

**ENDING AMERICA'S VIETNAM WAR :  
A STUDY OF THE ROLE OF PRESIDENT  
IN FOREIGN POLICY**

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CERTIFICATE

This is to certify that the dissertation entitled,  
"ENDING AMERICA'S VIETNAM WAR: A STUDY OF THE ROLE OF  
PRESIDENT IN FOREIGN POLICY", submitted by Mr. M. SREE  
KRISHNA V.V.S. NARAYANA in partial fulfilment of the  
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PHILOSOPHY of this University, has not been previously  
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before the examiners for evaluation.

  
(Prof. B.K. SHRIVASTAVA)  
Supervisor

  
(Prof. R.P. KAUSHIK)  
Chairperson

*TO*  
*MY PARENTS*

## PREFACE

The American failure in Vietnam occupies a unique place in the diplomatic history of the United States. Its devastating impact cannot be minimised for it affected every sphere of American life. There is no agreement among scholars as to what the real cause was, behind the failure, while there has been a general agreement on presidential supremacy in foreign policy. Under normal circumstances a president is less restrained by Congress, Media and Public opinion in foreign policy decisions. However, the Vietnam war is a special case where the battle ground had shifted from Vietnam to the United States.

President Nixon faced severe pressures from all quarters to end the Vietnam war. Besides, Nixon's presidency itself ended in ignominy consequent to the Watergate affair. He was under the impression that posterity would judge him on the basis of his foreign policy successes. He could not have envisioned, that his role in foreign policy would be questioned and compared with that of Kissinger. It is not an easy task to distinguish Nixon's policy to that pursued by Kissinger. An attempt is made here to analyse the role of President Nixon in ending the Vietnam war. A careful perusal of the vast literature on the vietnam war would show

that the role of president Nixon has not been critically examined. A modest attempt has been made here to determine Nixon's role and distinguish it with that of Kissinger.

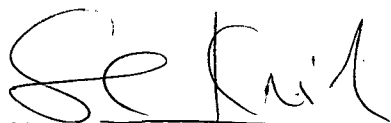
In completing this work, I am privileged to be guided by Prof. B.K. Shrivastava. I am deeply grateful to him for suggesting this topic and being patient all through especially when I committed silly mistakes. His insights helped me so much. However, the views expressed and errors of commission and omission, if any, are solely mine. I specially thank Prof. R.P. Kaushik, Prof. R. Narayanan, and Dr. K.P. Vijaya Lakshmi all from the Centre for American and West European Studies, School of International Studies, J.N.U., for teaching M.Phil courses that proved useful in research.

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**CHAPTER I**

**INTRODUCTION**



The Vietnam war, a singularly humiliating experience for the United States of America occupies a unique place in the diplomatic history of that country. The involvement of the United States in Vietnam spanned through successive six Presidencies viz. Truman, Eisenhower, Kennedy, Johnson, Nixon and Ford, only to suffer horrible reverses. The misconceived policy of containment of communism pursued in the case of Vietnam created the problem of how to withdraw American troops and achieve peace with honour that awaited president elect Nixon in 1969. Nixon believed in presidential supremacy in foreign policy. Before becoming president he said:

I have always thought this country could run itself domestically without a president. All you need is a competent cabinet to run the country at home. You need a president for foreign policy, no secretary of state is really important, the president makes the foreign policy.<sup>1</sup>

In his attempt to make foreign policy he allowed, Henry A. Kissinger, the then National Security Advisor and who later became Secretary of State to play a greater role in foreign affairs. Foreign policy of the United States became a two men show in Nixon's presidency. This was marked by an

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1. Quoted in, Roland Evans and Robert D. Novak, Nixon in the White House - The Frustration of Power (New York, 1971) p. 11.

era of detente in international relations. It is interesting to note that both Nixon and Kissinger, after leaving their respective offices, claimed that they were the real authors of detente and tried to underplay the role of other.

But none of them staked their claim for failure in Vietnam - a failure which the Nixon administration could only postpone at enormous cost both in monetary terms and human lives. The role of president Nixon in ending Vietnam war would become obvious only when distinction is made between Nixon foreign policy and the policy pursued by Kissinger. This is not an easy task which indeed led one observer to quip that just as Churchill designated Hindenburg and Ludendorff in *The World Crisis* as HL, it might be more accurate to refer to Nixon-Kissinger foreign policy by the symbol NK.<sup>2</sup> What is the role of president in foreign policy.

#### THE ROLE OF PRESIDENT IN FOREIGN POLICY

To lessen the complexity of foreign policy analysis many models have been put forward. Analytical models are generalisations that can help us pose and answer questions about foreign policy. Eventhough the models are many like

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2. William A. Hartley, "American Foreign Policy in the Nixon Era", Adelphi Papers (London) Vol 10, 1974, p.875.

Comprehensive Relational Decision Making Human Behaviour, Organizational Behaviour Democratic Politics, Pluralistic and Bureaucratic Politics, Ruling Elitism, International Politics, Transnational Politics, World System, etc. Only three models viz., the Pluralist, the Ruling Elite and the Human Behaviour models are especially relevant to examine the role of president.<sup>3</sup>

#### Pluralistic and Bureaucratic Politics Model

Main assumption of pluralist model is that the influence of public is not direct on foreign policy but occurs mostly through organized interest groups.<sup>4</sup> Only a small fraction of the population participates directly in policy making processes which include the president and his

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3. For discussion on models of policy making See Graham T. Allison, Essence of Decision (Boston, 1971).

Harold K. Jacobson and William Zimmerman (ed), The Shaping of Foreign Policy (New York, 1969).

James E. Dougherty and Robert L. Pfaltzgraff Jr, Contending Theories of International Relations (Philadelphia, 1971).

James N. Rosenau ed., International Politics and Foreign Policy 2nd edn. (New York, 1969).

Lloyd., Jensen, Explaining Foreign Policy (Englewood Cliffs N.J., 1982).

4. See Roger Hilsman The Politics of Policy Making in Defense and Foreign Affairs (New York, 1971).

\_\_\_\_\_, To Move a Nation (New York, 1967).

advisers, members of congress, bureaucrats, representatives of interest groups, academicians and some members of press. These are multiple power centres in the policy process owing to certain structural characteristics of the government like separation of the legislative and executive institutions. So there are, always, different individuals, groups and organizations concerned with any given issue. Because of the multiplicity of power centres disagreements about what policy should be, surface very often, and to avoid stalemate they bargain and compromise with each other. As a result the policy changes incrementally.

The traditional version of the pluralist model focuses on congress, the president and interest group organizations. An extension of this model includes the executive branch bureaucracy and it is called the bureaucratic politics model.<sup>5</sup> The bureaucratic politics model emphasis on the political tactics used by the executive branch policy makers as they promote individual and organizational interests and policy preferences. They form factions to promote or oppose particular policy alternatives. They leak sensitive

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5. For detailed discussion See Allison, n.3.

Morton H. Halperin, Bureaucratic Politics and Foreign Policy (Washington, 1974).

information to press to embarrass their opponents as well as withhold information from other organizational units to prevent them from exercising influence besides circulating rumours to discredit one another. Seen in this context it underplays the notion of national interest. Important determinants of foreign policy goals are group interests individual interests, bureaucratic interests and institutional interests.

#### Ruling Elite Model

According to this model power is assumed to be concentrated in a relatively small and cohesive group of political elites who have common interests and policy preferences. Internally, they manipulate the public and ignore its preferences, externally they pursue policies that are self-aggrandizing and detrimental to world peace, prosperity and Justice. Various versions of this model differ on the composition of ruling elite. But the central idea is same, policy process is undemocratic and the policies that result from it are imperialistic.<sup>6</sup>

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6. See Steven Rosen ed., Testing the Theory of Military Industrial Complex (Lexington, 1973).

## Human Behaviour Model

According to this model goals of foreign policy makers are to some extent dependent on the individual policy maker's own personalities and backgrounds. Individual personality, experiences, needs, values etc. affect policy makers perception of situations they confront. They can also affect the generation, evaluation choice of policy alternatives and selection of policy alternatives. Thus this model emphasizes the role of human behaviour in policy making, particularly the role of dysfunctional and even irrational behaviour and it highlights the variations among individuals and groups.<sup>7</sup>

However, all analytical models of foreign policy mentioned earlier suffer from several fallacies. Nevertheless, they are useful to direct and fix the focus of

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7. For detailed discussion See  
Herbert C. Kelman, International Behaviour : A Socio Psychological Analysis (New York, 1965).

Margaret G. Herrmann and Thomas W. Milburn (eds) A Psychological Examination of Political Leaders (New York, 1977).

Lawrence S. Falkowski ed., Psychological models in international politics (Boulder, 1979)

M.G. Herrmann, "Explaining Foreign Policy Behaviour Using the Personal Characteristics of Political Leaders", International Studies Quarterly (London) vol.24 (1), March 1980, pp. 7-46.

analysis on relevant questions : what are the formal and informal sources of presidential power? How much power do presidents and their advisors have? What are the constraints on presidential power? How do a president's background and personality affect policy making.

### **Presidential Power In Foreign Policy Making**

President's position in foreign affairs is preeminent. It derives in part from the authority granted to him in the Constitution. It also follows from the combination of judicial interpretations, legislative acquiescence. Personal assertiveness and custom and traditions.<sup>8</sup> The Constitution grants president few authorities but his authority in each area is limited by constitutionally prescribed congressional authority. Article II provides that he shall have the power, upon the advice and consent of the Senate, to make treaties and to appoint ambassadors and other public ministers and consuls whereas a later section empowers the president to receive ambassadors and other ministers. There is little else that deals explicitly with matters of foreign policy.<sup>9</sup>

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8. Charles W. Kegley Jr., and Eugene R. Wittkopf, American Foreign Policy : Pattern and Process (New York, 1987), edn. 3., p. 240.

9. Louis Henkin, Foreign Affairs and the Constitution (New York, 1972), p. 67.

But the totality of presidential power is enormous. The Constitution also makes the president the nation's chief legislative and executive officer and the commander-in-chief of its armed forces. Moreover court repeatedly conferred upon the president a broadly defined foreign affairs power. For example Curtis-Wright decision of supreme court in 1936 made president the sole organ of the federal government in the field of international relations.

Besides constitutional provisions president's power depend to a great extent on other factors which affect his position in the executive branch, his relations with congress and his public standing.

#### Executive Office of the President

Within the executive branch the President's position is substantially strengthened by the staff support he receives from the Executive Office of the President (EOP) -a large group of people who are individually and collectively among the most powerful participants in the policy process. The EOP was created in the Roosevelt administration by accepting basic recommendations of Brownlow committee. The Brownlow committee recommended two types of assistance to president. Presidential personal assistants would serve immediate political interests, the institutional staff would provide



continuity and a government wide perspective.<sup>10</sup> The EOP was expanded from time to time since "the man in the White House has decided that because of proximity and the absence of some key checks, his executive office units are the vehicle for achieving programmatic success."<sup>11</sup> All major components of EOP viz. White House Office, Office of Management and Budget, National Security Council, Council of Economic Advisors, Office of the US Trade Representative, Office of Science and Technology Policy, Council on Environmental Quality and Office, are involved in foreign policy making. A few of the components are especially important in foreign policy making. White House Office which includes many of the President's closest advisors plays an important role in foreign policy decision making especially when policy issue has significant political consequence in domestic sphere. Further, the Office of the Management and Budget is important in defence spending issues. Likewise, the Office of the Science and Technology Policy plays a role in advanced weapon issues. Nevertheless, one component that is centrally involved in foreign policy making is the National Security (NSC).

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10. Larry Berman, The New American Presidency (Boston, 1981) p. 104.

11. Ibid, p. 109.

## National Security Council

The National Security Council was created by the National Security Act of 1947 to advise the president with respect to the integration of domestic, foreign and military policy relating to national security. Statutory members of the council include the President (as chairman), Vice-President, and Secretaries of State and Defence. The Director of the Central Intelligence Agency (CIA) and Chairman of the Joint Chiefs of Staffs and the Director of the Arms Control and Disarmament Agency are statutory advisors. Numerous other officials participate informally. The significance of the NSC lies in the organization and procedures that have been developed around it.

The NSC staff is headed by the Assistant to the President for National Security Affairs who is one of the President's principal advisors on foreign policy. Aide with Eight arms, is the word Bradley Patterson chose to describe the multiple functions of NSC advisor. The eight arms or roles, described by him are: process manager, or source of independent policy advice, packager of information, Monitor of what happens to policy execution, as negotiator as a crisis manager, articulator of policies and as operator.<sup>12</sup>

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12. See Bradley H. Patterson, Jr., The Ring of power - The White House Staff and its Expanding Role in Government (New York, 1988). pp.92-128.

Kissinger, National Security Advisor to president Nixon, described his role as a source of independent advice:

A Security advisor serves his president best by never simply ratifying the bureaucratic consensus, he should always be the devil's advocate, the tireless asker of questions, the prober of what is presented as selfevident<sup>13</sup>

However the mere existence of an NSC system does not necessarily assure that the president's advisors and the rest of the executive branch will always be responsive to his wishes. Because he cannot devote his undivided attention to any one foreign policy problem and because his advisors and other executive branch officials often have their own policy preferences, the president is often frustrated by his inability to get the executive branch to implement the policy he prefers<sup>14</sup>.

The role of executive departments and agencies in foreign policy making may become subservient to that of EOP as a result of this frustration. Influence of the Department of State, an executive agency which bears the primary responsibility for the conduct of foreign relations, the

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13. Henry A. Kissinger, White House Years (Boston, 1979), p. 666.

14. Thomas L. Brewer, American Foreign Policy - A Contemporary Introduction (Englewood cliffs, NJ, 1986), 2nd edn., p. 155.

Department of Defense, the CIA and other executive departments and agencies as institutions in foreign policy making process may not be of primary importance always, because of divergence in policy preferences and attempts to protect organizational fiefdoms by respective bureaucracies. Heads of these departments if housetrained by bureaucracy often resist policy preferences of president, may lose their clout in policy making process.

As I.M. Destler, a foreign policy expert, writes, "The interests of executive branch organizations are not necessarily synonymous with the interests of the president. The people who staff them have often held their positions long before any given president is elected, they are likely to hold them long after he leaves and they frequently equate individual survival with organizational survival. To them the president often appears as a transient meddler in their business".<sup>15</sup>. The problem of gaining control over bureaucracies confronts all presidents. As a consequence, the EOP was expanded over the years. But ironically bureaucracy viewed as a fourth branch of government has become difficult to control.

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15. I.M. Destler, Presidents, Bureaucrats and Foreign Policy (Princeton N.J., 1974).

Cited in Kegley and Wittkopf, n.8, p. 245.

When it comes to the Congress powers granted to it by Constitution were substantial from the start. Its specific foreign affairs powers deal with the regulation of international commerce, the punishments of piracies and felonies committed on the highseas and offenses against the law of nations and declaration of war congressional control of purse strings and general legislative powers also grant great authority to affect flow and form of foreign relations. President often meets congressional resistance to his policy preferences. He attempts to persuade members of congress to help him. His success depends on many factors, but one of the most important is his professional reputation<sup>16</sup>.

Media and Public Opinion can restrict a president's ability to pursue his preferred policies. Further, variations in public standing tend to increase or reduce congressional resistance to his wishes. Nevertheless, the president has considerable leeway in his choices. The alternative that he chooses, the way in which he selects his option among them and his success in gaining support for his decisions depend on his own personal traits. Keeping in view this, the personality of the president is to be considered for understanding foreign policy decisions.

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16. Richard E. Neustadt, Presidential Power (New York, 1976), Chapter 4.

## Personality of President

James D Barber, a political scientist, observes, "Every story of presidential decision making is really two stories; an outer one in which a rational man calculates and an inner one in which an emotional man feels. The two are forever connected<sup>17</sup>. When president makes decisions, his feelings about himself particularly selfesteem affects his decisionmaking style. Nixon himself prior to becoming president wrote,

Reactions and responses to crises is uniquely personal in the sense that it depends on what the individual brings to bear on the situation - his own traits of personality and character, his training, his moral and religious background, his strengths and weaknesses.<sup>18</sup>

To gain access to personalities, belief systems and decision making processes of individual psychological approach to the study of foreign policy offers a number of techniques. Some of them are to study how individuals use words and symbols, using secondary sources for traditional biographical analysis and more unconventional psycho-historical approaches, operational code analysis, formal content analysis and events-data analysis. However, these are very costly to be available to all researchers.

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17. James D. Barber, The Presidential Character (Englewoodcliffs N.J., 1972), p.7.

18. Richard M. Nixon, Six Crises (New York, 1968), p xxv.

Presidential performance is partly a function of the president's personality. However, the personal sources of a president's style, power and policies are always operative within the institutional constraints of the presidency, public, congressional and even bureaucratic expectation about presidential behaviour, all restrict an individual president's leeway yet, president is able to adopt his preferred policies and to do so according to his own decision making style to a great extent.

Under normal circumstances president is less restrained by Congress, Media and Public Opinion in foreign policy decisions. However, Vietnam war is a special case where the battle ground shifted from Vietnam to the United States and led to societal upheaval.

#### THE GROWING INVOLVEMENT OF THE UNITED STATES IN VIETNAM

For the first time in its history the United States lost a war -the war in Vietnam. A number of theoretical constructs to explain this abysmal failure were putforward by various scholars.

