoi to an acceptable stand.

PENNSYLVANIA was Kissinger's most intense preview of his involvement in Vietnam diplomacy under Nixon, but contrary to his memoirs[49] it was not his Vietnam diplomatic debut: consulting for Johnson's State Department, he had already furthered prior efforts to use Czechoslovakia and Sainteny as mediators. Dropping tantalizing hints but repeatedly deferring a Bộ–Kissinger meeting (which the latter avidly desired), the North Vietnamese strung Washington along but were not really yet interested in negotiations, secretly marshaling their energies for the military strike that would take the form of the January 1968 Tet Offensive.[50] A captured DRVN document, leaked to a US reporter in mid-1967, hinted at Hanoi's disdain for diplomacy, quoting Lê Duẩn as telling Southern-based guerrillas that they should fight on even if

48 The US records on these initiatives are in *Pentagon Papers*, VI.C.4; *FRUS, 1964–1968*, vol. V, *Vietnam, 1967* (Washington, DC, 2002); and Hershberg, *Marigold*, chs. 12–13.

49 Henry A. Kissinger, *Ending the Vietnam War: A History of America's Involvement in and Extrication from the Vietnam War* (New York, 2003), 41, incorrectly gives this impression.

50 For PENNSYLVANIA, see *SDVW:NVPP*, 716–71; Robert K. Brigham and George C. Herring, "The PENNSYLVANIA Peace Initiative: June–October 1967," in Gardner and Gittinger (eds.), *Search for Peace*, 59–74; and Ferguson, *Kissinger*, vol. I, ch. 20.

North Vietnam agreed to talks with the United States. "We must foresee this so that we have a correct understanding and should not depend upon negotiations," the VWP general secretary, a Southerner, explained. "The reason why we advocate negotiations is that we want to prove that we are always concerned about peace on a correct basis."[51]

Ultimately, PENNSYLVANIA nudged the process forward only slightly, prodding LBJ to utter publicly, on September 29, the "San Antonio formula" in which he agreed to stop bombing North Vietnam once assured that step would "lead promptly to productive discussion" and assuming Hanoi would not "take advantage" of a bombing curb (for example, through stepped-up infiltration of the South).[52]

In late 1967 diplomatic activities related to the war intensified, but Hanoi and Washington had divergent motives in pursuing them. The Americans still wondered whether Hanoi might enter talks under acceptable conditions, but the North Vietnamese were setting the stage for the Tet Offensive, laying the groundwork for diplomatic follow-up to the military and political gains they anticipated, particularly with LBJ under domestic political pressure facing a reelection (and Democratic renomination) campaign. To do so they tiptoed toward talks. In November, at the annual Bolshevik Revolution festivities in Moscow, they dallied with the Poles again: Lê Duẩn told Gomułka Hanoi would negotiate *three weeks* after a US bombing halt – but when Warsaw's ambassador in Washington passed the news along Rusk was unimpressed with the rare DRVN commitment to a concrete date.[53] Hanoi went public with more forthcoming language in late December, when Foreign Minister Trinh clarified at a Mongolian reception that North Vietnam "will" – not "could" – talk with the United States once it "unconditionally" stopped bombing.[54]

By then, as a new principal channel, Washington had turned to Romania, whose leader, Nicolae Ceauşescu, was acting as a self-styled communist "maverick" by refusing to back the Kremlin in the Sino-Soviet split and balking at breaking ties with Israel during the June 1967 Arab–Israeli War like the rest of the Warsaw Pact. Bucharest had quietly tried since early 1965 to prod the North Vietnamese to talk and in late 1966 had perhaps, like the Poles,

51 Bernard Gwertzman, *My Memoirs: Fifty Years of Journalism, from Print to the Internet* (Bloomington, 2016), 77.
52 Editorial Note, *FRUS, 1964–1968*, vol. V, doc. 340.
53 Hershberg, *Marigold*, 639–40, 643–4.
54 Editorial Note, *FRUS, 1964–1968*, vol. V, doc. 451; "Hanoi Again Offers Talks If US Bombings End," *New York Times*, December 31, 1967, 2.

