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BEHIND THE DELAY: NIXON, KISSINGER, AND THE 1973 PARIS PEACE AGREEMENT NEGOTIATIONS ON VIETNAM

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ABSTRACT

On January 27, 1973, in Paris, the Paris Peace Accords on Vietnam were signed, compelling the United States to withdraw all its troops and auxiliary forces from South Vietnam while recognizing Vietnam's independence, sovereignty, and territorial integrity. The Accords were the culmination of the most arduous and protracted diplomatic struggle in the history of revolutionary Vietnamese diplomacy. This article seeks to delineate the intense battle of wits and arguments undertaken to defend Vietnam's position while exposing the adversary's calculated, deceitful, and brutal maneuvers throughout the negotiations. It focuses on a brief yet pivotal period from after the spring–summer 1972 victories in the South until the official signing examining the historical context, Vietnam's strategic intentions, U.S. assessments and motives, Nixon's delay tactics, the Nixon-Kissinger rift, and ultimately offering critical observations on the Paris negotiations.

KEYWORDS: Vietnam, United States, Paris Peace Agreement, 1973.

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1. INTRODUCTION

The 1973 Paris Peace Agreement ended more than four years of arduous negotiations between the United States representing experienced global diplomacy and the Democratic Republic of Vietnam representing a young but determined diplomatic tradition. Its signing created a decisive strategic opening that culminated in the Spring 1975 victory, the liberation of the South, and national reunification.

Half a century later, former adversaries have become comprehensive strategic partners, a transformation rooted in the postwar reconciliation process initiated by the Paris Agreement. This milestone holds enduring significance as both a diplomatic triumph and a turning point in modern Vietnamese history.

The negotiations were marked by sustained U.S. military pressure aimed at breaking Vietnam's resolve, yet each campaign failed to alter the balance. The 1971–1972 period witnessed heightened tensions both on the battlefield and at the negotiating table. By early October 1972, after numerous intense rounds, the parties reached a basic consensus and scheduled a signing for October 30. However, following his re-election, President Richard Nixon reversed course, demanding revisions to agreed terms. Ultimately, the final text retained the core provisions of the October 1972 draft, underscoring Vietnam's diplomatic resilience and ability to defend its strategic interests.

Research on the Vietnam War, especially the Paris Peace Conference and Agreement, still draws a lot of interest from scholars, experts, and readers in Vietnam and around the world. Studies on Vietnam usually focus on the important role played by the Communist Party and the Government of the Democratic Republic of Vietnam during the talks. They highlight how the Vietnamese delegation, especially people like Le Duc Tho and Nguyen Duy Trinh, showed determination and skill in diplomacy. These works give detailed information about the whole negotiation process, from the start to the signing of the agreement. They also look at strategies like the "fighting while negotiating" approach and how the military and diplomatic efforts worked together closely.Important works include Luu Van Loi's book about the talks between Le Duc Tho and Kissinger in Paris and the Ministry of Foreign Affairs' publication on the Diplomatic Front and the Paris Negotiations on Vietnam.Memoirs and articles by key negotiators such as Nguyen Duy Trinh, Nguyen Co Thach, and Dinh Nho Liem are also significant. These writings, made by people who were involved in the talks and had a deep understanding of strategy, offer clear descriptions of the difficult diplomatic work in Paris. They also explain the many challenges the Vietnamese delegation had to face and how they managed to overcome them.

International scholarship particularly from the United States offers a more multidimensional perspective, focusing on political, personal, and geopolitical factors as well as the impact of the Paris negotiations on foreign policy. American scholars often center their analyses on Henry Kissinger, examining U.S. efforts to withdraw from the war "with honor" and exploring internal conflicts within the U.S. administration, especially between the State Department and the Pentagon.

From this perspective, some scholars contend that the Paris Agreement marked only a temporary pause in the conflict rather than a lasting settlement. They note the continued U.S. aid to the Republic of Vietnam and the North's steadfast resolve to achieve national reunification. Discussions often include the "domino theory" and U.S. fears of communist expansion in Southeast Asia.