Leslie Gelb, an active policy maker, observed that vietnam policy had obviously failed but the system had infact worked well. For him, "The paradox is that the

foreign policy failed, but the domestic decision making system worked".<sup>19</sup> However, many scholars disagreed with this assessment for differing reasons. According to them the policy failed because the policy making system failed. Some of them insisted that the political skirmishings and the bureaucratic politics fought out in the Washington hierarchy had been decisive, they had distorted orderly procedures of policy perception and implementation.<sup>20</sup>

Some others thought incremental decision making led to this failure. According Theodore Draper, "Incrementalism ran rife; one miscalculation led to another and instead of adapting to a deteriorating situation, as organizational theory would recommend, an enormous disproportionate military and political investment was made simply to sustain an unwise commitment".<sup>21</sup>

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19. Lesley H. Gelb with R.K. Betts, The Irony of Vietnam : The System Worked (Washington D.C., 1979), p. 2.
20. See Jenson, n. 3.  
L. Bloomfield, The Foreign Policy Process (Englewoodcliffs, N.J., 1982).  
W. Goldstein, "The American Political System and the Next Vietnam", Journal of International Affairs (New York) Vol.25 (1), pp. 91-119.
21. Theodore Draper, Abuse of Power (New York, 1967), p. 161.



The literature on Vietnam can be classified in terms of differing interpretations of political behaviour. A first set of theorists applied 'rational actor model' of analysis to explain the defects in strategic planning, they found fault with ideological dogmas and the containment doctrines of coldwar.<sup>22</sup>

The weaknesses of decision making system in Washington were brought out by some other scholars. It was not the irrationality of policy choices that worried them, and that confused other nations whether they were allies (especially in Saigon) or adversaries. But it was the confusing behaviour of the policy makers in the NSC and rivalry for power which drew their criticism. They pointed out that it was the failure of political input (procedures) rather than of policy output that explained the continuing debacle in Vietnam. The choice of policy goals was relentlessly wrong,

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22. Senator Fulbright criticized the foolish notion of United States, World Policeman role in William J. Fulbright, The Arrogance of Power (New York, 1966), p.9.

Morgenthau pointed out fundamental misperception of national interest in Hans J. Morgenthau, Politics Among Nations (New York, 1978), 5th edn.

Also see D. Zagoria, Vietnam Triangle : Moscow, Peking, Hanoi (New York, 1968).

largely because the process of choosing and implementing policy was steeped in confusion.<sup>23</sup>

Leslie Gelb, while evaluating the major criticisms wrote,

the pragmatic managers of national security may have acted egotistically, the bureaucracy might have been trapped in its own falsehoods, and successive presidents might have fooled the congress and the electorate (if not themselves). But in the end there were all third order issues because the US political bureaucratic system did not fail, it worked.<sup>24</sup>

Apart from the discussion on whether or not the system failed, the historical account of American involvement in Vietnam through four successive presidencies is projected to understand the crisis that awaited Nixon administration.

#### Vietnam - A Background

Vietnam together with Laos and Cambodia is collectively known as Indo-China which form the eastern part of the Southeastern extremity of Asia. The long history of

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23. See Allison, Graham T., Remaking Foreign Policy : The Organisational Connection (New York, 1976), pp 36-38.

Also see M. Halperin with D.N. Hoffman, Top Secret National Security and the Right to Know (Washington, 1977), Hilsman, n.3.

24. Gelb, n.19, p. 353.

vietnamese shows that they always resisted foreign rule. They incessantly struggled for freedom from the Chinese and the French.<sup>25</sup>

The French, last colonisers of Vietnam, came into contact with Vietnamese during the seventeenth century. They obtained commercial concessions from the Chinese emperor in 1845. By 1885, they could establish colonial rule which came to an end with the Geneva accords of 1954 - except from a brief period of six months between March and September 1945, when the control over Vietnam temporarily passed on into the hands of the Japanese and then on to the occupying forces of Britain and China. The French faced Vietnamese resistance from the time they established their protectorate over Indo-China in 1884. However, till the end of nineteenth century, the resistance was in the nature of an attempt to reinstate the dynasty and was confined to the mandarins rather than as a popular movement with a broad platform for political and social reform.<sup>26</sup>

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25. For history of vietnam see Helen B.Lamb, Vietnam's Will to Live (New York, 1972).

Joseph, Buttinger, The Smaller Dragon : A Political History of Vietnam (New York, 1958).

26. Susheela Kaushik, The Agony of Vietnam - The Origin and Background of American Intervention in Vietnam (New Delhi, 1972) p. 4.

With the turn of the century Vietnamese were greatly inspired and influenced by the nationalist movements in China and Japan. After 1917, when the Manchu regime in China was rooted out Canton became an important centre for organizing the Vietnamese nationalist movements. It was here that they came into contact with the revolutionary nationalism of Europe. During the first world war, many Vietnamese in France learned at firsthand about French revolution. Moreover, the Bolshevik revolution in Russia greatly influenced Vietnamese nationalists. Since the 1920's the pro-Russian and pro-communist elements came to be introduced into the nationalist movement. The resurgence of Vietnamese nationalism in 1920's, the birth of the communist movement could be traced to the emergence of one great personality - Ho Chi Minh. The Vietnamese revolution was in many ways the personal creation of one charismatic leader Ho Chi Minh.<sup>27</sup>

Ho Chi Minh, who was also called as Nguyen Ai Quoc (Nguyen, the patriot) and the original name being Nguyen Van Tranh, came in touch with western concepts of nationalism and communism during his early years of life in Paris and London. He joined the French communist party and worked for

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27. George C. Herring, America's longest war - The United States and Vietnam 1950-1975 (New York, 1979), p. 1.

more than two decades as a party functionary and revolutionary organizer. In 1930, he organized Indo-Chinese Communist Party (ICP) by uniting three different communist parties - Indo-Chinese communist party, Annamese Communist party and Indo Chinese communist union. He returned to Vietnam in 1940 and in May 1941 formed the Vietnam DOC Lap Dong Minh, called simply as Viet Minh, that ended French rule.<sup>28</sup>

When French surrendered to Germany in the second world war (1940) Japanese marched into Vietnam but allowed French colonial authorities to retain nominal power till March 1945. They deposed the puppet French government and formally established their rule in 1945. Viet Minh, working closely with an American intelligence unit waged impressive guerrilla warfare against Japanese. When Japanese surrendered in August 1945, Viet Minh quickly occupied government headquarters in Hanoi and proclaimed the independence of Vietnam.<sup>29</sup> They had a semblance of control

28. For biographical account of Ho Chi Minh see Charles, Fenn, Ho Chi Minh - A biographical Introduction (London, 1973).

Jean Lacoutre, Ho Chi Minh : A Political Biography trans., Peter Wiles (New York, 1968).

29. Ellen J. Hammer, The Struggle for Indochina (Stanford, 1954), pp.11-53, 94-105.

John Mc. Alister Jr. Vietnam The origin of Revolution (New York, 1969), Passim.

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over seven provinces, and Tonking. On 2 September, the Democratic Republic of Vietnam (DRVN) was formed. American army officers were present during the independence celebrations on that day.

Nevertheless, independence of Vietnam would not have been achieved without a bloody war precisely because, the French had plans to regain control and rule Vietnam. The Viet Minh, though firmly entrenched and well organized in the North was comparatively weaker in the South. Hence, the French, with the help of British occupation forces were able to reestablish their control over Southern part of Vietnam. Negotiations between the French and Viet Minh dragged on for more than one year proved inconclusive. The shelling of Haiphong by a French cruiser in November 1946 triggered war.<sup>30</sup> As Bernard Fall wrote,

Militarily the French forces sent to Indochina were too strong for French to resist the temptation of using them; yet not strong enough to keep the Viet Minh from trying to solve the whole political problem by throwing the French into the sea.<sup>31</sup>

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30. Hammer, n.29, pp.148-202.

31. Bernard B. Fall, Street without Joy - Insurgency in Indochina 1946-1963 (Harrisburg, 1961), p. 26.

## American Involvement

American involvement in Vietnam prior to Nixon's ascendance to the presidency is divided into three phases. In the Phase -I United States unsuccessfully supported colonial French against Vietnamese nationalists led by Ho Chi Minh. With the signing of Geneva accord in 1954, the French involvement ended. It is in the second phase of its involvement that lasted till 1964; the U.S. sabotaged Geneva agreement and tried the impossible task of nation-building in South Vietnam. The U.S. partnership with Diem, the president of South Vietnam was at strain and consequently in a coup'd etat it 1963 he was overthrown. The alleged role of U.S. in the Coup made it responsible for the fate of any successive government in Vietnam. The Kennedy administration's decision to send military personnel in 1961-62 marked a shift in U.S. policy and honourable disengagement was made more difficult. In the third phase, the United States, under Johnson presidency, went for a war in Vietnam and suffered horrible reverses. By the end of 1968, U.S. announced halt to bombing North Vietnam and decided in favour of a negotiated settlement.

### a) Phase - I (1950-1954)

President Franklin D. Roosevelt appeared to have supported the cause of independence of vietnam during the

world war II and opposed the return of Indochina to France. He advocated placing Indo-China under international trusteeship. But in 1945, he retreated from this stand since British were strongly opposed to the trusteeship. He endorsed a proposal that need mothercountry's approval to place the colony in trusteeship.<sup>32</sup> He died in April 1945, and the then Vice President Harry S. Truman took over as president of the United States.

During Truman presidency American policy towards Vietnam became more and more favourable to France. After second world war, the United States and the Soviet Union emerged as superpowers and both started looking at the newly emerging developing nations through ideological coloured glasses and competed for supremacy. Moreover, Western Europe was important in the cold war that was beginning to take shape. The US anxious to get their support extended support to the former colonial powers as quid pro quo for their support for U.S. in cold war. Eventhough, Hochi Minh openly appealed for American assistance and the U.S. diplomats in Vietnam stressed that, regardless of his ideology Ho Chi Minh had established himself as the symbol of nationalism

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32. Herring, n.27, pp.5-6.



and struggle for freedom. The Truman administration refused to take any step to help him as it was obsessed with communist menace in Europe. By early 1947 it had arrived at the conclusion that Ho Chi Minh was Moscow's agent. During the first three years of Indochina war, the U.S. maintained a distinctly pro-French neutrality.<sup>33</sup> In 1949, the USSR exploded its first nuclear device and China went communist. These two events greatly enhanced American threat perception on December 30, 1949 president Truman approved a Key National Security Council study on Asia numbered N.S.C. 48/2. The document directed,

"the United States on its own initiative scrutinize closely the development of threats from communist aggression. It observed that particular attention should be given to the problem of French Indo-China"<sup>34</sup>

American strategists were of the view that South-East Asia was vital to the Security of the United States. By early 1950, American policy makers had formulated the "domino theory", which argued that the fall of Indochina to communism would bring about in rapid succession the collapse of other nations of South East Asia. The strategic reassessment in 1950 in the context of the Korean War and

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33. Ibid, p.8.

34. Kaushik, n.26, p. 62.

the possibility of French defeat in the same year ended the American neutrality and produced a commitment to provide France military and economic assistance.

The French instituted puppet Bao Dai government to win nationalists in Vietnam politically. In February 1950, the Truman administration formally recognized Bao Dai government and initiated plans to support it with economic and technical assistance. Meanwhile, the Korean War broke out in the summer of 1950 and consequent Chinese intervention in it gave credence to the American paranoia of global communist strategy.<sup>35</sup> In October, 1950 the French suffered Cao-Bang disaster - one of the greatest defeats in its history of colonial warfare. In the words of Bernard Fall, "For the French Indochina war was lost then and there".<sup>36</sup> Nevertheless, the Truman administration refused to commit ground forces to Indochina under any circumstances. This seems to be the result of American experience in Korea for Secretary of State Dean Acheson said, "we could not have another Korea, we could not put ground forces into Indochina"<sup>37</sup>

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35. Ibid, p. 84-87.

36. Bernard B. Fall, The Two Vietnams - A Political and Military Analysis (Boulder, 1984) p. 111.

37. Acheson Memorandum June 17, 1952 Mike Gravel (ed), The Pentagon Papers (Boston, 1971) Vol.1, p. 381.

The United States by the end of Truman presidency was bearing more than 40 per cent of the cost of war and had established a stake in the outcome.

The Republican administration of Dwight D. Eisenhower accepted without modification the Indo-China policy bequeathed to it by the Democrats. Eisenhower and his Secretary of State John Foster Dulles agreed that the fall of Indo-China to communism would cause loss of all South-East Asia. However, they were equally reluctant to commit American combat forces. But agreed that, France must remain in Indo-China and bear the burden of conflict. They pressurised the French to adopt more offensive war strategy and end the war. In response, the French, initiated the Navarre plan known by the name of French General Henry Navarre which required an immediate reinforcement of the French expeditionary corps in such key fields as artillery and mobile infantry. After extracting a formal French promise to pursue the Navarre plan, the US in 1953 agreed to provide France with an additional \$385 million in military assistance. Dulles proclaimed publicly that, the new strategy would "break the organized body of communist aggression by the end of the 1955 fighting season."<sup>38</sup> But

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38. Fall, n.36, p. 122.

actually Navarre himself in a secret report to his government stated that war could not be won in the military sense and that all that could be hoped for was a draw.<sup>39</sup> This strategy was soon abandoned in the face of drastic deterioration in the military situation. In the spring of 1954, Viet Minh led by General Vo Nguyen Giap succeeded in getting Navarre to fritter away his reserves into a dozen airheads around Indo-China. And he suddenly called-off his northern attack and threw his four divisions on Dien Bien Phu. When the French surrender at Dien Bien Phu looked imminent, the U.S. made frantic efforts to involve its NATO allies and proposed United Action.

Eisenhower wrote a letter to British Prime Minister Churchill on 4 April, 1954 requesting him to join in a united action in Vietnam.<sup>40</sup> However, Churchill and his foreign secretary Anthony Eden did not share American fear that fall of vietnam would bring the fall of whole South East Asia. They did not want to entangle Britain in a war, they felt could not be won. French were in the beginning opposed the idea of internationalizing war, but later agreed

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39. Henri Navarre, Agonie de l'Indochine (Paris, 1956) cited in Fall, n.36, p.122.

40. For full text of letter, see, Dwight D. Eisenhower, The White House Years - Mandate for Change 1953-1956 (London, 1963), p. 347.

to it.<sup>41</sup> Dulles once again attempted to persuade Britain for United Action but it did not give in.

French finally surrendered to Viet Minh on 7 May 1954, after fifty five days of stubborn but futile resistance. Dien Bien Phu debacle put Western Powers in a disadvantageous position at Geneva conference which started on 26 April 1954. The U.S. approached the Geneva conference in a mood of resignation. It was clear that the U.S. did not expect anything much out of the conference by way of a permanent settlement or solution to the problem. Its main aim was to see that the Viet Minh did not gain more than what they actually held. The U.S. did not assume leading role in this conference.<sup>42</sup> In fact Eisenhower and Dulles were not in favour of negotiated settlement. They seriously considered American intervention even without British participation. But once again the US and France could not agree on terms and thus negotiations were dragged further Eisenhower and Dulles felt that France was only interested in keeping alive the possibility of American intervention "as a card to play at Geneva talks" and hence ended the talks by mid June.<sup>43</sup>

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41. Though Americans supported French in Indochina their relations always suffered from mutual mistrust and disagreement on war

42. Kaushik, n.26, pp.183-4.

43. Herring, n.27, pp.37-38.

On 21, July 1954 Indo-Chinese armistice was finally signed and an unsigned final declaration was issued. The U.S. did not sign Geneva accords and only issued unilateral statement in which it took note of the accords and gave assurance that the U.S. would not disturb them by the threat or by the use of force.<sup>44</sup> The terms of the Geneva Accord provided for the partition of Vietnam along the seventeenth parallel to permit the regrouping of military forces from both sides. The country was to be reunited by elections scheduled for the summer of 1956 and was to be supervised by an international commission comprising Canada, India and Poland. The Signing of Geneva agreement and withdrawal of French troops marked the end of the first phase of American involvement in Vietnam. The first phase ended indirect involvement of the United States. In the second phase it increasingly assumed a direct role.

(b) Phase - II (1954 - 1964)

The Eisenhower administration was, however, not interested in the implementation of Geneva accords. National Security Council recommended among other things, "the use of all available means to weaken the infant Viet Minh regime in

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44. Pentagon Papers, n.37, pp.571-72.

Northern Vietnam.<sup>45</sup> The C.I.A. team stationed in Saigon devised many dubious methods to embarrass Viet Minh government. On 8 September, South East Asia Treaty Organization (SEATO) was formed and extended protection to Cambodia, Laos and the free territory of the state of Vietnam.<sup>46</sup> Eisenhower in a personal letter to Ngo Dinh Diem, Prime Minister of the fragile government in South Vietnam, on 23 October, 1954 promised direct U.S. aid to Saigon.

With firm American backing Diem won a fraudulent national referendum which paved way to depose emperor Bao Dai. As a result Diem was made the chief of State of Republic of Vietnam (RVN). He did little to promote democracy. Opposition of anykind was brutally suppressed. With the help of Diem government, the United States was able to block the elections to prevent a big win for Viet Minh. Diem government declared that since the Republic of Vietnam was not a signatory to the Geneva Accord it was under no obligation to abide by it.

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45. NSC, "Review of US Policy in the Far East, August, 1954, U.S. Congress, House Committee on Armed Services, United States - Vietnam Relations 1945-1967 :A Study Prepared by the Department of Defense (Washington, 1971) Book 10, pp.731-41.

Cited in, Herring, n.27, p. 44.

46. Signatories to the SEATO were, U.S.A., France, Great Britain, Australia, Newzealand, Philippines, Thailand and Pakistan.

