

Dans les Couloirs



**France's Mediator Role in the Paris Peace Negotiations
to end the Vietnam War, 1968-1973**

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France's Mediatory Role in the Paris Peace Negotiations to end the Vietnam War, 1968-1973

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What has France got to do with it?

1968, the year when the unmistakable entrance of the Vietnam War in the domestic scene in France paradoxically coincides with the entrance of France in the diplomatic process to end the Vietnam War. In May 1968, Paris is scene to the largest general strike ever attempted in the country assembling both students and working men in their attempt to challenge the Gaullist government of Charles de Gaulle. By inflaming nearly two thirds of the French working population, it virtually brings the French capitalist economy to a halt, thereby touching the very existence of the French state. In the meantime thanks to that same Gaullist policy the United States and the Democratic Republic of Vietnam (North Vietnam) accept Paris to be the capital to the peace negotiations. The peace conference between the warring parties kicks off at avenue Kléber on May 13, 1968, exactly the first day that the student and labour movements converge into a general strike.¹

What starts out as low key support for the South Vietnamese in order to contain communism in the North under the Kennedy administration, escalates after the Tonkin incident in 1964 into a very unpopular all-out war for the greater good of protecting the credibility of the United States. As early as 1964 the first anti-war protest comes to the surface assembling thousands of people in the U.S. and abroad. The shocking images and news footage entering the American living rooms lead the American people to question the necessity of the ordeal. While the American troops do not seem to gain any military momentum, the mounting American death toll becomes less and less acceptable at the home front. The surprise offensive of Tet on January 30, 1968 unleashes a generally felt sentiment to find a way out of the 'Quagmire'.²

The military effect of the Tet offensive by the North Vietnamese is limited. It does not meet their primary objectives of collapsing the South Vietnam government, shattering their army, nor does it generate a general uprising of the South Vietnamese people. Though, acknowledging this fact, President Johnson announces in its television speech of March 31, 1968 that "there is no need to delay the talks that could bring an end to this long and bloody war"³. By doing so, he renews his proposal for peace talks made in San Antonio in August 1967. This time round the North Vietnamese do accept. After thirty-three days of deliberations, during which nearly fifteen cities have been proposed and rejected on bases of partiality, the Americans and the North Vietnamese come to agree on Paris as neutral enough to host the peace negotiations.⁴ From the very outset the French, under the guidance of Charles de Gaulle, have pushed for a political settlement to end the American participation.⁵ Therefore, France may offer the needed ambiance.

Nonetheless the choice for Paris seems a striking one. The anti-Atlantic policies of Charles de Gaulle, which are interpreted by the Americans as bold criticism and rivalry, lead to the deterioration of the French-American relations during the 1960s. At the height of which is the Phnom Penh Speech of de

¹ Keesings Historisch Archief, 'Studentenopstand Parijs' (1968) And Pierre Journoud, *De Gaulle et le Vietnam, 1945-1969 : La Réconciliation* (Paris, 2011), 13.

² George C. Herring, *America's longest war: the United States and Vietnam, 1950-1975* (New York 2002)

³ Speech President Lyndon B. Johnson, 'Decides not to seek re-election' (March 31, 1968), online via: <http://www.historyplace.com/speeches/lbj-decision.htm>

⁴ Anonymus, 'Vreedzaam Contact in Parijs: Washington en Hanoi vinden elkaar na 33 dagen', *De Tijd: Dagblad voor Nederland*, 8 mei 1968 (Amsterdam) via Koninklijke Bibliotheek, Den Haag.

⁵ Y. Torikata, 'Reexamining de Gaulle's Peace Initiative on the Vietnam War', *Diplomatic History*, Vol. 31, No. 5 (November 2007), 909-936, 918-929.

Gaule on September 1, 1966, given just a few months after France withdrew its troops from NATO. In this speech he condemns the American involvement in Southeast Asia for exceeding the neutrality agreed upon in the Geneva Conventions and threatening world peace.⁶ Controversially, at the same time, several French individuals, among whom former diplomat Jean Sainteny, left-wing FAO employee Raymond Aubrac and Pugwash-affiliated professor Herbert Marcovich, play a substantial role in bringing the two warring parties to the negotiating table.⁷ Moreover, through its colonial history, large private French businesses have substantial holdings in the production of rubber, tobacco, automobiles and coffee in (South) Vietnam. These private investments are vital to both the South Vietnamese economy and to the French trade interests in the region.⁸ In the light of these circumstances, how can France have remained neutral and impartial as the role of host requires it to be, while the French did seem to have an interest at heart?

Mediator in the negotiations

Kissinger and Le Duc Tho receive a Nobel Peace prize for their achievement of bringing about a peace settlement to end the American involvement in the Vietnam War, though the invasion of Saigon in April 1975 severely damages the credibility of the peace accords. Nonetheless, or precisely for that reason, it is interesting to analyse the mediatory role played in the negotiations leading to these controversial peace accords. The Vietnam War accounts for a legacy of 'never again'. It is remembered by endless escalations involving enormous human losses, inhuman use of Napalm bombs, great international resistance and the violation of international agreements, while not making any military progress and diminishing its chances to get out. In its aftermath it still fundamentally influences military-interventionist policy, from the adoption of the Weinberger-Powell Doctrine⁹ until the present day. Nowadays, we live in a world where more and more violent conflicts are resolved through mediation and political settlement instead of military victory and mediation is an increasingly important foreign policy instrument.¹⁰ Even in this worst-case scenario one has found a way out. What are the roles played in that achievement?

Considering its incorporated 'lesson from the past' a multitude of scholars have focused on the coming about of the peace negotiations and the pursuit of mediation and peace initiatives by third parties during the Vietnam War. Forthcoming studies have been plentiful from American perspectives, which have very often been written by American scholars. In recent years the positions towards the war and respective actions undertaken by some of the great powers, such as the Great Britain¹¹, China¹², the Soviet Union¹³ and France¹⁴, have also been subject to research. Additionally, in

⁶ Speech Charles de Gaulle, 'Allocution prononcée à la réunion populaire de Phnom-Penh, 1er septembre 1966' (September 1, 1966), online via <http://www.charles-de-gaulle.org/>

⁷ P. Journoud., 'Diplomatie informelle et réseaux transnationaux : Une contribution française à la fin de la guerre du Vietnam', *Relations Internationales*, No. 138 (2009), 93-110.

⁸ M. Sullivan, 'France and the Vietnam Peace Settlement', *Political Science Quarterly*, Vol. 89, No. 2 (June 1974), 318-322.

⁹ Doctrine drawn up from the lessons from Vietnam in order to avoid any future quagmires which comprises 6 recommendations. Herring, *America's longest war*.

¹⁰ I.W. Zartman and S. Touval, 'International Mediation', 438 in: C.A. Crocker, F.O. Hampson, and P. Aall, *Leashing the Dogs of War: Conflict Management in a Divided World* (Washington D.C. 2007)

¹¹ R. Steininger, 'the Americans are in a Hopeless Position: Great Britain and the War in Vietnam, 1964-1968', *Diplomacy and Statecraft*, No. 78 (November 1997)

¹² Z. Quang, *China and the Vietnam Wars, 1950-1975* (London, 2000)

¹³ I.V. Gaiduk, *The Soviet Union and the Vietnam War* (Chicago, 1996)

their attempt to burst through the American historiography, collections like *The Search for Peace in Vietnam, 1964-1968*¹⁵ and *La Guerre de Vietnam et l'Europe*¹⁶ have assembled scholars who represent both communist and capitalist, and Western and non-Western viewpoints and backgrounds. By these means, they have accomplished to bring fresh perspectives and new details forward about the dynamics surrounding the opening up of the negotiations.

France's role and position with regard to the American involvement in the Vietnam War have long been explained as that of a critical and unloyal ally, at the height of which was the Phnom Penh speech. Still historians do not seem to agree on the interpretation of de Gaulle's intentions with regard to his peace initiatives. Roughly we can make a distinction between scholars who tend to view de Gaulle's criticism as a means to defy American hegemony and promote France's power and independence. This is in line with the interpretation of the Johnson administration at that time and concerns mostly American scholars like Anna Sa'adah¹⁷ and Marianna Sullivan¹⁸. Contrarily, French scholars like Jean Lacouture, Maurice Vaisse and Pierre Journoud explain de Gaulle's intentions in the light of the French experiences in Indochina and Algeria as genuine warnings that a military victory will be infeasible. Though, they do not fail to acknowledge that this should be viewed in the context of de Gaulle's greater objectives of the Grand Design.¹⁹

Forthcoming studies by Pierre Journoud, Yuko Torikata and Vu Son Thuy reveal that its historical liaison with Vietnam enabled France to fill the knowledge and intercultural communication gap that existed between Washington and Hanoi. Yuko Torikata argues that such a mediatory role is exactly the role de Gaulle was seeking for France. In his article *Reexamining de Gaulle's Peace Initiative on the Vietnam War* he states that while de Gaulle seemed to disengage himself from any peace initiatives after the escalation of the war in April 1965, he "nonetheless took vigorous diplomatic initiatives to prepare for future peace mediation"²⁰. By developing more extensive and closer diplomatic relations with all the parties involved in the war, in particular the Communist countries, de Gaulle was building the capacity to bridge the two blocs. France's ability to adequately contact Washington, Beijing, Hanoi and the National Liberation Front made France, in the eyes of de Gaulle and the French Ministry of Foreign Affairs, the Quai d'Orsay, the most suitable candidate for mediation.²¹

Safeguarding its interests in Indochina, re-establishing its relations with the regional powers and expanding its influence vis-à-vis the U.S., is what Vu Son Thuy argues to be the objectives of France's mediating aspirations.²² All three scholars agree that de Gaulle's Vietnam policy fits perfectly in his 'Grand Design'. His geopolitical vision aimed to promote France's sovereignty and grandeur by bursting through the bipolar system, enhancing relations on both sides of the Iron Curtain, making France the leader of an 'European Europe' and rebalancing the power within the Atlantic Alliance vis-

¹⁴ Journoud, *De Gaulle et le Vietnam*.

¹⁵ L.C. Gardner and T. Gittinger, eds., *The Search for Peace in Vietnam 1964-1968* (College Station, 2004)

¹⁶ C.E. Goscha, and M. Vaisse, *La Guerre de Vietnam et l'Europe 1963-1973* (Bruxelles, 2003)

¹⁷ A. Sa'adah, 'Idées Simples and Idées Fixes: De Gaulle, the United States and Vietnam' in: Robert Paxton and Nicholas Wahl, eds., *De Gaulle and the United States: A Centennial Reappraisal* (Oxford: Berg, 1994), 295-315.

¹⁸ M. P. Sullivan, *France's Vietnam Policy: A Study in French-American Relations* (Westport, 1978)

¹⁹ Journoud, *De Gaulle et le Vietnam*.

²⁰ Y. Torikata, *Reexamining de Gaulle's Peace Initiative on the Vietnam War*, *Diplomatic History*, Vol. 31, No. 5 (November 2007), 909-936, 923-924.

²¹ *Ibidem*, 923-930.

²² Vu Son Thuy, 'The French Role in Finding a Peaceful Solution to the Vietnam War', 415-428, 425-426, in: Goscha, C.E., and Vaisse, M., *La Guerre de Vietnam et l'Europe 1963-1973* (Bruxelles, 2003)

à-vis the United States.²³ This results in discrete action and diplomacy by both well-experienced French diplomats and some French intellectuals, most of whom enjoy personal relations with high representatives of North Vietnam. This enables France to play a constructive role in establishing contacts and brokering channels of communication to bring the warring parties to the negotiating table.²⁴

Although scholars have, by now, succeeded in reconstructing the French contribution in the opening of the peace negotiations as well as in demonstrating de Gaulle's desire and deliberate lobbying to acquire a mediatory role, very limited research has been done to the actual mediating role played by the French during the negotiations from 1968 until 1973. That is, there are four studies that cover France's mediatory role in the Vietnam peace talks. The two articles by Journoud *Cinquième partie dans les négociations* and *Le processus de paix et le Quai d'Orsay* come to a similar conclusion stating that the evolution of the context results in a delicate and discrete French diplomatic position and reduces the necessity of its mediatory role.²⁵ Departing from the conviction that Gaullist policy intended to defy American hegemony, Sullivan concludes in her article *France and the Vietnam Peace Settlement* that "France's contacts with all the delegations enabled French officials to participate peripherally in the talks"²⁶, though the "French mediatory function was limited, because there were other interlocutors available"²⁷. And lastly, in *Le Président Georges Pompidou et la Guerre du Vietnam (1969-1974)* Laurent Cesari concludes that the French contribution was limited to the incorporation of two articles in the Paris Peace Accords.²⁸

All four articles have in common that they conclude that the French mediatory role has been marginal for which they give different explanations in the contextual sphere. However, neither of these studies has taken de Gaulle's larger objectives into account when reviewing France's mediatory role. Though, earlier studies have already revealed that de Gaulle's ambitions reached further than a simple mediatory participation. For that reason, this study will examine France's mediatory role in the Paris peace negotiations from May 1968 until January 1973 in the light of de Gaulle's objectives for this mediatory role. After all, even if France's specific mediatory role turns out to be limited, that does not exclude that the French have not advanced on their additional agenda. Better yet, looking at that second agenda may explain why France puts up with a frustrating and limiting role as mediator. Forthcomingly, this study will reveal that France's role has been far more successful than has previously been acknowledged.

In April 1969 de Gaulle resigns after a defeat in a referendum on governmental reforms. A change of power may evidently lead to a change of policy. It is widely assumed that the remaining Gaullist majority and the opposition parties, among others the *Parti Communist Français* (PCF), in support of Hanoi and the NLF do not leave his successor Pompidou with much leeway to deviate from de Gaulle's Vietnam Policy. Thus, "under Pompidou the French diplomacy remains faithful to the

²³ F. Bozo, *Two Strategies for Europe : De Gaulle, The United States and the Atlantic Alliance* (Lanham, 2001)

²⁴ K. Edwards, 'Review Essay De Gaulle et le Vietnam (1945-1969)', *H-Diplo* (May 13, 2013) online via <http://www.h-net.org/~diplo>. And Journoud, *De Gaulle et le Vietnam*.

²⁵ P. Journoud, 'cinquième partie dans les négociations', 203 in : Journoud, P., and Menétry-Monchaëu, C., *Vietnam, 1968-1976: La Sortie de Guerre/Exiting a War* (Bruxelles, 2011)

²⁶ Sullivan, *France's Vietnam Policy*, 141.

²⁷ Ibidem.

²⁸ L. Cesari, 'Le Président Georges Pompidou et la Guerre du Vietnam (1969-1974)', 179-192,189. : Goscha, C.E., and Vaisse, M., *La Guerre de Vietnam et l'Europe 1963-1973* (Bruxelles, 2003)

position defended by de Gaulle²⁹. However, Cesari argues that Pompidou's intrusion on the dossier is part of the explanation for France's limited mediatory role, as he states that "if indeed France did not succeed in speeding up the return of peace in Vietnam, nor to put one's stamp upon the content of the Paris Accords, it is because the parties in the Vietnamese conflict have avoided to make an appeal for its mediation, but additionally because Pompidou – who knows Asia badly – only saw a minor theatre for the French diplomacy and was not prepared to compromise its principal Foreign policy objectives for the initiatives towards Indochina, of which the earning capacity appears uncertain to him"³⁰. Journoud, likewise, calls Pompidou a "less visionary heir"³¹ by which he implies that Pompidou did not dispose of the vision to fulfil de Gaulle's ambitions and objectives with regard to the mediatory role. This study will therefore take the evolution of France's Vietnam Policy as the starting point of the reconstruction of France's mediatory role – on both levels: the mediation and the larger aspirations. This study will bring forward that in fact Pompidou's presidency may have created more favourable circumstances to achieve de Gaulle's anticipated objectives.

Structure and objectives

Thus, this study sets itself the objective to reconstruct the French role in the negotiations from the opening of the negotiations on 10 May 1968 until the signing of the Peace Accords on 27 January 1973 in the light of de Gaulle's Vietnam mediatory objectives. The existing literature leaves some gaps this study aims to fill. Sullivan's primary perspective is the evolution of the French Vietnam policy in the framework of Franco-American relations instead of the mediatory role per se. Moreover, she departs from the conviction that de Gaulle's policy was motivated by a simple defy of American hegemony, whereas this study embraces the hypothesis that de Gaulle has a unique vision on Vietnam and affiliation with its faith that surpasses such a defy. Besides, Journoud's articles are the extension of his book *De Gaulle et le Vietnam* and thus they focus on the period until 1969. As a result he not only leaves a larger part behind, but more importantly, he underexposes the period under Pompidou's leadership. Cesari elaborates on the course of the negotiations in more detail, though his final conclusion of the French contribution is based solely on the incorporation of French ideas in the final peace accords without looking at the total picture. Therefore, I believe this study will contribute greatly to the existing literature by elaborating on the matter into detail and to not lose sight of France's second agenda. In that fashion, the study aims to answer the questions whether France's Vietnam Policy evolves during the course of the negotiations? What is the specific role played by the French as mediator in the negotiations? And do the French succeed in accomplishing their larger objectives through their mediatory role?

The red line in this study is the question if the French Vietnam Policy evolves during the course of the negotiations by external or internal influences, such as public opinion and domestic politics, social-economic development, European or international incidents, and the evolution of the war. After all, a change in policy may signify a deviance from its original objectives. Taking particular account of the military and diplomatic developments of the Vietnam War characterized by military escalations, diplomatic overtures and negotiating halts – evidently these developments often require an

²⁹ Journoud, *cinquième partie dans les négociations*, 202.

³⁰ Cesari, *Le Président Georges Pompidou et la Guerre du Vietnam*, 179.

³¹ Journoud, *De Gaulle et le Vietnam*, 419.

adjustment of the French strategy – I distinct three phases in the negotiations. Each phase is elaborated in a separate chapter. Each chapter commences with an introduction into the French political landscape. Thereafter a thorough analysis follows of the course of the negotiations during that specific period from the French mediatory perspective. In this study a chronically topical structure will be upheld.

Chapter one covers the period from the early 1960s until the end of 1968. This corresponds with de Gaulle's commencement of formulating his Vietnam Policy until President Johnson's announcement of a bombing halt on November 1, 1968 and the end of the preliminary talks that more or less coincide with the crisis of the Franc – the direct monetary consequences of the May Riots. A brief introduction of the French peace initiatives from 1965 until 1968 will be outlined to demonstrate de Gaulle's deliberate lobbying to acquire the role of mediator and host to the negotiations. In that fashion, de Gaulle's vision, policy and objectives for Vietnam and the mediatory role will reveal itself. Thereafter, France's role in the preliminary negotiations leading up to the bombing halt will be under review. From November until January the negotiations at Kléber are stuck around the question of the table setting.

In the wake of the 1968 events de Gaulle resigns and Pompidou succeeds him as President of the Fifth Republic opting for a direction of *Continuité et ouverture*. Chapter two aims to map out the mediatory role of France played in the period from January 1969 until October 3, 1971, a period that has been characterized by relapses of escalations, troop withdrawals and heightened diplomatic intercourse. Resultingly, this chapter will illustrate how the French coop with the new set of circumstances and the ever evolving landscape they operate in. This includes the arrival of President Nixon, his policy of Vietnamisation, the negotiations at Avenue Kléber as well as private negotiations between Henry Kissinger and Le Duc Tho. In response to the re-election of President Thieu on October 3, 1971 the North Vietnamese refuse to engage in any further negotiations, placing the negotiations once again back in deadlock.

After the failure of the negotiations in October 1971 the French place themselves more to the background, focussing their attention on the outlining of a larger Asian policy. Moreover, it is not until after the Easter Offensive and the subsequent Operation Linebacker for all parties to re-assemble at the negotiating table in the summer of 1972. The forthcoming intensive sessions and the contextual developments will be under review in the third chapter, covering the period from the end of 1971 until the signing of the Paris Peace Accords on January 27, 1973.

Finally, I close by drawing up the balance of France's specific mediatory role in regard to the accomplishment of its larger mediatory objectives as foreseen by de Gaulle through that same mediatory role. Particular attention will go out to the change of power from de Gaulle to Pompidou and the affiliated evolution of France's Vietnam Policy during the course of the negotiations from 1968 until 1973.