Key works include Henry Kissinger's memoirs White House Years and Years of Upheaval, which provide an insider account from a central figure in the negotiations; Jeffrey Kimball's Nixon's Vietnam War, offering an in-depth analysis of Nixon's policies and the strategic use of negotiations for political ends; and RN: The Memoirs of Richard Nixon, which, alongside personal reflections, addresses major domestic and foreign policies. In particular, Nixon's memoir sheds light on his Vietnamization strategy and its direct influence in prolonging the process leading to the signing of the 1973 Paris Peace Agreement.

Recent studies on the 1973 Paris Agreement increasingly integrate multiple perspectives to provide more comprehensive and objective analyses, drawing on newly released and declassified sources. Many archival materials from the United States, the Soviet Union, China, and other countries have been made public, enabling scholars to shed new light on behind-the-scenes arrangements and the pressures exerted by major powers on the parties involved in the conflict.

Domestic research often gives limited attention to internal challenges, whereas foreign studies may lack a deep understanding of Vietnam's historical and cultural context. Adopting a multi-dimensional approach, this study examines a specific phase of the Paris negotiations (1972–1973) to explore the historical context after the spring–summer 1972 victory in the southern battlefield; Vietnam's strategic goals; U.S. assessments and intentions under Nixon and Kissinger; the reasons behind

Nixon's delay in signing the agreement; the relationship and tensions between Nixon and Kissinger; Nixon's broader objectives; and key concluding insights.

2. RESEARCH FINDINGS AND DISCUSSION

2.1. Historical Context

Following the Spring–Summer 1972 victory, the balance of forces across Indochina shifted decisively in favor of Vietnam in its confrontation with both the United States and the Republic of Vietnam. Vietnam's main forces retained firm control over key strategic areas, while the U.S. policy of "Vietnamization" had largely failed to achieve its objectives. On the southern battlefield, U.S. troop numbers had declined to approximately 270,000. Although the Saigon army was substantially reinforced, it continued to exhibit significant weaknesses in combat effectiveness.

At the same time, President Nixon confronted mounting challenges in both international and domestic arenas. As 1972 was a presidential election year, political pressure on the administration intensified sharply. In his January 25, 1972 address, Nixon outlined four conditions for ending the war: an internationally supervised ceasefire; the return and accounting of American prisoners of war; continued U.S. economic and military assistance to the Saigon government; and a political settlement for South Vietnam to be determined by the Vietnamese parties through free elections (Kissinger, 1994). Notably, by late May 1971, the United States had quietly dropped its long-standing demand that North Vietnam withdraw its troops from the South.

2.2. Vietnam's Strategic Policy

In the wake of the Spring–Summer 1972 campaign, the Vietnam Workers' Party recalibrated its strategy to consolidate military gains, capitalize on U.S. domestic vulnerabilities, and secure a peaceful settlement within the year to shift the war into a new phase. Despite three months of intense negotiations, progress remained elusive. To break the impasse, the Politburo instructed its delegation to present a draft agreement to the United States on October 8, 1972. Introducing the proposal, Special Adviser Le Duc Tho[1] emphasized its alignment with President Nixon's own terms calling for a ceasefire, troop withdrawals, and agreed principles on political issues while leaving their resolution to the South Vietnamese parties (Ministry of Foreign Affairs, 2015).

Henry Kissinger, after reviewing Vietnam's draft, requested a recess and, once alone with Winston Lord, embraced him, exclaiming, "We've won." Alexander Haig[2], equally moved, declared, "We have salvaged the honor of the American soldiers who served and died in Vietnam." Within Kissinger's delegation, only John Negroponte voiced hesitation, warning that Saigon would likely oppose the agreement (Isaacson, 1993).