Insurgency gradually increased in South Vietnam but North Vietnam did not give even verbal support to it until early 1959. When it became clear that national elections would not be held, North Vietnam formally approved resumption of armed struggle in the South and began to send arms and advisors to assist southern insurgents.<sup>47</sup> It is on 20 December 1960 National Liberation Front of South Vietnam (N.L.F.) pejoratively called Viet Cong was formed and North Vietnam took control of directing it and training its guerrillas. Second Indo-China war broke out in January 1960.

By the end of Eisenhower presidency, the United States by all its actions such as sabotaging Geneva agreements and assuming the almost impossible task of nation building, significantly increased its commitment. By the end of 1960, the U.S. military personnel in South Vietnam totalled about 900.<sup>48</sup>

John F. Kennedy assumed American presidency in 1961. He had long taken a close personal interest in Vietnam which he had once described as "the cornerstone of the free world" in

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47. King C. Chen, "Hanoi's Three Decisions and the Escalation of Vietnam War", Political Science Quarterly (New York) Vol. 90, Summer 1975, p. 258.

48. U.S. Military Assistance Advisory Group (MAAG) officially took over the responsibility for training the Army of the Republic of Vietnam (ARVN) from the departing French on 28 April 1956.



South East Asia. He was less willing than Truman and Eisenhower to permit the fall of Vietnam to communism.<sup>49</sup> However as the president of U.S. he could not devote full attention to the Vietnam problem.

Concerned with the increasingly deteriorating situation in South Vietnam, Kennedy sent his advisors Walt W. Rostow and General Maxwell D. Taylor to South Vietnam. Taylor-Rostow Report recommended increasing the American economic and military aid and dispatch of an 8,000 men logistic task force. Kennedy was attracted by the idea of stiffening Diem regime through an infusion of American advisors. However, he did not like the proposal of American military commitment. He told Arthur Schlesinger :

They say it's necessary in order to restore confidence and morale. But it will be just like Berlin. The troops will march in; the bands will play; the crowds will cheer; and in four days everyone will have forgotten. Then we will be told we have to send in more troops.... If it (the war in Vietnam) were ever converted into a White Man's war, we would lose as the French had lost a decade earlier.<sup>50</sup>

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49. Herring, n.27, p.75.

50. Arthur M. Schlesinger Jr., A Thousand Days - John F Kennedy in the White House (London 1965), p. 476.

Eventhough, Kennedy did not intend to Americanise the war, he felt an American retreat in Asia might upset the whole world balance. In December, 1961 he decided to send military men into Vietnam. The result in 1962 was to place the main emphasis on the military effort.<sup>51</sup>

During 1961-62, Kennedy administration sent 15,000 military men into Vietnam. The series of decisions to order military buildup closed an era (1950-61) during which honourable disengagement had remained possible. They, therefore, mark a real and crucial watershed in the history of U.S. involvement in Vietnam.<sup>52</sup>

The policy in 1962 was dominated by those who saw Vietnam as primarily a military problem and who believed its solution required unconditional support of Diem.<sup>53</sup> Robert McNamara, the Secretary for Defense and advisors like Taylor and Rostow submitted optimistic reports to president in 1962. In Washington, the president who had other matters in his mind accepted the cheerful reports from men in whom he

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51. Ibid, p. 477.

52. Paul M. Kattenberg <sup>U</sup> The Vietnam Trauma in American Foreign Policy 1945-1975 (New Brunswick, 1982), edn. 3, p. 113.

53. Schlesinger, n.50, p. 836.

had great confidence.<sup>54</sup> His 1963, state of Union message summed up the mood at the turn of the year "the spear point of aggression has been blunted in South Vietnam."<sup>55</sup>

The Kennedy administration's relationship with Diem had not been smooth. Diem administration had been inefficient and failed to carry out any political reform. Reluctant to commit American money, men and prestige to a "losing horse" as Secretary of State Dean Rusk put it, the administration tried to make the aid package conditional on reforming Diem government and asked for a share in the decision making process.<sup>56</sup> Diem rejected these proposals and thus Kennedy administration backed out. Diem and his brother Ngo Dinh Nhu continued with their repressing tactics which further alienated people. They also began to explore the possibility of a settlement with Hanoi that would result in American withdrawal from Vietnam.<sup>57</sup> Relations between the Kennedy administration and Diem government were disturbed and arrived at a flash point in the spring of 1963, when the

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54. Ibid, pp. 478-9.

55. Cited in, Ibid, p. 479.

56. Dean Rusk to State Department, 1 November, 1961 Gravel, n. 37, vol. II, p. 120.

57. Chen, n.46, pp.254-5.

Budhist unrest started and spread soon to all sections of people because of State repression.

The Kennedy administration took a fateful decision to get rid of Diem and the cable sent on August 24, 1963 to ambassador Henry Cabot Lodge was almost a Coup order.<sup>58</sup> In November Diem was killed in the coup against him. The Americans knew that the coup was being planned but did nothing. Some even alleged that it had the blessing of Washington. Among those who made the allegation was Madame Nhu, sister-in-law, of the South Vietnamese President.

Kennedy shocked when, he heard the death of Diem. His advisor Schlesinger recorded, "He was sombre and shaken I had not seen him so depressed since the Bay of Pigs. No doubt he realised that Vietnam was his great failure in foreign policy and that he had never really given it his full attention."<sup>59</sup>

After three weeks of coup, Kennedy was assassinated. End of Kennedy's presidency marked the end of Phase-II of American involvement in Vietnam. In this phase, eventhough, honourable disengagement of U.S. from Vietnam was made

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58. Berman, n.10, p.51.

59. Schlesinger, n.50, p. 848.

difficult for any successive president, it was perhaps not an impossible task. Vice President Lyndon B. Johnson took over as American president after Kennedy's assassination. His presidency marked the beginning of the Phase-III in American involvement in Vietnam.

(C) Phase - III (1963-1968)

Lyndon B. Johnson recognising his inexperience in foreign policy asked Dean Rusk, Robert Mc Namara and Mc George Bundy to stay because he felt, "I need you more than president Kennedy did"<sup>60</sup> He relied heavily on them who played prominent roles in shaping Kennedy's Vietnam policy and had a personal stake in upholding that policy. None of them told Johnson that Kennedy was planning on pulling the U.S. out of Vietnam. In an yet another coup in January 1964, Major General Nguyen Khanh overthrew the Junta and the U.S. recognized quickly the Khanh government. American intelligence reports warned that unless new government took charge immediately and dealt with its problems effectively, South Vietnam had at best an even chance of withstanding the insurgency menace during the next few weeks or months.<sup>61</sup>

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60. Quoted in Eric Goldman, The tragedy of Lyndon Johnson (New York, 1968), p. 29.

61. Gravel, n.37, vol. III, p. 42.

By 1964 Sino-Soviet split was almost complete and it was evident that there was no monolithic communist threat. However, Johnson explained that the immediate objective was to deter Chinese aggression in South-East Asia. According to Secretary of State Rusk, "Credibility of American guarantees in Europe would suffer if they did not protect Vietnam. On the recommendation of Secretary of Defense Mc Namara, Johnson instructed the Joint Chiefs of staff to prepare a contingency programme of graduated military pressure against North Vietnam. The president also approved covert operations along the North Vietnamese coast. The U.S. Navy also began patrols by sending destroyers up the Gulf of Tonkin to gather intelligence."<sup>62</sup>

It is on the night of 4 August 1964 the U.S. destroyers Maddox and C Turner Joy reported that they were under attack. Even though evidence of the attack was less than conclusive, Mc Namara and his military advisors seem to have chosen selective parts of the communications available to them and concluded that destroyers were attacked. Accepting Mc Namara's observation without question, Johnson ordered retaliatory airstrikes against North Vietnamese patrol boats and their support facilities.<sup>63</sup> He also used this

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62. Berman, n.10, p. 253.

63. Herring, n.27, pp. 120-122.

opportunity to secure passage of Tonkin Gulf resolution by U.S. Congress. It is on 7 August 1964, by a vote of 88-2 in the Senate and 416-0 in the House, the U.S. Congress passed the resolution allowing the president to use "all necessary measures to prevent further aggression", there by giving a blank check to the president. The easy passage of bill encouraged Johnson to take the legislation lightly in making his later decision on Vietnam.

By the end of November 1964 there emerged a firm consensus in the administration that the U.S. must soon undertake what Taylor described as a "carefully orchestrated bombing attack" against North Vietnam.<sup>64</sup> By February, 1965 Operation Rolling Thunder - the policy of gradually intensified air attacks, was launched. Soon after, Johnson accepted General Westmoreland request for ground troops and the first U.S. ground combat forces landed in Vietnam on 9 March 1965. By the end of 1965, the number of U.S. military personnel in Vietnam totalled 184,000. The decision to send ground combat forces was probably reached more quickly and with less staffing, planning and forethought than any comparable fateful decision ever made in U.S. history.<sup>65</sup>

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64. Taylor to State Department, August 18, 1964, Gravel vol III, p. 547.

65. Kattenberg<sup>U</sup>, n. 52, p. 134.

President Johnson made war policy decisions on the basis of direct contact with only a small number of advisors like Mc Namara, Rusk and Rostow at the infamous Tuesday lunchons. As the war progressed, American casualties increased and troop levels were also built up blindly. In the United States, public opinion, Media and Congress became more and more antagonistic to the continuation of war. In South Vietnam, in 1967 Nguyen Van Thieu became the president.

The offensive of early 1968 inflicted heavy casualties on both sides. Tet offensive represented the inescapable failure of United States policy. Johnson was under the impression that Tet was the enemy's last gasp. But when he faced with General Westmoreland's request for an additional 206,000 men over the approved ceiling of 525,000, he asked his new secretary of Defense Clark Clifford to answer the question, "what would these 206,000 men accomplish?" when Clifford put the same question to the Joint Chiefs, he learned that they had never had a plan for victory or one to end the war. Clifford then urged the president to seek a way out of vietnam and Johnson's world shattered<sup>66</sup> Former Secretary of State Dean Acheson, ambassador Maxwell Taylor, former NSC advisor Mc George Bundy and other elder statesmen counseled Johnson to seek disengagement without victory.

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66. Berman, n. 10, p. 256.



Hounded by recurrent dreams of losing control, on 31 March 1968, president Johnson announced his decision to de-escalate the war and withdrew from the presidential race. Johnson in his memoirs wrote,

by renouncing my candidacy, I expressed a fervent wish that problems that had resisted solution would now yield to resolution. I wanted Hanoi to know that Lyndon Johnson was not using this new move toward peace as a bid for personal political gain. May be now, with this clearest possible evidence of our sincerity thrown into balance, North Vietnam would come forward and agree to a dialogue - a genuine communication dedicated to peace<sup>67</sup>

To meet Hanoi's condition for productive discussion, Johnson ordered halt to all bombing of North Vietnam on 31 October 1968.

The president's decision to seek a negotiated settlement in Vietnam was the significant turning point in US policy from escalation and action -reaction, to deescalation and negotiation. Johnson, by then realised that the U.S. objectives could not be achieved through military force. The number of U.S. military personnel in Vietnam by the end of 1968 was about 536,100. Then the challenge that awaited president elect Richard M. Nixon was how to achieve peace with honour for the United States of America.

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67. Lyndon B. Johnson, The Vantage Point - Perspectives of Presidency 1963-1968 (Delhi, 1972), p. 436.

**CHAPTER II**

**NIXON ASCENDANT**

When Richard Milhous Nixon, ascended the presidency of the United States in 1969, he had no specific plans to end the Vietnam war. He thought that the influence of Vietnam war on the course of events in other parts of the globe might be detrimental or favourable to the US depending on the nature of its outcome. He reasoned that if defeat for America in Vietnam, would spell doom for American foreign policy, its the sudden Unilateral withdrawal from there would create doubts about the credibility of American commitments in American allies in general and NATO, in particular. He found in Henry Alfred Kissinger a unique partner in pursuing his foreign policy. Instead of ending Vietnam war at the earliest, the Nixon administration expanded the war to Cambodia and Laos. To contain the domestic antiwar movement against American casualties, unilateral withdrawal of American troops in phases had been taken up. Further, Vietnamisation of war - a policy of expanding and training South Vietnam army to fill in the gaps created by leaving American troops and equipping them fight against North Vietnamese had been implemented which succeeded in changing the colour of the corpses in the war.

In the absence of political will to arrive at a negotiated settlement, both secret Paris talks between Kissinger and Le Duc Tho initited by the Nixon

administration and Paris plenary sessions were dragged on till the last quarter of 1972. The United States tried to capitalize on the apparent Sino-Soviet rift with a view to use Soviet and Chinese influence to end the Vietnam war, on the one hand and improve its own power equations on the other. To have a rapprochement with the Peoples Republic of China Nixon visited China in February 1972. Strategic Arms Limitation Treaty (SALT) with the Soviet Union was concluded in the first half of the same year. This ushered in an era of detente in international relations. Even though there was little progress in regard to Vietnam, the diplomatic successes of the administration made Nixon popular and President Nixon was ascendant.

This chapter deals with the policies and decision making processes in Nixon administration till the end of 1971. Before doing that it is necessary to examine the emergence of Nixon-Kissinger Partnership the ideas and the policy preferences they had before they came to occupy their official positions.

#### **NIXON-KISSINGER: EMERGENCE OF PARTNERSHIP**

Richard M. Nixon was born in a farming village called Yorba Linda, thirty miles inland from Los Angeles in 1913 in

a middleclass family.<sup>1</sup> He practiced law for some time and entered politics in 1945. From an obscure lawyer his meteoric rise to the vice president of the United States in 1953 -all in a matter of six years, speaks of his political skills. He had been an hardline anticommunist through all this period and effectively used it to climb up the power ladder. He ran for the presidency against John F. Kennedy in 1960 and lost. He won the presidential elections in 1968 against Hubert Humphrey by a slender margin. He won a 0.7 percent margin in the popular vote and a majority in the electoral college. The Democrats retained control of both houses of congress.

Henry Alfred Kissinger, a Jewish immigrant from Germany served in the American army at the end of second World War. He entered the academic world at the moment when the study of international relations in the United States was becoming a discipline in its own right. His academic life at Harvard University spanned two decades during which he devoted much

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1. For biographical account of Nixon, see Earl Hazo and Stephen Hest, President Nixon - A Political Portrait (Ludhiana, 1969).

Herbert S. Parmet, Richard Nixon and His America (Boston, 1990).

Richard M. Nixon, RN - The Memoirs of Richard Nixon (London, 1978).

Roger Morris, Richard Milhous Nixon : The Rise of an American Politician (New York, 1990).

of his time and energy to the development of a sustained and detailed critique of American foreign policy.<sup>2</sup>

Kissinger served the administration of John F. Kennedy as a consultant to three groups: the National Security Council, the Arms Control and Disarmament Agency (ACDA) and the Rand corporation, but his role was minimal.<sup>3</sup> In Johnson's presidency he worked as a foreign policy consultant and visited Vietnam twice in 1965 and 1966. He was involved in secret diplomatic exchanges between the Johnson Administration and Hanoi in between June and October, 1967.

The partnership between Nixon and Kissinger emerged in an interesting way. Kissinger was a good friend of Governor Nelson Rockefeller. He served as a foreign policy consultant to the latter when he ran for presidential nomination of the Republican Party. While doing so Kissinger made disparaging comments about Nixon. He said : "That man Nixon is not fit to be president. Richard Nixon is the most dangerous of all

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2. For biographical account of Kissinger see Bruce Mazlish, Kissinger - The European Mind in American Policy (New York, 1976).

Marvin Kalb and Bernard Kalb, Kissinger (London, 1974)  
Stephen R Graubard, Kissinger : Portrait of a Mind (New York, 1973).

3. Kalb and Kalb, n. 2, pp. 61-64.

the men running to have as president.<sup>4</sup> In Kissinger's eyes, Nixon was a Parvenu, lacking in culture. He shared the general view prevailing at the Council on Foreign Relations, where Nixon was disliked and distrusted.<sup>5</sup>

Kissinger and Nixon first met at a pre-christmas party on December 10, 1967. The meeting never warmed beyond simple correctness. "Neither of us is very good at Cocktail party conversation", Kissinger recalled years later. He remembered Nixon as being "stiff" and himself as being "aloof".<sup>6</sup> They did not meet again until November 25, 1968. A few weeks after Nixons' Victory over Humphrey, on the invitation of President elect Kissinger met Nixon at Hotel Pierre in New York.

Nixon says "From the outset of my administration, however I planned to direct foreign policy from the White House. Therefore I regarded my choice of a National Security Advisor as crucial. Considering the importance, I placed on the post. I made my choice in a uncharacteristically impulsive way".<sup>7</sup> Nixon and Kissinger had a wide ranging talk

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4. Ibid, pp. 15-16.

5. Mazlish, n.2, p. 212.

6. Kalb and Kalb, n. 2, p. 15.

7. Nixon, n.1, p. 340.

on foreign policy. Nixon said he was determined to avoid the trap Johnson had fallen into of devoting virtually all his foreign policy time and energy to Vietnam, which was really a short term problem.<sup>8</sup> Nixon outlined his views on various foreign policy matters. Kissinger suggested that the President was going to need a strong National Security Council.<sup>9</sup> He also recommended that Nixon structure a National Security apparatus within the White house that, in addition to coordinating foreign and defence policy, could also develop policy options for the latter to consider before making decisions.<sup>10</sup> After his encounter with Nixon in Pierre hotel, Kissinger was struck by Nixon's perceptiveness and knowledge so at variance with his previous image of him.<sup>11</sup>

Nixon knew Kissinger's disparaging comments about him.<sup>12</sup> However, he offered him national security advisors job, when they met again on November 27, 1969. Kissinger asked for one week's time in which he consulted Rockefeller and others and accepted the offer.