Final remarks

This study stems for the greater part from the examination of the French Diplomatic Documents originating from the dossier *Asie-Océanie* (AO) at *la Courneuve*, the *Archives du Ministère des Affaires*

Étrangères (MAE) in Paris. In addition, this study makes use of declassified American diplomatic cables from the CIA and the Kissinger Transcripts made available online via the Digital National Security Archive (DNSA). The use of diplomatic cables enables me to interpret the information at hand independently and objectively – to my extent³². This is particularly useful, since the limited amount of academic literature available on the subject is often written by either French, Vietnamese or American scholars. By independently interpreting the cables I can safeguard the unique cultural perspective that I contribute to diversify the existing debate. In addition, the combination of both the French and the American diplomatic cables enables me to gain better insight of the knowledge of the French, what part of that knowledge they share, and how this information is interpreted by the Americans. Examination of the Dutch and German documents revealed that they were insufficiently involved and informed to make similar use of their diplomatic cables of the period, which confirms the preservation of secrecy and discretion by the French and the negotiating parties.

The use of words such as ‘the French’, ‘France’, ‘Paris’, and ‘the Quai d’Orsay’ all refer to the official French diplomacy as it is directed by the French Ministry of Foreign Affairs, to be found at the Quai d’Orsay in Paris, hence its ‘nickname’. The same accounts for ‘Hanoi’, ‘the DRV’, and ‘the North Vietnamese’, as well as ‘the Americans’ and ‘Washington’ etcetera. Make note that two parties are at play in South Vietnam which each have their respective names. That is the ‘Saigon government’ under the leadership of President Thieu, and the NLF forces who create a political representation in 1969 called the PRG.

Following the fact this study makes use of a lot of French literature, I would like to note that all translations (of citations) are by the author. Where I am of the personal opinion that the English translation would deviate from the French meaning and/or expression, I choose to preserve the French citation. In those cases an English translation is provided in the footnote.

To clarify the boundaries of this study, I would like to stipulate that since the subject under examination is the role played by the French in the mediations, all developments that influence the Vietnam War, but are of no importance to the French role, are left outside the scope of this study. In that fashion, relatively little attention is paid to the periods in which the negotiations are put to halt. In addition, in the conclusion an assessment is made of the progress on the larger objectives. This is done more or less on the date of signing the Paris Peace Accords, on 27 January 1973, and does not stretch further in the ‘future’ than the end of 1973. Likewise, this study does not comply with the apparent untenability of the Paris Peace Accords as is to unveil in the following years.

In support of the sometimes confusing and large variety of names and personalities you will find a list of all personalities that are mentioned in the annexes. A concise timeline can be found here as well.

³² I acknowledge that no author can be completely objective due to his or her (cultural) background, political affiliations etc. I would say that is a positive input.

De Gaulle's vision for Vietnam

*« La position française est prise. Elle l'est par la condamnation qu'elle porte sur les actuels événements. A moins que l'univers ne roule vers la catastrophe, seul un accord politique pourrait donc rétablir la paix. »*³³

The rapid dispersion of footage make citizens all over the world witness to Charles de Gaulle's electrifying speech in Phnom Penh on September 1, 1966 in which, for an audience of 100.000 Cambodians, he condemns the American involvement in Vietnam and urges for the withdrawal of its troops. To the illusion of the Americans the deployment of their forces will contain communism. Though, as he argues, instead it will only result in an extension of the war: strengthening the guerrilla forces, exceeding the borders of Vietnam, provoking both the Soviet Union as well as China and thus threatening world peace. To the pleasure of the crowd he extols the success story of Cambodia. According to de Gaulle, through Cambodia's neutral posture preserves its personality, its dignity and its independence. The Cambodian people have good reason to be proud, since they set an encouraging example for the neighbouring countries.³⁴ However, their future is now threatened by the war on the other side of the border. De Gaulle thus proclaims for the neutralisation of Vietnam and the conclusion of the war through a political settlement to safeguard peace in Indochina.³⁵

As early as 1963 Charles de Gaulle starts to publicly oppose the American policy to Vietnam by advocating for the neutralisation of Vietnam and offers France's services to facilitate a negotiated settlement to end the war. As firstly defined by de Gaulle's minister of Information, Alain Peyrefitte, on 29 August 1963, neutralisation is to be the self-determination of the Vietnamese people, free of foreign interference.³⁶ Consequently, he openly criticizes the American engagement in Vietnamese affairs well before the Americans get officially involved following the Tonkin incident in August 1964. A measure to which de Gaulle feels he has to resort to since his discrete attempts to warn the Kennedy administration of the risks of involvement disappointingly fail. As the Saigon government of Ngo Dinh Diem becomes increasingly unpopular and corrupt, opting for neutralisation is, in the eyes of the French, the only feasible solution to avoid an outburst into war involving external powers.³⁷ In particular the Buddhist crisis, and more specifically the self-immolation of a Buddhist monk in the streets of Saigon in June 1963, is regarded by the French as the ultimate display of not simple resentment, but notably an outcry for help. The political and moral leadership of the Buddhists leads this act to further inflame the disaffection of the South Vietnamese citizens, bringing the South Vietnamese society at the verge of disintegration. Despite the growing international pressure to reform the discriminatory acts against Buddhist, the Diem government proves unresponsive.³⁸ Thus, when the Buddhist crisis finally ends in the military coup and assassination of Diem and his principal

³³ Fragment from the Phnom Penh Speech of 1 September 1966.

Translation: France has taken in her position. One of condemnation of the recent events. Unless the universe is to turn into catastrophe, only a political agreement could re-establish peace.

³⁴ See this electrifying speech via http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=mTJg_GZcvGA

³⁵ Speech Charles de Gaulle, 'Allocution prononcée à la réunion populaire de Phnom-Penh, 1er septembre 1966' (September 1, 1966), online via <http://www.charles-de-gaulle.org/>

³⁶ Torikata, *Reexamining de Gaulle's Peace Initiative on the Vietnam War*, 918. And Journoud, *Cinquième partie dans les négociations*, 194.

³⁷ Discours de Charles de Gaulle, 'Conférence de Presse du 31 Janvier 1964'. Online via : <http://fresques.ina.fr/de-gaulle/fiche-media/Gaule00382?video=Gaule00382>

³⁸ Herring, *America's Longest War: the United States and Vietnam, 1950-1975* (New York, 2002), 114-116.

counsel and brother, Ngo Dinh Nhu, in November 1963, it further strengthens de Gaulle's conviction that there is no realistic alternative other than neutralisation to end the hostilities in Vietnam.³⁹

Besides the opportunity to defy the American hegemony, the French resentment to the American policy stems from a perception gap with regard to the nature of the conflict. General de Gaulle's experiences in Algeria⁴⁰ and Indochina convince him of the unique understanding that the strength of the National Liberation Front (NLF)⁴¹ and the communistic North⁴² stems mostly from Third World nationalism than from the Communist ideology.⁴³ Forthcoming, de Gaulle considers the conflict in Vietnam to be an internal conflict, henceforth pleading for non-interference of foreign powers. Moreover, he does not fear a reunification of Vietnam under the leadership of the communist North.⁴⁴ He even advocates in favour of reunification.⁴⁵ After all, if his analysis of nationalism is correct, one will not have to worry that once Vietnam falls to communism the neighbouring countries will follow suit. Likewise, neutralisation will not endanger the global position of the West, but will simply bring peace and stability to the region.⁴⁶ After France's example in Algeria, the U.S. should take the courageous decision to leave Vietnam. De Gaulle's analysis is thus in contradiction with the Domino Theory that forms the foundation of the American policy to Vietnam. Finally, in the event that the Americans decide to escalate the war, there is no role to play for the French. Whereas with a negotiated settlement the French could be useful and simultaneously reinforce their influence in the region.⁴⁷ These assumptions are at the core of de Gaulle's plea for neutralisation and France is eager to play a role in this.⁴⁸

The Grand Objectives for Indochina

The Phnom Penh Speech of September 1, 1966 underlines French foreign policy with regard to Indochina, as it is implemented in 1963 until long in the 1970's. De Gaulle pleads for a negotiated settlement on the basis of the 1954 Geneva Accords resulting from a peace conference to which at least all the original signatories take part. Furthermore, this peace accord should guarantee for the neutrality, the independence and the non-interference of Vietnam, as well as the whole of Indochina. Though with a pessimistic tone whether the day will ever come to light, de Gaulle stresses the

³⁹ Torikata, *Reexamining de Gaulle's Peace Initiative on the Vietnam War*, 915-919.

⁴⁰ In 1961 Charles de Gaulle decided to comply with a referendum and gave Algeria – which was regarded as an internal part of France, a province – its independence. The independence war in Algeria (1954-1962) was a complex conflict characterized by guerrilla warfare, terrorism, torture, and counter-insurgencies and resembles the war in Vietnam. Resultingly, de Gaulle's decision is often presented as an example for the Americans.

⁴¹ This article will use the abbreviation NLF. They were usually referred to by the South Vietnamese government as Vietcong.

⁴² In this article communist North of Vietnam will be referred to in different ways, namely as Hanoi, North Vietnam, or the Democratic Republic of Vietnam (DRV).

⁴³ One should not overlook the fact that president de Gaulle is a military man with profound experiences as a military leader. His decision to leave Algeria – in the capacity of a president, but on the conscience of a general – is of great significance. This military expertise made him conclude a military victory in Indochina is unfeasible.

⁴⁴ Torikata, 'Reexamining de Gaulle's Peace Initiative on the Vietnam War', 918-919.

⁴⁵ As Alain Peyferitte elaborated in his speech on 29 August 1963, de Gaulle foresaw a true independence for Vietnam only in the framework of reunification. Journoud, *De Gaulle et le Vietnam*, 12. And Journoud, *cinquième partie dans les négociations*, 194.

⁴⁶ Logevall, F., 'De Gaulle, Neutralization, and American involvement in Vietnam, 1963-1964', *Pacific Historical Review*, 41 (February 1992), 69-102, 71.

⁴⁷ Journoud, *De Gaulle et le Vietnam, 1945-1969 : La Réconciliation* (Paris, 2011), 179.

⁴⁸ Logevall, 71. And Pierre Journoud, 'Cinquième partie dans les négociations', 193 in : Pierre Journoud and Cécile Menétry-Monchaeu, *Vietnam, 1968-1976: La Sortie de Guerre/Exiting a War* (Bruxelles, 2011)

necessity for the Americans to decide on a fixed date to retreat their troops. This could serve as a first stray of haulm to approach the other side.⁴⁹

In spite of the tone of the speech, the Phnom Penh Speech should not be regarded as a simple condemnation of American policy. Instead, it should be regarded as a final attempt to sell his assessment of the Vietnam Conflict. After all, in his *discours* de Gaulle addresses four major themes that have consequently been hammered away by the Americans, ever since his first meeting with President Kennedy in 1961. Though, according to the French assessment, these issues are crucial to peace in the region. That is, the recognition of the principle of self-determination for the Vietnamese people, the withdrawal of American troops from South Vietnam, the acceptance of neutrality for the Indochinese peninsula, and the necessity to deal with China directly.⁵⁰ Through its tone and fierce use of words by de Gaulle, France takes on an independent posture and demonstrates to be fearless of opposing the superpower hegemony.

The aspired French mediatory role to end the Vietnam War is in two ways in line with de Gaulle's Grand Design. Primarily, the mediatory role shall enable the French to put itself back on the map among the Great Powers. It represents yet another means to demonstrate its independent position in world politics and to be the alternative third power in a world defined by bipolarity. Accordingly, the mediatory role is both additional to and a facilitating factor for France's policies of détente, anti-bipolarity and the enhancement of relations throughout the world, including its Third World Policy. The Power Politics⁵¹ that are made possible by an elaborate nuclear program of 'Tous Azimuts'⁵². Namely, by acting as an intermediary between the two military blocs, France would contribute to the dissolution of the bipolar system. Additionally, France hopes to enlarge its audience and prestige among the Third World and Independent countries in order to enhance its leverage vis-à-vis the two superpowers. Through its mediatory role France aspires to demonstrate its indispensability in bringing about a negotiated peace by bridging the different parties involved. France's plea for the participation of all Five Great Powers in a new Conference on Indochina will signify the (renewed) recognition of France belonging to those Great Powers, without whom a political solution would legitimately not hold up.⁵³

Secondly, through its mediatory role France shall be able to safeguard and expand its current interests and influence in the region. By helping broker a negotiated peace France hopes to preserve a positive influence in the region. That is, to overcome their imperialist past in Indochina and regain prestige, notably in Vietnam, but eventually in the entire developing world. As a former colonial power, France has originally has great interests in certain economical sectors, such as the rubber industry and the tobacco and coffee plantations, in particular in South Vietnam.⁵⁴ Similar to France's

⁴⁹ Speech Charles de Gaulle, 'Allocution prononcée à la réunion populaire de Phnom-Penh, 1er septembre 1966' (September 1, 1966), online via <http://www.charles-de-gaulle.org/>

⁵⁰ Sean J. McLaughlin, 'De Gaulle's Peace Program for Vietnam: The Kennedy Years', *Peace&Change*, Vol. 36, No. 2, (April 2010), 218-261.

⁵¹ Definition of Power Politics, in the words of Martin Wight, a form of international relations in which sovereign entities protect their own interests by threatening one another with military, economic or political aggression.

⁵² Tous Azimuts means omni-directional. In other words, it insisted on France's capacity to deploy the *force de frappé* at any time and any place.

⁵³ Sullivan, *France's Vietnam Policy*, 25.

⁵⁴ Sullivan, *France's Vietnam Policy*, 318-322. Vu Son Thuy, 'The French Role in finding a Peaceful Solution to the Vietnam War', 415-428, in: Goscha, C.E., and Vaisse, M., *La Guerre de Vietnam et l'Europe 1963-1973* (Bruxelles, 2003), 424-426.

approach to the African states in the *Communauté Française*⁵⁵ France aspires to build on the friendly relations, to promote independence, and meanwhile conclude bilateral accords that politically and economically attach the two countries to one another, but preferably to France.⁵⁶ Therein a particular role is accorded to the binding power of culture. Like no other country in the world the French acknowledge the usability of culture for the susceptibility to economical and political development and alignment.⁵⁷ Over the years they have built an impressive cultural attachment with Indochina, enormously supported with the dispersion and the continued importance of the French language.⁵⁸ They are ready to expand this cultural attachment to reap the fruits in economical and political terms in the near future.⁵⁹

Thus, the guarantee of reunification, neutralisation and independence in a negotiated settlement is at the core of the French objectives for Indochina. These objectives result from the desire to create a stable political environment. After all, a stable political environment is needed to foster economic development. None surprisingly, France is greatly concerned with the corrupt Saigon governments held in office by the Americans and as a result promotes at several occasions more feasible alternatives. Moreover, a stable political environment would fend off an all-out Asian war which would require increasing American occupation to the detriment of its commitment in the European security.⁶⁰ Last but not least, France feels – as a signatory to the Geneva Accords of 1954 and as a country of which its people still felt a strong alignment with the Indochinese peoples – that it has an obligation to its former colonies to make things right. A sentiment that is strongly supported within the French society. Nowhere else in the world is the anti-war movement as fierce as in France.⁶¹

Bringing the peace negotiations to Paris

De Gaulle acts upon these ambitions by pursuing a strategy to place France in the most desirable position to acquire the role of mediator. To de Gaulle's estimation France ought to excel in four qualities, making France indispensable to a successful conclusion of the hostilities. First of all, France ought to be the channel in the relations of all interested parties in the negotiations. This means that France is to enhance its relations with the parties involved. Thereby, France shall acquire the abilities to contact or reassemble the parties in the shortest and to broker relations between them.⁶² Secondly, France is to bridge the (intercultural) communicational and knowledge gap between the

⁵⁵ *La Communauté Française* (The French Community, 1958-1995) was the sequel to the *Union Française* and assembled the states of the former French colonial empire. The purpose was to redefine their relation after the independence of these states but preserve their alliance with the former motherland. In practice, it entailed beneficial and extensive bilateral cooperation that bind the former colonies to France. Not all states decided to remain a member after their independence. The Indochinese states all left the Union between 1955 and 1957.

⁵⁶ Bossuat, G., 'French Development Aid and Co-operation under de Gaulle', *Contemporary European History*, 12, 4 (2003), 431-456, 431-456.

⁵⁷ Cécile de Bouttemont, *La langue française dans l'espace de Francophonie : promotion et diffusion* (Mars 2009), online via centre des ressources documentaires www.ciep.fr

⁵⁸ Journoud, *Cinquième partie dans les négociations*, 193. And Declassified CIA documents on the Vietnam War, 'French Involvement in Vietnam', June 19, 1966.

⁵⁹ Journoud, *Cinquième partie dans les négociations*, 190. And Vu Son Thuy, *The French Role in finding a Peaceful Solution to the Vietnam War*, 425. Laurent Cesari, 'Le Président Georges Pompidou et la Guerre du Vietnam (1969-1974)', 179-192, : Goscha, C.E., and Vaïsse, M., *La Guerre de Vietnam et l'Europe 1963-1973* (Bruxelles, 2003), 189.

⁶⁰ Torikata, *Reexamining de Gaulle's Peace Initiative on the Vietnam War*, 916.

⁶¹ Vu Son Thuy, *The French Role in finding a Peaceful Solution to the Vietnam War*, 426.

⁶² Torikata, *Reexamining de Gaulle's Peace Initiative on the Vietnam War*, 924-927.

U.S. and the Democratic Republic of Vietnam (DRV). Unlike most potential competitors⁶³ France's historical connection with the region results in thorough knowledge and understanding of the region, its culture, its traditions, as well as a lasting personal connection with its people through education, language and personal friendships. France can contribute this expertise to bring about a reciprocal understanding.⁶⁴ Thirdly, France is to have leverage both vis-à-vis the warring parties as well as with regard to international public opinion. Which, as mentioned, it aspires to enlarge through its independent posture.⁶⁵ Lastly, France ought to convince all parties involved of its sincerity to valuably contribute to a peace. In other words, France ought to demonstrate a sincere desire that foregoes its anti-Americanism and an impression of a simple restoration of its influence in the region.⁶⁶ Since, for instance, the enhancement of relations with a certain party may profit from France's understanding of their culture or from its sincerity, it goes without saying that these four qualities are interrelated. De Gaulle's France employs both formal and informal diplomacy to acquire these competences.

Like a spider in its web

In order to acquire the role of mediator, de Gaulle is to place France at the crossroad of all parties involved. Accordingly, as of 1963 de Gaulle pursues a policy of enhancing the relations with all these parties. The Ministry of Foreign Affairs at the Quai d'Orsay and more particular the *directeur d'Asie-Océanie* Etienne Manac'h plays a crucial role in brokering these relations. As the Head of Asian affairs at Quai d'Orsay from 1960 to 1969 Etienne Manac'h largely contributes to redefining France's Indochinese policy after decolonisation of these countries in 1954 and 1962⁶⁷. Through his diplomatic experiences and personal interests and friendships he is well acquainted with the Communist ideology and Communist regimes.⁶⁸ His sincerity, comprehension, and anticipation prove to result in a welcoming trustworthy judgement that is actually listened to.⁶⁹ In other words, his diplomatic and personal experiences greatly contribute to Manac'h's new task to enhance the relations with what France assesses all the parties involved: The U.S., North Vietnam, South Vietnam, the NLF, China, URSS and the neighbouring countries Cambodia and Laos.

On 27 January 1964 de Gaulle announces in a much-publicized press conference the decision to establish diplomatic relations with the People's Republic of China.⁷⁰ The French thereby break with the American opposed norm to isolate and ignore Communist states. The French assess the role of China in potential peace negotiations particularly crucial. After all, as France, it is one of the signatories of the 1954 Geneva Accords and it increasingly has the North Vietnamese under its

⁶³ France in particular took the UK, the SU, India and Yugoslavia into account as potential competitors in the race to gain the mediatory role. Torikata, *Reexamining de Gaulle's Peace Initiative on the Vietnam War*, 924-925.

⁶⁴ Journoud, *Cinquième partie dans les négociations*, 188. And Journoud, *De Gaulle et le Vietnam*, 391.

⁶⁵ Torikata, *Reexamining de Gaulle's Peace Initiative on the Vietnam War*, 935.

⁶⁶ Journoud, *De Gaulle et le Vietnam*, 382-383.