2.3. U.S. Assessments and Intentions

Kissinger and the U.S. delegation attributed Vietnam's decision to present the October 8 draft to a convergence of factors: the U.S. mining of North Vietnamese ports, which curtailed supply routes to the South; U.S. offensives against North Vietnamese sanctuaries in Cambodia and Laos in 1970-1971; the failure of Vietnam's 1972 spring counteroffensive; the absence of strong support from Moscow and Beijing when the Nixon administration resumed bombing the North; and Hanoi's fear that Nixon's re-election would allow him greater latitude to intensify the war (Kissinger, 1994).

On this basis, Kissinger resolved to secure an agreement with Vietnam. After four consecutive days of negotiations, culminating in a final 16-hour session on December 11, 1972, the two sides reached an accord largely based on Vietnam's proposals. By October 20, the text of the agreement had been finalized, with plans for Kissinger to make a secret visit to Hanoi on October 24 and for an initial signing on October 31, 1972. In his memoirs, Kissinger later described the day he reached agreement with Special Adviser Le Duc Tho as "the happiest moment of my diplomatic life," telling members of the U.S. delegation, "We have fought for four years to reach this day" (Isaacson, 1993).

2.4. Reasons for the Nixon Administration's Delay in Signing the Agreement

A central question arises: Why did the draft agreement, finalized on October 20, 1972, face reversal by the United States, leading to the December 1972 B-52 air raids on Hanoi and Haiphong, only for essentially the same agreement to be signed on January 27, 1973?

Previously, the U.S. government, American scholars, and other observers often attributed the delay primarily to objections from the Saigon

[1] Le Duc Tho served as Special Advisor to the delegation of the Democratic Republic of Vietnam at the Paris Conference on Ending the War and Restoring Peace in Vietnam.

[2] Alexander Haig, Nixon's special envoy to Paris, was tasked with overseeing and limiting Kissinger's authority.

government. While President Nguyễ"n Văn Thiễ^.u's opposition was indeed strong and genuine, historical evidence indicates it was not the decisive factor. Declassified materials reveal that President Nixon held Nguyen Van Thieu in low regard. For instance, in July 1969, Nixon summoned Thieu to a meeting on Midway Island. Kissinger insisted Thiễ^.u arrive before Nixon; Thieu resisted, asserting that Nixon, as host, should arrive first. Ultimately, Thieu attended but had to wait 15 minutes for Kissinger. Upon entering the meeting room, Thieu noticed a large chair reserved for Nixon and three smaller ones for others. He instructed his secretary to fetch an equally large chair for himself (Nguyen & Schecter, 2003).

Regarding the October 20 draft, Thieu demanded 69 amendments. At the November 20, 1972 meeting, Kissinger presented all of Thieu's demands but remarked they were "for the record" only. To placate Thieu's insistence on North Vietnamese troop withdrawals, Kissinger orchestrated a letter from Nixon to Thieu dated January 17, 1973, stating, "We [the United States] do not recognize the right of foreign troops to remain on South Vietnamese soil" (Isaacson, 1993). In reality, Kissinger had already accepted Vietnam's position that North Vietnamese forces on Vietnamese territory were not "foreign troops."

Thus, the primary cause of the delay did not stem from Saigon's objections. The true reasons lay elsewhere.

The relationship and tensions between Henry Kissinger and Richard Nixon in addressing the Vietnam issue

Sources published in the early twenty-first century, including the memoirs of Richard Nixon and Henry Kissinger as well as contemporary American press accounts, depict a relationship shaped by Nixon's political cunning, Kissinger's ambition, and their mutual exploitation to advance personal objectives. In his memoirs, Nixon stated that he regarded Kissinger neither as a friend nor as an enemy; in practice, however, both men strategically leveraged their association for individual gain.