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8. Ibid, p. 341.

9. Henry A. Kissinger, White House Years (Boston, 1979), pp. 11-12.

10. Nixon, n. 1, p. 341.

11. Kissinger, n. 9, p.12.

12. Nixon, n. 1, p. 340.



There started a special relationship which had been business like throughout. Their relationship had not been at personal level and they had never become friends.<sup>13</sup>

It will be relevant here to look into the views of both Nixon and Kissinger on Vietnam before examining how their partnership worked.

#### Nixon's Views on Vietnam

Nixon, hardline anticommunist as he was, believed in the containment of communism and the efficacy of American intervention, if necessary by inducting American force. In 1954, when he was vice president, he advocated sending U.S. troops to replace those the French had lost in Vietnam<sup>14</sup>. In 1955, he argued that aggression by in Chinese Communist Vietnam and elsewhere could be halted with the possible use of atomic weapons. By 1964, he considered that too many

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13. Kissinger, n. 9, Passim.

\_\_\_\_\_, years of upheaval (New Delhi, 1981) Passim.

Mazlish, n.2, pp. 211-12.

14. Allan E. Goodman, The Lost Peace - America's Search For a Negotiated Settlement of the Vietnam War (Stanford, 1978) p. 78.

George C. Herring America's Longest War : The United States and Vietnam 1950-1975 (New York, 1979), p. 35.

For Nixon's Version see, Nixon, n. 1, pp. 152-3.

compromises had already been made to the communists in Indo-China, and urged retaliatory airstrikes against Laos and North Vietnam. Nixon supported the post-gulf of Tonkin escalation of US involvement although he questioned the Johnson administration's tactics. In 1965, he opposed the Johnson administration's efforts to start negotiations, fearing that Hanoi would interpret it as a sign of US weakness. Negotiations should only take place, Nixon believed, after North Vietnamese withdrawal from South Vietnam, after the status quo ante had been achieved and not before. In 1966 he strongly disagreed with congressmen Gerald Ford and Melvin Laird when they said that Johnson made a serious mistake in committing the US so deeply to the war in Vietnam. In November the same year he criticised the Manila Conference communique which included an American proposal for a mutual phased withdrawal of the United States and North Vietnamese forces from the South. Constant calls for negotiations Nixon said would only encourage Hanoi to continue fighting and he predicted that the war would go on at least through 1971.<sup>15</sup>

In his article "Asia after Vietnam" in Foreign Affairs in October 1967, he defended American commitment to Vietnam

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15. See "President Nixon's Record on Vietnam 1954 - 1968", in Legislative Proposals Relating to the War in South East Asia 92nd Congress, 1st session, April and May 1971, pp. 295-9.

and argued that Asia would have been a different place if it were not for the American presence in Vietnam which diverted China from other potential targets like India, Thailand and Malaysia.<sup>16</sup> While wrapped in much of familiar rhetoric, the piece did anticipate two of his most important foreign policy initiatives: the enunciation of the Nixon Doctrine as a formula for politico-military retrenchment and the opening to China. In a language strikingly similar to that of Nixon doctrine he asserted that the development of indigenous "regional defence pacts" would permit a necessary reapportionment of the burdens of containment. In 1958 when Nixon as the Vice President of United States visited Latin American countries, he said "it is not how much aid we provide but how we provide it, that counts".<sup>17</sup> This also showed his line of thinking which ultimately emerged in the Nixon Doctrine.

As a presidential candidate Nixon was particularly critical of the Johnson administration's gradualism in the use of force. He suggested that the thrust of US diplomacy should be directed not at Hanoi but at Moscow, for he believed the Soviet Union had as much influence on the

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16. Richard M. Nixon "Asia After Vietnam", Foreign Affairs (New York) Vol. 46 (1), October 1967, pp. 111-12.

17. Richard M. Nixon, Six Crises (New York, 1962), p. 273.

course of the war as the happenings on the battlefields of South Vietnam.

I felt there were a number of unexplored avenues to probe in finding a way to end the war. I believed that we could use our armed strength more effectively to convince the North Vietnamese that a military victory was not possible. We also needed to step up our progress for training and equipping the South Vietnamese so that they could develop the capability of defending themselves. Most important, I believed that we were not making adequate use of our vast diplomatic resources and powers. The heart of the problems lay more in Peking and Moscow than in Hanoi.<sup>18</sup>

Nixon was not interested in finding either the earliest or the quickest solution to the conflict because he believed that the way war ended would determine whether another war would begin elsewhere.

The earliest way to end the war quickly would be, for the US, to surrender on terms designed to concentrate the fact....The silence of defeat that would descend over the Vietnam battlefield would soon be shattered by the roar of guns elsewhere. Not only the hardliners in Peking but also the hardline doctrinaire faction in the Kremlin, which has recently recovered prestige and influence would be greatly encouraged to support bolder and more dangerous adventures. Inevitably, the challenge to

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18. Nixon, n.1 p. 298.

See Also, Richard Whalen, Catch the Falling Flag - A Republican Challenge to His Party (Boston, 1972), p. 287.

our power, interests and security would bring a clash, the possible consequences of which are too easily imagined.<sup>19</sup>

Nixon believed that threats of drastic military action against North Vietnam could bring the concessions necessary to end the Vietnam war. He was not averse to nuclear threat. Nixon compared his situation to that Eisenhower faced in Korea in 1953 and was certain that the nuclear threat would intermediate the North Vietnamese as it had the North Koreans.<sup>20</sup> He counted on his image as a hard-line anticommunist to make the threat credible. They'll believe any threat of force Nixon makes because it is Nixon he told one of his advisors. We'll just slip the word to them that, 'for God's sake, you know Nixon's obsessed about communists.... and he has his hand on the nuclear button.'<sup>21</sup>

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19. This is from the draft of a speech Nixon intended to deliver in a Radio address scheduled for March 31, 1968. He never delivered it, since he came to know president Johnson would announce some important decision. However, the draft of the speech was published in Whalen, n. 18, p. 287.

20. Lewis Chester et. al. An American Melodrama : The Presidential Campaign of 1968 (New York, 1969), p. 464.

21. Quoted in, H.R. Haldeman with Joseph D. Mohr, The Ends of Power (London, 1978), p. 83.

To sum up, Nixon had some definite views on how to end Vietnam war. He thought favourable outcome of Vietnam war was vital to American interests and the Soviet Union and China could help influence North Vietnam to bring the war to an end provided US could use diplomatic channels effectively. Threat of high level coercion would also help bring a quick settlement. Nevertheless, contrary to the impression he had given in 1968 presidential campaign, Nixon had no specific peace plans to end Vietnam war.<sup>22</sup> It should be also emphasised here that Nixon never questioned the American involvement in Vietnam. He believed in containment of communism through American interventionist policies albeit with certain modifications enunciated in the Nixon Doctrine.

#### Kissinger's Views on Vietnam

Kissinger in his academic career at Harvard University concentrated on American foreign policy towards Europe, impact of nuclear weapons on strategy and foreign policy etc. In the beginning Vietnam had not attracted his attention. He was appalled at America's role in the coup d'etat in which Diem government was overthrown. However, he

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22. Nixon, n. 1, p. 298.

agreed with Johnson's decision to commit combat troops in Vietnam.<sup>23</sup> As mentioned earlier, Kissinger visited Vietnam twice in the midsixties, and was involved in secret exchange of messages between the United States and North Vietnam at the end of Johnson administration.

In a "National Security Policy" seminar at Harvard Kissinger said "The U.S had become deeply involved in Vietnam because of the American tendency to transform individual conflicts into crises with universal potential".<sup>24</sup> The U.S approach instead of countering a communist war of national liberation had created two wars. One in which conventional American forces were pitted against and nearly stymied by conventional North Vietnamese forces and the other in which Saigon's forces were tied down and beginning to be chewed up by the viet cong guerrilla forces. He further observed that even a victory for U.S. in the first war would not necessary mean that Saigon would win the second.<sup>25</sup>

Kissinger wrote a frank and revealing article in Foreign Affairs which throws light on his views just before

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23. Kissinger, n. 9, p 231.

24. Goodman, n. 14, p 81.

25. Ibid, p. 81.

he joined the Nixon administration. It was written before he was appointed but published afterward.<sup>26</sup> Kissinger noted in it that "by opting for military victory through attrition, American strategy produced what came to be the characteristic feature of the Vietnamese war. Military successes that could not be translated into permanent political advantage".<sup>27</sup> So some kind of negotiated settlement was necessary. However, Kissinger was not sanguine about the role the Soviet Union could play in pressuring Hanoi into negotiation. He was not for the sudden withdrawal of troops. "However we got into Vietnam, whatever the judgement of our actions, ending the war honourably was essential for the peace of the world."<sup>28</sup>

In his memoirs also he wrote:

No serious policy maker could allow himself to succumb to the fashionable debunking of "prestige" or "honour" or "credibility". For a great power to abandon a small country to tyranny simply to obtain a respite from our own travail seemed to me - and still seems to me, Profoundly immoral and distinctive of our efforts to build a new and ultimately more peaceful pattern of international relations.<sup>29</sup>

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26. Henry A. Kissinger, "The Vietnam Negotiations" Foreign Affairs Vol. (47), January 1969, pp. 211-34.

27. Ibid, p. 214.

28. Ibid, p. 234.

29. Kissinger, n. 9, p. 228.



In brief, his basic conclusions in "Foreign Affairs" article were

- that American military strategy was incapable of producing victory.
- that American military operations had to be geared to clearly negotiating objectives.
- that the South Vietnamese government could survive only if it developed a political programme to which noncommunist South Vietnamese could rally.
- that the U.S must cede increasing responsibility for the conduct of the war to the South Vietnamese.
- that if in negotiations Hanoi proves intransigent and the war goes on, the U.S. should seek to achieve as many of its objectives as possible unilaterally.
- that in negotiations the U.S should concentrate on military issues such as ceasefire while leaving the distribution of political power to the Vietnamese parties.

It seems French manner of withdrawal from Algeria influenced Kissinger for he wrote in his memoirs:

We could not simply walk away from an enterprise involving two administrations, five allied countries, and thirty-one thousand dead as if we are switching a television channel. Many urged us to "emulate de Gaulle" but they overlooked that it

took even de Gaulle four years to extricate his country from Algeria because he too, thought it important for France to emerge from its travails with its domestic cohesion and international structure intact. He extricated France from Algeria as an act of policy, not as a collapse, in a manner reflecting a national decision and not a rout. Such an ending of war was even more important for the United States.<sup>30</sup>

To sum up Kissinger was not looking for quick solution or sudden withdrawal of American troops. He like Nixon believed that favourable outcome of war was important to American interests. But unlike Nixon he was not sanguine about possible Soviet Union role in influencing Hanoi to bring about an agreement. While Nixon believed more in the utility of force rather than diplomacy.

Kissinger thought diplomacy, supported by necessary use of force was needed. It should also be noted here that unlike Nixon, Kissinger was ideologically neutral.<sup>31</sup> This is reflected in his essay about Bismarck. The Prussian statesman was shown as breaking through ideological prejudice in order to further the interests of Prussia. One section of the essay was titled "the relativity of legitimacy" and the guiding principle of Bismarckian diplomacy was shown to be the perfect flexibility of international relationships

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30. Emphasis added, Kissinger, n.9, pp. 227-8.

31. Henry A. Kissinger, "The White Revolutionary : Reflections on Bismarck", Daedalus Summer 1968, pp. 888-924.

limited only by the requirements of national interest. It should be also mentioned here that both Nixon and Kissinger distrusted bureaucracy and preferred secrecy in diplomacy.

#### EXPANSION OF WAR AND DIPLOMATIC STALEMATE

Richard Nixon formally took over as the president of the United States of America on 20 January, 1969. Though the Nixon administration had no specific policy framework on how to end the war the views of both Nixon and Kissinger offered some guidelines to chalk out a strategy.

Immediately after taking over as NSC advisor, Kissinger commissioned a study on the situation in Vietnam entitled National Security Study Memorandum-1 (NSSM-1). This lengthy document made it clear that different departments had different perceptions about the situation in Vietnam. Optimists ranging from Ellsworth Bunker, American ambassador in Saigon Admiral John Mc Cain, Pacific commander and General Creighton Abrams, commander of American forces in Vietnam, believed that North Vietnamese agreed to talks because of their military weakness and pacification gains were real. However civilian side of Pentagon, C.I.A., and to a less extent Department of State were of the opinion that improvement in South Vietnamese capability produced essentially a stalemate. Pacification gains were fragile

and inflated and political progress was inadequate. Enemy was not dealing from weakness either in Paris or on the ground. They suggested that compromise peace settlement was only feasible outcome for Vietnam. Moreover there were large disagreements in intelligence circles over elementary facts - on the size and deployment of North Vietnamese forces, importance of Cambodia and especially port of Sihanoukville as a supply route.<sup>32</sup>

Reacting to this memorandum Kissinger said "the answers made clear that there was no consensus as to facts much less as to policy".<sup>33</sup>

#### Decision to Bomb Cambodia

Nixon in the initial exuberance of ascendancy to presidency wanted to prove to North Vietnam that he was a tough president. Bombing raids were meant to be symbolic how Nixon would react to North Vietnamese offensive operations.

In February 1969, the Nixon administration received reports about North Vietnamese offensive into South Vietnam. Nixon's impulsive reaction was to retaliate. As he himself said,

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32. See Kissinger, n. 9, pp. 238-9.

33. Ibid, p. 239.

My immediate instinct was to retaliate -Kissinger and I agreed that if we let the communists manipulate us at this early stage we might never be able to negotiate with them from a position of equality, much less one of strength Johnson had made this mistake and had never been able to recover the initiative<sup>34</sup>

The Nixon administration could not bomb North Vietnam since it was certain to create domestic uproar. But it believed that there should be some military reaction to the offensive. Kissinger recorded in his memoirs:

I thought that a failure to react to so cynical a move by Hanoi (reported North Vietnamese Offensive) could doom our hopes for negotiations; it could only be read by Hanoi as a sign of Nixon's helplessness in the face of domestic pressures, it was likely to encourage further military challenges<sup>35</sup>

Suggestion to attack Cambodian sanctuaries first came from General Wheeler, Chairman of the Joint Chiefs of Staff<sup>36</sup>. General Abrams and Ambassador Bunker recommended B-52 bombing runs against the same. This proposition looked impressive to both Nixon and Kissinger. Nixon postponed final decision as it might trigger demonstrations in Europe

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34. Nixon, n.1, p. 380.

35. Kissinger, n. 9, p. 244.

36. Ibid, p. 241.

which he was to visit in second half of February, 1969. However, he suddenly made up his mind enroute from Washington to Brussels and ordered bombing. Kissinger advised him to wait. Again, in early March Nixon ordered bombing and later retreated. Again on March 15, 1969 reacting to rocket attack on Saigon Nixon ordered immediate B-52 attack. Kissinger advised Nixon that decision should not be taken without giving the latter's senior advisors an opportunity to express their views - if only to protect himself if it led to a public uproar. In an earlier meeting, both the Secretary of State William P. Rogers and Secretary of Defence Melvin Laird opposed attack on Cambodia. So, Nixon convened a meeting on March 16, 1969. But by the time the meeting took place, Nixon had taken the decision and gave orders to Defence department. However, in the meeting he pretended that decision was still open. Laird and Wheeler supported the decision while Rogers opposed it on domestic grounds.<sup>37</sup>

Nixon, as would be seen later, preferred secrecy in his dealings. He sidelined established institutions like the State department and maintained facade of collective decision making. Kissinger on his part created a hierarchial

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37. For detailed account of how the decision to bomb Cambodia was arrived at, See Kissinger n.9, pp. 240-6.

system of review and interdepartmental groups in National Security Council which brought a great deal of centralisation to the policy process in the White House. Decision making of the kind formerly diffused through the State and Defence departments was drawn into the White House. Substantial power was placed in the hands of the Assistant to the President for National Security Affairs and his staff. Nothing of consequence was permitted to be done by State or Defence without clearance from the National Security Council.<sup>38</sup>

First B-52 attack code named Operation Breakfast took place on 18 March, 1969 on Base Area - 353, in Cambodia. Kissinger made a significant observation in his memoirs:

Originally the attack on Base Area 353 was conceived as a single raid. Nixon ordered another strike in April 1969 partly because there had been no reaction from either Hanoi or Phnom penh to the first, partly because the results exceeded our expectations, but above all because of an event far away in North Korea (American reconnaissance plane was shot down)<sup>39</sup>

He further said that each attack in between April and August, 1969 was specifically approved by the White House. Afterward general authority was given, raids were conducted

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38. John Lehman, The Executive, Congress and Foreign Policy: Study of the Nixon Administration (New York, 1976), p. 215.

39. Kissinger, n. 9, p. 247.

regularly.<sup>40</sup> From this information, we could infer that the Nixon administration had not fixed any goal in military sense before taking a decision to bomb Cambodia. The vague goal they had in mind was to negotiate from strength, which however in the given circumstances seemed very unlikely. They continued with bombing because of various reasons the main one being reduction in the number of American casualties.