exerted some slight fraternal influence on them.[55] In the winter of 1967–8, with Moscow again staying aloof, its dialogue with the US and DRVN leaderships came to the fore. In an initiative State Department aides optimistically tagged PACKERS (after the inaugural Super Bowl's winners), Romania sent missions to Hanoi in December and January, conveying messages and seeking to reconcile the two sides' ever-so-slowly-converging stands on a formula to stop the bombing and start talking.[56] The fencing fizzled, yet the Romanians' careful, accurate, and discreet handling of the sensitive contacts impressed top US officials, who far preferred them to the Hungarians or Poles – so much so that LBJ, while vetoing Warsaw, would secretly approve Bucharest as a possible site for what became the Paris talks.[57] The exercise boosted Ceauşescu's ambition to elevate his country's (and his own) prestige: after he again defied Moscow by opposing the August 1968 invasion of Czechoslovakia, the incoming Nixon administration would choose Romania for another sensitive mediation mission, tapping it (along with Pakistan) to relay to Beijing US interest in normalizing Sino-American relations.[58]

As PACKERS faded in February, Washington tracked another channel to the North Vietnamese: the Italians, who reported being approached by Hanoi's ambassador to Czechoslovakia. What Fanfani did not tell Rusk was that Rome had assiduously pursued a dialogue with the DRVN in Prague since the previous summer, in contacts brokered by the Italian Communist Party and involving Marigold veteran Giovanni D'Orlandi, no longer Rome's envoy in Saigon. The initial contacts proved fruitless, but Hanoi had reopened the channel in mid-January – hoping to integrate the diplomacy with the upcoming offensive. Though wary, the Americans favored the Italian-mediated dialogue, and gave it another positive sports-related code name: KILLY, after the gold medal–winning French alpine skier Jean-Claude Killy. Fanfani and D'Orlandi hosted a secret DRVN delegation in Rome, yet a bid to link a bombing halt and negotiations start remained frustratingly elusive.[59]

55 Watts, "Mediating the Vietnam War."

56 *SDVW:NVPP*, esp. 801–15; Mircea Munteanu, "Over the Hills and Far Away: Romania's Attempts to Mediate the Start of US–North Vietnamese Negotiations, 1967–1968," *Journal of Cold War Studies* 14, 3 (Summer 2012), 64–96.

57 Hershberg, *Marigold*, 684.

58 Mircea Munteanu, "Communication Breakdown? Romania and the Sino-American Rapprochement," *Diplomatic History* 33, 4 (September 2009), 615–31.

59 For KILLY, see *SDVW:NNPP*, esp. 816–18; Sica, *L'Italia e la pace in Vietnam*; Hershberg, *Marigold*, 666–81; James G. Hershberg, "Prelude to Paris: New Evidence on Italy, Vietnam, and 'KILLY,'" paper for conference War, Diplomacy and Public Opinion: The Paris Peace Talks and the End of the War in Vietnam, 1968–1975, Centre d'Études d'Histoire de la Défense, Paris, France, May 13–15, 2008.

Ultimately, not international diplomacy but military and political developments finally brought the United States and North Vietnam into direct talks. LBJ, facing a powerful challenge from antiwar Democrats, abruptly exited the presidential race and sharply limited US bombing of North Vietnam on March 31, 1968; three days later, Hanoi (having invested so much in Tet) agreed to begin direct discussions. After a month of wrangling over a site for the talks, they agreed to meet in Paris, and bilateral US–DRVN exchanges effectively replaced third-party international diplomacy as the principal arena to seek peace, or at least peace talks.

Conclusion

International diplomacy offered only limited opportunities to ameliorate the Vietnam War given incompatible US and DRVN objectives, military confidence, domestic politics, and willingness to endure pain. As recounted above, the July 1962 Harriman–Ung Văn Khiêm conversation and 1964–5 U Thant initiative were probably missed chances to launch an ongoing US–North Vietnamese dialogue – which would at least have broken the taboo on direct contacts and enabled Washington and Hanoi to understand each other better, though whether this would have lessened, shortened, or avoided the conflict seems doubtful. Of the myriad international diplomatic initiatives during the 1965–8 escalation, Marigold *may* have offered both Washington and Hanoi a de facto "decent interval" medium-term solution (withdrawal of US troops for a DRVN deferral of unification), or at least a chance to enter direct discussions roughly a year and a half earlier than in fact happened – but it is hard to extract much hope, aside from mutual maneuvering, probing, and seeking benefit in international public opinion, from the numerous other peace campaigns and conspiracies, especially as both sides intensified military operations seeking a decisive blow, in the buildup to 1968.