Kissinger's political loyalties shifted significantly over time. In the 1960 presidential election, he supported Nelson Rockefeller, identified himself as a Democrat, and voted for John F. Kennedy instead of Nixon. By 1968, however, Kissinger backed Nixon over Hubert Humphrey, prompting the American press to label him a *"chameleon."* Following Nixon's election victory, Kissinger sought to strengthen his standing by covertly relaying information on the progress of the Paris Peace Talks to Nixon's camp. He obtained these updates through contacts such as Richard Holbrooke and other members of the U.S. delegation led by W. Averell Harriman, the chief American negotiator.

Nixon placed high value on Kissinger's reports, as they enhanced his ability to challenge Democratic policy on Vietnam. Supplemented by intelligence from aide Bryce Harlow, who received information from close associates within President Lyndon Johnson's White House, Nixon learned in advance of Johnson's plan to halt the bombing of the Democratic Republic of Vietnam by late October 1968 and to initiate four-party peace talks. Acting on this intelligence, Nixon, through South Vietnam's ambassador in Washington, Bui Diem, and intermediary Anna Chennault[3], urged President Nguyen Van Thieu to delay participating in the negotiations (Nguyen & Schecter, 2003). Nixon later acknowledged in his memoirs that, in the final days of the 1968 campaign, he began to pay close attention to Kissinger.

In 1967, Nixon took note of a speech in which Henry Kissinger proposed that the Saigon government be given a limited period of survival, a "decent interval", following the withdrawal of U.S. forces, estimating that the interval between the end of the war and the complete collapse of South Vietnam would be two to three years (Nguyen & Schecter, 2003). This notion aligned with Nixon's own strategic thinking. Nixon's overarching objective was to secure an "honorable peace," acknowledging that the United States could not achieve outright victory in South Vietnam. As he explained, "In the type of guerrilla warfare in South Vietnam, if the conventional forces (the U.S. and the Saigon government) do not win, they lose; whereas if the guerrillas (the Democratic Republic of Vietnam) do not lose, they win" (Ministry of Foreign Affairs, 2015).

For Nixon, the challenge was to devise a solution that projected strength and convinced public opinion that the United States had neither abandoned its ally nor withdrawn in defeat. Nevertheless, Kissinger did not initially support the strategy of *"de-Americanization of the war."*[4] He argued that a unilateral troop withdrawal would leave the U.S. with no bargaining leverage against the adversary and that partial withdrawals would have a counterproductive domestic effect, comparable to giving the public "salted peanuts," which only increase their appetite. Nixon rejected this view,

[3] Anna Chennault, wife of General Claire Lee Chennault.

[4] Later, Nixon's Secretary of Defense, Melvin Laird, revised the term to "Vietnamization of the war."

maintaining that only gradual troop reductions could reduce casualties and that fewer casualties would, in turn, diminish and ultimately dissolve the antiwar movement in the United States. While Nixon continued to implement his phased withdrawal plan, he nonetheless remained attentive to Kissinger's ideas.

Another factor influencing Nixon's decision to appoint Henry Kissinger as National Security Adviser was his desire to sideline the U.S. Department of State. Declassified sources reveal that Nixon harbored deep resentment toward the State Department dating back to his tenure as Vice President under Dwight D. Eisenhower[5]. Upon winning the presidency in 1968, Nixon resolved to neutralize the Department's role in shaping and implementing foreign policy, concentrating this authority within the White House, specifically, the National Security Council.

Nixon sought an adviser with strategic vision and a diplomatic style similar to his own, secretive, dramatic, and tightly controlled. In a meeting with Kissinger on December 25, 1968, Nixon outlined this approach explicitly. Kissinger agreed to assume the role of Assistant to the President for National Security Affairs, thereby becoming the central figure in managing U.S. foreign policy from the White House.

In pursuing a "peace with honor" settlement for Vietnam, Nixon and Kissinger generally aligned in their strategic objectives, though occasional disagreements arose.