⁶⁷ Laos and Cambodia gained their independence and neutralisation in the International Conference on the Neutralisation of Laos and Cambodia in 1962, which is part of the Geneva Accords 1962.

⁶⁸ Etienne Manac'h is a prominent French diplomat. Before he becomes the head of *Asie-Océanie* he was Consul in Bratislava and Deputy Head of Eastern European Affairs at the Quai d'Orsay. In addition he is personally fascinated with the Communist ideology and seeks to truly comprehend the Far East and its specific issues. These interests have resulted in personal friendships with specialists such as Jean Chesneaux, Philippe Devillers and Jean Lacouture, in addition to his regular and cordial consultations with American, Vietnamese and other Asian diplomats.

⁶⁹ Journoud, *De Gaulle et le Vietnam*, 207-209.

⁷⁰ Sharon Elbaz et Philippe Oulmont, 'Charles de Gaulle et la reconnaissance de la Chine populaire', online via www.charles-de-gaulle.org

sway.⁷¹ In his speech de Gaulle motivates his decision by stating “there is no political reality in Asia which does not interest or touch China”⁷². A peace accord while omitting the Chinese would therefore not be legitimate. And even more interesting, none of the other potential mediators, among others the Soviet Union and the United Kingdom, has relations with China. Thus, following this analysis France is the first Western country to recognise the People’s Republic of China and in the following years enhances the diplomatic ties with the country.⁷³

Following this same analysis France continues to further enhance the relations with the neighbouring and communist countries. In that fashion, France continues to establish more cooperative relations with the Soviet Union within the framework of détente. This results in exchanged visits and the signing of several commercial agreements at the height of which is De Gaulle’s visit to Moscow in June 1966.⁷⁴ Furthermore, to assure itself of a receptive audience at the entrance gates of Vietnam France maintains good relations with Laos and Cambodia.⁷⁵ In both countries France upholds a high diplomatic representation combined with French aid, to which in particular Prince Sihanouk’s Cambodia is successfully receptive.⁷⁶

After South Vietnam breaks off the diplomatic relations with France in June 1965 France actively seeks to enhance the relations with North Vietnam and to equilibrate the diplomatic status of North Vietnam to that of the South. The escalation of the war following the Baltimore Speech by Johnson in April 1965 had already set in a further deteriorating of the Franco-American relations. At this point of time France does not possess the capacity to influence the American decision making and therefore is not compromising anything by stepping up their diplomatic ties with the North Vietnamese parties. The improvement of relations with Hanoi passes scantily. Contrary to French hopes, the Phnom Penh Speech cannot surpass the lack of confidence dominating the relations. Nonetheless, the Quai d’Orsay is able to establish a regularly based diplomatic dialogue.⁷⁷

The Quai d’Orsay is simultaneously capable to establish relations with the NLF. Consciously preventing to comprise their mediatory aspirations Manac’h meets representatives of the NLF in the greatest secrecy. In this matter he maintains regular contacts with Huynh Van Tram in Algiers and meets with Tran Buu Tram in Phnom Penh, during de Gaulle’s trip to Cambodia. As of 1966 similar meetings take place in Jakarta and Cairo. Consequently coming to the conclusion that the NLF and the North Vietnamese have a very different view of how a peace should come about.⁷⁸

Back in Paris Manac’h does not neglect to build relations with the *Vietnamiens exilés* living in France. To those personalities belong representatives of the former governments of Vietnam’s last emperor

⁷¹ Discours de Charles de Gaulle, ‘Conférence de Presse du 31 Janvier 1964’. Online via : <http://fresques.ina.fr/de-gaulle/fiche-media/Gaulle00382?video=Gaulle00382>

⁷² Qiang Zhai, ‘China’s Response to French Peace Initiatives’, 288. in: Gardner, L.C., and Gittinger, T., eds., *The Search for Peace in Vietnam 1964–1968* (College Station, 2004), 280.

⁷³ Christopher Goscha and Maurice Vaisse, *La Guerre de Vietnam et l’Europe 1963-1973* (Bruxelles, 2003) And Zhai, *China’s Response to French Peace Initiatives*, 278-288

⁷⁴ François Puaux, ‘La conception gaullienne de la détente - (1964-1968)’, espoir No. 109 (1996) online via www.charles-de-gaulle.org

⁷⁵ Pierre Journoud, ‘Le Quai d’Orsay et le Processus de Paix, 1963-1973’, 385-400 in : Goscha, C.E., and Vaisse, M., *La Guerre de Vietnam et l’Europe 1963-1973* (Bruxelles, 2003), 387-390. Torikata, ‘Reexamining de Gaulle’s Peace Initiative on the Vietnam War’, 926-927.

⁷⁶ Gérard Bossuat, *French Development Aid and Co-operation under de Gaulle*, 446.

⁷⁷ Journoud, *le Quai d’Orsay et le processus du paix*, 387-390.

⁷⁸ Torikata, *Reexamining de Gaulle’s Peace Initiative on the Vietnam War*, 933.

Bao Dai and Ngo Diem, such as Tran Van Huu⁷⁹, Ho Thong Minh⁸⁰ and Nguyen Van Tam⁸¹. Among those personalities France hopes to inspire individuals to take part in the neutralist politics which will have to succeed the inevitable fall of the Saigon government. Such neutralist politicians will bring a fresh wind in the corrupt Saigon system, let stability set in and lead Vietnam to reunification.⁸²

While events such as the initiation of the *force de frappe* (1958), the veto to British EEC admission (1963), de Gaulle's call for an international return to the Gold standard as opposed to the domination of the dollar (1965), and France's withdrawal from NATO (1966) mark the deterioration in Franco-American relations⁸³, simultaneously, on an informal basis, the relations improve. As early as 1965 the French play an active role in brokering relations between informal American representatives and North Vietnamese personalities.⁸⁴ In that fashion, a first meeting takes place in Paris in the summer of 1965 between former American diplomat Edmund Gullion⁸⁵ and Delegate-General of the DRV to France Mai Van Bo.⁸⁶ Additionally, the Americans regularly inquire at the Quai d'Orsay about the information they obtain from their regular contact with the different Vietnamese parties. The same accounts for French intellectuals specialised in Vietnamese affairs, *Vietnamologues*. Among others the scientist Paul Mus, scientist and war correspondent Bernard Fall and journalist Philippe Devillers are requested to elaborate on their knowledge and experience by American diplomats or policy makers, making them true messengers between the warring parties. Accordingly, other than on the public political level, these contacts contribute to the building of trust and of a constructive attitude in the bilateral relations.⁸⁷

The French are confident that they are accomplishing their goal of placing themselves in the most desirable position. De Gaulle entrusts the French Ambassador in Washington Charles Lucet in 1965 that since France maintains good relations with Beijing, Moscow, Hanoi and Washington without becoming an agent of the Americans, there would be a great chance that France shall be able to play a valuable role behind the scenes of the Vietnamese problem.⁸⁸ In accordance with de Gaulle, Manac'h is also hopeful about a potential role in peace mediation. In a memorandum he states that "as long as there is no direct agreement between Washington and Beijing, action should be taken by an independent big power who inspires respect both in the United States and China"⁸⁹. Moreover, a potential mediator must possess the credibility and "capability to synthesize and impose, if necessary, a certain coercive action, based on an objective investigation of the facts and the mobilization of international opinion"⁹⁰. In the eyes of Manac'h, the functioning relations with China,

⁷⁹ Tran Van Huu was the former Prime Minister of the State of Vietnam under Emperor Bao Dai (1950-1952).

⁸⁰ Ho Thong Minh was the former Minister for Defence in Ngo Diem's government (1954-1955).

⁸¹ Nguyen Van Tam was the former Prime Minister to the State of Vietnam under emperor Bao Dai (1952-1953). All three had come to Paris in exile in 1955.

⁸² Journoud, *De Gaulle et le Vietnam*, 353.

⁸³ Frédéric Bozo, *Two Strategies for Europe: De Gaulle, the United States, and the Atlantic Alliance* (Boston 2001), 153-178.

⁸⁴ Journoud, *Le Quai d'Orsay et le processus de paix*, 388-389

⁸⁵ Edmund Gullion was a former American diplomat. His first posting was in Marseille, followed by terms in Saigon (1949-1952) and Leopoldville (1961). He is fluent in French and considered a Hawk, though slightly adjusted in the light of his first hand knowledge.

⁸⁶ Torikata, *Reexamining de Gaulle's Peace Initiative on the Vietnam War*, 925.

⁸⁷ Journoud, *la diplomatie informelle et réseaux transnationaux*, 98-101.

⁸⁸ Hervé Alphand, *l'Étonnement d'Être: Journal 1939-1973* (Paris 1977), 459-460.

⁸⁹ Etienne Manac'h, citation in Torikata, *Reexamining de Gaulle's Peace Initiative on the Vietnam War*, 924, originating from Note no. 233/AS, 4 août 1965, AO, CV 162. In this memorandum Manac'h excludes the potential competition of Tito's Yugoslavia and Shastri's India.

⁹⁰ Torikata, *Reexamining de Gaulle's Peace Initiative on the Vietnam War*, 925.

and the support by the greater part of world for France, notably by the vast majority of Asian countries, makes France the most suitable candidate.⁹¹

The true problem is China

Considering their aspiration it should come as no surprise that the French are actively involved in the bringing about of the peace negotiations. In the period of 1965 to 1968 the French undertake four *filières* all for the purpose of enhancing the bilateral relations with the host country and simultaneously discretely lobbying for peace negotiations in Paris. In that way setting up bit by bit an indirect dialogue between Washington and Hanoi. The success of these covert missions is due to the unique connections and knowledge of the region of the solicited individuals. The secret nature of the mission adds to their utility. Consequently, these individuals are able to achieve what is unreachable for ordinary diplomats. The French Ambassador François de Quirielle, for example, is still experiencing great trouble getting in contact with high officials in Hanoi, whereas someone like Raymond Aubrac can easily get in contact with his personal friend Ho Chi Minh⁹². Acknowledging the utility of such covert actions Charles de Gaulle himself initiated three of these.⁹³

In early December 1965 de Gaulle sends former French diplomat Jean Chauvel – who represented France to the 1954 Geneva Conference on Indochina – on a strictly covert mission to Beijing and Hanoi to fathom the attitude of the two countries towards peace negotiations. France has reason to believe both Hanoi and Beijing are shifting towards a toughening position. In order not to lose its credibility and prestige as *intercédteur*⁹⁴ de Gaulle desires to know their intentions. China turns out to be profoundly against negotiations, accepting nothing but a military victory of the North Vietnamese. Contrarily, the Prime Minister of the DRV Pham Van Dong responds positively to the Three Phase Plan proposed by Chauvel. This plan foresees in a gradual peace process of discussing the cease fire; achieving a careful political settlement for the south; and the final withdrawal of troops from foreign territory.⁹⁵ This stems Chauvel hopeful. However, back at the Quai d'Orsay, Manac'h concludes that the North Vietnamese are under an increasing sway of the Chinese.⁹⁶ As the French tell the Americans, the DRV will not agree to negotiate for peace at this time. They are wary that negotiating shall enable the Americans to lay a trap to force the DRV to abandon the fight while they do not feel they have been defeated.⁹⁷ In other words, according to the French there is no reason for optimism in the near future.⁹⁸

When former French diplomat Jean Sainteny is send by de Gaulle to Beijing, Hanoi and Phnom Penh in July 1966, he returns with the same message: the true problem was China. Jean Sainteny is chosen

⁹¹ Torikata, *Reexamining de Gaulle's Peace Initiative on the Vietnam War*, 924-925.

⁹² Ho Chi Minh was a Communist Revolutionary leader who played a key role in the establishment of the communist-based Democratic Republic of Vietnam in 1945. He was prime minister (1945-1955) and president (1945-1969) of the DRV. He first came in touch with communism when he was living in Paris (1919-1923) and thereafter left for Moscow in 1923. In 1941 he returned to Vietnam to the Viet Minh independence movement against the French colonisation.

⁹³ Journoud, 'la diplomatie informelle et réseaux transnationaux', 98-106, 108.

⁹⁴ Translation: someone who intercedes between two parties.

⁹⁵ Torikata, *Reexamining de Gaulle's Peace Initiative on the Vietnam War*, 927-928.

⁹⁶ Ibidem. And Zhai, *China's Response to French Peace Initiatives*, 288.

⁹⁷ Declassified CIA documents on the Vietnam War, 'View of French officials in Hanoi that peace prospects are slight', January 25, 1966, No. 1992-003132.

⁹⁸ Torikata, *Reexamining de Gaulle's Peace Initiative on the Vietnam War*, 927-928.

for his personal connections and knowledge of the region since he has represented France in the bilateral negotiations with Ho Chi Minh's Vietnam in 1946 and after the Geneva Accords of 1954 became *délégué du gouvernement français* to North Vietnam. Ho Chi Minh confides him that the DRV will never give up fighting unless the Americans retreat first. Sainteny is convinced that the North Vietnamese are nonetheless looking for an honourable way out while fiercely withstanding both the American attacks and the Chinese pressure. Though, for the time being, the North Vietnamese are bending under the Chinese pressure.⁹⁹ The Chinese oppose every form of negotiations out of fear it will result in an U.S.-USSR tête-à-tête excluding China, and thus diminishing its influence in Asia and the communist world. The DRV is fully dependent on China for arms and rice supplies.¹⁰⁰ The later, the French assess, is crucial to the North Vietnamese rejection of negotiations as long as the Chinese fail to give their consent to negotiate.¹⁰¹ The openness and sincere nature of Sainteny's conversation with Ho Chi Minh is illustrated by the fact they discuss the problematic treatment of American Prisoners of War (POWs) and the British support of the American enterprise. Afterwards Sainteny discusses his findings both with the Quai d'Orsay and with the Americans. The success of the covert operation results in an official request by Averell Harriman¹⁰² addressed to Charles de Gaulle to allow Jean Sainteny to convey American messages to Hanoi, which de Gaulle rejects.¹⁰³ The most probable reason for his rejection is the fact that Sainteny as a former French diplomat could never execute a fully covert operation, but would always be associated with the French position. A covert operation for the Americans would therefore imply French support.

Acknowledging China's increasing importance in the conflict and observing further escalations of the war to solely contribute to aggravating the tensions in Asia, de Gaulle gives his Phnom Penh Speech just after Sainteny's return. As the French assess, the nature of the American war efforts put a tightening strain on Chinese interests and may wake a sleeping dog. After all, the Chinese will not accept a permanent American presence at their Southern border. Moreover, as an increasingly powerful neighbouring country and close partner to the Vietnamese Communists, China has the measures at its disposal to undue any sort of peace settlement that does not suit her liking. Consequently, a feasible solution should include China and should not go against China, as is the effect of the current American efforts.¹⁰⁴ Although de Gaulle in his speech explicitly dismisses any success of mediatory efforts at this stage, his attempt to address the four inevitable themes – principle of self-determination, the American withdrawal, Neutrality, and direct dealing with China – fits in the objective of persuading the Americans to abandon their military objectives in Indochina and come to the negotiating table.¹⁰⁵

⁹⁹ Torikata, *Reexamining de Gaulle's Peace Initiative on the Vietnam War*, 931-932.

¹⁰⁰ Zhai, *China's Response to French Peace Initiatives*, 278-289.

¹⁰¹ Declassified CIA documents on the Vietnam War, 'French officials in Hanoi believe that North Vietnam will not negotiate with the U.S. without China's approval, due to its dependence on Chinese rice supplies', March 9, 1967, No. 2000-3027.

¹⁰² Averell W. Harriman is Ambassador-at-large who represents the U.S. as chief negotiator in the negotiations with North Vietnam (1968-1969).

¹⁰³ Torikata, *Reexamining de Gaulle's Peace Initiative on the Vietnam War*, 936.

¹⁰⁴ Philippe Devillers, 'La politique française et la Seconde Guerre du Vietnam', *Politique Étrangère*, 32^e année, No. 6 (1967), 569-604, 589-590.

¹⁰⁵ Devillers, *La politique française et la Seconde Guerre du Vietnam*, 589-590. And McLaughlin, *De Gaulle's Peace Program for Vietnam: The Kennedy Years*, 218-220.

Rapprochement step by step

From June to October 1967 the influential scientist's peace movement Pugwash initiates a filière of its own, codenamed Pennsylvania, which leads to a true dialogue between the warring parties. On the suggestion of French biologist Herbert Marcovich of the Pasteur Foundation in Paris, he and Raymond Aubrac are set to go to Hanoi to sound out the North Vietnamese on their views towards negotiations. Raymond Aubrac is a socialist engineer for the Food and Agricultural Organisation (FAO) in Rome, and a French resistance hero as well as a personal friend of Ho Chi Minh. A friendship that raise from the time Ho Chi Minh stayed with him in Paris during the negotiations for Vietnam's independence in 1946. As a result, it appears quite easy for the both of them to acquire visas for Vietnam and meetings with high officials. De Gaulle is aware of the filière and, unlike in the case of Sainteny, this time he interposes no objection on the condition that the two Frenchman are acting unofficially.¹⁰⁶ At the end of July 1967 Aubrac and Marcovich have meetings in Hanoi with Pham Van Dong and Ho Chi Minh. An American member of Pugwash, Henry Kissinger, who is at that time a counsellor to the Johnson administration, acts as a liaison between the filière and the U.S. government. Accordingly, the Pennsylvania filière is able to present an unofficial 'Phase A Phase B formula' resulting in a true dialogue concerning the conditions for negotiations.¹⁰⁷ This formula proposes to divide the negotiations in two phases, thus concluding an agreement on the cessation of the bombings before continuing to discuss the remaining issues.¹⁰⁸ The direct result of which is Johnson's San Antonio Speech on 29 September 1967 wherein he announces his preparedness to stop the bombing on the condition that it will lead to fruitful peace negotiations and an assurance that the North Vietnamese will not try to militarily profit from the pause. This speech is in accordance with Pham Van Dong's suggestion that Hanoi would be able to accept a *de facto* bombing halt as long as there exists no delay between the halt and the opening of the negotiations. Nevertheless, the Pennsylvania filière ultimately turns out to be subordinate to military aspirations, notably the preparation for the Tet Offensive. As of October the dialogue instead of the bombings were put to a halt.¹⁰⁹

Three days before Professor André Roussel leaves for Hanoi to attend a conference in his function of president of the Franco-Vietnamese Medical Association (AMFV), he as well is recruited by the Elysée to fulfil a covert mission. Personally invited by Mai Van Bo professor Roussel is set to leave for Hanoi on January 23, 1968. Through René de Saint-Légier, Charles de Gaulle personally requests him not only to reinforce the Franco-Vietnamese relations, but more importantly, to sound out the North Vietnamese view with regard to preliminary peace negotiations to take place in Paris. The Tet Offensive¹¹⁰ that erupts on January 30, 1968 upsets Roussel's schedule. Nonetheless, professor

¹⁰⁶ George Herring, *The Secret Diplomacy of the Vietnam War: The Negotiating Volumes of the Pentagon Papers* (Austin, 1983), 717.

¹⁰⁷ Journoud, *le rôle d'une « tierce-partie » dans l'ouverture d'une négociation de paix*, 148.

¹⁰⁸ Journoud, *De Gaulle et le Vietnam*, 341.

¹⁰⁹ Journoud, *le rôle d'une « tierce-partie » dans l'ouverture d'une négociation de paix*, 148-149. And Herring, *The Secret Diplomacy of the Vietnam War*, 717-771. And Journoud, *la diplomatie informelle et réseaux transnationaux*, 93-109.

¹¹⁰ The combined troops of the NLF and North Vietnam launched a surprise attack on military and civilian commands and control centres across South Vietnam on January 30, 1968 the purpose of which was to enforce the collapse of the Saigon government. Although the poor coordination of its timing contributed to the failure of the offensive in military sense, the rapid spread of footage further inflamed the resentment and uncertainty of the American people at the home front, amounting to a crisis within the Johnson administration. While the offensive let to a great deal of destruction and suffering to both sides, the Communists weren't able to seize control over South Vietnam. Contrarily, the military and political infrastructure of the NLF even suffered a enormous setback. The Tet offensive is often regarded as a costly 'victory' for the US and their South Vietnamese counterparts. Herring, *America's longest war*, 229-234.