Bombing was kept secret. According to Kissinger, the original intention had been to acknowledge the Breakfast strike in response to a Cambodian or North Vietnamese reaction, which they firmly anticipated.<sup>41</sup> But Nixon gave a different impression. He said he neither anticipated Cambodian nor North Vietnamese reaction. In fact, he gave this to be one of the reason for keeping bombing a secret. According to him Sihanouk would have been forced to protest if it was made public, otherwise he could remains silent. North Vietnamese could not protest since they were officially denying they had any troops in Cambodia. The last reason he gave seems more plausible - problem of domestic

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40. Ibid, pp. 247-9.

41. Ibid, p. 249.



antiwar demonstrations.<sup>42</sup> However, by May bombing was made public in press through news leaks.<sup>43</sup> Nixon ordered wiretaps and his administration became more and more secretive. Apart from bombing Cambodia, Nixon administration in the early months of 1969 took two more important interrelated decisions : unilateral troop withdrawal and Vietnamisation of war.

Unilateral troop withdrawal was mainly intended to mollify public opinion. To facilitate American troop withdrawal, Vietnamisation was taken up. Nixon wrote "early in the administration we had decided that withdrawing a number of American combat troops from Vietnam would demonstrate to Hanoi that we were serious in seeking a diplomatic settlement; it might also claim domestic public opinion by graphically demonstrating that we are beginning to wind down the war".<sup>44</sup>

However one fails to understand if nonreaction to a military offensive was to be construed as weakness, why unilateral troop withdrawal also could not be seen in the

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42. Nixon, n. 1, pp. 380-1.

43. New York Times, 9 May, 1969

44. Nixon, n. 1, p. 392.

same light. Kissinger's explanation looks more plausible.

In our innocence we thought that withdrawal of American troops might help us win public support so that troops which remained and our enhanced staying power might give Hanoi an incentive to negotiate seriously. At the same time if we strengthened the South Vietnamese sufficiently, our withdrawal might gradually even end our involvement without agreement with Hanoi if Nixon favoured withdrawal for both these reasons.<sup>45</sup>

Nixon met Thieu on 8 June, 1969 at Midway Island to convey his decision to withdraw troops. He announced immediate withdrawal of 25,000 troops. He also announced that further withdrawal depended on three conditions: (1) the progress in training and equipping the South Vietnamese armed forces (2) the progress of Paris talks (3) the level of communist's activity.<sup>46</sup> However, responding to an article by Clarke Clifford, Nixon in a press conference impetuously said - " he hoped to improve on Clifford's schedule (troop withdrawal)". This folly made U.S. commitment to unilateral withdrawal irreversible.<sup>47</sup>

The Nixon administration's announcement of withdrawal of troops led to demands for withdrawal for more and more

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45. Kissinger, n. 9, p. 271.

46. Nixon, n.1, p. 392.

47. See Kissinger, n.9, p.275.

troops from Congress, media and public. The U.S. withdrew 65,000 troops in 1969; 50,000 in 1970 and 250,000 in 1971. By the beginning of 1972, there were 184,000 U.S. troops left in South Vietnam.<sup>48</sup>

To replace leaving American troops South Vietnamese army (ARVN) was sought to be expanded through Vietnamisation. The word Vietnamisation was coined by Laird. It involved training equipping and inspiring the South Vietnamese to fill in the gaps left by departing American troops. Nixon wrote: "It was largely on the basis of Laird's enthusiastic advocacy that we undertook the policy of Vietnamisation. This decision was another turning point in my administration's Vietnam strategy".<sup>49</sup>

However Vietnamisation was started by the Johnson administration itself. However, it was undertaken as a main strategy, during the Nixon administration.<sup>50</sup> Vietnamisation as mentioned earlier succeeded in changing the colour of the corpses, and offered a smoke screen for the United States to withdraw its troops.

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48. Goodman, n. 14, p. 86.

49. See Guenter Lewy, America in Vietnam (New York, 1978) pp. 164-5.

50. Nixon, n. 1, p. 392.

Nixon doctrine or Guam doctrine was announced in July 1969. According to it the U.S. could furnish only the material military and economic assistance to the allies willing to accept the responsibility of supplying the manpower to defend themselves. On diplomatic front, the Nixon administration initiated secret talks in Paris which played vital role in bringing a negotiated settlement. Numerous open Paris plenary sessions also took place without producing any result.

#### Paris Peace Talks and Secret Negotiations

Both Nixon and Kissinger knew that victory for America in Vietnam was an impossible goal. They knew that some kind of negotiated settlement was necessary. However, Nixon wanted the settlement on American terms and to achieve that he believed, diplomacy by itself was not sufficient and should be coupled with physical force. He was sceptical of negotiations. Kissinger was more enthusiastic about negotiations and invariably recommended to keep negotiating channels open. He was not averse to use of force but unlike Nixon, he believed that there might be progress in negotiations even without any military gains on war front.

Meanwhile in Hanoi's strategy there was no place for defeat. Their military strategy was one of "continuous offensives" with maximum military pressure on both the

Americans and the Saigon army in order to compel the United States to admit that it was stalemated and could not win a military victory. When the Americans finally recognised their real situation, the communist party leaders believed, it would mark the beginning of the last stage of the war : the stage of fighting while negotiating.<sup>51</sup> Kissinger described North Vietnamese negotiating style in these words.

The North-Vietnamese considered themselves in a life and death struggle; they did not treat negotiations as an enterprise separate from the struggle; they were a form of it. To them Paris peace talks were not a device for settlement but an instrument of political warfare. They were a weapon to exhaust us psychologically to split us from our South Vietnamese ally and to divide our public opinion through vague hints of solutions just out of reach because of the foolishness or obduracy of government.<sup>52</sup>

On American side Kissinger advocated a two-track negotiating strategy. Kissinger wrote in his memoirs,

I had great hope for negotiations - perhaps as events turned out more than was warranted I even thought a tolerable outcome could be achieved within a year. Much of the impetus for negotiations came from me .... I had doubts about Vietnamisation; nor did I think we had to time for victory - that opportunity, if it ever existed, had been lost by our predecessors .... we needed a strategy that made continuation of the war seem

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51. Gareth Porter, A Peace Denied - The United States, Vietnam and the Paris Agreement (London, 1975), p. 32.

52. Kissinger, n. 9, p. 260.

less attractive to Hanoi than a settlement. I embraced two-track negotiating strategy .... Nixon on the whole supported this approach.<sup>53</sup>

Saigon on its part was intransigent over dealing with the PRG. As mentioned earlier NSSM-I showed that there was no unanimity among various agencies of U.S. government over the situation in Vietnam and the negotiating strategy to be adopted at Paris peace talks. As Kissinger wrote :

pronouncements that the United States is ready to negotiate do not guarantee that a negotiating position exists or that the U.S. government has articulated its objectives. Until a conference comes to be scheduled, two groups in the American bureaucracy usually combine to thwart the elaboration of a negotiating position; those who oppose negotiations and those who favour them.... pragmatism and bureaucracy thus combine to produce a diplomatic style marked by rigidity in advance of formal negotiations and excessive reliance on tactical considerations once negotiation start. In the preliminary phases, we generally lack a negotiating programme during the conference, bargaining considerations tend to shape internal discussions.<sup>54</sup>

These reasons convinced Kissinger that the process of completely secret face-to-face negotiations with Hanoi could help achieve an agreement. To support these secret negotiations Kissinger needed to keep the Paris talks sterile and to develop an organisational system that

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53. Ibid, p. 262.

54. Kissinger, n.26, p. 221.

fragmented the Washington bureaucracy so that the necessary staffing could be accomplished, drawing an expertise throughout the government while minimising agency predispositions toward a particular settlement. This was achieved largely by the creation of interagency special groups that operated under Kissinger's control. He had created a mini bureaucracy he could control and which would not sabotage the kind of agreement he was trying to reach.<sup>55</sup> So Open Paris meeting were used as a facade for secret negotiations and a propaganda platform. There were 174 sessions between January 25, 1969 and January 18, 1973 and not once was there a hint in the record that either side thought their deliberations would actually contribute to the settlement of the war.<sup>56</sup>

Kissinger met Xuan Thuy on August 4, 1969 in Paris. Kissinger outlined the proposals based on Nixon's May 14, 1969 speech.<sup>57</sup> In his speech Nixon proposed Eight Point Peace Plan which include simultaneous withdrawal of troops free elections under international supervision, ceasefire, N.L.F. participation in political life in South Vietnam etc.

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55. Goodman, n. 14, p. 93.

56. Ibid, p. 91.

57. For Nixon's Speech see New York Times, 15 May 1969.

At the outset these proposals looked very forthcoming, which they were not. For example, N.L.F. participation in political life required surrender of arms. In case of elections, Thieu regime would conduct elections and the role of the international body would be mere supervision.<sup>58</sup> Kissinger under Nixon's direction threatened North Vietnam with grave consequences unless an agreement was arrived at by November 1, 1969.<sup>59</sup> Xuan Thuy demanded complete withdrawal of American troops and observance of N.L.F.'s ten points (N.L.F. unveiled a ten point peace plan on May 8, 1969 that demanded unconditional U.S. withdrawal and coalition government excluding Thieu). He also maintained that there were no North Vietnamese troops in South Vietnam and demanded that Thieu regime should be overthrown. According to Kissinger, American refusal to overthrow Thieu regime remained the single and crucial issue that deadlocked all negotiations until October 8, 1972.<sup>60</sup>

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58. Porter, n.51, pp. 84-5.

59. See Nixon n. 1, p. 396.  
Kissinger n. 9, p. 280.

60. Kissinger, n. 9, p. 282.



Nixon on 17 October, 1969 met Robert Thompson, a British expert on guerrilla warfare. This meeting seemed to have influenced Nixon's further thinking on Vietnam. Thompson predicted victory in two years - victory either in the form of negotiated settlement or preparing South Vietnamese to carry on the burden i.e. success of Vietnamisation. He also advised not to escalate war at that moment.<sup>61</sup> Anyway Nixon had no plans to carry out the threat he issued.<sup>62</sup> November 1, deadline passed without reescalation of war.

To mobilise public opinion, Nixon in a major speech on 3 November, 1969 appealed for the help of the "great silent majority". He firmly defended American involvement in Vietnam and warned that pullout would produce a crisis of confidence in American leadership at home and abroad. He offered a prospect that Vietnamisation would not only reduce American casualties but might also terminate American involvement honourably irrespective of what North Vietnam did. He criticised peace movement for sabotaging his diplomacy. He concluded with a warning: "North Vietnam cannot humiliate the United States. Only Americans can do

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61. Nixon, n.1, pp. 404-5.

62. Kissinger, n. 9, pp.280,304.

that".<sup>63</sup> This speech was successful and outwitted his detractors. Antiwar "moratoriums" on October 15 and November 15 drew large crowds but in their aftermath the peace movement grew quiescent.

Both Thompson's assessment and positive response to November 3 speech encouraged Nixon to prolong war. He himself wrote :

I had never imagined that at the end my first year as president I would be contemplating two more years of fighting in Vietnam. But the unexpected success of the November 3 speech had bought me more time and Sir Robert Thompson's optimistic estimate that with two years we would be able to achieve a victory..... I was prepared to continue the war despite serious strains that would be involved on the homefront.<sup>64</sup>

After coming to the decision to continue war, he was very sceptical of secret talks proposed by Kissinger.<sup>65</sup> Hanoi rejected the first approach made by U.S. in November 1969. In January, 1970 another approach was made and North Vietnam indicated approval. Reacting to this, Nixon said "I don't know what these clowns want to talk about, but the

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63. Public papers of president Nixon 1969 (Washington, 1971) pp. 901-9.

64. Nixon, n 1, p. 413.

65. Ibid, p. 413  
Kissinger, n.9, p. 437

line we take is either they talk or we are going to sit it out. I don't feel this is any time for concession".<sup>66</sup> This kind of rigid posture produced only a stalemate in negotiations.

Kissinger met Le Duc Tho on 21 February, 1970. It marked the beginning of secret negotiating sessions which ultimately produced a negotiated settlement. In the negotiations Le Duc Tho rightly questioned Kissinger about Vietnamisation "Before there were a million U.S. and puppet (South Vietnamese) troops and you failed. How can you succeed when you let the puppet troops do the fighting".<sup>67</sup>

First round of negotiations failed because of American refusal to see the reality. Kissinger wrote, "the first round of negotiations with Le Duc Tho collapsed because diplomacy always reflects some balance of forces and Le Duc Tho's assessment was not so wrong. His sense of public opinion in America and especially of the leadership groups he had identified (antiwar groups) was quite accurate. The dilemmas of Vietnamisation were real ... In these circumstances Le Duc Tho could see no reason to modify his

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66. Quoted in Kissinger, n.9, p. 438.

67. Ibid, p. 444.

demands for unconditional withdrawal and the overthrow of the Saigon government".<sup>68</sup>

In the later sessions the same reasons given by Kissinger prevented progress in secret talks until October 8, 1972 when Le Duc Tho presented Kissinger with "breakthrough" draft plan. On diplomatic front Nixon administration also tried "Linkage theory".

#### Linkage Theory

The Nixon administration, in accordance with President's idea to use Soviet influence tried to link improvement in bilateral relations between the United States and Soviet Union with settlement in Vietnam. It was tried first in April 1969 when Kissinger met Soviet ambassador Dobrynin and explained that settlement in Vietnam was key to progress in bilateral relations.<sup>69</sup> Again on 20 October, 1969 Nixon summoned Dobrynin and told him

if the Soviet Union found it possible to do something in Vietnam and the Vietnam war ended, then we might do something dramatic to improve our relations, something more dramatic than could now be imagined. But until then, I have to say that real progress will be very difficult.<sup>70</sup>

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68. Ibid, p.448.

69. Nixon, n. 1, p. 391.

70. Ibid, pp. 407.

Kissinger also proposed (Cyrus) Vance mission to Soviet Union to linkup Strategic Arms Limitations Treaty (SALT) with Vietnam and to use Moscow as the seat of secret negotiations with Hanoi. In 1971 also, the same approach was tried proposing Kissinger as negotiator. Both of them never took off because of Soviet nonresponse.<sup>71</sup> After the opening was made to China, the Nixon administration tried to use it also to influence Vietnam. However China rejected any effort to "enmesh" it in Indochina.<sup>72</sup> Nevertheless, as we would see later the Nixon administration was able to gain some diplomatic leverage which however played not very important role to save American honour in Vietnam.

Meanwhile, in 1970 and 1971 the Nixon administration took adventerous decisions to expand the war into Cambodia and Laos respectively.

#### Expansion of War

In Cambodia, a pro-American clique headed by Prime Minister Lon Nol overthrew the neutralist prince Sihanouk in March 1970. Lon Nol's position appeared shaky from the outset, and Washington feared that the North Vietnamese might attempt to take over Cambodia, thereby enormously

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71. Kissinger, n. 9, pp. 265-9.

72. Ibid, p. 1104.

increasing the threat to South Vietnam. In the same month to contain antiwar protests, Nixon announced the withdrawal of 150,000 troops over the next year. Vietnamisation was certain to fail if North Vietnam took over Cambodia. Kissinger did not see how Americans could standby and watch Cambodia collapse without thereby producing at the same time the collapse of all U.S. was doing in Vietnam. Nixon was for bold move.<sup>73</sup>

A National Security Council meeting was convened on 22 April, 1970. Three options emerged. The State department and Defence department recommended that the U.S. should do nothing. Kissinger recommended an attack on communist sanctuaries with South Vietnamese forces only. "Use whatever forces necessary including U.S. forces to neutralise all base areas" was the recommendation put forward by ambassador Bunker, General Abrams and acting Joint Chiefs of staff Admiral Moorer. Rogers opposed American participation.<sup>74</sup> NSC again met on 26 April, 1970 and in that meeting also both Rogers and Laird opposed Nixon's decision to send American troops into Cambodia.<sup>75</sup> Nevertheless Nixon stuck to his guns

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73. Kissinger, n. 9, p. 487.

74. For Detailed Account of NSC Meet on 22 April, 1970 See Ibid, pp. 489-92.

75. Ibid, p. 500.  
Nixon, n.1, p. 450.

and this decision was one of the most controversial decisions of his presidency.

Joint US-ARVN force attacked communist bases in Cambodian Parrot's Beak and Fishhook on April 28 and 29 respectively. Nixon in a belligerent televised speech on 30 April explained his decision to public. Anticipating a furore at home, Nixon indicated that he would rather be a one term president than preside over America's first defeat. "If when the chips are down", he warned, "the world's most powerful nation acts like a pitiful helpless giant, the forces of totalitarianism and anarchy will threaten free nations and free institutions throughout the world."<sup>76</sup>

The invasion of Cambodia was aimed in part at buying time by destroying temporarily the communist base areas in the border areas of Cambodia. But it was also used by Nixon to increase the credibility of his threat to attack North Vietnam for any renewed offensive. "This action... puts the enemy on warning", he declared on 10 May, 1970 "that if it escalates while we are trying to deescalate, we will move decisively and not step by step."<sup>77</sup>

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76. Public Papers of President Nixon, 1970 (Washington, 1971) pp. 405-10.

77. New York Times, 11 May 1970.

From a military stand point, Nixon's Cambodian venture, rendered sanctuaries unusable for some time and might have bought some time for Vietnamisation. But it dangerously enlarged the battlefield and the U.S. acquired another fragile client government faced with determined internal opposition supported by Hanoi.

On the domestic front, demonstrations erupted in university campuses and six students were killed in angry confrontation with National Guardsmen and police. The Cambodian incursion also provoked serious congressional challenge to presidential authority since the beginning of the war. Senate repealed the Tonking Gulf resolution of 1964 by a vote of 81-0. Anticipating opposition, Nixon withdrew American ground combat troops from Cambodia by June 29 and the following day U.S. Senate passed Cooper-Church amendment barring U.S. military personnel from further combat or advisory roles in Cambodia. However, the House of Representatives rejected this amendment, permitting the administration to continue air operations.