So, was it all sound, fury, intrigue, and paper-pushing, signifying very little? In terms of the war's outcome, perhaps. Yet Vietnam diplomacy also both influenced and reflected wider developments in international affairs, especially the Sino-Soviet split and the Cold War – and offered clues to the move at the end of the 1960s toward both détente and Sino-American rapprochement.

On the communist side, international diplomacy offered a barometer to measure the Sino-Soviet split's intensity. With Beijing angrily opposing negotiations and ardently favoring armed struggle, the willingness of Warsaw Pact nations such as Hungary and Poland to take whirls at persuading Hanoi to enter talks with the Americans in 1965–6 signaled Moscow's cautious

approval of that course. In 1967, the Soviets' attempts to directly mediate, overcoming prior reticence, showed their exasperation with the Chinese and refusal to let Mao Zedong drag them into a war with the United States. Coming as the superpowers – despite differences over the Arab–Israeli War and other issues – finalized a nuclear nonproliferation treaty, the enhanced if still limited Soviet cooperation on Vietnam foreshadowed a broader US–Soviet détente and would persist, intermittently, on the Paris talks' sidelines. As for Hanoi, its spring 1968 consent finally to talk directly with Washington revealed that it had moved to Moscow's side of the communist quarrel, and aroused sharp protest from the Chinese – who even, bizarrely, blamed the DRVN's announcement of its readiness to meet the Americans, on April 3, 1968, for the assassination of Martin Luther King, Jr., the next day.[60] Sino-Vietnamese friction over negotiations hinted at sharper tensions to come – exacerbated by the 1971 Sino-US opening and climaxing, of course, in the 1979 border clash (the "Third Indochina War").

The Vietnam War's international diplomacy also had implications and complications for the West. Skeptical of Washington's deepening involvement, crucial NATO allies criticized LBJ's handling of peace overtures and, in the case of Ottawa, London, and Rome, felt burned by what they viewed as Washington's botching of initiatives in which they were involved. The diplomatic debacles increased the tension already developing between Washington and the West European allies over the war, as the Europeans rebuffed LBJ's entreaties to tangibly support South Vietnam and worried that their superpower patron had become grossly overcommitted and distracted in Southeast Asia.

Also tangible, if difficult to measure, was the failed international diplomacy's impact on US domestic politics. The charge that LBJ had fumbled peace efforts through incompetence – or worse, given the repeated untimely bombing raids just as diplomacy *seemed* on the verge of progress, deliberately sabotaged them in the hawkish belief that military pressure on Hanoi could produce a better outcome – stirred opposition to the president among anti-war Democrats, including former supporters on Capitol Hill. Disgust over Johnson's perceived mismanagement of Vietnam diplomacy helped inspire Senators Eugene McCarthy (D-Minnesota) and Robert F. Kennedy (D-New

60 Zhou Enlai–Phạm Văn Đồng conversation, April 13, 1968, in Odd Arne Westad, Chen Jian, Stein Tønnesson, Nguyen Vu Tung, and James G. Hershberg (eds.), *77 Conversations between Chinese and Foreign Leaders on the Wars in Indochina, 1964–1977*, CWIHP Working Paper 22 (Washington, DC, May 1998), 121–2; Qiang Zhai, *China and the Vietnamese Wars, 1950–1975* (Chapel Hill, NC, 2000).

York) to challenge LBJ for the Democratic Party's nomination in 1968 – a crucial part of the dynamic that prompted the president's shocking March 31 departure from the race to focus on the search for peace. Conversely, though naturally it is impossible to know how counterfactual history would have gone, had one of the diplomatic initiatives noted above, such as Marigold, produced direct US–North Vietnam negotiations, *even if they later broke down*, it seems far less likely that a prominent Democrat would have challenged an incumbent. Another speculative yet plausible question is whether, had ongoing US–DRVN discussions started in 1967 – again, even if they withered – the Tet Offensive's planning and hence timetable might have been delayed. Had it taken place months later, of course, the consequences for the US presidential campaign would have been immense.

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