

MEMORANDUM

April 10, 1970

THE WHITE HOUSE
WASHINGTON

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Vietnam Committee
File in my file
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MEMORANDUM FOR THE PRESIDENT

FROM: Henry A. Kissinger *H*
SUBJECT: Your Statement on Vietnam

Attached is a draft of your statement on Vietnam.

Since we have been criticized for not being serious about negotiations, I have added a section which states our position on negotiations and makes clear that the enemy, not we, is the obstacle to progress. In this section, I have included some of the general principles that I have mentioned in private to Le Duc Tho for whatever impact this might have on the deliberations now going on in Hanoi.

On page 7 I have cited the low level of American combat deaths during the first quarter of this year compared to previous years without mentioning specific figures. (There were 1,108 deaths the first three months of this year compared to 3,184 in 1969 and 4,869 in 1968.) I believe the point is better handled in this way, for we don't want to appear to be satisfied that there were "only" 1,108 deaths the first three months of this year.

Attachment

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Draft - April 10, 1970

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REPORT ON VIETNAM

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a program report on our plan to bring a quiet peace
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Today, I am making another in a series of my periodic reports to the American people on our efforts to bring peace to Vietnam.

As in the past, I will relate both the encouraging and discouraging developments that have taken place. I can state at the outset that the mixed picture I have noted in recent reports persists. In short, there is continued bleakness on the negotiating front and continued progress on the Vietnamization front.

I regret that I can report to you absolutely no progress in the formal discussions in Paris.

The reason for the stalemate is simple. And it is now distressingly familiar to all who yearn for genuine negotiations and a fair settlement. The other side continues to make its two totally unacceptable demands. We are told that;

- we must unilaterally and unconditionally withdraw all our forces from South Vietnam.
- on our way out, we must overthrow the existing government of South Vietnam.

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Furthermore, these demands are laid down as conditions for beginning negotiations. The other side seeks guaranteed political predominance before real bargaining even takes place. If we acceded to their demands there would be nothing left to negotiate. We will not accept this transparent capitulation.

While Communist spokesmen continue to obstruct progress in Paris, Communist troops have made ominous moves in Indochina.

In recent months, Hanoi has sent thousands more of its soldiers into Laos to launch new offensives. The North Vietnamese threaten the very government that they proposed and helped establish eight years ago. They blatantly violate the 1962 Geneva Accords which reflected Communist formulations for a Laotian political settlement. They continue to pour men and supplies down the Ho Chi Minh Trail into South Vietnam.

In recent weeks, Viet Cong and North Vietnamese forces have increased their pressures against Cambodia. This small country has struggled to maintain its neutrality and territorial integrity since the Geneva Conference of 1954. Vietnamese Communist troops, now almost 40,000 strong, have for years occupied Cambodia to attack South Vietnamese. They are now fighting Cambodians as well.

In recent days, the Communists have stepped up their attacks in South Vietnam itself.

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Hanoi and its allies thus not only block the search for a negotiated peace in Vietnam. They trample on past international agreements for Indochina and make us question the validity of possible future ones.

Vietnamization

Enemy intransigence has given us no choice but to pursue our Vietnamization program.

We have emphasized from the beginning of this Administration that we seek a rapid settlement of the Vietnam conflict through negotiation. We have also made it clear that we will move forward with Vietnamization so long as the enemy prevents negotiating progress.

I have described this program in preceding reports and noted its primary objective of turning over to the Government of South Vietnam the responsibilities for its own self-defense. For the American people this process offers the prospect of a steadily diminishing U. S. involvement in Vietnam, even with a negotiating stalemate. For the South Vietnamese it assures continuing U. S. support while they progressively strengthen themselves. For the other side it should underline our determination to sustain our commitments and demonstrate that it is in their own self-interest to negotiate.