In February 1971, Nixon administration with a view to show the success of Vietnamisation and to stop communist supplies through "Hochi Minh trail" in Laos launched LAMSON 719, an exclusive ARVN operation with U.S. air and logistical support. It ended in a grand failure when



battered ARVN either fled or were airlifted out of Laos by March 24, 1971. It showed the futility of Vietnamisation. According to Kissinger, "the basic fault was to attempt decisive results with insufficient forces, for which all senior officials including himself must bear the responsibility".<sup>78</sup>

In June 1971 Kissinger met with Le Duc Tho and secret negotiating sessions continued without producing any solution, mainly because continued American support for Thieu left no room for diplomatic manoeuvre.<sup>79</sup> In October, 1971 Thieu was elected to another four year term.

The Nixon administration in other spheres of foreign policy had successes in 1971. His China trip and Soviet summit were announced. There was progress in Strategic Arms Limitations talks and SALT was signed during his Soviet summit in May 1972. He visited China in February 1972. However, in Vietnam, Hanoi launched spring offensive. It marked a decisive phase in Vietnam war. Watergate revelations made the president imperilled and Nixon was forced to resign in August 1974. Paris peace agreements signed in 1973 could not disguise American defeat in Vietnam.

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78. Kissinger, n. 9, p. 1111.

79. For details see, Ibid, pp. 1021-9.  
Porter, n.51, pp. 97-101.

**CHAPTER III**

**NIXON : FROM ASCENDANCE TO ANGUISH**

Nixon in his first three years of power failed to end Vietnam war and produced a diplomatic stalemate. In March 1972 with a view to push the United States towards a negotiated settlement Hanoi launched a massive spring offensive. The United States, as it was pursuing diplomacy of detente, gained some diplomatic leverage and got away with mining Haiphong and heavy bombing without suffering any setbacks in its relations with the Soviet Union and China. North Vietnamese were very forthcoming in negotiations and by October 1972, the draft of agreement to be signed was ready. However, Nixon, with his eyes on presidential elections sabotaged the agreement raising new objections to the agreed draft agreement. After winning a landslide victory in 1972 presidential elections, Nixon in December ordered massive bombing of North Vietnam on a maddening scale. He exhausted all negotiating cards, came back to October draft and Paris peace agreements were signed on 27 January, 1973 which were later followed more in breach than in observance.

Nixon got entangled in the Watergate affair and by the middle of 1973 his presidency was into grave crisis. Nixon was forced to appoint Henry Kissinger, as his Secretary of State to save American foreign policy which he always wanted to run from the White House. He could not come out of

Watergate scandal clean and had decided to resign when impeachment looked imminent. Eruption of Watergate indirectly effected Kissinger's fortunes and he reigned supreme in foreign policy affairs of the United States during the Watergate crisis on 9 August, 1974 Nixon resigned and thus the unique partnership between Nixon and Kissinger ended.

### ROAD TO PARIS PEACE AGREEMENTS

North Vietnamese troops crossed the demilitarised zone on March 30, 1972 in the largest offensive of the war since 1968 and quickly overran northern Quang Tri province. The spring offensive was aimed at breaking a stalemate and moving the conflict to a new stage. The Lao Dong party leaders were determined to force the United States to accept what it had been resisting for more than three years : the end of its client regime's claim to exclusive sovereignty over South Vietnam. The reduction of the Saigon regime to a status equal to that of its opponents would provide an acceptable basis for ending the war. Along with the complete withdrawal of US military personnel from South Vietnam it would shift the balance of forces sharply in favour of the revolution.<sup>1</sup> The Vietnamese leader believed that the offensive would be a crippling blow to Nixon's Vietnamisation policy and that the U.S. government would

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1. Gareth Porter, A Peace Denied - the United States Vietnam and the Paris Agreement (London, 1975) p.102.

have to agree to reach a settlement. Nixon was to face presidential election in 1972 and he could not afford setbacks in the Vietnam war.

However, North Vietnamese had not envisioned Nixon's ability to manipulate detente with the Soviet Union and China for his own internal political benefit thus nullifying in effect the damaging political impact of the offensive and reescalation of American military involvement in South Vietnam. In fact even Nixon was not sure of his ability to manipulate.

Nixon in response to the spring offensive resumed bombing of North Vietnam. However, the offensive launched by North Vietnamese seemed to have unnerved the Nixon administration. Kissinger tried to assure Nixon that in the case of defeat, Nixon could take comfort in the fact that he successfully withdrew 500,000 troops.<sup>2</sup> However, Nixon ruled out the option of defeat.

"Defeat" I said was simply not an option...Both Haldeman and Henry seems to have an idea which I think mistaken - that even if we fail in Vietnam we can still survive politically. I have no illusions whatever on that score, however. The U.S. will not have a credible foreign policy if we fail and I will have to assure the responsibility for that development.<sup>3</sup>

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2. Richard M. Nixon RN : The Memoirs of Richard Nixon (London, 1978), p.588.

3. Ibid, pp.588-9.

By May 1, 1972 Loc Ninh and Quang Tri were taken over by North Vietnamese. An Loc was besieged and battle for Hue had begun. On the same day Nixon received a report from General Abrams. Kissinger told Nixon that "he (Abrams) feels that he has to report that it is quite possible that the South Vietnamese have lost their will to fight or to hang together and that the whole thing may well be lost".<sup>4</sup> Nixon was unnerved by the report : "And then I thought of the bleak possibility - it was conceivable that all South Vietnam would fall. We would be left with no alternative but to impose a naval blockade and demand back our prisoners of war. 'And then we are defeated' I told Haldeman and Kissinger"<sup>5</sup>

Secret talks between Kissinger and Le Duc Tho were scheduled to be held on May 2, 1972. Nixon tried to use threat, as he always did. In a memorandum to Kissinger he recommended :

In a nut-shell you (Kissinger) should tell them (North Vietnamese) that they have violated all understandings, they stepped up the war, they have returned to negotiate seriously. As a result, the president has had enough and now you have only one message to give them - settle or else!<sup>6</sup>

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4. Ibid, p.594.
  5. Ibid, p. 595.
  6. Ibid, pp.593-4.

However, North Vietnamese were unmoved by these threats, as they had been in previous years. Military situation showed they gained an upperhand. It was obvious that Vietnamisation was a failure. Talks broke off. On open diplomatic front Nixon suspended Paris plenary sessions on March 24 for a while. According to Kissinger, Nixon never liked open talks in Paris.

Nixon had never liked the plenary sessions at Avenue Kleber. He associated them with the bombing halt, which he thought had nearly cost him the election in 1968. He considered that they gave the North Vietnamese a weekly forum on television to undermine our domestic support. And he constantly sought ways to diminish their importance.<sup>7</sup>

Both Nixon and Kissinger felt that dramatic escalation of war was necessary to conclude it.<sup>8</sup> Nixon, on 8 May ordered mining of Haiphong harbor and other waterways and destruction of all North Vietnamese transportation and communication links.<sup>9</sup>

Nixon explaining his decision in his memoirs said, that "he believed that it was essential that the U.S. take decisive action to cripple the North Vietnamese invasion by

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7. Henry A. Kissinger, White House Years (Boston, 1979), p.1107.

8. Ibid, p.1113.

9. Nixon, n.2 , p. 602.

interdicting the supplies of fuel and military equipment the enemy needed for its push into South Vietnam."<sup>10</sup> Announcing his decision to public he said mining of the port of Haiphong was a way to "stop the killing" by keeping weapons "out of the hands of the international outlaws of North Vietnam".<sup>11</sup>

However, intelligence specialists pointed out that this move, even combined with the maximum bombing of road, rail and water traffic in the North, could only slow down and not stop the flow of weapons into North Vietnam and then to South.<sup>12</sup> So Nixon and Kissinger were less concerned about their ability to cut off weapon supply of the North Vietnam than about their ability to reassure the American people that the administration was taking what appeared to be decisive steps to end the war.<sup>13</sup> Proving credibility of American threat was perhaps another consideration they had in mind. It might also help bring out a negotiated settlement.

Nevertheless they knew they were playing high risk game. Nixon administration was very concerned about the prospects

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10. Ibid, p. 602.

11. New York Times May 9, 1972.

12. Porter, n.1, p. 110.

13. Ibid, p.110.



of the planned summit meet in Moscow in May. Nixon, Kissinger, C.I.A. and Department of State thought mining Haiphong would lead to cancellation of summit.<sup>14</sup> However, the Soviet Union for its own reasons had decided not to cancel the summit and China also did not react strongly to the escalation of war. The failure of the Soviet Union and China to react strongly to Nixon escalation was a serious blow to the Lao Dong party's military - diplomatic strategy for obtaining a favourable settlement of the conflict in 1972. Both the communist giants had altered their method of supporting North Vietnam. Their support took indirect rather than direct form. They stepped up supply of arms to Hanoi.<sup>15</sup> But since both of them valued their relations with the United States they chose to underplay Vietnam factor in bilateral relations. However, when the Lao Dong party leadership finally decided to sacrifice its main demand for the replacement of the Thieu regime by a coalition government in order to get a settlement, it was because of its evaluation of the existing balance of forces and not in response to pressure from the Soviets or Chinese to change its negotiating stance.<sup>16</sup> North Vietnamese leaders realised

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14. Kissinger, n. 7, p.1200.  
Nixon n. 2, p. 602.

15. See Porter, n.1, p. 114.

16. Ibid, p. 115.

that American air power became a major factor in the balance of forces in the South, and that the PRG and its followers needed to be free from B-52 attack not only to normalise the PRG zone but also strengthen the position of DRV troops in the South. Furthermore the North Vietnam needed a respite from war after seven years of being unable to devote its resources economic development. A spokesman of the North Vietnam later explained, they were ready to end the war "even if there was a compromise but a compromise which permits us to make a step forward."<sup>17</sup>

Private Channel again became active in August 1972. Before leaving for Paris, Kissinger when he came to know Nixon's scepticism felt that "Nixon would not have been pained if he had recommended halting all negotiation until after the election. Kissinger did not do that because his analysis was different".<sup>18</sup> After August 14 meet, Nixon and Kissinger felt "communists actually seemed to be interested in reaching a settlement".<sup>19</sup>

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17. Nguyen Khac Vien, "The American War: An Interview with Jeune Afrique" in David Marr and Jayne Werner eds., Tradition and Revolution in Vietnam, trans., Linda yarr et al.(Berkeley, 1974), p. 149.

18. Kissinger, n. 7, p. 1319.

19. Nixon, n.2, p. 689.

Series of negotiations continued and on October 8, Le Duc Tho presented a detailed draft to Kissinger which made obvious the North Vietnamese intention to reach a settlement. The draft, which was submitted in English and had nine chapters and twenty two articles.<sup>20</sup> The key political provisions were contained in chapter 4, dealing with internal South Vietnamese matters. It provided that the government of South Vietnam would be determined by general elections within six months under international supervision and it obligated the South Vietnamese parties to "achieve national reconciliation and Concord" and to ensure democratic liberties. Among the questions to be decided between the two South Vietnamese parties was to be the mutual reduction of military forces. The U.S. was to refrain from supporting "any political tendency or any personality" in South Vietnam. Civilian detainees were to be released along with captured military personnel, at the same time as the US troop withdrawal (Chapter 3) - a major point in past PRG programmes.

Reunification would be carried out "step by step through peaceful means" civilians could move freely between the two Zones in conformity with the principle of Vietnam's unity

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20. New York Times, October 27, 1972.

(Chapter 5). According to Article 1, the U.S. was pledged to respect the "independence sovereignty and territorial integrity of Vietnam as recognised by the 1954 Geneva agreements. The cease fire provisions prohibited any movement of military forces which would come in contact with those of the otherside or extend the area of control. The U.S. and other foreign states were obligated to withdraw all military personnel and the South Vietnamese parties were prohibited from accepting additional military personnel, advisers or war supplies.

Kissinger agreed to make the draft the basis for negotiating the final agreement. He ordered his staff to write a counter draft based on the North Vietnamese draft. Before going further into the crucial round of negotiations it should be mentioned here the free hand given to Kissinger in conducting negotiations. Nixon received a one paragraph message on 10 October, 1972 from Kissinger which the former recorded was more tantalising than enlightening :

The negotiations during this round have been so complex and sensitive that we have been unable to report their content in detail due to the danger of compromise. We know exactly what we are doing, and just as we have not let you down in the past, we will not do so now.<sup>21</sup>

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21. Nixon, n.2, p. 691.

Kissinger also acknowledged that Nixon did not interfere in negotiations. According to him "it took unusual fortitude not to try to affect a negotiations that might decide the election and that would certainly determine whether or not his second term would be tranquil or ridden by crisis".<sup>22</sup>

The U.S. counterdraft made several substantive revision in the North Vietnamese proposal. The U.S. demanded that the language on civilian detainees be revised so that the release of American POWs would not depend on that of Vietnamese political prisoners. And the DRV ceasefire provision, which required that all air craft be grounded and all ships remain at anchor, was amended to permit training flights and movement by ships which were not "acts of force".<sup>23</sup> But most of the provisions proposed by the North Vietnamese survived the negotiations.

By the end of October 11, Kissinger and Tho had agreed on most of the Chapters in the draft. There was give and take from both sides. North Vietnamese dropped their demand for Thieu's removal. The U.S. had not received any commitment on the part of North Vietnam to withdraw its

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22. Kissinger, n. 7, pp. 1351-2.

23. Porter, n.1, p.123.

troops and was satisfied with the latter's assurance that there would be no further infiltration. By October 12 only two issues remained unresolved. The first was the release of Vietnamese civilian prisoners, and the second was provision for replacement of war material by both sides. Kissinger and Tho even agreed on a tentative schedule for completion of negotiations. Kissinger had proposed that the bombing and mining would end on October 18 and that the text of agreement be initialed on October 19 and signed one week later. But later Kissinger revised the schedule so that the final date for the signing would be October 30. North Vietnamese agreed.<sup>24</sup> However, this time table was not met with since the United States went back on its commitment.

By the end of October Nixon was sure, he would win the presidential elections. Therefore he was not interested in settlement before elections. He told Kissinger "as for as the election was concerned, a settlement would not particularly help us, that there were risks in so far if Thieu blow it or the North Vietnamese blew it which could hurt us".<sup>25</sup> Kissinger felt "Nixon was quite positive that an agreement was unnecessary for the election.... Haldeman

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24. North Vietnam's statement of October 26, New York Times, October 27, 1972.

25. Nixon, n.2 pp.693-4.

thought an agreement was a potential liability".<sup>26</sup> Nixon knew Thieu would disagree and expressed the view that he was satisfied with the agreement as it stood, but insisted that Thieu should agree as well. Thieu did not agree. Nixon did not exert pressure on Thieu as he would do later in January 1973.

Thieu's opposition to the draft agreement became public on October 24. His main objections were : the failure to establish the Demilitarised Zone as a secure border; potential of the National Council of Reconciliation and Concord to become a coalition government and continued presence of North Vietnamese troops in South Vietnam.<sup>27</sup> Nixon requested for another, Kissinger - Le Duc Tho meet to which North Vietnam refused. By this time North Vietnam was convinced that U.S. was into delaying tactics and went public with peace agreement on 26 October, 1972. On the same day Kissinger also in a televised press conference announced "peace at hand".<sup>28</sup> Kissinger press brief was meant to counter Hanoi's version that the U.S. was delaying agreement Nixon made the decision to postpone agreement to his second

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26. Kissinger, n.7, p.1362.

27. Nixon, n.2, p. 703.

28. New York Times, October 27, 1972.

term and stuck to it. He won a landslide victory in the presidential elections of 1972.

In November, Kissinger met Le Duc Tho and put forward Thieu's demands which meant a major deviation from the agreed draft of October.<sup>29</sup> Because of U.S. intransigent position in negotiations Le Duc Tho also went back on earlier concessions. By December 11, North Vietnamese returned to their pre-October demands for a linkage between the release of American prisoners and the release of Vietnamese civilian detainees. The reversal in Hanoi's position was to compel the U.S. to return to October draft.<sup>30</sup> However, Kissinger and Nixon felt otherwise.

Kissinger wrote, "My description of the December negotiations, leave little doubt that Hanoi had in effect made a strategic decision to prolong the war - about all negotiations and at the last movement seek unconditional victory once again".<sup>31</sup> Kissinger recommended stepping up military pressure<sup>32</sup> Nixon wanted to show Hanoi that a

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29. Kissinger, n.7, p.1407.  
See also Porter, n.1, pp.148-51.

30. Ibid, p. 154.

31. Kissinger, n. 7, p. 1446.

32. Ibid, p. 1448.



settlement was a better option than continuing the war. Kissinger and Nixon agreed that this meant stepping up the bombing.<sup>33</sup> He told Kissinger:

we'll take the same heat for big blows as for little blows. If we review the bombing, it will have to be something new and that means we will have to make the big decision to hit Hanoi and Haiphong with B-52s. Anything less will only make the enemy contemptuous.<sup>34</sup>

It was a last desperate gamble to coerce North Vietnamese. On 14 December, Nixon ordered reseeding of and the mines in Haiphong harbour, resumed reconnaissance, the destruction of large areas of Hanoi - Haiphong complex. "I don't want any more of this crap about the fact that we could not hit this target or that one," he told Moorer, Chairman of the Joint Chiefs of Staff. "This is your chance to use military power to win this war, and if you don't I'll consider you responsible".<sup>35</sup> Nixon broke off secret negotiation and during December 18-30, the U.S. unleashed the most devastating attacks of the war, dropping more than 36,000 tonnes of bombs and exceeding the tonnage during the

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33. Nixon, n. 2, p 733.