Seeking a position of strength, Nixon often favored applying military pressure on the Democratic Republic of Vietnam and, according to recently declassified sources, at times even contemplated the use of nuclear weapons. As a diplomat grounded in geostrategic thinking, Kissinger consistently advocated leveraging the Sino–Soviet split to improve relations with both powers and to isolate North Vietnam. He was deeply concerned that escalating the war into North Vietnam could jeopardize the U.S.–Soviet–China triangular balance.

He feared that concerns over territorial security would compel China to intervene militarily, much as it had during the Korean War. Kissinger also recognized that employing nuclear weapons against Vietnam would risk expanding the conflict, undermining the negotiations, collapsing the Vietnamization strategy, and leading to political disaster for Nixon himself. Consequently, Nixon largely accepted Kissinger's cautionary approach.

In the closing months of Nixon's first term, tensions between him and Kissinger over a Vietnam settlement intensified sharply. Nixon aimed to limit Kissinger's prominence, ensuring he would not be seen as the chief architect of a peace deal or claim credit for a resolution that could enhance Nixon's reelection prospects. Yet, unable to replace Kissinger as the lead negotiator with the Democratic Republic of Vietnam, Nixon sought to curb his influence by dispatching Alexander Haig to Paris to both assist and supervise him. Haig had entered the White House as Kissinger's aide on the National Security Council with the rank of colonel. Nixon valued Haig's loyalty, especially as Haig often criticized Kissinger in private conversations. Rapidly advancing his protégé's career, Nixon promoted Haig to three-star general in March 1972 and to four-star general and Vice Chief of Staff of the Army six months later. Although Kissinger resented the speed of Haig's rise, he initially welcomed it, assuming Haig would transfer to the Department of Defense. Nixon, however, acted strategically, elevating Haig's rank while keeping him close, assigning him to shadow Kissinger during the decisive final stage of the negotiations.

The central dispute between Nixon and Kissinger during this period concerned whether to sign the Paris Peace Agreement before or after the U.S. presidential election on November 5, 1972. Kissinger maintained that the United States held greater bargaining leverage beforehand. He argued that North Vietnam pressed for an early signing because it feared that a reelected Nixon would adopt a harsher stance, making pre-election negotiations the optimal moment to secure concessions. Kissinger further contended that even with a decisive Nixon victory in November, the Democrat-controlled Congress, reconvening in January 1973, would inevitably move to cut funding for the Vietnam War. Consequently, he believed that America's negotiating position in early 1973 would be weaker than in late 1972.

Nixon, however, believed his leverage would increase after the election. In his memoirs, he wrote, "After a major election victory, with the antiwar crowds completely defeated, I thought we could make them [North Vietnam] cry uncle" (Issacson, 1993). Charles Colson, a Nixon aide, recalled frequent discussions among Nixon, Haldeman[6], and himself

[5] At the time, John Foster Dulles, as Secretary of State, exercised near-complete control over foreign policy deliberations, effectively excluding Vice President Nixon from decision-making processes.

[6] H. R. Haldeman — White House Chief of Staff.

about the risks of concluding the agreement before the election. Haldeman's diary entry of November 20, 1972, recorded Haig's agreement with Nixon that "Henry was strongly motivated by the desire to be personally credited with bringing about the peace settlement to end the war." Haldeman viewed it as a major problem, as it drove Kissinger to push for a swift settlement, even at the cost of accepting less favorable terms, and "we could not persuade him to abandon that aim." Nixon also believed that Kissinger sought to shape public perception to highlight his decisive role in securing Nixon's second-term victory (Issacson, 1993). This divergence in motives and strategy became the core source of tension between Nixon's camp and Kissinger at the time.

Notably, tensions between Kissinger and Nixon were not confined to the pre-election period. According to Walter Isaacson, Kissinger's biographer, Nixon consistently disagreed with Kissinger's negotiation approach throughout 1972. Nixon routinely questioned and mocked Kissinger's reports of progress with North Vietnam. As Peter Rodman, Kissinger's aide, later observed, "Nixon never truly agreed with Kissinger that a diplomatic solution was possible. He was deeply skeptical and weary of diplomacy" (Issacson, 1993).