Our Vietnamization plan does not guarantee success. There are many risks as well as opportunities. As I told the American people last year

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*The enemy launched attacks -
It does not end our withdrawal program
& for every increase in losses*

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November 3, we inherited a very difficult situation when we took office. We did not have the luxury of starting from scratch. We had to work with what we found. We judged that the transfer of responsibilities to the South Vietnamese was the best possible option available to us.

I can report to you today that we continue to make considerable progress in our Vietnamization efforts.

Let me briefly review what we have done and then project what we will do.

We have based the timing and pace of American troop withdrawals on the three criteria of the level of enemy activity, progress in negotiations, and the increasing ability of the South Vietnamese people to defend themselves.

As we set out on the Vietnamization course there were many uncertainties.

How rapidly could the South Vietnamese armed forces operate on their own? Could the government maintain the momentum of its pacification program? What would be the impact of our withdrawals on South Vietnamese self-confidence?

We were confident that we were heading in the right direction, but we couldn't be sure what would happen along the way. While we have had long-term schedules for planning purposes, we have been required

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in the opening stages of Vietnamization to feel our way carefully before specifying levels of reductions.

now what shall we do? Plus what?

These uncertainties caused us to announce ~~short term~~ withdrawal plans at three month intervals. After careful assessments within our government and consultations with our allies, I announced in June, September and December successive withdrawals which represent a total reduction of some 115,500 men in the authorized troop ceiling since I took office.

Since my report since 1 - Every 3 months 2 - Cambodia 3 - Laos

In past statements I have stressed the careful studies that we have made on this program as it has progressed. No other problem facing this Administration has received closer attention or more thorough examination. In addition to our regular reporting from the field and trips by agency analysts, I asked Secretary Laird and General Wheeler to take a first-hand look. We have also talked to independent observers from outside the government and other countries.

Here in Washington we established the Vietnam Special Studies Group which I have described before. Drawing on experts throughout the government, this group continues to provoke questions, measure progress, identify problems. To provide a basic foundation for its assessments we have sent special White House teams to Vietnam to explore the military and pacification situation in depth.

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We are determined to know, and to let the American people know, as precisely as possible the progress of the Vietnamization program.

We will not fool ourselves. We can not fool the enemy.

Some of our major findings, which I highlighted in my Foreign Policy Report, include the following:

-- There has been steady progress in improving, equipping, and training the South Vietnamese armed forces. Their numbers have grown, particularly in the local and territorial forces. Their effectiveness has increased in many areas, although substantial problems remain.

-- We have seen a particularly encouraging example of Vietnamization in the southern delta area where a large portion of the population lives. American ground combat forces were withdrawn from this region last year and its defense is now a South Vietnamese responsibility. The North Vietnamese have sent several crack regiments into this area to test the results. To date, the South Vietnamese forces have given a good account of themselves in meeting this threat.

-- The pacification program has made significant advances and the government has extended its authority in the countryside. The percentage of rural population living in secure areas has grown substantially while that under Viet Cong control has dropped sharply. Solid success in pacification is especially difficult to measure. Sustained political and military efforts by the government will still be required.

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-- There has been an overall decline in enemy force levels and attacks, although we still see at times disturbing signs of heightened enemy activity. Increasingly, North Vietnamese fillers are needed to bolster Viet Cong units.

-- Casualties for all forces in Vietnam have been dropping. During the past three months American combat deaths declined to the lowest levels for comparable periods in the last five years. ~~American deaths during~~ for the first quarter of this year were about one-third those for the same period in 1969 and less than one-fourth those in 1968.

-- One of the ~~most significant~~ elements in the total picture is the growing confidence of the South Vietnamese themselves. They fully share the objectives of the Vietnamization program and are displaying enthusiasm and pride in its accomplishments.

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Latin* There are of course soft spots. We can expect some temporary setbacks. The enemy will score tactical successes whose importance should neither be inflated nor ignored. Serious political and economic, as well as military problems remain. Neither we nor the South Vietnamese minimize these difficulties. ~~I will not minimize them to the American people, who have had their full quota of over-optimistic reports on Vietnam.~~

Many unknowns in the Vietnamization program remain. We will continue to make comprehensive assessments. However, after several months of experience we now have a good feel both for the rate of progress and for the many remaining problems. We need no longer restrict ourselves to short-term projections.