34. Ibid, pp. 733-4.

35. Ibid, p. 734.

entire period from 1969 to 1971. Hanoi and Haiphong were devastated, their factories, power plants and residential districts becoming a "mass of rubble".<sup>36</sup>

The Christmas bombing demonstrated the basic weakness of the American position. For while the brutal bombing of Hanoi could not alter the North Vietnamese determination at the negotiating table, it did bring a final, decisive shift in mood in the U.S., from hope to despair, and a determination in Congress to end the war. The Soviets and Chinese responded angrily, in significant contrast to their restraint of May. Congressional doves made it clear that when they returned to Washington after the Christmas recess they were ready to do battle with the president. Nixon was in a fix. He wrote "casting a dark shadow over everything was the knowledge that if the bombing did not succeed in forcing the North Vietnamese back to the negotiating table there was no way of knowing how-or-whether-the Vietnam war would end".<sup>37</sup>

To keep his options open, Nixon had indicated to Hanoi that he would stop the bombing if they agreed to resume the peace talks. The North Vietnamese consented and the

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36. Wilfred Burchett, Grasshoppers and Elephant- Why Vietnam Fell, (New York, 1977) p.171.

37. Nixon, n.2 p.735.

negotiations resumed in Paris on 8 January, 1973. Since he exhausted all his negotiating cards, Nixon was ready to conclude an agreement. North Vietnamese delegation made it clear that it was not prepared to capitulate on any of the issues. After six days of marathon sessions, the text of agreement was ready. The changes from the October agreement were largely cosmetic, enabling the United States to claim that nothing had been given up on the major points in contention in December on the demilitarised zone. The North Vietnamese agreed to make explicit reference to it in the treaty, but the U.S. accepted its description as a "provisional and not a political and territorial boundary", preserving the spirit of Hanoi's position. The question of civilian movement across the demilitarised zone was left to be resolved later in negotiations between North and South Vietnam,

This time Nixon imposed the agreement on Thieu. Kissinger, in a different context wrote how the United States treat its allies :

Clashes with our allies in which both sides claim to have been deceived occur so frequently as to suggest structural causes.... when an issue is fairly abstract - before there is a prospect for an agreement - our diplomats tend to present our view in a bland, relaxed fashion to the ally whose interests are involved but who is not present at the negotiations. The ally responds equally vaguely for three reasons : (a) he may be misled

into believing that no decision is imminent and therefore sees no purpose in making an issue; (b) he is afraid that if he forces the issue the decision will go against him; (c) he hopes the problem will go away because agreement will prove impossible. When agreement seems imminent, American diplomats suddenly go into high gear to gain the acquiescence of the ally. He in turn feels tricked by the very intensity and suddenness of the pressure while we are outraged to learn of objections heretofore not made explicit.<sup>38</sup>

In the case of United States relations with South Vietnam, somewhat similar to the above had happened. Thieu When he came to know about the imminent agreement, Thieu raised several objections. Nixon on the one hand indicated that if Thieu accepted the treaty he would provide South Vietnam continued support and respond with full force if North Vietnam violated the agreement. On the other hand he went to a great extent to coerce Thieu into agreement. He threatened that U.S. would stop all economic and military aid if Thieu did not accept the treaty. He also made it clear that U.S. would sign the agreement alone if South Vietnam did not join.<sup>39</sup> In the end Thieu agreed to sign the settlement.

On 23 January, 1973 Kissinger and Le Duc Tho initialled the agreement. On 27 January, 1973 the "Agreement on ending

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38. Henry A. Kissinger "The Vietnam Negotiations" Foreign Affairs vol.47, (January 1969), p. 225.

39. Nixon, n.2, pp. 749-50.

the war and Restoring peace in Vietnam was formally signed in Paris by representatives of Democratic Republic of Vietnam (DRV), Republic of Vietnam (RVN), Provisional Revolutionary Government of Republic of South Vietnam (PRG) and the United States of America. The representatives of Hanoi and the PRG signed on one page, the U.S. and Saigon on another so that the signature of Tram Van Lam, Saigon's minister for foreign affairs, would not have to appear beside that of Nguyen Thi Binh, the PRG's minister for foreign affairs.

The agreement with nine chapters includes twenty three articles. Chapter one dealt with the Vietnamese people's fundamental national rights. The United States agreed to respect the independence, sovereignty, unity and territorial integrity of Vietnam as recognised by the 1954 Geneva agreements (Art 1) Chapter two dealt with the cessation of hostilities and withdrawal of troops. The U.S. accepted to stop all its military activities against North Vietnam. Cease fire came into effect on 27, January, 1973 (Art 2). It was agreed on the Article 4, that the U.S. would not continue its military environment or intervene in the internal affairs of South Vietnam. The U.S. was summoned to should withdraw all its military personnel from South Vietnam within sixty days of signing the agreement (Art

5,6). Chapter three dealt with the release of POWs. It was expected to be completed not later than the total withdrawal of troops (Art 8). Chapter four dealt with the exercise of the South Vietnamese people's right to self determination. Political future of South Vietnamese envisioned to be decided by people through elections held under international supervision (Art 9). Immediately after the ceasefire the two South Vietnamese parties sought to achieve national reconciliation and Concord through the agency of National Council of National Reconciliation and Concord (Art 12). The reunification of Vietnam was to be carried out step by step through peaceful means on the basis of discussion and agreement between North and South Vietnam (Chapter V, Art 15). Four party joint military commission was proposed to oversee standstill ceasefire and International Commission of Control supervision was expected to report on implementation of agreement (Chapter VI, Art 16,17,18). The U.S. agreed to contribute to post-war reconstruction of the North Vietnam (Chapter VIII, Art 21).

The Paris peace agreement was fragile. Political settlement envisaged to be achieved through the National Council of National Reconciliation and Concord could not be accomplished by a decree. The ceasefire - a standstill - in place leaving hostile forces cheek-by-jowl invited violation. Nixon was not happy when the agreement was

concluded : "I had always expected that I would feel an immense sense of relief and satisfaction when the war was finally ended. But I also felt a surprising sense of sadness, apprehension and impatience ... Apprehension because I had no illusion about the fragile nature of the agreement or about the communists true motives in signing it".<sup>40</sup>

Agreements were soon violated. Both sides ordered their armed forces to increase areas of control just before the ceasefire went into effect, enlarging claims that each was sure to contest.<sup>41</sup> The last U.S. troops in Vietnam departed on 29 March. As far as the U.S. was concerned, the war was over. The U.S. was able to buy two year interval before South Vietnam fell to Viet Minh. Even before that Nixon was forced to resign, as he was entangled in watergate affair.

#### THE WATERGATE

The watergate affair was perhaps the greatest political scandal in U.S. history. For the first time, a president was forced to leave office before his term expired. As the main concern of this study is foreign policy, only the impact of

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40. Ibid, p.757.

41. William S. Turkey, The Second Indochina war - A Short Political and Military History 1954-1975, (Colorado, 1986), p. 151.

the watergate on foreign policy is the main focus of analysis. Nevertheless the Watergate affair is briefly discussed.<sup>42</sup>

At its simplest level, the Watergate affair was "a third rate burglary" and a subsequent coverup by Nixon and his aides. In the summer of 1972, several employees of the Committee to Re-Elect the President were arrested after they were discovered breaking into and bugging the Democratic National Committee's offices at the posh Watergate complex in Washington. The break in was not a major issue in the 1972 election, but the next year congressional committees began an investigation.<sup>43</sup>

During the investigation, it was found that Nixon had secretly taped Oval office conversations with aides. When the Watergate special prosecutor, Archibald Cox, ordered

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42. For detailed discussion on the Watergate, see H.R. Haldeman, with Joseph D. Mona, The Ends of Power (London, 1978).

J. Ehrlichman, Witness to Power: The Nixon Years (New York, 1982).

For Nixon's version see, Nixon, n.2.

William Safire, Before the Fall - An Inside View of the PreWatergate White House (New York, 1975).

43. For details of Watergate Investigation see, Congressional Quarterly - Almanac (Washington, D.C., 1974), vol.XXIX, pp.1007-53.



Nixon to surrender the tapes in October 1973, Nixon ordered Cox fired. Nixon soon handed over the tapes Cox sought. In the summer of 1974 the Supreme Court ruled that Nixon had to surrender even more tapes, which indicated that he had played an active role in covering up the Watergate scandal. Nixon resigned on August 9, 1974, when it became apparent that the House of Representatives would impeach him for "high crimes and misdemeanors" and the Senate would convict him.<sup>44</sup>

According to Kissinger, Nixon's span of attention to foreign policy declined in the early 1973 itself. He wrote:

He (Nixon) would sign memoranda or accept my recommendations almost absentmindedly now, without any of the intensive underlining and marginal comments that in the first term had indicated he had read my papers with care. He stopped engaging me in the long, reflective, occasionally maddening conversations that were his means of clarifying a problem in his own mind.<sup>45</sup>

American foreign policy had been a two-men show in Nixon's first term. As Nixon was increasingly overwhelmed by the Watergate, it slowly became one-man show i.e. Kissinger

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44. For details of Impeachment Report see, Congressional Quarterly - Almanac (Washington, D.C., 1975), vol. XXX, pp.867-902.

45. Henry A. Kissinger, Years of Upheaval (New Delhi, 1982) pp 415-16.

show. Kissinger with the revelation of his secret trip to China in 1971 and Vietnam peace negotiations became increasingly popular. It gave opportunity to Nixon's critics to diminish Nixon's achievements in foreign policy by exalting Kissinger's. According to Kissinger while he did not consciously encourage the process, there was no consistent record of his resisting it.<sup>46</sup>

Influence of national security advisor or any other presidential assistant depends on presidential authority. However, in endless revelations of the Watergate scandal, presidential authority was draining away. To insulate the foreign policy from Watergate scandal Nixon had to have a strong secretary of State. So in August he decided to appoint, Kissinger the Secretary of State. It was a painful decision for Nixon. As Kissinger wrote "he (Nixon) had never wanted a strong Secretary of State; foreign policy, he had asserted in his 1968 campaign, would be run from the White House. And so it had been. If Nixon was ready to bend this principle it showed how weak he had become"<sup>47</sup> Kissinger took his oath of office and assumed the duties as the secretary of state on 22 September, 1973. Kissinger seems to have

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46. Ibid, p.7.

47. Ibid, p.4.

dominated the American foreign policy in the Watergate crisis and afterwards in the Ford administration.

As noted earlier ceasefire agreements were violated soon after the conclusion of the Paris peace agreements. Kissinger and Le Duc Tho met in Paris in June, 1973 to improve observance of ceasefire. The meeting however produced no progress.<sup>48</sup> In the first year of post Paris agreement Saigon alleged that it had been violated 35,673 times. The PRG charged Saigon with 301,000 violations ; 34,266 land grabbing operations, 35,532 artillery shellings, 14,749 aerial bombardments and reconnaissances and 216,550 police and pacification operations.<sup>49</sup> The initial intent of both sides was to take territory that would later have to be adjudicated by the Two Party Joint Military Commission (TPJMC) as provided for in Article 3(b) of the Paris peace agreements. When the TPJMC proved unable even to inspect contested areas, let alone to determine "the areas controlled by each party and modalities of troop stationing" both sides fought to regain the territory they had lost.

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48. For details please see, Ibid, pp 327-34.

49. Allan E. Goodman The Lost peace - America's Search for a Negotiated Settlement of the Vietnam war (Stanford, 1978), p. 169.

The Nixon administration tried to save South Vietnam by employing various subterfuges to sustain its military aid at a high level without overtly violating the terms of the Paris accords. Instead of dismantling its bases, the U.S. transferred title to the South Vietnamese before the ceasefire went into effect. Supplies were designated "nonmilitary" and were rendered eligible for transfer. The military advisory group was replaced by a "civilian" team of some 9,000 men, many of them hastily discharged from military service and placed in the employ of the government of Vietnam.<sup>50</sup> Nixon and Kissinger also sought to keep alive the threat of American military intervention. "The only way we will keep North Vietnam under control is not to say we are out forever" Kissinger observed. He added "We don't want to dissipate with them the reputation for fierceness that the president has earned".<sup>51</sup> The bombing of Cambodia was continued, in part to support Lon Nol against Khmer Rouge and in part to maintain Nixon's "reputation for coercion". However, by earlier summer of 1973 Nixon's ability to threaten was severely curtailed by the congress.

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50. Tad Szulc, The Illusion of Peace Foreign policy in the Nixon years (New York, 1978) pp 672-6.

51. Quoted in William Safire Before the Fall - An inside view of the prewatergate whitehouse (New York, 1975) p. 673.

## The Congressional Assertion

The Watergate affair naturally influenced the power equation between the president and Congress. The congress became increasingly assertive of its role in foreign policy matters. Nixon's predilection for secrecy in his dealings, his decisions to reescalate Vietnam war and drag the end of war made relations between the president and congress sour. The Watergate aggravated it to an extent that was hitherto unknown. The Congress severely restricted the freedom of action of Nixon in the aftermath of Paris peace agreements. The congressional challenge reflected a weariness and a widespread feeling among the American people that once American troops had been safely removed the nation should extricate itself entirely from the conflict. Increasing evidence of White House involvement in the Watergate affair increased Nixon's vulnerability. In late June, congress sent its challenge to President: a supplemental appropriation bill with a provision barring all present and past appropriations from being used to conduct combat activity in or over Cambodia. Nixon vetoed the measure within twenty hours. The House upheld Nixon's angry Veto, but the president was eventually forced to accept a compromise extending the deadline to August 15. The compromise amendment attached to a new supplemental appropriation bill

and to a continuing resolution, barred the use of any past or present appropriations for financing directly or indirectly U.S. Combat activities in or over or from off the shores of North Vietnam, South Vietnam, Laos or Cambodia.<sup>52</sup>

Kissinger remarked that "Time and again they (North Vietnamese) had counted on a declining administration position, and time and again they had been disappointed. But this time, they may well draw the conclusion that it is for real. It would be idle to say that the authority of the executive has not been impaired".<sup>53</sup> In the twenty-first plenum of the Central Committee, North Vietnam in October concluded that Thieu could not be made to implement the Paris agreement and resolved to achieve reunification by military means.

At the other end of the spectrum, Congress was trying to curtail Presidential war powers. Although the threat of a Presidential Veto hung heavily over the war powers debate the war powers resolution entitled HJ Res 542 passed by both the chambers in July with a substantial margin - 244-170 in the House and 72-19 in the Senate. The chief sponsor of HJ

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52. For details see, Congressional Quarterly Almanac, n.43, pp.792, 861-2.

53. Quoted in , Bernard Kalb and Marvin kalb Kissinger (London, 1974) p. 434.

Res 542 is senator Jacob K. Javits. Nixon refused to sign the resolution branding it both dangerous and unconstitutional. It is on 7 November, his veto was overridden by a vote of 284-135 in the House of Representatives. On the same day Senate completed the process on a 75-18 vote.<sup>54</sup> While passing the war power resolution, among others senators Thomas F. Eagleton, John C. Stennis J.W. Fulbright played a significant role.

As cleared by Congress the HJ Res 542 set a 60-day limit on any presidential commitment of US troops to hostility abroad or to situations where hostilities might be imminent, and on any substantial enlargement of combat forces abroad unless congress declared war, specifically authorised continuation of that commitment or was unable to meet because of an armed attack upon the United States. The commitment could be extended for another 30 days if necessary for the safe withdrawal of troops. Unauthorised commitments could be terminated prior to the 60-day deadline through congressional passage of a concurrent resolution - a measure which would not require the president's signature to take effect.<sup>55</sup> Again in November, congress passed the

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54. For details see, Congressional Quarterly Almanac, n.43, pp.905-17.

55. Ibid., p.792.

military procurement authorisation which prohibited the use of funds for any US military action in any part of Indo-China.

By early 1974, heavy fighting erupted in Vietnam and military balance gradually shifted in favour of North Vietnam. Paris talks on the future of South Vietnam between the RVN and PRG had broken off. The Nixon administration requested for \$474 million in military aid to South Vietnam which the House of Representatives rejected. On 6 August, three days before Nixon's resignation the House had cut military aid appropriation for South Vietnam from \$1 billion to \$700 million.

Nixon was forced to resign on 9 August, 1974. Gerald Ford became the president of the United States. By April 1975, defeat of South Vietnam looked imminent. Ford requested emergency military assistance for Saigon which Congress flatly rejected. It is on 30 April, North Vietnamese army entered Saigon thereby making its conquest complete.

Nixon blamed congress for the failure :

America had won at such cost over twelve years of sacrifice and fighting were lost within a matter



of months once congress refused to fulfil our obligations. And it is Congress that must bear the responsibility for the tragic results.<sup>56</sup>

Kissinger felt agreement could have been enforceable if it were not for the Watergate.<sup>57</sup> Both these claims seem hollow given the fragile nature of Paris agreements. By Kissinger's own admission issues that proved difficult to negotiate e.g. political future of South Vietnam were left to the two South Vietnamese parties.<sup>58</sup> Pious decrees in agreements would not solve problems. As mentioned earlier Nixon was apprehensive when the agreement was signed in January, 1973. The Nixon - Kissinger duo sought to extricate the United States of America with minimum loss of face in which they failed. In ending Vietnam war the United States achieved neither peace nor honour.

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56. Nixon n.2, p. 889.