Roussel has a meeting with Pham Van Dong on the very same day. Pham Van Dong entrusts him “je suis ouvert à tous”¹¹¹. Thereby he implicitly gives his consent to preliminary talks in Paris while leaving further initiative with de Gaulle. Three weeks later Mai Van Bo in Paris confirms the North Vietnamese approval.¹¹² Considering the analysis of the Quai d’Orsay that the Chinese still oppose any form of negotiations and their increasing grip on Hanoi, this consent is quite a break through.¹¹³

Thus, when Johnson announces the unconditional bombing halt on 31 March 1968 the only stumbling block left in bringing the mediatory role to Paris are the Americans, and more particular President Johnson. With the North Vietnamese implicit consent to Paris they give in to the benefits of France’s involvement over the risk of France trying to re-establish its influence in the region. France’s independent attitude towards the U.S. ensures a certain partiality and the passing years have shown the utility of the linkages that still exist between French and North-Vietnamese personalities. Moreover, with the choice for Paris Hanoi is not favouring either China or the SU.¹¹⁴ Furthermore, Hanoi is hopeful a mediatory role will lead to a further divergence in the Franco-American relations.¹¹⁵ Obviously a good reason for the Americans to oppose Paris. While indeed the French have demonstrated a constructive messenger and they would be highly capable of facilitating in communicational services and expertise. Still, de Gaulle’s hostile posture and his apparent determination to achieve a ‘Peace at every price’ are not very attractable. This leads the Americans doubt France’s sincerity.¹¹⁶ Moreover, the Americans are concerned with the pro-Vietcong atmosphere in the Parisian streets particularly inflated by the French Communist Party (PCF).¹¹⁷ However, in Paris, unlike in any of the alternative sites, all parties are represented.¹¹⁸ When on 3 May 1968 the DRV publicly propose the peace negotiations to be held in Paris, coupled with the mounting impatience of the public opinion, it leaves Johnson no option but to accept Paris. Consequently, Paris is not only host to the preliminary, but to the whole of peace negotiations to end the Vietnam War.¹¹⁹

¹¹¹ Translation: I am open to anything.

¹¹² Journoud, *De Gaulle et le Vietnam*, 317-320.

¹¹³ Zhai, *China’s Response to French Peace Initiatives*, 282-283.

¹¹⁴ Declassified CIA documents on the Vietnam War, ‘Significance of Paris as Site for Vietnamese Negotiations’, 6 May 1968, Document ID 12064, p. 1-6, 3.

¹¹⁵ Journoud, *De Gaulle et le Vietnam*, 333.

¹¹⁶ Journoud, *le Quai d’Orsay et le processus de la paix*, 391.

¹¹⁷ The majority of the French people felt connected with the Vietnamese struggle and were advocating to put an end to the hostilities. A situation that was reflected in politics with the Gaullist and the Communist being the principle parties and fierce opponents of the American involvement in Vietnam. The occurrence of demonstrations and rallies against the Vietnam War were unprecedented in Europe.

Declassified CIA documents on the Vietnam War, ‘Significance of Paris as Site for Vietnamese Negotiations’, 6 May 1968, Document ID 12064, p. 5. And Journoud, *De Gaulle et le Vietnam*, 392-403.

¹¹⁸ Ibidem, 3-4. All parties have either embassies or representations in Paris, including China and the DRV who have a 7-man Delegation General headed by Mai Van Bo. The South Vietnamese officially do not uphold diplomatic relations with the French at the moment but still use their embassy for consular affairs. Only the NLF is not represented yet, but the Americans expected the French not to oppose the opening of an office.

¹¹⁹ Journoud, *De Gaulle et le Vietnam*, 326-333.

In the mean time a mysterious French intermediary was send to Thieu in Saigon to gain the support of the South Vietnamese for the French mediatory role. On 23 April 1968 Tran Van Do publicly confirmed that the Republic of Vietnam had no objections against France’s mediatory role. (source: Journoud, *De Gaulle et le Vietnam*, 326-327.)

Overture of the preliminary negotiations

After all the trouble the different parties have gone through to start negotiations, the overture of these (preliminary) negotiations are quite the disappointment. In their opening speeches on Avenue Kléber on 13 May 1968 the chief negotiators, W. Averell Harriman and Xuan Thuy¹²⁰, enumerate their respective countries' positions, albeit these views are already known to the counterparty. While the North Vietnamese demand a true unconditional cessation of the bombing before further discussing any other issue, the Americans refuse to do so without a sort of guarantee regarding either their demands or at least a demonstration of sincerity and good will to come to a settlement. Wary for the American aggression, the North Vietnamese brush aside a proposal for mutual de-escalation of the fighting. Thus, at this point neither of the two parties seems willing to compromise. The disagreement, the difficulties, the uncertainty, but mostly, the inexistence of trust between the parties dominate the negotiations for the start. Consequently, not long after its overture a blockage sets in.¹²¹

The French Package Deal Formula

Both the Americans and the North Vietnamese request the French to facilitate an atmosphere of reciprocal comprehension and of constructive attitude.¹²² The mediatory role places France exactly where it wants to be: at the crossroad of the different parties interested in a settlement for the Vietnam War. And the Quai d'Orsay has become the mandatory stop in that track. Thus, aspiring to play an even more useful role in this new phase, France steps up its diplomatic activities. The regularity of meetings at the Quai d'Orsay with the different belligerents intensifies and it increasingly involves high placed representatives.¹²³ However, acquiring the role of an impartial and neutral host and mediatory equals the necessity of some changes in France's attitude. Its latitude narrows and becomes more delicate.¹²⁴

Accordingly, the French play a constructive role within their capacity. The French accurately tag the developments, at the negotiating table, at the battlefield, and in the diplomatic arena. They share these analyses with the belligerents. In that way, the Americans are handed an elaborate analysis by the French Delegate General in Hanoi, François de Quirielle, of the composition of the North Vietnamese delegation in Paris and the role of the high functionaries such as Le Duc Tho¹²⁵ therein.¹²⁶ Additionally, Manac'h ensures the different representatives to keep in contact with both one another as well as with the Quai d'Orsay. As a spider in its web, the Quai d'Orsay, and more specifically

¹²⁰ Xuan Thuy is a North Vietnamese politician and who had been minister of Foreign Affairs of the DRV (1963-1965). In 1968 he is appointed chief negotiator to the peace negotiations in Paris.

¹²¹ Journoud, *De Gaulle et le Vietnam*, 336-339.

¹²² Ibidem, 340.

¹²³ Journoud, *Le Quai d'Orsay et le processus de paix*, 390-391.

¹²⁴ Ibidem. And Journoud, *De Gaulle et le Vietnam*, 340 and 347.

¹²⁵ Le Duc Tho is a North Vietnamese politician and diplomat and was a founder member of the Indochinese Communist Party in 1930. As Quirielle assessed Le Duc Tho would serve as a special counsellor to the North Vietnamese chief negotiator Xuan Thuy and would be at the core of the delegation. Since he was not part of the government, but a close friend of Ho Chi Minh and Pham Van Dong, Quirielle estimated Le Duc Tho would serve a superior authority that could forego consultation in Hanoi to accept a compromise. Hence the regarded efficiency, he concluded the DRV were ready to engage in talks. Journoud, *De Gaulle et le Vietnam*, 340-341.

¹²⁶ Journoud, *De Gaulle et le Vietnam*, 338-341.

Manac'h, is briefed of all the positions and considerations. Which, in turn, enables him to act as the liaison who clarifies or further elucidates on the meaning of these positions and demands to the counterparty. Next to that, it provides him with the ability to devise the requirements to break the impasse and open discussions on the true issues at hand. From June to late October 1968 he makes several suggestions to both parties in the hope to converge their points of view.¹²⁷

On 18 June Manac'h urges the two parties to secretly negotiate the significant conditions required for a cessation of the bombing. He proposes that a simultaneous decision to unilaterally de-escalate their share in the war would be a good start. By arranging the cessation in a package deal Manac'h hopes to gain a breakthrough. Basically, it is an adaptation to the *Phase A - Phase B formula* – that is firstly suggested by the Pennsylvania filière – which also foresees in a cessation before continuing to discuss the difficult issues in the second phase. This formula takes into account that the DRV cannot accept concessions with regard to a cessation. However, it can commit itself to reciprocal measures while the first moves to de-escalation have set in. Moreover, Manac'h is convinced the Package Deal will contribute to the necessary building of trust. Additionally, he tries to avoid a situation in which an isolate gesture of preparedness from the North Vietnamese will not suffice or will not be picked up by the Americans.¹²⁸

As of 26 June private meetings take place between the different representatives, discussing the proposal made by Manac'h. On the suggestion of Manac'h, as of July, the North Vietnamese set in a significant additional, but unofficial de-escalation of the fighting and infiltrations, parallel to these meetings. Although these consultations seem useful in exploring the lines of the issues, resulting in several proposals by both parties, they do not conclude in an agreement. Moreover, to the disappointment of Manac'h, the Americans do not seem to take account of the significance of the North Vietnamese de-escalation. Instead the Americans continue to demand for an official and public statement to illustrate the North Vietnamese intention to negotiate.¹²⁹

The disappointing results do not discourage the French, who in fact step up their diplomatic actions. By half of September Manac'h encourages Le Duc Tho to take part in the private meetings. From this period on these private meetings take place on more regular basis and in Sceaux, not far from Manac'h private residence. Step by step the lines for a cessation are set out, though the American demand being the only hick-up left. The letter of Soviet premier Alexei Kosygin¹³⁰ as well as the attitude of the North Vietnamese in the negotiations should convince the Americans of the sincerity and desire of the DRV to end the war. It becomes the more and more obvious that the war damages are a great economic burden to the DRV and its opposition to the Chinese will to continue fighting demonstrates its eagerness to regain its independence.¹³¹ At the end of September Manac'h yet again polls the Americans whether a North Vietnamese gesture of appeasement would not invite to reduce the bombing on North Vietnamese territory. However, as Secretary of State Dean Rusk

¹²⁷Journoud, *De Gaulle et le Vietnam*, 336-347.

¹²⁸ Ibidem, 341-342.

¹²⁹ Ibidem, 342-344.

¹³⁰ On 4 June 1968 Soviet premier Alexei Kosygin had send a letter to president Johnson stating "I and my colleagues believed with good reason that North Vietnam was willing to negotiate a settlement, providing that the US ceased its bombing campaign". Quoted in: David Milne, 'The 1968 Paris Peace Negotiations: a two level game?', *Review of International Studies*, Vol. 37, No. 2 (April 2011), 577-599, 587.

¹³¹ Journoud, *De Gaulle et le Vietnam*, 347.

informs the newly appointed Minister of Foreign Affairs Michel Debré¹³² on 4 October, the Americans will not adjust their rigid attitude. To the satisfaction of the Johnson administration the rejection of negotiations during the past months result in support and unification of the American people.¹³³ As befits an impartial mediator, the French refrain from pronouncing for a bombing halt.¹³⁴

Negotiations hostage to American domestic politics

While Manac'h assumes the Americans have not taken account of the significant political sign of the North Vietnamese de-escalation, Harriman has well remarked the lull in the intensity of fighting urging his government to act upon it. But, as candidly observed by Dean Rusk in November 1968 "as long as Lyndon Johnson was President and [I] was Secretary of State there would not be any progress in Paris"¹³⁵. The internal struggle between the Hawks and the Doves in Washington dominates the American position in the peace negotiations in Paris. While on the one hand Averell Harriman, Cyrus Vance¹³⁶ and Clarke Clifford¹³⁷ are advocates of a negotiated settlement and a bombing halt and are seriously engaged in negotiations in Paris. Back in Washington hawkish figures like Walt Rostow¹³⁸ and Dean Rusk attribute to an unsupportive atmosphere. They are still convinced a military victory can be realised. A strong military standing can therefore not be compromised for a possible achievement of peace. They intend to hide behind Saigon while gaining the best possible deal to preserve South Vietnam. With these objectives in mind, they go out of their way to safeguard them.¹³⁹

The Hawks in Washington overrule the Doves in Paris. Whenever Harriman's team in Paris recognizes the display of sincerity and willingness from the North Vietnamese and appeals to act upon it, the Hawkish analyse of distrust and hard line posture downplay these efforts. As a result, both Soviet premier Kosygin's letter and Harriman and Vance's estimation of the DRV's preparedness at the end of September¹⁴⁰ are played out as unserious, turning it down, and continuing an extremely hard line instead. A hard line that even include proposals to step up the military expedition, like Rostow suggests in a letter to the President on 16 September, "if you judge diplomacy has failed, the bombing of Cambodia, the bombing of Hanoi-Haiphong, the mining Haiphong and the launching of ground attacks north of the DMZ¹⁴¹" could be considered.¹⁴² Rostow even succeeds in installing an

¹³² Following the Mai events Charles de Gaulle decides to changes some positions in the government, among others he appoints Michel Debré as Minister of Foreign Affairs as of 31 Mai 1968 in the place of Maurice Couve de Murville.

¹³³ Journoud, *De Gaulle et le Vietnam*, 342-344.

¹³⁴ Ibidem, 345.

¹³⁵ Milne, *1968 Peace Negotiations: a two level game*, 599.

¹³⁶ Cyrus Vance was an American politician and diplomat. From 1964 to 1968 he was Deputy Secretary of Defence after which he was appointed as a delegate to the peace talks in Paris. He would later become Minister of Foreign Affairs under Jimmy Carter (1977-1980).

¹³⁷ Clarke Clifford was an American lawyer who became Secretary of Defence on 19 January 1968 to 20 January 1969, succeeding Robert McNamara. He was chairman of the President's Intelligence Advisory Board from (1963-1968). Clifford had served frequently as an unofficial counsellor to the White House, often regarding Vietnam or other Asian countries.

¹³⁸ Walt Rostow was an American economist. From 1964 to 1968 he was Special Assistant for National Security Affairs to president Johnson.

¹³⁹ Milne, *1968 Peace Negotiations: a two level game*, 597-599.

¹⁴⁰ The private conversations with North Vietnamese chief negotiators Le Duc Tho and Xuan Thuy stemmed Harriman and Vance positive of the willingness to come to an agreement. Milne, *1968 Peace Negotiations: a two level game*, ??

¹⁴¹ DMZ stands for Demilitarized Zone and was a zone around the 17e parallel that accounted for the division between North and South Vietnam as it was determined in the 1954 Geneva Accords.

information embargo on Harriman's team in Paris, controlling all information addressed to President Johnson.¹⁴³ In the words of Clifford, their main problem is that "the President is under the sway of 'pessimistic' advisors"¹⁴⁴. Though, in addition, the President seems to have lost interest in concluding the peace negotiations, as he shows no interest to provide the necessary boost to facilitate a negotiated breakthrough in Paris by refraining militarily.¹⁴⁵ Consequently, all efforts by Harriman in Paris are thrown to the winds.¹⁴⁶

The approaching presidential elections of November 1968 add an extra dimension to the thwart of the Paris negotiations. Representing Republican presidential candidate Richard Nixon the Chinese-American businesswoman Anna Chennault¹⁴⁷ contacts South Vietnamese Ambassador to the U.S. Bui Diem to pass a message to his President, Nguyen Van Thieu. Bypassing the sitting Administration, she informs the Ambassador that the substantive, direct negotiations that the Democrats – President Johnson and his possible Democratic successor – plan to engage in with the Communists, could work out very negatively for South Vietnam. South Vietnam would have more chance of obtaining favourable terms to ensure its preservation under the Hawkish Nixon. Thus, before committing to any unnecessary conciliations, Thieu should, as she advises him, await the presidential elections. Better yet, Thieu should prior to the elections and the hopeful forthcoming inauguration of Nixon to president refuse to participate in the peace negotiations.¹⁴⁸

The ambiguity of the Bombing Halt¹⁴⁹

On 31 October 1968 President Johnson publicly announces the unconditional U.S. bombing halt to have effect on 1 November at 21h.¹⁵⁰ Along the way the preliminary negotiations in Paris have set out the conditions for an American cessation. Behind the scenes the U.S. and the DRV come to agree on the participation of both South Vietnam and the NLF in the negotiations, as of 5 November. In addition, all parties ought to set in a military de-escalation that include the abstention of deploying forces past the DMZ and of infiltrating in urban centres in South Vietnam. Since the North

¹⁴² Walt W. Rostow to the President, 16 September 1968, NSF, Files of Walt W. Rostow, Box 10, *LBJL*, via: Milne, *1968 Peace Negotiations: a two level game*, 592.

¹⁴³ *Ibidem*, 584-585.

¹⁴⁴ Notes on Telephone conversation between W. Averell Harriman and Clark Clifford, 21 June 1968, W. Averell Harriman Papers, *LOC*, via: Milne, *1968 Peace Negotiations: a two level game*, 588.

¹⁴⁵ *Ibidem*, 591-592.

¹⁴⁶ *Ibidem*, 579-599.

¹⁴⁷ Apart from being an influential businesswoman Anna Chennault is also head of nationwide Republican Women for Nixon.

¹⁴⁸ Milne, *1968 Peace Negotiations: a two level game*, 593-594.

¹⁴⁹ Titel translated from Pierre Journoud, *De Gaulle et le Vietnam*, 347.

¹⁵⁰ The fact that Johnson waited until 31 October to announce the bombing halt signals his unwillingness to support the Democratic presidential candidate Hubert Humphrey. Johnson had felt betrayed by his vice-president Humphrey after he gave a speech in Salt Lake City on 30 September distancing himself from the Johnson administration's Vietnam Policy and expressing his unqualified support for an unconditional bombing pause. Though unable to reveal the Chennault-Nixon-Thieu connection for political consideration to preserve national unity, Humphrey was behind on Nixon in the polls. A breakthrough in the Paris peace negotiations might have beared advantages to Humphrey's campaign, but this was forestalled by Johnson's reluctance to proceed with urgency. Coupled with Thieu's announcement of his stalling strategy Humphrey defeat seemed sealed. Nixon won the elections with a the slightest margin of 43,4% over 42,7%. Milne, *1968 Peace Negotiations: a two level game*, 591-597.

Vietnamese have already enforced a de-escalation, the decision to de-escalate represents more of a political than a military agreement.¹⁵¹

The Chennault – Thieu – Nixon triangle works out as planned. Further strengthened in his conviction to gain better terms with the electoral victory of Richard Nixon on November 1968, President Thieu responds to the announcement of the cessation by implementing a stalling strategy. He refuses point blank to send a delegation to participate in the Paris negotiations until two conditions are met. First of all, he urges there to be no distinction between North Vietnam and the NLF. Secondly, all purely Vietnamese issues should be handled bilaterally between Hanoi and Saigon, without interference of external parties. It lasts until 27 November for President Thieu to send General Ky as his chief negotiator to Paris.¹⁵² Still, he manages to stall the negotiations by a three month long discussion about the shape of the negotiating table. At 16 January 1969 the parties finally come to terms on a sitting and negotiations are to resume on January 18.¹⁵³

With the arrival of Nixon everything is to change. As Averell Harriman later recalls in his memoirs – and Pham Van Dong in a conversation with the French in February 1972 recalls the same – “Johnson had stopped the escalation and Harriman had contributed a great deal to be at the point of truly advancing the things”¹⁵⁴. They both felt like they were at the verge of a peace settlement. With the arrival of Nixon that window opportunity has just been closed down. His election represents a further shift to the hard line posture. He will opt for a honourable peace through Vietnamisation supported by ‘Bombings for Peace’.¹⁵⁵ Correspondingly, one of the first decisions he makes as President is to call Harriman back to Washington and to replace him with the former Ambassador to South Vietnam and the more Hawkish Henry Cabot Lodge Jr..¹⁵⁶

¹⁵¹ Ibidem. And Journoud, *De Gaulle et le Vietnam*, 347.

¹⁵² Journoud, *De Gaulle et le Vietnam*, 349-355. And Milne, *1968 Peace Negotiations: a two level game*, 595-598.

¹⁵³ Journoud, *De Gaulle et le Vietnam*, 354-356.

¹⁵⁴ MAE, AO, ‘avant-projet relatif au voyage de la délégation de la commission affaires étrangères en RPC et en RDV’, 10 février 1972 in : Journoud, *De Gaulle et le Vietnam*, 506.

¹⁵⁵ Milne, *1968 Peace Negotiations: a two level game*, 586.