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We believe that we have now reached the point where we can chart a longer term course for our troop withdrawals. We can set a target that we should meet under foreseeable conditions while allowing for adjustments if intervening events dictate.

I am therefore announcing today that we plan to withdraw an additional 150,000 American troops from Vietnam by late spring of next year. When added to our previous withdrawals, this will mean a total reduction of 265,500 men in our authorized forces in Vietnam below the level existing when this Administration took office in January 1969.

The precise timing and pace of these withdrawals over the coming months will ~~not~~ be keyed to the circumstances and our continuing best judgments.

We believe this long-term projection represents a prudent rate of turnover of responsibilities to the South Vietnamese, based on reasonable expectations of progress in Vietnamization.

Further troop reductions ^{above this number} are not ruled out. We would like nothing better than to be able to speed up this process because of progress in the negotiations. ^(depend on level of continuity - Secretariat) If the other side had responded constructively to our offer of May 14, 1969, most U. S. and foreign troops could already have left South Vietnam.

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We will also watch the level of enemy activity. We have been concerned at the recent increases in their attacks in South Vietnam. Let me repeat: the Government of North Vietnam could make no greater mistake than to assume that it would gain by an increase in violence. We will not hesitate to take strong measures if the level of enemy activity and the threat to remaining American forces in Vietnam requires us to do so. It would be a costly error to test our resolve or exploit the withdrawal of U. S. troops with an escalation of the fighting.

In this connection, we take a very grave view of developments elsewhere in Indochina. North Vietnamese offensives in Laos and Vietnamese Communist pressures ^{on the neutrality of} ~~in~~ Cambodia are direct threats to the neutrality of those nations. Such actions come against the long background of Hanoi's flagrant use of the territory of those countries to pursue its aggression against South Vietnam.

We continue to support the neutrality and integrity of Laos and Cambodia. We will expect the North Vietnamese and their allies to start doing the same.

Negotiations

Hanoi's implacability forces us down the road of Vietnamization. There is a better way to end this war. We prefer the shorter road of negotiations.

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For we take no satisfaction in the prospect that as American presence and casualties drop, Vietnamese continue to kill Vietnamese. Or that the Communist forces continue to be killed in much greater numbers than allied forces. We value all human life. We want to see all combat stilled.

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On several occasions I have reviewed the general approach and specific proposals that the Government of South Vietnam and we have made to bring about genuine negotiations for a peaceful settlement. I have explained also our understanding of the other side's perspective, our willingness to be forthcoming once there is true give and take.

We recognize that a political settlement is of course the heart of the matter for the Vietnamese. It is what the fighting has been about for some thirty years in that part of the world. Let me briefly list a few principles that govern our viewpoint of a negotiated settlement.

First, our single basic objective remains to seek a solution which allows all South Vietnamese to determine their future without outside interference.

Second, this requires the withdrawal of all outside forces from South Vietnam. I hereby reaffirm our acceptance of the principle of total withdrawal of American troops. In turn, we must see the withdrawal of all North Vietnamese forces and reliable assurance that they

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will not return. ~~As I have said previously, we do not insist that Hanoi publicly acknowledge its withdrawals, only that they take place.~~

Third, a fair political process must register the existing relationship of political forces. ~~We do not pretend that this is easy to accomplish.~~

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It requires agreement on a procedure which forecloses no outcome and gives every significant group a free chance to participate and contest the political issues. We are prepared to do this. We want to shift the struggle in Vietnam from military to political competition.

Mr. Santoro
Fourth, the political process must reflect the will of the South Vietnamese people. Our proposals have included the concept of free elections under international supervision. We recognize the complexity of shaping a process which would fairly apportion political power in South Vietnam; our suggestions have not been presented on a take-it-or-leave-it basis. We have stated repeatedly that we are prepared to be flexible once genuine negotiations begin.