Although Nixon recognized he could not prevent Kissinger from reaching an agreement that met all of Nixon's own stated conditions, he sought to delay its signing until after the election by leveraging President Thieu's opposition. In his diary entry of October 20, Nixon wrote, "What we care about is South Vietnam, and that is why we have endured Thieu's delays, because our objective is to help South Vietnam survive, and at this moment, Thieu is the only leader who can guide its people in that direction" (Nixon, 2004).

On December 12, 1972, Kissinger and Haig returned to Washington to present the agreement's terms to Nixon. Nixon approved, calling them a complete surrender by the enemy, and celebrated with food and wine. Yet he also advised that if Saigon objected, Kissinger should make concessions and Haig should avoid pressuring Thieu. At this point, Haig, who had helped Kissinger reach the Paris agreements, reversed his stance. In discussions with Nixon, he warned that forcing Thieu's compliance could lead to bloodshed, adding that "this time Henry has gone too far."

When Kissinger proposed from Saigon that the United States halt bombing of North Vietnam even without signing the agreement, arguing that the breakdown was not their fault, Nixon ordered him not to travel to Hanoi and refused his plan for shuttle diplomacy between Saigon and Hanoi. Meanwhile, Haig intensified his efforts to undermine Kissinger, arranging for Fritz Kraemer, a hawkish Pentagon mentor, to meet Nixon. Kraemer persuaded Nixon to resume bombing campaigns against the North.

Kissinger immediately returned to Washington, where he found Nixon largely indifferent to the deadlock caused by Thieu's opposition. Nixon's primary concern was preventing the public from learning the results of the Paris negotiations and delaying any disclosure until after the election. Perceiving that Nixon and his allies were attempting to undermine his credibility, Kissinger, on October 25, met with Max Frankel, bureau chief of *The New York Times*, and disclosed that a peace agreement with North Vietnam had been reached. He later informed Nixon of this meeting, prompting Nixon to react angrily[7] and remark to Colson that "now everyone will say Kissinger won the election."

The following day, October 26, in response to the Democratic Republic of Vietnam's release of the full text of the agreement and the proposed signing date, Kissinger held a press conference in the United States. He opened with the statement, "We believe that peace is at hand." Explaining to William Safire[8] why he had made this declaration, Kissinger said it was intended to signal to Hanoi that the United States remained ready to sign, despite its refusal to initial the agreement. Nixon, however, was displeased, later stating, "I knew instantly that our bargaining position with North Vietnam would be severely undermined" (Issacson, 1993).

On November 20, Kissinger met again with Le Duc Tho in Paris. Following the meeting, he cabled Nixon: "There are now only two options: either we accept the agreement as reached and force it upon Saigon, or we end the negotiations and resume bombing North Vietnam" (Nixon, 2004). Two days later, Nixon replied that unless the other side demonstrated a reasonable attitude comparable to that shown by the United States, Kissinger should terminate the talks and resume military operations. Alongside the official cable, Nixon sent a note instructing Kissinger to show it to the North Vietnamese, clarifying that it was not a directive but a tactical message.

Nixon remained resentful of Kissinger's "peace is at hand" statement, believing it constrained the U.S. from breaking off negotiations and left no alternative

[7] According to Charles Colson's memoir, Nixon clenched his jaw tightly and remained silent.

[8] William Safire – speechwriter for President Nixon.

but to accept an agreement based on the October 8 draft principles (Bộ^. Ngoạ.i giao, 2015). However, the next day, Nixon shifted his stance, ordering Kissinger to leave Paris if Hanoi did not concede and to prepare for an intensive bombing campaign. Seizing on the situation, Haig and Nixon's aides accused Kissinger of exceeding his authority by making concessions to North Vietnam despite Haig's objections. From Paris, Kissinger proposed ending the talks and launching a six-month bombing campaign, but Nixon noted in his diary that it was untenable. In his view, Kissinger's earlier statement had raised public expectations of a pre-election peace settlement, and resuming open-ended hostilities would place the United States in a politically and strategically weakened position (Nixon, 2004).