57. Kissinger n. 7, p. 1359.

58. Ibid, pp.1354-60.

**CHAPTER IV**

**SUMMARY AND CONCLUSION**

The role of the president in foreign policy is pre-eminent in the United States of America. It is the result of a combination of factors like constitutional power, Judicial interpretation, legislative acquiescence, personal assertiveness custom and traditions. In conducting foreign affairs of the U.S. the President is dependent on various organs of the executive branch. However, the staff report he receives from the Executive office of the President (E.O.P.) strengthens his position in the executive branch. One component of E.O.P. that is centrally involved in foreign policy making is the National Security Council (NSC). Further the assistant to the president for national security affairs who heads the NSC is one of the principle advisors of the president on foreign policy. Even though presidential supremacy in foreign policy is evident, Congress, Media and Publication can restrict the president's ability to pursue his preferred course of policies. Again, the way a president conducts foreign policy is also dependent on his personality traits.

Under normal circumstances President is less restrained by Congress, Media and Public Opinion in foreign policy decisions. However Vietnam war is a special case where the battle ground shifted from Vietnam to the United States and led to societal upheaval. The growing involvement of the

U.S. in Vietnam before Nixon's ascendance to presidency spread over four presidencies, viz., Truman, Eisenhower, Kennedy and Johnson. The course of events of U.S. involvement is divided into three phases. The first phase marked the support to the colonial French against Vietnamese national liberation forces led by Ho Chi Minh. As a consequence of the signing of Geneva agreements in 1954 the French left Vietnam and suffered humiliation. In the second phase the U.S. directly provided military men, economic and military aid to South Vietnam. The U.S. sabotaged Geneva accords to prevent Ho Chi Minh from winning elections and uniting Vietnam. However, U.S. did not react when it came to know the imminent coup against Diem in 1963. It is in the third phase, the U.S. committed combat troops to South Vietnam. It suffered horrible reverses and by the end of 1968 announced its decision to reach a negotiated settlement.

It was mistakenly assumed that the national liberation forces led by Ho Chi Minh was a part of global monolithic communist design. In this context the fall of a country (domain) to communism was expected to bring about the collapse of adjoining nations in a rapid succession, this was known as Domino theory. Initially it was used by policy makers to convince Congress and public in aiding Greece and Turkey. Later they themselves believed in Domino theory and

applied to Indo China. The U.S. assumed a self styled world policeman role during this period. However Vietnam war showed the limited utility of the containment policy.

When Nixon took over the American presidency in 1969, he refused to disown the policies of his predecessors - partly because of his belief in those policies and his being a hardline anticommunist. He defended American intervention in Vietnam. Moreover, he was of the opinion that a defeat for America in Vietnam would spell doom for American foreign policy interests. He favoured a negotiated settlement on American terms. To achieve this, Nixon chose coercion. Further he thought of using the influence of Soviet Union and China to end Vietnam war. Nixon stressed the presidential supremacy in foreign policy and wanted to run foreign policy from the White House. He chose Kissinger as his national security advisor and found a unique partner in him. They shared their distrust of bureaucracy and preferred secrecy and back channels. Both Nixon and Kissinger believed that an immediate withdrawal of American troops from Vietnam was no solution to the problem. Besides, Kissinger had some ideas on how to end the war in Vietnam. He favoured diplomacy backed by necessary use of force. A two track negotiating strategy - U.S. should concentrate on military issues and leave political settlement to the South

Vietnamese parties was put forward by him.

At the other end of the spectrum, Nixon resorted to centralisation of foreign policy making power in the White House to bypass the bureaucracies of Department of State and Department of Defence. Centralisation of power in the White House naturally increased the role of presidential assistants. It is one of the reasons for an increased role of Kissingers in foreign policy. Kissinger as presidential emissary conducted secret negotiation with North Vietnam in Paris and visited China as well. When these were made public, Kissinger became popular. Moreover, when presidential authority was eclipsed due to the Watergate affair, in order to save foreign policy, Nixon was forced to appoint Kissinger as the Secretary of State. The vital role played by Kissinger posed a question - what are the respective roles of Nixon and Kissinger in foreign policy making.

Besides, the Nixon administration had no specific plans on how to end Vietnam war. A study on Vietnam entitled National Security Study Memorandum-I (NSSM-I) showed the disagreement among various agencies, as to the strategy to be followed to end the Vietnam war. As a part of his intention to prove that he was a tough president, Nixon ordered bombing of Cambodian communist sanctuaries in March

1969 as a response to the North Vietnamese attack. To gain public support, the Nixon administration announced a unilateral withdrawal of 25,000 troops. This step backfired and led to the demands of more and more withdrawal of troops, thereby increased pressure on administration. Unilateral withdrawal of troops in phases thus became a policy. Nixon announced "Guam doctrine" or "Nixon doctrine", and pledged American material support to those allies who were willing to provide manpower in their struggle against communism. Nixon doctrine was perhaps a smoke screen for American troop withdrawal. Expansion of South Vietnamese army was taken up to replace the leaving American troops in the name of Vietnamisation of war. To prepare the ARVN to win against North Vietnam was the goal of Vietnamisation.

Nixon, instead of ending the war at the earliest expanded it to Cambodia and Laos. In a coup d'etat in Cambodia in March 1970, a pro American clique headed by prime minister Lon Nol overthrew the neutralist prince Sihanouk. North Vietnam pledged support to Khmer Rouge (Cambodian Communists) to oust Lon Nol government. When Lon Nol regime appeared shaky, Nixon took a controversial decision to invade Cambodia in April 1970. It was felt that if Cambodia fell to Communists, it would result in the failure of Vietnamisation policy. It aimed in part to buy

some time by destroying communist bases in Cambodia and to increase, the credibility of Nixon's threats. From a military stand point, Nixon's Venture in Cambodia gained some time for Vietnamisation. On the contrary it fueled antiwar protests and increased Congressional opposition. The Senate repealed the Tonkin gulf resolution. The LAM SON - 719 an exclusive ARVN operation in Laos was launched in February 1971, to stop communist supplies. This operation had the American air and logistic support which ultimately ended in a failure. The result was a test case for Vietnamisation that proved disastrous.

On the diplomatic front, in 1970, with the enthusiastic advocacy of Kissinger, the U.S. initiated secret negotiations between Kissinger and Le Duc Tho in Paris. Rigid positions of both sides prevented any progress towards a negotiated settlement. The bone of contention for disagreement was the U.S. refusal to disown Thieu as demanded by North Vietnam. Meanwhile, open Paris plenary sessions were kept sterile and were used as propaganda platform.

With a view to push the U.S. towards a settlement Hanoi launched a massive spring offensive in march 1972. Both Nixon and Kissinger felt dramatic escalation to be necessary to conclude the war. In May, Nixon ordered mining of



Haiphong harbour and resumed the bombing of North Vietnam. Around that time, the U.S. gained some diplomatic leverage as a result of which, the Soviet Union and China issued no strong protests to Nixon's escalation. However the help from these two communist giants, that Nixon sought, had not been considerable to end the Vietnam war.

In a series of negotiations from August to October, Kissinger and Le Duc Tho made progress in Paris peace talks. In order that diplomacy to succeed, has to fulfil three basic prerequisites by the parties involved : The political will to agree, a common frame of reference and mutual apportionment of benefits or losses. These prerequisites were met by both sides. Hanoi dropped the demand for Thieu's removal and the U.S. no more insisted on a formal North Vietnamese troops pull out from South Vietnam. The text of agreement was ready for signature by the end of October. Nevertheless, Nixon feared the settlement to be a potential liability in the presidential elections of 1972 and postponed it to his second term. He called for drastic changes, as demanded by Thieu, in the agreed October draft agreement. To bring back the Americans, North Vietnamese went on to their pre-October demands. Nixon, out of frustration, ordered massive Christmas bombing, against which Congressional and public reaction was sharp. It was clear to Nixon that Congress would force him to end the war.

He was left with no option but to reach a settlement based on October draft and coerced Thieu into the agreement.

The Agreement on Ending the war and Restoring Peace in Vietnam was signed on 27 January 1973, with no serious intention of implementing it by the parties. In effect Americans settled for the terms available in 1969 itself, except for North Vietnamese demand for Thieu's removal before the agreement. Even Thieu's government barely survived two years after the settlement.

With the Watergate revelations suggesting Nixon's involvement nemesis set in. It led to a serious Congressional challenge to the executive authority of presidency. Compromise settlement to end all American military activities in Indo-China by August 15, 1973, War powers act of November 1973, cuts in the aid to South Vietnam etc. were obvious examples for the erosion of executive authority. As Nixon could not survive the Watergate, he resigned on 9 August 1974. Moreover by April 1975, the conquest of South Vietnam by North Vietnam was complete. All the American efforts for about quarter of a century ended in vain.

Following from the events and processes that marked the end of the U.S. involvement in Vietnam, the role of

president in foreign policy has been examined here. The influence of Congress, Media and Public opinion on President's preferred course of policies is mutually interdependent. Public opinion influences Media. Media sets a trend in public opinion. Both influence the members of Congress which in turn has an impact on the former. President Nixon could not handle effectively the pressure from these quarters. His complex ego-defensive personality traits appeared not to enable him garner support for his policies. They also seemed to have influenced the way in which he chose the policy alternatives. Nixon wanted to prove that he was a tough president - be it North Vietnamese or Congress or public. He could not grasp effectively, the constraints on his administration. He tested the patience of Congress, Public, and Media. In the end, he ran out of alternatives and signed the agreement on the terms available.

Nixon saw in the antiwar groups a conspiracy to discredit him. His arrogant handling of these groups further fueled antiwar protests. As a consequence, Nixon was forced to withdraw more and more troops thereby lost a bargaining chip. On the otherhand, his tough pronouncements, intended to influence North Vietnamese, seemed not to have achieved the desired effect due balance of forces favourable to Hanoi. Nixon miscalculated the enemy's ability to withstand

coercive tactics and pay the price.

However, it could be understood that pressure from Congress, Media and Public opinion was not so compelling as to influence Nixon to change his coercive policies. Nixon's courageous decisions to reescalate war showed his ability to pursue his chosen course of coercive policies. In doing so, he systematically sidelined the Executive branch agencies like the Department of State and Department of Defense - the important participants in the foreign policy making under normal circumstances. Nixon maintained a facade of collective decision making. However in reality, he took many of the decisions in consultation with Kissinger.

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Though Nixon fixed the goal, "peace with honour", he had no time-frame to achieve this. In prolonging the war, he seemed to have influenced by Robert Thompson, a British expert on guerrilla warfare. Thompson predicted victory - either in the form of a negotiated settlement or success of Vietnamisation. Nixon gave the impression that he undertook the policy of Vietnamisation because of its advocacy by Melvin Laird, his secretary of Defence. It is not clear, whether he attributed the credit to Laird because of the failure of Vietnamisation. Seen in the context of Nixon doctrine, Vietnamisation appeared to be Nixon's own policy.



What is worth noting is that William Rogers, the Secretary of State was relegated to background and did not play a considerable role in Nixon's foreign policy decisions. He was outsmarted by Kissinger.

When it comes to the influence of Kissinger it assumed gigantic proportions that ultimately left many wonder about the respective roles of Nixon and Kissinger. Dividing the policy preferences of Nixon and Kissinger into watertight compartments may not be possible. In their special relationship, both of them were of the similar view on many occasions as to what policies are to be pursued in Vietnam war. In arriving at major decisions like, expansion of war into Cambodia and Laos, reescalation of war in Vietnam, outline of strategy to be followed in secret talks etc. the present study revealed that both Nixon and Kissinger were in agreement.

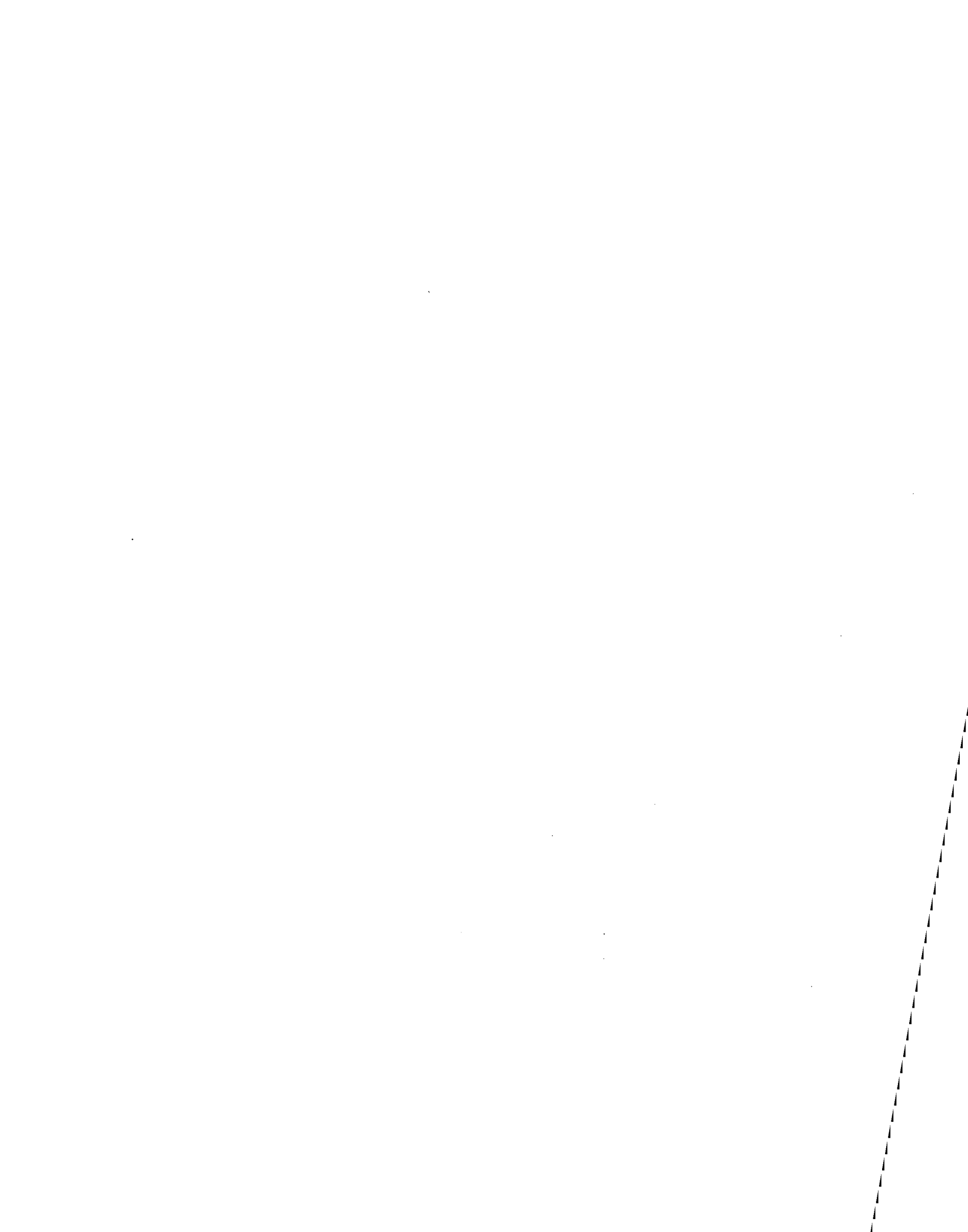
However, subtle distinction could be made between Nixon's policy and that pursued by Kissinger. Nixon preferred to treat all communists as a group in attempting to link the progress in bilateral relations with the Soviet Union and China towards a settlement in Vietnam. On the contrary Kissinger favoured to differentiate pressures against Moscow, Peking and Hanoi. Moreover Kissinger was not sanguine about the Soviet help in ending the war and to

a large extent proved to be right. However, Nixon received some indirect help from the two communist giants for his domestic advantage and got away with mining Haiphong without any strong protest from Moscow and Peking.

While Kissinger was very enthusiastic about negotiations, Nixon was sceptical. Kissinger believed that since Hanoi could not militarily force the U.S. out of Vietnam, it would be ready to reach a negotiated settlement. He seemed to have miscalculated domestic pressures on the Nixon administration. He advocated a two track negotiating strategy which was pursued till the end. In secret negotiations Kissinger appeared to have been given considerable flexibility. When a negotiated settlement was ready in October 1972 the U.S. went back on its commitment to sign it by the end of the month. A careful examination showed that Nixon, his aides like Haldeman and others and not Kissinger were responsible for such a sabotage. When the Watergate nemesis set in, Nixon's span of attention seems to have decreased and as a consequence, the role of Kissinger in foreign policy affairs increased. Again as far as the Vietnam war was concerned the U.S. had not done much after Watergate revelations. Moreover the Nixon administration's Indo-China policy was under severe constraints created by Congress. Kissinger's increased role was more applicable in regard to the war in Middle East and

year of Europe etc. and is out of the purview of the present work.

In the end, when South Vietnam fell to Hanoi, Nixon blamed the Congress for failure while Kissinger found the fault with Watergate affair. However the efficacy of Paris peace accords and the ability and will of the U.S. to enforce them, even without Congressional constraints and Watergate, are doubtful. "Peace with honour" was not achieved. Both Nixon and Kissinger were no less responsible for the prolongation of human tragedy. However for the failure of U.S. in Vietnam the Nixon administration could alone not be held responsible. The failure, may be a result of multiplicity of factors, which led to a complex debate that proved inconclusive. Nevertheless, it may be summed up, within the limitations, the goals set by the Nixon administration to end America's war in Vietnam had not been achieved. The role of president Nixon in ending the war could not be minimised. It was also accountable for concentration of executive authority and consequent abuse of it.





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