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Lastly, we will abide by the outcome of the political process. President Thieu and I have said that we will accept the free decision of the South Vietnamese people - whatever the outcome. We will not, however, agree that the President and other leaders of the Government of Vietnam should be overthrown before real negotiations are joined. This arrogant demand

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would prevent a fair political process and prearrange the political results. It suggests that the other side fears the outcome of genuine political competition.

That is the essence of our approach. The contrast between the negotiating attitudes of the two sides is sharp indeed.

They say, "take out all your side's foreign forces from South Vietnam while we leave ours there." We say, "let us remove all outside forces and entrust the future of South Vietnam to its own people."

They say, "toss out the present government of South Vietnam and guarantee in advance that we will rule the country." We say, "let both sides search for a political process that reflects present strengths and gives everyone a chance to compete for political power."

I do not know how we could offer a fairer position or a more open attitude. We fail to understand why the other side persistently refuses to enter into meaningful discussions. We regret it sticks to its unreasonable demands. We wonder why it prefers the continued costs and anguish of battle to the genuine accommodation of negotiation.

I pledge once again to seek a negotiated settlement despite enemy intransigence.

At the same time, I pledge that we will not participate in the type of sham negotiations that the other side demands to camouflage an allied surrender.

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If negotiations fail, our conscience will be clear. History will record that it was not our fault.

Prisoners of War

No statement on Vietnam would be complete without my underlining once again our deep concern for the fate of American prisoners. One can perhaps speculate upon, even if not fully understanding, Hanoi's motives in refusing to negotiate seriously for a Vietnam peace. What is frankly incomprehensible is its attitude on prisoners of war.

This is not a political nor a bargaining issue. It involves the anguish of a wife or mother not knowing whether her loved one is alive or dead. It concerns children growing up without even being able to communicate at long-distance with their fathers.

transfer

North Vietnam gains nothing by using these prisoners as political pawns. On the contrary, its callous positions have prompted a rising tide of international condemnation. For simple humanitarian reasons, we once again ask Hanoi to provide information on the whereabouts of all prisoners of war; to allow them to write and receive packages from their families; to permit inspection of prisoners of war camps by impartial organizations; and to provide for the early release of at least the sick and wounded captives.

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Conclusion

What is the significance of what I have said today?

On the disappointing side, the enemy still shows no signs of negotiating seriously. On the positive side, the Vietnamization program continues to make steady progress.

If these trends continue they suggest a declining but still substantial American involvement in Vietnam over the coming year. I am confident the American people will support this course so long as the enemy remains unreasonable.

I deeply hope instead that by next spring we will have witnessed genuine negotiations and the building of a just peace. The other side holds the key to that hope. We will not be found wanting.

We were told repeatedly in the past that our adversaries would negotiate seriously if only we stopped the bombing of North Vietnam... if only we began withdrawing our forces from South Vietnam... if only we dealt with the National Liberation Front as one of the parties to the negotiations... if only we agreed in principle to remove all our forces from Vietnam.

We have taken all these steps. Yet the enemy still refuses genuine negotiations.

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The other side indicated that it would take serious note of large American withdrawals, such as 100,000 men. We have already removed more than that.

They have then said we should commit ourselves to withdrawing this many in a single announcement. Today, I am projecting a reduction of still another 150,000 American troops.

I have repeated our willingness to be forthcoming in negotiations and sketched the general principles which guide our approach.

We are prepared to act on these principles and to seek a settlement in which the other side's interests as well as ours are recognized and protected. Both sides have shown at a terrible cost that they can make war. It is now time for the enemy to turn their proven courage and determination to making peace.

We are ready to do just that. We want a peace in which both sides can find some repayment for the price they have paid.

I can only hope that the other side will at long last respond to our initiatives so that peace and political competition can replace the military struggle in Southeast Asia.

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