Ultimately, Nixon decided to launch a B-52 bombing campaign against Hanoi and Haiphong, deploying all 129 B-52 aircraft along with numerous advanced fighter jets in the assault. The question was who would announce the operation on television. Kissinger suggested that Nixon make the announcement, while Nixon's aides urged Kissinger to do so. Kissinger opposed using B-52s against Hanoi and Haiphong, recommending instead an intensified bombing campaign north of the 20th parallel. Nixon, however, ordered the strikes without any televised statement. On December 16, 1972 two days before the operation began Nixon instructed Kissinger to hold a press conference. During the briefing, Kissinger mentioned Nixon 14 times, implying that the current deadlock was Nixon's responsibility. The December 1972 bombing campaign later became known as Operation Linebacker II[9].

3. CONCLUSION AND DISCUSSION

An examination of documents released nearly three decades after the war indicates that Nixon never intended for Kissinger to sign the agreement on December 20, 1972.

Instead, he ordered the bombing of Hanoi and Haiphong, and only on January 23, 1973, instructed Kissinger to initial the "Agreement on Ending the War and Restoring Peace in Vietnam," whose substantive content remained unchanged.

In reality, the delay in signing was not primarily due to opposition from the Nguyen Van Thieu government. While such opposition did exist, it served merely as a pretext for the United States to pursue a new strategy: to pass the election period, free from political constraints; to employ renewed military pressure to gain leverage at the negotiating table; and to prolong the timeline to increase support for the Saigon government.

The conflict between Nixon and Kissinger was not the principal cause of the delay. The primary factor lay in Nixon's aggressive policy and staunch anti-Communism. By ordering B-52 strikes on Hanoi and Haiphong before ending the war, Nixon sought to inflict heavy damage on the Democratic Republic of Vietnam, forcing the North to focus on recovery efforts and thereby limiting its capacity to support the South. This, in turn, would give the Saigon government an opportunity to consolidate power or at least prolong its survival. At the same time, Nixon aimed to create the impression that it was American pressure and his own hardline stance, rather than the goodwill of the Democratic Republic of Vietnam or Kissinger's diplomatic skill, that compelled Hanoi to sign the Paris Peace Agreement.

However, Nixon miscalculated. The cost of this final escalation proved enormous. International opinion condemned the December 1972 B-52 bombings as a crime against humanity and, in contemporary terms, as an act of "state terrorism." In his memoirs, Kissinger reflected, "The three-month delay in signing the Agreement was meaningless. Now that the Agreement has been signed, I feel no sadness, but neither do I find any cause for satisfaction" (Issacson, 1993).

The Nixon administration shifted from suspending negotiations to launching bombing raids, only to halt the attacks to resume talks. On 23 January 1973, Special Advisor Le Duc Tho and U.S. National Security Advisor Henry Kissinger initialed the Agreement on Ending the War and Restoring Peace in Vietnam. Four days later, on 27 January 1973, the four parties and two sides formally signed the Paris Agreement at the Kléber Conference Center. Widely regarded as both a test of strength and a protracted battle of wits, the longest negotiation in modern diplomatic history, the Paris Conference represented the pinnacle of Vietnamese diplomacy. Throughout the process, Vietnam upheld its strategic principles while applying tactical flexibility, conceding only within permissible limits.

This approach simultaneously cornered the adversary and offered them a dignified withdrawal. Consequently, many scholars view the Paris Agreement as both a conclusion and a beginning: the conclusion of a prolonged negotiation and the

[9] This referred to the continuation of the Linebacker I bombing campaign conducted in May.

opening of Vietnam's path toward national reunification.

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