¹⁵⁶ Journoud, *De Gaulle et le Vietnam*, 354.

La Troisième Force Neutraliste

The turning point of 1968: French foreign policy on the brink of collapse

Several events in 1968, both in the international and national scene, expose the weakness of de Gaulle's policy and compel France to reassess its foreign policy as of early 1969. The domestic upheaval of May 1968 reveals how the Gaullist line is increasingly unresponsive to France's national needs. By prioritising foreign policy objectives the Gaullist regime apparently overlooks the social and economic dissatisfaction of its people. The Soviet invasion of Czechoslovakia in August crushes France's ideal of rebalancing the international order, sought for through a policy of anti-bipolarity and *détente*. Thereby mocking the Franco-Soviet Communiqué of June that year and fostering de Gaulle's fear of the Soviets steamrolling over Europe. In addition, the crisis of the Franc in the fall – the direct economic and monetary consequence of the May riots – proves that France's claimed (financial) independence from the United States will no longer hold up. This becomes even more clear when the Germans defy France's leadership in Europe by refusing to devalue the Mark in favour of the Franc. Faced with a devaluation it are the Americans who save France from a true crisis. In the light of these events, the Gaullist policy evidently no longer enjoys the global room for manoeuvre, thereby losing much of the plausibility and persuasiveness of the self-proclaimed independent world power.¹⁵⁷

Consequently, a rapprochement towards the West and more particular towards the United States is inevitable. The first signs of such a rapprochement can be recognized as early as November 1968, when Prime Minister Michel Debré pays a visit to President Johnson in Washington.¹⁵⁸ Several events in the early months of 1969 set in a further normalisation. Subsequently, the revive of the friendship between the two states is sealed with Nixon's visit to Paris, a following meeting between Nixon and de Gaulle in Washington, and the renewing of France's membership to the Atlantic Pact on April 4, 1969.¹⁵⁹ De Gaulle remains faithful to the foundation of his Politics of Grandeur, thus preserving national independence at the core of his approach. Though, by basically giving up imposing his principles on France's Atlantic partners he strives for appeasement in his foreign alignments to reignite the bonding with the French public.¹⁶⁰ However, de Gaulle's proposals for further constitutional reform regarding the regions and the Senate are defeated in a national vote. De Gaulle interprets the loss of the referendum as a rejection of his power therefore offering his resignation the following day, on April 28, 1969.

¹⁵⁷ E.A. Kolodziej, *French international Policy under De Gaulle and Pompidou: the Politics of Grandeur* (London, 1974), 391-401, 544-546. J.P. Baulon, 'Mai 68 et la réconciliation Franco-Américaine : Les vertus diplomatiques d'une crise intérieure', *Guerres Mondiales et Conflits Temporaires*, Vol 2 (2005), No. 218, 115-131, 115-131. Bozo, *Two Strategies for Europe*, 227-238.

¹⁵⁸ Baulon, *Mai 68 et la réconciliation Franco-Américaine*, 130. And S. Rials, *Les idées politiques du président Georges Pompidou* (Paris 1977), 62.

¹⁵⁹ Unlike what is widely assumed, the rapprochement in Franco-American relations thus started when Johnson was still in office¹⁵⁹, with a further convergence in ideas with the arrival of Nixon.¹⁵⁹ The questions about the Dollar and the Vietnam War remained principle obstructions.

¹⁶⁰ Bozo, *Two Strategies for Europe*, 227-238

Bonheur instead of Grandeur

Georges Pompidou's election to president in June 1969 marks a further shift in France's foreign policy. In combination with his choice for Maurice Schumann as minister for Foreign Affairs, this signals an opening to the European and Atlantic wings of the Gaullist Party.¹⁶¹ Promising in his presidential election *Continuité et Ouverture*, he seeks to reconcile a continued loyalty to the Gaullist line with the opening up to new perspectives, strategies and policy means better suited for the new circumstances. Shifting the focus of the government from foreign to the domestic affairs, 'Bonheur' instead of grandeur is to be the core objective of the governmental programs. Therefore, "domestic politics, foreign policy and France's alignment abroad are to reinforce domestic political stability and to promote France's economic growth"^{162, 163}

Subtle, through his pronouncements, decisions and behaviour, Pompidou gives new meaning to the principle elements of Gaullism regarding the Economic European Community (EEC), France's regional and global role in world politics, and 'independence and grandeur'. While consciously preserving a measure of national independence acceptable to the Gaullist prominents and sentiments so vividly present¹⁶⁴, his domestic policy gains momentum. In order to promote France's economic growth and to elicit the domestic support for the Gaullist party, he lays emphasis on the acceleration of the industrialisation and on scientific and technological developments. Additionally, he changes to a policy of multilateral diplomacy, enabling him to slow down the military nuclear program and relatively stagnate the foreign aid expenditures which formed the basis of the power politics played by de Gaulle.¹⁶⁵ For France to transform into a competitive commercial and industrial power Pompidou wants it to become, it ought to facilitate the expansion of the private sector abroad. Thus, private investment is to be encouraged instead of governmental aid.¹⁶⁶

Foreign policy is to be an instrument and not the end of Pompidou's policy. Central at this policy is the broadening of France's security, economic and diplomatic alignments for the objective of enhancing the domestic well-being of France. Pompidou drops the globalism pursued by de Gaulle to the benefit of regionalism. Acknowledging that the room for manoeuvre severely changed after the events of 1968 and its credibility and capacity as a world power would no longer hold up, Pompidou's France would no longer act as the self-appointed spokesman of a region, neither for Europe nor for the Independent World. Instead France is to centre its attention on the regions in which it originally always has had influence and broaden that influence, in particular in the Mediterranean and Francophone Africa. Regional power influence rests on skilled multilateral diplomacy, economic prowess, cultural superiority and historical achievement.¹⁶⁷ Since its influence in those regions is more easily acceptable and acknowledgeable, it would make it more profitable as well. This would be both in economic and financial terms as well as in the sense of independent authority, in its bilateral relations and with regard to the superpowers. By engaging itself in the Four Power Peace Talks of the

¹⁶¹ Kolodziej, *French international Policy under De Gaulle and Pompidou*, 403-404.

¹⁶² *Ibidem*, 584.

¹⁶³ *Ibidem*, 392-584.

¹⁶⁴ *Ibidem*, 400. Sullivan, *France and the Vietnam Peace Settlement*, 311.

¹⁶⁵ *Ibidem*, 384, 589.

¹⁶⁶ Amandy Sesay, *Africa and Europe: From Partition to Independence or Dependence?*, 77

¹⁶⁷ Kolodziej, *French international Policy under De Gaulle and Pompidou*, 589.

Middle East, for example, France places itself in the role of the peace arbitrator attempting to maintain its influence and to obtain an enhanced status in the world.¹⁶⁸

Along with Pompidou's focus on regionalism, France has to anchor itself firmly within the West. Pompidou sets out to a further rapprochement of the relations with the U.S., and thus a moderation of its criticism towards the Americans. Pompidou thereby acknowledges the necessity to secure the American commitment to defend Europe. Moreover, he recognises the potential value of the U.S. and the other *Anglophone* countries in terms of economic partnerships. Additionally, he seeks to enlarge the ties with its West European neighbours, including the relations with the UK. Unlike de Gaulle he does not oppose a British admission to the EEC. He sees in the EEC the vehicle to reinforce and radiate France's influence and to realise France's domestic and foreign policy objectives. After all, a strong European cohesion would mean a solid containment of any revival of German aggression, the opening up to new markets, a profitable Common Agricultural Policy (CAP) and a playing field at which the French could act independently.¹⁶⁹

Thus, the Gaullist elements of independence and France's enhanced status in the world prevail at the core of the governmental policy, albeit pursued in more modest and less provocative terms and with different means. Where Charles de Gaulle did not dare to adapt profoundly to the new circumstances, Pompidou does prioritise France's domestic (economic) well-being over its foreign objectives. Western Europe is to become the instrument to achieve the domestic and foreign policy objectives set out. Consequently, Pompidou will take more account of the economic aspects of France's foreign alignments.

Pompidou's approach to Vietnam: A Romania in the North and a Yugoslavia in the South

Where de Gaulle felt a sincere alliance with the Indochinese people leading him and his Elysée to be closely involved, Pompidou is much less personally engaged with the dossier. As a result, the change of power leaves the Quai d'Orsay much more leeway to play a central role.¹⁷⁰ Faced with the Gaullist hardliners the Pompidou government does not utterly change de Gaulle's approach with regard to Indochina.¹⁷¹ The successor of Etienne Manac'h as head of the department *Asie-Océanie*, Henri Froment-Meurice¹⁷², recalls in his journal that particular Schumann "is instinctively anti-communist"¹⁷³ and only rallies with the Gaullist policy to Indochina out of reason and (forced) loyalty.¹⁷⁴ Pompidou's speech on April 1, 1970 confirms his loyalty to the line set out by de Gaulle in Phnom Penh, though a slight nuance in the choice of words can be detected.¹⁷⁵ France will continue

¹⁶⁸ D. Pickles, 'The Decline of Gaullist Foreign', *International Affairs*, Vol. 51, No. 2 (Apr., 1975), p. 220-235, 225. And Journoud, *Cinquième partie dans le négociations*, 202. And K. Fujisaku, 'La politique asiatique de la France après de Gaulle (1969-1972) : une approche multilatérale en rupture avec la politique de grande puissance', *Relations Internationales*, No. 134, Vol. 2 (2008), p. 83-92, 87.

¹⁶⁹ Kolodziej, *French international Policy under De Gaulle and Pompidou*, 399-405, 585-590.

¹⁷⁰ Journoud, *Le Quai d'Orsay et le processus de paix*, 385-386.

¹⁷¹ Kolodziej, *French international Policy under De Gaulle and Pompidou*, 400.

¹⁷² Henri Froment-Meurice is a French diplomat. He interrupted his term as Ambassador in Moscow to succeed Etienne Manac'h as head of *Asie-Océanie* in March 1969, a function he held until March 1975. He has been Ambassador in Japan, USSR (1979-1982) and FRG (1982-1983).

¹⁷³ H. Froment-Meurice, *le Journal d'Asie : Chine-Inde-Indochine-Japon 1969-1975* (Paris 2005), 51. (25 April 1971)

¹⁷⁴ *Ibidem*.

¹⁷⁵ Ministère des Affaires Etrangères (MAE), *Asie-Océanie (AO)*, 'Déclaration gouvernementale du 1^{er} avril 1970', no date, no number, p. 1.

to contribute to the creation of the right conditions for de-escalation in search for a negotiated settlement. However, to the disappointment of the high officials at the Quai d'Orsay de Gaulle's baldness gives way for a certain cautiousness by Pompidou.¹⁷⁶ As Pompidou is striving for a normalisation of the French-American relations – and he regards the French facilitation of a honourable peace a means to succeed at this goal¹⁷⁷ – he is not willing to “*rompre des lances*”¹⁷⁸ with the Americans over Vietnam, but instead adopts a more modest and cooperative attitude.¹⁷⁹

France's diplomacy with regard to Vietnam and Indochina in the period from 1969 to 1971 is based on two assumptions. Firstly, the French are hopeful that the Saigon government will accept a *Troisième Force Neutraliste* to organise and engage itself in politics. Following the breakdown of the settlement proposal at the peace negotiations in November 1968, Etienne Manac'h concludes that the Thieu government is not contributing to a true peace, but instead is sabotaging, or at least complicating, the peace negotiations. Besides, the French are soon to recognise that the Thieu government is like the 'top of a pyramid' which falls short of having any bonding with its base [the South Vietnamese population], making the Thieu government prey to dismantlement and chaos. The Thieu government, according to the French, should be either replaced or profoundly revised in order to create a stable political environment in South Vietnam required to fiercely negotiate the terms for the eventual reunification. Resultingly, the French advocate a neutralist government in South Vietnam, which would be made up of a third political force alongside the pro-American and the communist forces. This brings us to their second assumption, that this will result in a political composition that would be acceptable to Hanoi for a 'decent interval of time'¹⁸⁰ before the two Vietnams will be reunified.¹⁸¹ Consequently, according to the French, any sort of peace accord shall be based on the idea of coexistence of two Vietnams for a certain period of time, which will require in turn the retreat of all foreign forces from the Vietnamese territories.¹⁸²

The French vision of Vietnam's nearby future is perfectly summarized by the minister of Foreign Affairs Maurice Schumann in a conversation with Prince Souvanna Phouma during his visit to Laos in July 1969, expressing that France ideally foresees for Vietnam “*une Roumanie au Nord et une Yougoslavie au Sud*”¹⁸³. By this Schumann means a communist North Vietnam that would know perfectly to balance between the Soviet and Chinese pressure, and an interiorly socialist South with a neutralist foreign policy.¹⁸⁴ Remarkably, Froment-Meurice's Quai d'Orsay foresees four states in Indochina and even, within the privacy of the Quai d'Orsay's walls, doubts whether South Vietnam would become communist¹⁸⁵, whereas this would be unthinkable with de Gaulle, who proclaimed reunification to be inevitable.¹⁸⁶

¹⁷⁶ Journoud, *Le Quai d'Orsay et le processus de paix*, 387-396.

¹⁷⁷ Baulon, *Mai 68 et la réconciliation Franco-Américaine*, 115-131.

¹⁷⁸ Translation: not to break a lance, not to dispute

¹⁷⁹ Froment-Meurice, *Journal d'Asie*, 44. (10 March 1970)

¹⁸⁰ This term is introduced much later by Henry Kissinger in 1972, but, in principle, the French already made use of the idea.

¹⁸¹ Journoud, cinquième partie dans les négociations, 202-205 ? and Cesari, *Le Président Georges Pompidou et la Guerre du Vietnam*, 180-185. And DFF I 1969, 'Vietnam : Perspectives d'après guerre', Paris, le 18 février 1969, DDF No. 143, Note No. 142/CLV, p. 316-319.

¹⁸² Ibidem, 316.

¹⁸³ Cesari, *Le Président Georges Pompidou et la Guerre du Vietnam*, 181. And MAE, AO, 'Vietnam', 2 juillet 1969, No. 190/AS, p. 1-8.

¹⁸⁴ Cesari, *Le Président Georges Pompidou et la Guerre du Vietnam*, 181.

¹⁸⁵ MAE, AO, 'Consultations franco-américaines (Cambodge-Laos-Vietnam)', 14 juin 1971, p. 1-9, 4-5.

¹⁸⁶ Journoud, *Le Quai d'Orsay et le processus de paix*, 396.

Perfect case for Pompidou's regionalisation

With the Pompidou government focussing their foreign commitments on regions within their traditional influence sphere and emphasising on the commercial relations, de Gaulle's objective to fortify its influence in Indochina is in good hands. France continues to consider itself an indispensable factor in bridging the different parties whom – through its privileged relations, knowledge of the territory, sympathy with the people and economic interests – can aspire to improve the relations with all different parties. Moreover, through its mediatory role France still seeks to re-establish its influence in Indochina and its status in world politics. In addition to de Gaulle's policy means, the Pompidou government tries to promote to a greater extent the expansion of private enterprises and private investments in the region. Like de Gaulle, Pompidou's France aspires to secure involvement in the reconstruction of Vietnam after the war.¹⁸⁷

Through private liaisons coupled with *coopération* – in all its forms – the French seek to make the Indochinese peninsula once again independent from China, the USSR and the U.S. and from that starting point they aspire to radiate their influence over the greater region of Asia.¹⁸⁸ As early as February 1969 France draws up a rapport to assess the outline of a future post-war Vietnam and the role of France therein.¹⁸⁹ Accordingly, France starts to elaborate on how to organise their *coopération* and to what measure, both bilateral and in the framework of international reconstruction, in order not to lose time when implementing it directly after a peace accord is signed.¹⁹⁰ In that fashion, France wonders whether it wants to accord a privileged policy of *coopération* similar to their affiliation with the Francophone African countries, which will include the accordance of capital credits, technical and cultural assistance and diplomatic support. In other words, is Indochina equally important to France as Francophone Africa and North Africa is, to engage itself to Asia? Like it accounts to Francophone Africa, the moral influence and connection with the Indochinese elites who have enjoyed their education in France enables France to seize that alliance.¹⁹¹ Although, after Froment-Meurice's trip to Indochina in March 1971 this question still remains unanswered, the Quai d'Orsay adopts the point of departure that the Indochinese peoples should at all times be able to count on French assistance.¹⁹² Meanwhile, the gradual enhancement of relations results already in 1970 and 1971 into the conclusion of four bilateral accords to provide for closer educational and technical cooperation. In addition, a bilateral commercial accord between Hanoi and Paris is signed on 28 May 1971.¹⁹³

¹⁸⁷ Cesari, *Le Président Georges Pompidou et la Guerre du Vietnam*, 181-184. DFF I 1969, 'Vietnam : Perspectives d'après guerre', Paris, le 18 février 1969, DDF No. 143, Note No. 142/CLV, p. 316-319.

¹⁸⁸ DFF I 1969, 'Vietnam : Perspectives d'après guerre', Paris, le 18 février 1969, 318-319.

¹⁸⁹ Ibidem.

¹⁹⁰ Ibidem.

¹⁹¹ MAE, AO, 'Vietnam', 2 juillet 1969, 7-8. And MAE, AO, 'Indochine : Projet de note pour le Secrétaire Général', 1er mars 1971, No. 32/AS, p. 1-3. Bossaut, *French Development Aid and Co-operation under de Gaulle*, 453-456.

¹⁹² MAE, AO, 'Indochine : Projet de note pour le Secrétaire Général', 1er mars 1971, 2.

¹⁹³ Diplomatie Française, Ministère des Affaires Etrangères (MAE), dossier Vietnam,

<http://www.diplomatie.gouv.fr/fr/dossiers-pays/vietnam/>

Accord commercial entre la République de la France et la république démocratique du Vietnam, 28 May 1971.

A difficult task ahead

With the North Vietnamese continuing their strategy of ‘Negotiating while Fighting’ and the Nixon administration adopting a strategy of ‘Peace through Coercion’ the negotiating efforts in Paris are at times overshadowed by military priorities. In addition, the profound distrust between the negotiating parties and the doubled ambition of the French to simultaneously be an impartial mediator and enhance its relations with these same parties, renders France a very delicate role. In order to tackle that problem, France had set in a policy of ‘freezing’ the relations with the parties involved as early as May 1968.¹⁹⁴ Despite these policy measures, several events give rise to allegations of partiality from both camps. Pompidou’s visit to the U.S. in 1970, for instance, leads the DRV to question the French intentions.¹⁹⁵ Likewise, the French support of the NLF’s peace proposition of July 1, 1971 results in an American denouncement of the French pressure.¹⁹⁶ Faced with increasing escalations the French try to play a constructive and, at the same time, delicate role to break the impasse by converging the positions of the different parties.¹⁹⁷

As a result of the strategies of the two principal belligerents the period under examination – January 1969 until October 1971 – is characterized by intervals of military escalation interrupting the negotiations in Paris. The French each time adjust their strategy to the new circumstances. This chapter is therefore structured in accordance with the three periods that can forthcomingly be distinguished. The first of which covers the period from January 1969 until autumn 1969, just after Nixon’s 3 November 1969 speech introducing Vietnamisation. Thereafter, the second period will erupt bringing forward the French initiative to run the deadlock in the negotiations until the American bombardments on North Vietnamese targets on 21 and 22 November 1970 once again lapses the talks. Lastly, the third period subsequently continues until the conclusion of the presidential elections in Saigon on October 3, 1971.

Promising start to evolve in pessimism

January 1969 – November 1969

A hopeful kick-off

Despite the slow advancements regarding the table setting, in early 1969 the French are optimistic fruitful discussions will soon erupt and rapidly lead to a conclusion. This optimism is set in firstly by Le Duc Tho’s public plea for the establishment of a ‘Government of Peace’ in South Vietnam on 20 December 1968.¹⁹⁸ As Mai Van Bo privately conveys to Prime Minister Debré, the fundamental problem is that the orientation of the current political leadership in Saigon is not set towards peace.¹⁹⁹ Correspondingly, Le Duc Tho advocates in his speech the formation of a new political

¹⁹⁴ Journoud, *De Gaulle et le Vietnam*, 382-395. And MAE, AO, ‘Vietnam’, 2 juillet 1969, p. 5.

¹⁹⁵ MAE, AO, ‘La France et le Vietnam’, 13 février 1970, No. 39/AS, p. 1-3.

¹⁹⁶ MAE, AO, ‘entretien avec les délégués de dirigeants de sociétés françaises en Indochine’, 3 mai 1971, C.L.V. No. 216, p. 1-2. And Cesari, *Le Président Georges Pompidou et la Guerre du Vietnam*, 186 (MAE, AO, ‘fiche Extreme Orient’, 13 juillet 1971)

¹⁹⁷ Journoud, *Le Quai d’Orsay et le processus de paix*, 386.

¹⁹⁸ DDF, ‘Conversation avec M. Mai Van Bo’, 12 Décembre 1968, DDF No. Note No. 6/AS, p. 30-31, 31.

¹⁹⁹ Ibidem.

leadership that represents peace and, thus, the replacement of the current leadership of President Nguyen Van Thieu, Vice-President General Nguyen Cao Ky and Prime Minister Tran Van Huong.²⁰⁰ Although, a few corners need to be knocked of the fierce tone adopted by the Communists, the principal idea of a fresh political leadership oriented towards peace is earlier raised by the French in their private conversations with Hanoi. As Mai Van Bo declares they “would not hesitate to take the minister’s suggestions into consideration”²⁰¹, he implicitly confirms that this is initially a French suggestion. Not long after Le Duc Tho’s declaration the NLF follows suit.²⁰²

The French estimate that if the hostile tone of the Communists is softened the solution of neutralist politics oriented towards peace should in time be acceptable to all parties. However, Etienne Manac’h warns both the NLF and the DRV that the current demand for a replacement of Thieu equals the illegitimate dismantlement of the public power. Consequently, risking the enhancement of public support for the three leaders and permitting the Americans to react harshly. This would be counterproductive to their objective. Instead, a more productive method would be to support a political force popular and acceptable to both the South Vietnamese people as well as to their own liking. The French hope popular support and sympathy for the proposal among the South Vietnamese people will further increase and pressure the Thieu government. In particular since the Buddhist and the liberal Catholics – long time opponents – seem to find one another in their avocation for peace and justice. This tendency is further inflamed by the increased oppression and arrests of Buddhist and forthcoming discrete peace actions to the detriment of Thieu’s policy. Next to that, the French remain hopeful that in time the Americans will acknowledge that the weakness and corruption of the Thieu government make the situation untenable.²⁰³ Moreover, since the principal objective of the Communists is of a political nature through military means, whereas the American objective is de-escalation, progressively those objectives may lead to a double-gain of a cease-fire and restoration of the independence.²⁰⁴ To match their expectations of a rapid conclusion of a peace accord, the French, as early as February 1969, draw up a rapport to assess the post-war situation and France’s role and relations therein.²⁰⁵

The first cracks

However, the first suggestions and proposals of the adversaries soon reveal their main differences, which will prove the principle obstacles in the coming negotiations. Le Duc Tho’s proposal of a Government of Peace and the replacement of the Thieu-Ky-Huong leadership in Saigon²⁰⁶ encounters fierce resentment of Thieu who advocates the dismantlement of the NLF if increasing participation in domestic politics is to be allowed.²⁰⁷ In the wake of which the NLF refuses to enter in discussions with the Saigon government. Simultaneously, the U.S. withholds from bypassing Thieu by negotiating

²⁰⁰ Larry Berman, ‘Secret European Initiatives during the Nixon Years : No closer to peace’, 439-453, in: Goscha, C.E., and Vaïsse, M., *La Guerre de Vietnam et l’Europe 1963-1973* (Bruxelles, 2003), 440.

²⁰¹ DDF, ‘Conversation avec M. Mai Van Bo’, 12 Décembre 1968, DDF No. Note No. 6/AS, p. 30-31, 30.

²⁰² DDF, ‘Entretien avec M. Tran Buu Kiem : président de la délégation du FNL’, 8 janvier 1969, DDF No. 30, Note No. 13/AS, p. 60-65, 63. DDF, ‘Conversation avec M. Mai Van Bo’, 12 Décembre 1968, DDF No. ??, Note No. 6/AS, p. 30-31.

²⁰³ MAE, AO, ‘Relations de la France avec le Vietnam-Sud’, 4 mars 1969, No. 63/AS, p. 1-5.

²⁰⁴ DDF, ‘Entretien avec M. Tran Buu Kiem : président de la délégation du FNL’, 8 janvier 1969, 63.

²⁰⁵ DDF, ‘Vietnam: Perspectives d’après guerre’, Paris, 18 février 1969, DDF No. 143, Note No. 142/CLV, p. 316-319.

²⁰⁶ Berman, *Secret European Initiatives during the Nixon Years*, 440.

²⁰⁷ DDF, ‘Entretiens sur le Vietnam’, Paris, 16 avril 1969, DDF No. 291, Note No. 113/AS, p. 673-676, 674-675.

directly with the NLF. In addition, the American proposal of a mutual retreat of both the American and the North Vietnamese troops is irreconcilable with the North Vietnamese demand for an unconditional retreat. As a result, 'Kissinger's Program' to negotiate the military issues between Hanoi and Washington, while leaving the two South Vietnamese²⁰⁸ parties to solve the political problems among each other, is brushed off the table. Instead, Hanoi and the NLF advocate all-comprising negotiations among all four parties to deal with both military and political issues.²⁰⁹

In other words, the withdrawal of American troops, and the composition of domestic politics and the relation between the NLF and the Thieu government are the two principal sources of divergence. As the withdrawal question is at a deadlock and both sides support their South Vietnamese counterpart to fight the battle, they, as well, possess a direct share and responsibility in the military aspect of the war. This leads the French to conclude that 'Kissinger's Program' of separate negotiations is unfeasible.²¹⁰ Resultingly, the French stay with their conviction that the military and political issues are inevitably interconnected.²¹¹ Furthermore, the communicational problem leaves no other option than to negotiate *à quatre*.²¹²

Nixon's visit to Paris in early March 1969 serves the occasion for de Gaulle to set forth the French analysis and recommendations. Central in de Gaulle's plea are the unilateral withdrawal of American troops and a negotiated political settlement among all four parties. However, Nixon, in response, states incapable to rule out future military measures and submits the conditions for an American withdrawal. These are the progress of strengthening the South Vietnamese army to act independently, Vietnamisation, and the decrease of the adversary's war effort. When the Americans secretly start their Operation MENU on the Vietnamese-Cambodian borderline – serving the enemy bombs for breakfast, lunch and dinner – it is all but clear to de Gaulle that Nixon and Kissinger pursue their political objectives through military means, instead of opting for his recommendation of withdraws. Scepticism sets in with the French officials. Manac'h notes in his journal that "the Vietnam War misses a political appreciation and a regulatory method"²¹³. On the basis of these events de Gaulle fears that under the spell of the rhetoric of prestige and credibility Nixon and Kissinger trap themselves in a spiral of violence.²¹⁴

Promising discussions at Kléber

In May both sides present their primary propositions which will give rise to serious negotiations at Kléber. On May 8, 1969 the NLF presents its ten point plan²¹⁵ by which the NLF advocates a global character of the negotiations – in opposition to the Kissinger Program – ; the complete retreat of all foreign forces from the South Vietnamese territory; and for the establishment of a 'Government of Peace' led by "people who declare in favour of peace and neutrality"^{216, 217}

²⁰⁸ The Saigon government and the NLF.

²⁰⁹ Journoud, *De Gaulle et le Vietnam*, 202. And DDF, 'Entretiens sur le Vietnam', 16 avril 1969, 674-675.

²¹⁰ DDF, 'Entretiens sur le Vietnam', 16 avril 1969, 673-676.

²¹¹ DDF, 'Propositions du FNL, III) Position française', Paris, 13 mai 1969, DDF No. 351, Note No. 139/AS, p. 802-804. 802.

²¹² DDF, 'Entretiens sur le Vietnam', 16 avril 1969, 675.

²¹³ Note of Etienne Manac'h in his journal, March 4, 1969 in: Journoud, *De Gaulle et le Vietnam*, 387.

²¹⁴ Journoud, *De Gaulle et le Vietnam*, 382-388.

²¹⁵ DDF, 'Propositions du FNL, III) Position française', Paris, 13 mai 1969, 802-804.

²¹⁶ Ibidem, 803.

Following the NLF, on May 14, 1969 – after four months in office – Nixon publicly sets out the grand lines of his Vietnam Policy and announces an eight point plan to serve as a basis for serious negotiations. This plan composes the principles of a mutual and simultaneous retreat of troops by both the Americans and the North Vietnamese within twelve months; of participation of the NLF in the political scene after elections organised under international surveillance; and of a reference to the Geneva Accords of 1954 and 1962.²¹⁸ In addition, Nixon comes back from Kissinger's proposition to handle the military and political issues separately, and instead, accepts to negotiate all issues jointly, between all four parties.²¹⁹

Both Hanoi and the NLF as well as the Americans request the French to actively mediate in the forthcoming discussions. To the French estimation, although both proposals, and in particular the one of the NLF, consist certain ambiguities, they offer interesting and constructive perspectives. While leaving out de Gaulle's recommendation of an unilateral withdrawal of American troops²²⁰, the French are pleased to see their recommendation of a fixed calendar of retreat inserted in the American proposal.²²¹ Moreover, both parties pronounce in favour of addressing the political and military issues jointly, signing a willingness to advance at the negotiating table.²²²

Resultingly, the French make use of these requests to "valorise their delicate but important role"²²³. They demand the different parties to clarify and further define their propositions. In that fashion, the French act upon the assumption that an enhanced comprehension will make the adversaries more receptive to convergence of their positions. In accordance, The French ask the NLF to elaborate on what relation they foresee between the complete retreat of all troops and the general elections. Additionally, they request both the NLF and the DRV to give an indication of their definition of neutrality for South Vietnam. Thereby mooting the problem of how a possible communist country can be neutral. Moreover, both the NLF and the Americans define in more detail their provision of international surveillance. To further feed the lively weekly discussions at Kléber that derive from the two propositions, the French additionally have regular private consultations with the different parties during which they actively submit their estimations and recommendations.²²⁴

Nonetheless, after only a month of fruitful and hopeful discussions, they once again dissolve in a deadlock. The question of a Government of Peace turns out to be the principle obstacle, over which the American and NLF's positions frontally clash. The NLF pleas for a *Neutralité d'avance* – the transfer of power to neutralist politicians assembled in a provisional coalition government before general elections have been held. As they, accordingly, dismiss the idea that Thieu will change his vision and policy, the NLF refuses to enter in discussions with a Saigon under the leadership of Thieu. Meanwhile, the Americans refuse to abandon Thieu. To the disappointment of Froment-Meurice, the Americans cannot seem to differentiate the NLF as separate from Hanoi, but instead regards them as marionettes with whom direct negotiations would be useless.²²⁵ These American actions reveal, in the eyes of the French, Nixon's refusal to broach the political question. This observation leads

²¹⁷ DDF, 'Propositions du FNL, III) Position française', Paris, 13 mai 1969, 802-803.

²¹⁸ Journoud, *De Gaulle et le Vietnam*, 384.

²¹⁹ Froment-Meurice, *Journal d'Asie*, 12. (17 May 1969)

²²⁰ As de Gaulle proposed to Nixon during his visit to Paris in March 1969.

²²¹ DDF, 'Propositions du FNL, III) Position française', Paris, 13 mai 1969, 802-804.

²²² DDF, 'Entretiens sur le Vietnam', 16 avril 1969, 676.

²²³ DDF, 'Propositions du FNL, III) Position française', Paris, 13 mai 1969, 804.

²²⁴ Ibidem, 802-803. And Froment-Meurice, *Journal d'Asie*, 13-20.

²²⁵ Froment-Meurice, *Journal d'Asie*, 19-20. (2 July 1969)

Froment-Meurice to conclude that “in reality, Nixon does not have the courage yet to end this war”²²⁶. As long as Thieu stays in power, the overture of negotiations among the four parties will be hampered and the question of Saigon’s domestic politics will not be addressed.²²⁷

Following the failure of these discussions the NLF adopts a more rigid line to promote a Government of Peace and their participation in domestic politics. In defying the Saigon government of Thieu, delegates of the NLF and several smaller groups create the Provisional Revolutionary Government (PRG) on June 8, 1969. This action is destined to further complicate the relationship with the Saigon government in support of the NLF’s irrevocable position that it refuses to enter in discussions with Thieu’s South Vietnam. Irreversibly, it will provoke a reaction from Thieu. Likewise, other countries are forced to reconsider their policy. In the light of the complicating Franco-South Vietnamese relations and within the framework of France’s ‘freezing’ policy, France decides to maintain the equilibrium by refraining from either resuming diplomatic relations with South Vietnam, or acknowledging the PRG.²²⁸ If anything, this hardened position reveals, according to the French analysis, that the NLF is counting on the pressure of the American public opinion on Nixon’s presidency to let momentum turn in its favour.²²⁹ The enhanced complicating context will enable the French to “play the role of informant, of analyst, of intermediary, and even of consultant”²³⁰.

A discrete French lobby to commence

“The hour of France has now come. You should not remain silent, the world awaits for France to act”²³¹, are the words of former minister of Foreign Affairs Nguyen Quoc Dinh. Likewise, Philippe Devillers argues to Froment-Meurice “the bells of the neutralists and the intermediary tendencies have tolled”²³². As long as the NLF refuses to enter in discussions with the Thieu-Ky-Huong clique, negotiations à quatre are out of the question. This leaves the secret negotiations between Hanoi and Washington as the only device where France ought to plea for the enlargement of subjects. After all, as the French came to conclude, results failed to materialize in the preceding period due to, among other things, the limited scope of subjects.²³³ Convinced that time is not working in favour of the South Vietnamese faith, the French have hope the Americans will acknowledge the necessity to advance on the political plan. Moreover, the French believe the North Vietnamese are prepared to hear what they have to say. However, faced with the inexistence of any form of negotiations at this point²³⁴ coupled with the uncertainty about the American intentions, the Quai d’Orsay cautiously explores the different grounds before initiating an overture to revive the negotiation.²³⁵

²²⁶ Froment-Meurice, *Journal d’Asie*, 16 (3 June 1969)

²²⁷ *Ibidem*, 11-19.

²²⁸ MAE, AO, ‘Vietnam’, 2 juillet 1969, 4-5.

²²⁹ Froment-Meurice, *Journal d’Asie*, 17.

Anti-war sentiments among the American people are becoming the more and more vocal ever since the Tet Offensive in early 1968. Accordingly, the American Public Opinion gains political leverage over the Vietnam policy.

²³⁰ MAE, AO, ‘Vietnam’, 2 juillet 1969, p. 4.

²³¹ Former Foreign Minister of South Vietnam Nguyen Quoc Dinh in conversation with Henri Froment-Meurice on June 13, 1969. Froment-Meurice, *Journal d’Asie*, 17.

²³² *Ibidem*, 17. French journalist Philippe Devillers in a conversation with Henri Froment-Meurice on June 13, 1969.

²³³ MAE, AO, ‘Vietnam’, 2 juillet 1969, 1-3.

²³⁴ *Ibidem*. Mai Van Bo informs Henri Froment-Meurice of the inexistence of serious negotiations, both formal and informal, ever since Cabot Lodge came back from leave.

²³⁵ Froment-Meurice, *Journal d’Asie*, 17.

On the basis of conversations with a wide variety of *interlocuteurs* the Quai d'Orsay draws up a suitable approach. The Quai d'Orsay actions stems from the assumption that the current political composition of the Saigon government will now or in due time come to an end where after the NLF will assume power. Doubting whether the NLF will share in their power, the French reason that the neutrality of Vietnam will be best safeguarded in the hands of “*nationalists neutralistes non communistes*”²³⁶. Recent conversations with divers *interlocuteurs* reveal that one already toys with the idea and suitable candidates are named.²³⁷ The conversation with Philippe Devillers produces the names of Tran Van Huu²³⁸ and Au Truong Thanh²³⁹ as possible key figures to represent such a political wind.²⁴⁰ Likewise, the name of General Duong Van Minh²⁴¹ is frequently heard.²⁴² Conveniently, most of them reside in France and belong to the Quai d'Orsay's close acquaintances.²⁴³ Moreover, as a Polish colleague conveys to Froment-Meurice, the NLF does not object the current composition of Saigon's delegation in Paris as long as the leadership in Saigon is changed.²⁴⁴ This strengthens the French in their idea that a coalition government comprising neutralist forces, communist forces and pro-American forces will be acceptable. Ho Thong Minh²⁴⁵, additionally, confides Froment-Meurice that the NLF will never accept either the formula of ‘controlled free elections’, nor a mixed parity commission, as proposed by the Americans. He, instead, counter proposes for Thieu to hand over his power to a government charged to establish peace, similar to what Bao Dai did in 1954. To his account, this method was acceptable to the NLF two months earlier.²⁴⁶

Under the current circumstances, the French pursue their idea of a *Troisième Force Neutraliste* in twofold. Firstly, France is to encourage all neutralist activities both in Saigon and in Paris. In this framework, Froment-Meurice encourages Ho Thong Minh's intention to establish a ‘Union of Vietnamese in France’. This political union composed of NLF sympathizers intends to establish a dialogue between the different political factions in South Vietnam to come to a future coalition government. They prefigure to represent neutralist politics and they have demanded prominent Tran Van Huu to join them.²⁴⁷

Secondly, they present the idea delicately to the different negotiating parties. The NLF should come to learn of the existence of additional political factions, in which they will see a sparring partner who, like them, advocates peace, independence and neutrality.²⁴⁸ With regard to Hanoi, the Quai d'Orsay

In addition, France at this time is in the midst of the formation and installation of the Pompidou government.

²³⁶ MAE, AO, ‘Vietnam’, 2 juillet 1969, 5.

²³⁷ *Ibidem*, 1-8.

²³⁸ Tran Van Huu is Vietnamese exile in Paris since 1955. Former Prime Minister of the State of Vietnam (1950-1952) and a regular contact of the Quai d'Orsay.

²³⁹ Au Truong Thanh is former minister of Economy (1964-1967) and former presidential candidate South Vietnam in 1967. Residing in France where he is a lecturer at the University of Tours. Acknowledged to be an important neutralist candidate. Americans advice him in February 1970 to return to South Vietnam to present his candidacy in the elections, without a follow through.

²⁴⁰ Froment-Meurice, *Journal d'Asie*, 17. (13 juin 1969)

²⁴¹ Duong Van Minh is a Vietnamese general and politician. He was a senior general in the ARVN under Diem, he became president after leading the 1963 Vietnamese coup against Diem's presidency.

²⁴² MAE, AO, ‘Relations de la France avec le Vietnam-Sud’, 4 mars 1969, 4.

²⁴³ Considering the positions these people held in Vietnamese politics before coming to France – often in exile – they have traditionally been well-acquainted with the French diplomacy and political system.

²⁴⁴ Froment-Meurice, *Journal d'Asie*, 13. (20 May 1969)

²⁴⁵ Ho Thong Minh is a Vietnamese exile in Paris since 1955, regular contact of the Quai, and former Minister for Defence in Ngo Diem's government (1954-1955)

²⁴⁶ MAE, AO, ‘Entretiens divers sur le Vietnam’, 7 juillet 1969, No. 185/AS, p. 1-5, 5.

²⁴⁷ *Ibidem*.

²⁴⁸ MAE, AO, ‘Vietnam’, 2 juillet 1969, 6.

at multiple times inquires if Hanoi itself foresees suitable and acceptable personalities to take the lead of a Government of Peace.²⁴⁹ Next to that, France counts on the Chinese and the USSR to moderate its position.²⁵⁰ The USSR indeed is pushing Hanoi to seek to enlarge the topics under discussion.²⁵¹ For the time being, the Chinese, however, still seem convinced an American retreat can only be extorted at the battle field.²⁵² In addition, the French delicately incite the Americans to come to see the neutralist politics as a viable alternative to Thieu's clique, and to thereby avoid the "protracted political fight"²⁵³ the French otherwise anticipate. However, as the Americans assess that Thieu's political allies foster his hostile declarations whereas he is prepared to broach the political problem, the Americans refuse to abandon Thieu. Accordingly, for the time being, they exclude the tenability of the French recommendation to enter in direct discussions with the NLF without discrediting the Saigon government.²⁵⁴

Opening of parallel secret negotiations

Fearful that the rising protests at the home front may doom Nixon's Peace through Coercion strategy to pressure Hanoi into a settlement, the Americans meanwhile, as of July 1969, venture an all or nothing attempt to end the war, either by negotiated settlement or by force.²⁵⁵ In the wake of the failed May discussions, this leads the Americans to seek the establishment of their aspired high-level secret negotiations with Hanoi²⁵⁶ through the intermediary of Jean Sainteny. After a failed attempt in December 1968, Sainteny is once again charged to pass a letter from Nixon to Ho Chi Minh.²⁵⁷ In this letter Nixon expresses his wish to initiate high level secret negotiations between Kissinger and Le Duc Tho to come to an honourable and "just peace". He concludes by stating that unless some progress has been made towards a settlement by November 1, they will have to resort to "measures of great consequence and force"²⁵⁸. Albeit, the conciliatory tone adopted in this letter, that is nothing other than imposing an ultimatum.²⁵⁹

Nixon's ultimatum does not achieve its intimidating effect on Hanoi, who instead agrees to secret negotiations.²⁶⁰ A first meeting between Kissinger, Xuan Thuy and Mai Van Bo takes place on August 4 at Sainteny's apartment in Paris. After a three-and-a-half hour conversation the Americans cannot but conclude that the North Vietnamese modifications in their position are insufficient. Kissinger underlines that President Nixon will not withdraw his troops unilaterally nor will he replace Thieu. In addition, Kissinger declares that the American ultimatum still holds up. As Kissinger's disappointment to the inexistence of new proposals hints from the American diplomatic cables, this first meeting nonetheless means the opening up of secret parallel meetings between Kissinger and Le Duc Tho,

²⁴⁹ DDF, 'Entretien avec M. Tran Buu Kiem : président de la délégation du FNL', 8 janvier 1969, 63.

²⁵⁰ Cesari, *Le Président Georges Pompidou et la Guerre du Vietnam*, 182.

²⁵¹ MAE, AO, 'Vietnam', 2 juillet 1969, 2.

²⁵² Froment-Meurice, *Journal d'Asie*, 22-23.

²⁵³ Ibidem.

²⁵⁴ MAE, AO, 'Vietnam', 2 juillet 1969, 1-3.

²⁵⁵ Herring, *America's Longest War*, 280.

²⁵⁶ Bilateral (secret) negotiations between Washington and Hanoi was what Kissinger had proposed earlier in 1969.

²⁵⁷ An earlier letter addressed to Hi Chi Minh on 20 December 1968 had not been taken serious by the North Vietnamese who would not believe Sainteny had obtained the responsibility from Nixon to pass the message.

²⁵⁸ Berman, *Secret European Initiatives during the Nixon Years*, 443.

²⁵⁹ Ibidem, 443—444. And Herring, *America's Longest War*, 280-281.

²⁶⁰ Herring, *America's Longest War*, 280.

both of whom dispose of the highest authority to conclude a peace. These events are not only secret to the public. Similarly the official American delegation under the supervision of Cabot Lodge is kept in the dark.²⁶¹

A first French suggestion is put forward

Following Sainteny's intermediary for the Americans he is charged by the Quai d'Orsay to represent France at Ho Chi Minh's funeral in September 1969. Sainteny is to make additional use of the occasion to submit a letter addressed to Pham Van Dong in which President Pompidou confirms his loyalty to de Gaulle's Vietnam policy which are founded on the principles set out in Phnom Penh. From the forthcoming conversation between Sainteny and Dong, Sainteny draws two important conclusions. Firstly, Dong insists on the necessity of a complete and absolute withdrawal of American troops. Though, acknowledging he should put something forward as compensation, he displays a willingness to accept a neutral South Vietnam. Thereby implicitly consenting to the withdrawal of its own troops from South Vietnamese territory.²⁶² Accordingly, he confirms his loyalty to Ho Chi Minh's policy, as Ho Chi Minh earlier that month allowed Xuan Thuy to offer the South Vietnamese neutrality.²⁶³ Secondly, Hanoi's opposition to the Chinese will to prolong the war until victory manifests Chinese-North-Vietnamese divergence and Hanoi's desire to loosen ties with China. Hanoi's interest for French propositions of cooperation leads Sainteny to conclude that this desire to loosen ties with China may lead to the strengthening of ties with France.²⁶⁴

With the opening of secret negotiations at the highest level and the newly acquired information, the French assess the time has come to bring forward a suggestion to the outline of a possible peace accord. On September 26, Secretary-General at the Quai d'Orsay Hervé Alphand²⁶⁵ exposes the French outline of a feasible accord to Mai Van Bo. Their principle pillars are the withdrawal of American troops within a reasonable timeframe; the maintenance of two separate Vietnams for a 'decent interval'; international guaranties over its borders; the formation of a neutrality based government in Saigon; and reconstruction aid to the whole of Vietnam.²⁶⁶ This suggestion is to be discussed in further detail between Washington and Hanoi in their secret meetings.²⁶⁷

Likewise, Froment-Meurice's visit to Washington serves the occasion to clarify Hanoi's point of view to Kissinger and to reconcile the American position with the idea of a *Troisième Force Neutraliste*. Frank discussions about the issues overshadowing the negotiations erupt. Although Kissinger declares that "a political settlement obviously would include components of the real political forces

²⁶¹ DSNA, 'Detailed briefing on Paris peace talks DSNA Non-Classified', Memorandum of Telephone Conversation, August 05, 1969, no number, p. 1-2.

²⁶² Berman, *Secret European Initiatives during the Nixon Years*, 447-448. And DDF, 'Voyage de M. Sainteny à Hanoi', Paris, 12 septembre 1969, DDF No. 157, Note No. 241/AS, p. 376-377.

²⁶³ Froment-Meurice, *Journal d'Asie*, 24. (Conversation with Tran Van Huu)

²⁶⁴ Berman, *Secret European Initiatives during the Nixon Years*, 447-448. And DDF, 'Voyage de M. Sainteny à Hanoi', 12 septembre 1969, 376-377.

²⁶⁵ Hervé Alphand is a French diplomat. He was Ambassador in Washington (1956-1965), where after he returned to Paris in the function of Secretary General of the Ministry of Foreign Affairs (1965-1972).

²⁶⁶ Cesari, *Le Président Georges Pompidou et la Guerre du Vietnam*, 184.

²⁶⁷ Ibidem.

in South Vietnam”²⁶⁸, he simultaneously underscores the inability of disbaring the Thieu-Ky government, since, as he argues, this will split the army and police force from the domestic politics. Without leadership and cohesion between these two essential elements, the way is paved for the Communist to take over. According to Kissinger, that is the objective the ‘Communists’ foresee with a coalition government. This analysis highlights Kissinger’s suspicion of Hanoi’s intentions.²⁶⁹ In response, Froment-Meurice addresses the problem that Hanoi still refuses to negotiate with the current Saigon government. Where after he argues that “the solution could be reached either by changing the ideas of the men in power or changing the men”²⁷⁰. Hanoi lacks faith in the idea of changing ideas of men. They have difficulties entrusting on a process of self-determination to evolve under the leadership of Thieu. It is, after all, understandable that the elections of 1956²⁷¹ makes them wary. Instead, Hanoi proposes to accept the transfer of military activities to political activities and, in addition, to accept a ‘decent interval’ of ten years until the reunification of the Vietnams. Thereby giving prove of their preparedness to compromise on their ten point plan. Though, as Froment-Meurice puts it, “they could not stop fighting without the strong guarantee that something satisfactory could be worked out”²⁷². A hostile government in the South will not be acceptable to Hanoi. In addition, Froment-Meurice broaches the problem the rigid stance and blunt declarations of the Saigon government poses on the negotiating process, inflaming further hostility.²⁷³

The French suggestions and efforts, however, could not make a difference to Nixon’s intentions. When on 25 August 1969 the definitive rejection of Nixon’s letter comes through, Nixon interprets this as a choice for war. With hindsight, this rejection comes only a few days before Ho Chi Minh’s death, leaving the North Vietnamese not much alternative but to resort to rejection at that point.²⁷⁴ Nevertheless, Nixon intends to carry through with the carefully outlined Operation Duck Hook “designed to achieve maximum political, military, and psychological shock”²⁷⁵ in order to force Hanoi to make concessions. This operation includes the mining of harbours and even speculates about the use of nuclear weapons. As soon as this comes to the attention of the American public, they put their foot down. The eruption of massive peace demonstrations on October 15, lead the American decision makers to cancel Operation Duck Hook. Still, Nixon suits the action to word of an ultimatum and steps up the military enterprise.²⁷⁶

Forced to acknowledge incapable of intimidating or militarily pressuring Hanoi to bring a quick and decisive end to the war and unwilling to make concessions, Nixon finds himself without a policy and falls back on the Vietnamisation policy inherited by his predecessors. On November 3, he announces his determination to “initiate a pursuit for peace on many fronts” by choosing a policy that entails a gradual retreat of American troops coupled with the amplification of the South Vietnamese troops to stand in for themselves. In addition, as he warns a pullout would produce a bloodbath and a crisis of confidence in American leadership, he firmly defends the American commitment in Vietnam. This

²⁶⁸ DSNA, ‘Discussion between Froment-Meurice and Dr. Kissinger on Vietnam’, Kissinger, Transcripts, Secret, Memorandum of Conversation, September 29, 1969, p. 1-5, 2.

²⁶⁹ Ibidem, 1-3.

²⁷⁰ Ibidem, 3.

²⁷¹ Ibidem, 5. In 1956 the unifying elections that were set in the Geneva Accords of 1954 were successfully blocked by South Vietnamese President Ngo Dinh Diem, thereby backed by U.S. to avoid a victory by Ho Chi Minh.

²⁷² DSNA, ‘Discussion between Froment-Meurice and Dr. Kissinger on Vietnam’, September 29, 1969, 1-3.

²⁷³ Ibidem. And Froment-Meurice, *Journal d’Asie*, 17.

²⁷⁴ Berman, *Secret European Initiatives during the Nixon Years*, 444-445.

²⁷⁵ Ibidem, 448.

²⁷⁶ Herring, *America’s Longest War*, 280-281.

'silent majority' speech proves to obtain its goal of isolating the critics and mobilizing popular support for his policy in Vietnam.²⁷⁷

It's official, return to a Policy of Force

As Tran Van Huu later recalls in 1970, in May 1969 a true possibility for peace has been missed out on.²⁷⁸ During this month of fruitful discussions at Kléber, with support of constructive French mediation, the different positions indeed were converging. The following secret negotiations between Hanoi and Washington proceed a bit on this positive attitude. However, the simultaneous mounting escalations, with first and foremost Operation MENU²⁷⁹, undermine the intermediary actions and the conciliatory words at the negotiating table.²⁸⁰

Even before the May discussions strand, disappointment among the French functionaries over the lack of advancements, and more particular the American attitude and policy, has well set in. Operation MENU in Cambodia follows only a few days after Nixon's visit to Paris in March 1969. Not only does Nixon by that move fling de Gaulle's recommendation of urgent withdrawal in the winds, it additionally signs that the anticommunist ideology of Nixon's policy dominates the political playing field in Phnom Penh over its long time partnership with France.²⁸¹ In the intensification of military operations by Nixon, Mai Van Bo recognizes a means of obtaining a position of force, firstly on the battlefield and thereafter at the negotiating table, with the paramount objective of maintaining the Thieu government.²⁸² Coupled with the hold off of truly new proposals, both Hanoi and NLF already in March express to Manac'h their inability to trust their opponent intentions for peace.²⁸³ Manac'h later recalls that it has been hard to contradict these remarks, since fact is that the North Vietnamese analysis is correct.²⁸⁴ The French analysis, in that fashion, approaches more the North Vietnamese analysis than it will resemble the American. In turn the Americans are right to pick that up. As a consequence, in April 1969 this nearly leads to a rupture of the "amicable" Franco-American cooperation.²⁸⁵ These events hint the first signs of Nixon's return to a Policy of Force, sweeping away the early optimism stemming from the relative progress and de-escalation at the end of 1968.²⁸⁶

While the negotiations prolong in summer time, further disappointment sets in as the Americans knowingly neglect all the French suggestions and recommendations aimed at running the impasse in the negotiations. In spite of numerous suggestions to enlarge the political grounds in Saigon, the Americans seem by no means prepared to "pay the sacrifice of Thieu to revive the negotiations"²⁸⁷. The French recommendation to withdrawal within a fixed time scheme is answered by the official

²⁷⁷ Herring, *America's Longest War*, 281-283. And YouTube, 'Nixon : Address to the Nation on the War in Vietnam 3. November 1969', via <http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=e5J-AcZBn10>

²⁷⁸ MAE, AO, 'Entretiens sur le Vietnam', 23 juillet 1970,

²⁷⁹ Nixon launches Operation MENU as early as of March 17, 1969. This operation 'serves' the enemy on North Vietnamese and Cambodian territory bombs for breakfast, lunch and dinner.

²⁸⁰ Berman, *Secret European Initiatives during the Nixon Years*, 449.

²⁸¹ Journoud, *De Gaulle et le Vietnam*, 385-387.

²⁸² MAE, AO, 'Entretien avec Mai Van Bo', 31 mars 1969, No. ?/AS, p. 1-6, 1-2.

²⁸³ MAE, AO, 'Entretien avec Mai Van Bo', 31 mars 1969, No. ?/AS, p. 1-6.

²⁸⁴ Journoud, *De Gaulle et le Vietnam*, 389.

²⁸⁵ DDF, 'Contacts Franco-Américains sur le problème vietnamien', Paris, 19 avril 1969, DDF No. 298, No. Unknown, p. 692-693.

²⁸⁶ Journoud, *De Gaulle et le Vietnam*, 388-389.

²⁸⁷ MAE, AO, 'Suggestions françaises', 10 janvier 1970, p. 9.

announcement of Vietnamisation involving gradual retreats without a fixed date. Albeit, before formally announcing Vietnamisation, it has been in effect for over a year-and-a-half and leads the Chinese Ambassador in Paris to denounce it as a “masquerade” for intensified combats²⁸⁸ aimed to appease the American home front. This American attitude disillusioned its own people just as well. Increasingly frustrated by the hold off of long-term directives from Washington, Cabot Lodge decides to resign as chief negotiator in December 1969. To summarize, the unwillingness to compromise, the lack of trust and the increase of military escalations place the negotiations back in deadlock. Since military escalation at this point prevails in importance over the negotiating table, the negotiations are simple window dressing.²⁸⁹

An active French lobby

January 1970 – November 1970

By January 1970 the French have to admit that their discrete and accurately weighted suggestions have not forced a breakthrough in the negotiations. Meanwhile the conflict further escalates and the persistence of the NLF gathers increasing support of the South Vietnamese people. Contributing in that fashion to Schumann’s estimation that the Thieu government is too weak to bear the burden of war independently, Vietnamisation is posing additional threats to the stability of the region.²⁹⁰ Calmly the Quai d’Orsay broods on the idea of an official French initiative to publicly confront the parties to converge their positions while consciously preserving their neutral and impartial attitude. If such an initiative succeeds, France will, according to Froment-Meurice, not only have shown her good will, more importantly, it will enhance both its influence in the future, post-war Vietnam and its position as major power in world politics.²⁹¹

Preparations in full swing

Early February 1970 the New York Times publishes a letter from a close adjunct of Clifford Clark²⁹², Leslie Gelb, who advocates that Hanoi’s simple request of the Americans is to publicly announce its intention to withdraw its troops from Vietnamese territory and to concretise this intention by setting a final date. Thereafter, it will be up to the Americans to decide what they want in return: Hanoi’s engagement in sorting out the political future with Saigon, or mutual retreat of North Vietnamese troops and a resolution on the Prisoner Of War (POW) question. Gelb concludes his plea by stating the primary goals of the U.S. and Hanoi of respectively auto-determination of South Vietnam and retreat of American troops are not incompatible. The New York Times editor assists in this argument by underlining that although Nixon constantly demands Hanoi to make new

²⁸⁸ Froment-Meurice, *Journal d’Asie*, 20-21.

²⁸⁹ Journoud, *De Gaulle et le Vietnam*, 388.

²⁹⁰ Cesari, *Le Président Georges Pompidou et la Guerre du Vietnam*, 183.

²⁹¹ MAE, AO, ‘Initiative française pour le règlement du conflit vietnamien’, 10 janvier 1970, No. ??, p. 1-8, 1-2.

²⁹² Clark Clifford was Secretary of Defence from 19 January 1968 to 20 January 1969, under President Johnson.

concessions, as Gelb brings to light, in fact Hanoi has already eased its position. It are the Americans who withhold from converging the points of view.²⁹³

Leslie Gelb's analysis is for the greater part in accordance with the French line of thinking. In early January 1970 the Quai d'Orsay elaborates a French initiative to run the deadlock in the negotiations comprising two options. The French can either propose the establishment of an 'enlarged Conference' after the example of the ones in 1954 and 1962, adding to the current composition the UK, China, the USSR and France itself. Or, France can propose a "global settlement per stage"²⁹⁴ by which France would act on their assumption that both the military and the political issues ought to be addressed. Thereby additionally taking into account that the nature of these issues require it to be addressed gently, per stage.²⁹⁵ Since the French assess that the Americans have currently adopted an attitude of indifference, focusing on Vietnamisation instead of negotiations²⁹⁶, they come to conclude that an enlarged Conference is not feasible at this moment. Besides, such an enlarged conference may always serve to internationally guarantee the implementation of the peace accord after its conclusion. Consequently, the French set in for a 'global settlement per stage'.²⁹⁷

Similar to Gelb's analysis the central principle of France's global settlement per stage proposition is the unilateral public announcement by the Americans to withdrawal their troops within a fixed time scheme. This will set the outline where after two phases will emerge. Following this public American commitment Hanoi will as well retreat its troops from the South Vietnamese territory within a delay determined among the NLF and Hanoi. Simultaneous to these NLF-DRV discussions, a first withdrawal of American troops will take place and accordingly a calendar of complete withdrawal will be outlined. As soon as the Vietnamese come to conclude on their calendar to guarantee the North-Vietnamese retreat they will enter the second phase, during which the North Vietnamese as well start their withdrawal of troops. In addition, the French argue for a mutual delimitation of regrouping zones and a dual retreat of troops sharing the same deadline.²⁹⁸

With regard to the political issues of organising domestic politics and general elections the French advocate a midway path between the NLF's proposal of a provisional coalition government and the American proposal of a mixed parity commission under international supervision. This is to be a 'provisional authority' comprising, in addition to delegates of the NLF and the Saigon camp, other political tendencies such as the neutralists. This provisional authority will remain in power for the duration from the election campaigns until the formation of a definitive government and will be in charge of the police and the army. This proposal is inspired by the French experience in Algeria where Treaty of Evian establishes the *Exécutif provisoire algérien*. In other words, this provisional authority will see the light before the general elections, which, to the estimation of the French, should not be held until after the withdrawal of foreign troops has completed.²⁹⁹

Though, initial demarches will have to probe if the negotiating parties are sufficiently interested in a French overture to avoid for a premature action to damage the carefully equilibrated French

²⁹³ MAE, AO, 'Suggestions américaine concernant le Vietnam', 3 février 1970, No. 27/AS, p. 1-5.

²⁹⁴ MAE, AO, 'Initiative française pour le règlement du conflit vietnamien', 10 janvier 1970, 5. In French « un règlement global par étapes »

²⁹⁵ Ibidem, 3-5.

²⁹⁶ MAE, AO, 'Les Etats-Unis et le Vietnam', 26 janvier 1970, No. 54, p. 1-4.

²⁹⁷ MAE, AO, 'Initiative française pour le règlement du conflit vietnamien', 10 janvier 1970, 1-5.

²⁹⁸ Ibidem, 5-7.

²⁹⁹ Ibidem, 7-8.

position. Pompidou's coming visit to Washington in February would be very suitable to elaborate on the Vietnam War and the peace negotiations. The French have good hopes his visit will serve the occasion to even be requested to contribute suggestions. If one has to conclude the timing is off, the initiative will be put on hold. In each case, their recommendations may always serve as a catalogue to draw ideas from.³⁰⁰

Change of course

On February 16, Schumann surprises Froment-Meurice when he brings forward the French suggestion in a private conversation with Le Duc Tho. By consulting Hanoi first he reverses the scenario foreseen by Froment-Meurice. As Le Duc Tho refrains from consenting to these suggestions the French find it hard to estimate his reaction. Though, the secret talks between Le Duc Tho and Kissinger coincidentally resume, giving the French the impression that their recommendation will be elaborated on.³⁰¹

On February 23 Mai Van Bo demands an urgent meeting with Froment-Meurice to inform him that Kissinger and Le Duc Tho have had a secret meeting on Kissinger's demand that "the American government is prepared to go further"³⁰². However, as Bo ascertains, neither has the American position changed nor has Kissinger brought anything new forward. Instead, Kissinger underlines that he and Nixon are in office of seven years and are not pressured to rush things. The occurrence of such contentless secret meetings lacking to contribute to any development frustrates Froment-Meurice, who expresses in his journal that "there are people who want to speak, but who, when it comes to it, do not have anything new to say"³⁰³. As this, logically, leads the French to doubt whether their recommendations have been discussed during these secret meetings, the Quai d'Orsay highly recommends Pompidou to bring the initiative forward to Nixon and to urge him to name a successor for Cabot Lodge. Although Froment-Meurice is convinced Pompidou is prepared to do this, he afterwards doubts whether Pompidou actually did raise the issues with Nixon.³⁰⁴

A reversed chessboard

However, as the project of the initiative evolves, a coup d'état takes place in Phnom Penh. On March 18, 1970 Cambodia's neutralist Prince Sihanouk is overthrown by a pro-American clique headed by Prime Minister Lon Nol. "A coup by the CIA?"³⁰⁵, is what Froment-Meurice wonders and cannot exclude. After all, it is all but convenient that the obviously disliked neutralist Sihanouk is now replaced by a "friendly government"³⁰⁶ who will not object possible American attacks on North Vietnamese sanctuaries on their territory. Moreover, the U.S. is quick to recognize the new Cambodian government and in its wake directly initiates covert military aid. Resultingly, American attacks on the sanctuaries could as of now be justified as "sustaining a friendly Cambodian

³⁰⁰ MAE, AO, 'Initiative française pour le règlement du conflit vietnamien', 10 janvier 1970, 1-5 and 8-11

³⁰¹ Froment-Meurice, *Journal d'Asie*, 40-42. (16 February 1970)

³⁰² Ibidem, 42. (23 February 1970)

³⁰³ Ibidem, 43.

³⁰⁴ Ibidem, 39-43 (a.o. Conversation with Gaucher, official at the Elysée, 10 February 1970)

³⁰⁵ Ibidem, 46 (20 March 1970)

³⁰⁶ Ibidem.

government”³⁰⁷, thereby removing the long-standing concern about violating Cambodian neutrality.³⁰⁸

The events in Cambodia place France at a delicate position leaving it to wonder how to respond. With the disposition of Prince Sihanouk – their loyal partner and ‘their symbol’ of neutrality – the tenability of the Geneva accord of 1954, the foundation of France’s proclamation for neutrality, seems to crumble off.

« *La neutralité cambodgienne qui était une réalité devient une fiction, la neutralité laotienne qui n’était qu’une fiction cesse : voilà l’engrenage possible.* »³⁰⁹

An initial vigorous demarche in Washington encounters a laconic Kissinger unprepared to prevent events in Laos and Cambodia to ‘run its course’. Faced with Mai Van Bo’s question whether France “will consider to support Sihanouk?”³¹⁰, the French weigh their options. De Gaulle would probably not have hesitated to assure Sihanouk his “*indéfectible amitié*”³¹¹. However, the context of a Sihanouk in exile, choosing Peking over Moscow and thereby abandoning his neutralist politics and instead joins the rest of the “*Princes Rouges*”³¹² renders this option difficult. “Between the Americans and the Communists there is void. The true nationalists, wherever they may be, are overshadowed.”³¹³ By Sihanouk’s affiliation with Beijing, the Cambodian crisis marks the return of China. While carefully appeasing and confirming France’s relations with all parties involved, they asses a public declaration the only feasible response left.³¹⁴

Pompidou’s 1st of April Declaration

For lack of alternatives Froment-Meurice concludes that to opt for a *conférence élargie* is the sole option left.³¹⁵ After all, apparently the time had not been right for Pompidou to pressure Nixon to run the deadlock during his visit to Washington³¹⁶, and Nixon currently does not show any willingness to do that either. On April 1st, 1970 Pompidou publicly advocates the maintenance of the neutrality of all four states of Indochina, through negotiations including all interested parties, and by the withdrawal of all foreign interventions.³¹⁷ After brushing this option aside two months earlier, the French are well aware of the limited chances of success.³¹⁸

Pompidou’s Declaration underscores de Gaulle’s Phnom Penh principles, albeit a slight diverge can be detected. Against Froment-Meurice’s recommendation to publicly dissociate from the American

³⁰⁷ Herring, *America’s Longest War*, 290.

³⁰⁸ Ibidem, 288-291. And Froment-Meurice, *Journal d’Asie*, 45-46.

³⁰⁹ Froment-Meurice, *Journal d’Asie*, 48. (26 March 1970)

Translation: The Cambodian neutrality which was a reality now becomes a fiction, the Laotian neutrality which only was a fiction ceases: there you go, it’s a spiral (one sets in the other, it will be hard to come back from)

³¹⁰ Froment-Meurice, *Journal d’Asie*, 46 (20 mars 1970)

³¹¹ Ibidem, 47. (25 mars 1970)

³¹² Ibidem.

³¹³ Ibidem. Expressed by Henri Froment-Meurice.

³¹⁴ Ibidem, 45-48.

³¹⁵ Ibidem, 47-48.

³¹⁶ In the end it appears that Pompidou did not broach the matters proposed by the Quai d’Orsay.

³¹⁷ MAE, AO, ‘Déclaration gouvernementale du 1^{er} avril’, no date, no number, p. 1.

³¹⁸ Froment-Meurice, *Journal d’Asie*, 48.

policy to preserve their credible³¹⁹, the preoccupation of both the *Conseil des Ministres* as well as president Pompidou not to displease the Americans with whom the bilateral relations are finally improving, results in the adoption of a mild tone aimed at enhancing the Franco-American understanding. Contrarily, de Gaulle would have refrained from implicitly referring to a neutral and independent South Vietnam. The same accounts for Pompidou advocating for the cessation of all foreign intervention, instead of solely the cessation of the American intervention.³²⁰ This divergence is, according to Froment-Meurice, the result of the fact that both Schumann and Pompidou instinctively “remain fundamentally anti-communist”³²¹. However, as this is not the French policy, they remain loyal to de Gaulle’s line.³²²

The French assess the first reactions to their overture mixed. While the Asian countries of Singapore, Indonesia and India have expressed their support, the closely engaged parties seem hesitant.³²³ Froment-Meurice estimates France’s attitude towards the Sihanouk affaire may, contrary to its objective, even obscure France’s position. This could be the result of, for instance, the slow concretisation of France’s aid to Hanoi and simultaneous rapprochement with Saigon, as well as the ambiguity of the 1st of April Declaration with regard to the cessation of all foreign interventions and the lack of a reference to a final reunification.³²⁴ And indeed, the NLF, for instance, regards the French reaction to the Cambodian events as an abandonment of Prince Sihanouk, and in its wake refuses to consider their proposal. As the Cambodian situation prolongs, the Chinese are strengthened in their posture to resist any form of negotiations. Consequently, they limit the Soviet influence over the North-Vietnamese, with whom the French share the same objective of a negotiated compromise. The French are still convinced that without the Chinese nothing is possible.³²⁵ Consequently, they assess that the feasibility of an enlarged conference will depend on the attitude that Hanoi will adopt between these two fires.³²⁶

Nixon’s Cambodian venture

As for the Americans, despite France’s appeal to respect the neutrality of the Indochinese states, Nixon is eager to exploit the domestic developments in Cambodia and deploys American troops into the previously off-limits territory to attack North Vietnamese sanctuaries. Thereby he proceeds on the presumption that Hanoi can be threatened to make peace. His public announcement to deploy forces into Cambodia, three days after he launched it, on April 30, reignites the antiwar movement and encounters senatorial challenges of Nixon’s presidency. The protests further inflame after four students at Kent State University in Ohio and two at Jackson State College in Mississippi are killed in confrontation with the National Guard and police. This leads to outbreaks of protest dispersed over the country. In addition, the Senate votes to terminate the Tonkin Gulf Resolution of 1964 and

³¹⁹ Froment-Meurice, *Journal d’Asie*, 46.

³²⁰ Journoud, *le Quai d’Orsay et le processus de paix*, 396.

³²¹ Froment-Meurice, *Journal d’Asie*, 51. (25 April 1970)

³²² *Ibidem*.

³²³ MAE, AO, ‘Indochine (Conseil des Ministres du 8 avril)’, 7 avril 1970, No. 90/AS, p. 1-5.

³²⁴ Froment-Meurice, *Journal d’Asie*, 50 (9 April 1970)

³²⁵ MAE, AO, ‘de l’URSS et l’Indochine’, 21 avril 1971, C.L.V. No. 200, p. 1-7. And Cesari, *Le Président Georges Pompidou et la Guerre du Vietnam*, 184.

³²⁶ Will Hanoi oppose the Chinese will and not seize advantage of the developments in Cambodia. MAE, AO, ‘Indochine (Conseil des Ministres du 8 avril)’, 7 avril 1970, No. 90/AS, p. 1-5, 2.

proposes amendments to cut off all funds to American operations in Cambodia after June 1970, and to withdrawal all U.S. forces by the end of 1971. Moreover from a military standpoint the results are limited to making sanctuaries temporarily unusable, vastly complicating the supply lines along the Ho Chi Minh Trail, though failing to recover the sought-after Central Office for South Vietnam (COSVN)³²⁷. In order to ride out the storm the Nixon administration removes its forces from Cambodia by the end of June.³²⁸

In the light of the deployment of U.S. forces into Cambodia, by half of May, the French proposition of an enlarged conference is unanimously rejected. Hanoi and the NLF refuse the idea of any form of negotiations before a precise final date of withdrawal has been set. Accordingly, they respond by a boycott of the peace negotiations at Kléber. Likewise the secret talks are to be lapsed for months. Both Cambodian parties oppose the proposal of two Cambodian delegations to this enlarged conference. Besides, Thieu's South Vietnam rejects the concept of neutrality, not only for itself, but even more so for Hanoi. Fearful an enlarged conference will isolate their position, the Americans, for their part, try to push the idea on a long-term basis.³²⁹ The PRG's chief negotiator, Madame Binh, nearly a year later, expounds that the French proposal to involve Cambodia into the negotiations, while its situation still deteriorates, would only make them more complex. Therefore the proposal, in the eyes of the NLF, was unrealistic at that time.³³⁰

Furthermore, Nixon's Cambodian venture turns out counterproductive. He hoped to break the deadlock, but instead merely hardened it. Not only halt Hanoi and the NLF any further negotiations. In addition, the invasion into Cambodia enlarges the 'Theatre of War' by the forthcoming tightening grip of the domestic politics on Nixon's room for manoeuvre. In the foreseeable future, the use of combat forces will be limited and the pace of the withdrawals ought to be speeded up. The American home front has now become an indispensable factor in the war. Consequently, instead of forcing Hanoi to make concessions, Nixon strengthens Hanoi to bide its time.³³¹

Gouvernement à trois composantes³³²

By 1970 the name of General Duong Van Minh is quite often dropped in affiliation with the potential leadership of a neutralist political force.³³³ Ever since he is invited by Thieu to return from exile in 1968³³⁴, 'Big' Minh, as he is commonly known, has been secretly conferring with the political and religious leaders opposed to the Saigon government of Thieu. He first unveils his opposition on 1 November 1969, when he and Senator Tran Van Don³³⁵ openly express their desire of national reconciliation and peace. His close relations with such individuals, the army and the Buddhist monks,

³²⁷ The supposed 'nerve centre' of the North Vietnamese military operations, though it has never proven to have existed.

³²⁸ Herring, *America's Longest War*, 291-296.

³²⁹ Cesari, *Le Président Georges Pompidou et la Guerre du Vietnam*, 184.

³³⁰ MAE, AO, 'Entretien avec Mme Nguyen Thi Binh', 22 mars 1971.

³³¹ Herring, *America's Longest War*, 291-296.

³³² Translation: Government of three components

³³³ Different sources in the dossiers of Asie-Océanie, MAE.

³³⁴ Thieu's offer toward Minh to return from exile should be regarded in the sense of a "keep your enemies close". As Donald Kirk argues "Thieu apparently believed that he could either compromise with General Minh or else win the support of some of General Minh's allies by the mere gesture of permitting him to live in Vietnam". D. Kirk, 'The Thieu Presidential Campaign: Background and Consequences of the Single-Candidacy Phenomenon', *Asian Survey*, Vol. 12, No. 7 (Jul., 1972), p. 609-624, 615.

³³⁵ Senator Tran Van Don had established his own National Salvation Front.

in particular those of the An Quang Pagoda³³⁶, imply a strong alliance of opposition.³³⁷ The overwhelming victory of the candidates allied with the An Quang Pagoda Buddhist in the senatorial elections of 30 August 1970 confirms the supposition that if General Minh aligns with the An Quang Pagoda Buddhist, he may defeat president Thieu in fair and open presidential elections a year later. In other words, by the end of 1970 General Minh poses a strong political threat to Thieu's leadership in Saigon.³³⁸

In reaction to these events and in support of Duong Van Minh to strive for political participation, the PRG revives on 17 September 1970 its ten point proposition of 8 May 1969 into an eight point plan. Like in May 1969, this proposal advocates the withdrawal of the U.S. troops and the establishment of a provisional *gouvernement à trois composantes* charged to organise the presidential elections. Madame Binh underlines in her address to the 84e session of the Kléber negotiations that an American engagement to withdraw is essential to any sort of accord and the starting point to open the discussions on other issues. With regard to the ten point plan of May 1969 slight innovations can be detected.³³⁹

In her precisions Madame Binh signs a *souplesse* in the attitude of the PRG.³⁴⁰ Instead of demanding an American retreat within a delay of six months, they prolong this term to nine and a half months, terminating at 30 June 1971.³⁴¹ In addition, by addressing both the military and political aspects, the PRG argues for a global solution. In other words, the American retreat will surely be accompanied by a political accord.³⁴² In accordance, the proposal integrates a guaranteed security of the American troops and their allies, and the withhold of reprisals during the period of disengagement. Moreover, Madame Binh announces the PRG's preparedness to discuss the – to the American home front highly sensitive – POW question as soon as the final disengagement of the U.S. troops is set in. With regard to the political future of Vietnam, the PRG foresees a three phased plan. Firstly, a *Cabinet de Paix* will be established, charged to outline the constitution. Thereafter a provision coalition government will succeed that comprises "all the political and religious tendencies" provided that they "proclaim in favour of peace, independence and neutrality"³⁴³, which will pave the way for a freely elected government in phase three. To the delight of the French, the proposition of this government – comprising the PRG, the current Saigon government except from Thieu, Ky and Khiem, and additional peace favouring politicians – resembles in great line the *Exécutif provisoire algérien*, which the French have presented as an example multiple times. Moreover, by explicitly mentioning these additional political tendencies, the PRG acknowledges its political importance and accords them a substantial participation in future politics.³⁴⁴

³³⁶ An Quang Pagoda is a meeting place of Vietnamese Buddhist leaders and the headquarters of the Unified Buddhist Church of Vietnam in Saigon, hence the term An Quang Pagoda Buddhist. The Buddhist have traditionally been an influential movement in Vietnamese society. After 1964 they become the more and more politically organised and unified in response to the increasingly hostile attitude of the Saigon government and the Communists sentiments.

³³⁷ MAE, AO, 'Relations de la France avec le Vietnam-Sud', 4 mars 1969, No. 63/AS, p. 1-5, 4.

³³⁸ Kirk, *The Thieu Presidential Campaign*, 615-616.

³³⁹ Cesari, *Le Président Georges Pompidou et la Guerre du Vietnam*, 185. And MAE, AO, 'Des nouvelles précisions du G.R.P. sur son plan de règlement en dix points', 21 septembre 1970, C.L.V. No. 523, p. 1-9.

³⁴⁰ MAE, AO, 'Des nouvelles précisions du G.R.P. sur son plan de règlement en dix points', 3.

³⁴¹ This delay is nonetheless shorter than the Hatfield/McGovern Amendment that argues for 31 December 1971 as the final date. MAE, AO, 'des nouvelles précisions du G.R.P. sur son plan de règlement en dix points', 21 septembre 1970, 8.

³⁴² Ibidem, 7.

³⁴³ Ibidem, 4.

³⁴⁴ Ibidem, 1-8.

However, in the margin, the French nuance the judgement of these precisions, since the majority of the ambiguities detected in the May 1969 proposition remain in existence. Despite the fact that the PRG opts for a global solution, a parallel between the military and political issues is inexistent. Moreover, among others, there is no specification of the American and the North Vietnamese retreat of troops, nor of the relation between the complete evacuation of foreign troops and the holding of general elections. Similarly, the proposition remains rather vague when it comes to the issues of reunification and the inter-Vietnamese accord of the North Vietnamese retreat. Besides, as the PRG continues to refuse any involvement of the three principal leaders, Thieu, Ky and Khiem, they overshadow the significance of their approval to enter discussions with other members of the Saigon government. Lastly, the coincide of the introduction of the POW question with the debut of the election campaign in the U.S. may be interpreted as a propaganda tactic.³⁴⁵

Nixon 's "Major new initiative for Peace"³⁴⁶

Faced with increasing pressure from Congress and the American public³⁴⁷ and North Vietnamese that will not budge for the American pressure, Nixon turns to public diplomacy. On October 7, 1970 he addresses the nation in a television speech wherein he proposes a "standstill cease-fire and a American bombing halt throughout Indochina that would be followed by a comprehensive peace conference for the entire region and a negotiated U.S. withdrawal"³⁴⁸.

While the American home front is soothed by this 'generous' offer, the North Vietnamese resolutely reject the proposal on October 10. Curiously titled 'the retreat of the American troops', as Froment-Meurice remarks, the speech makes no reference to the setting of a calendar of withdrawal as demanded by Madame Binh in her ten points.³⁴⁹ Neither do the North Vietnamese fail to remark this. In addition, Xuan Thuy argues at Kléber, that without guaranties on (one of) the fundamental issues – such as a fixation of the final date, or a promise regarding a *gouvernement provisoire de coalition* – a cease-fire will not change anything to the current situation, but justify the American policy of Vietnamisation. A policy that is viewed by Hanoi as a 'policy of war'. In other words, this represents the justification of the American aggression and of the prolongation of the American engagement.³⁵⁰ Thus, in the eyes of Hanoi, Nixon's five point speech is not a sincere peace offer, but an electoral manoeuvre aimed at appeasing the American home front and justifying the prolongation of Vietnamisation.³⁵¹

Nixon's 7 October speech scatters French hope of a breakthrough in the negotiations. Like Froment-Meurice confines to his Soviet colleague Oberenko, neither does he believe the Americans to have an elaborate idea behind their five point plan.³⁵² Unfortunately, that means the Americans not only fail

³⁴⁵ MAE, AO, 'des nouvelles précisions du G.R.P. sur son plan de règlement en dix points', 21 septembre 1970, 3-7.

³⁴⁶ A News headline to cover Nixon's Address to the Nation of October 7, titled 'New Initiative for Peace in Southeast Asia'.

³⁴⁷ Ever since the American expedition in Cambodia the 'War at the Home Front' is playing up.

³⁴⁸ J.M. Hanhimäki, 'A Price winning performance?: Kissinger, Triangular Diplomacy, and the End of the Vietnam War, 1969-1973', *The Norwegian Nobel Institute*, Vol. 2, No. 1 (Oslo, 2001) 1-43, 11.

³⁴⁹ MAE, AO, '[sans titre]', 13 octobre 1970, p. 1-2. [analysis Nixon's 5 points by Froment-Meurice]

³⁵⁰ MAE, AO, 'de l'Analyse présentée par M. Xuan Thuy de la position de cinq points du président Nixon', 21 octobre 1970, C.L.V. No. 566, p. 1-5.

³⁵¹ MAE, AO, 'Des réactions du camp socialiste au discours Nixon (7 octobre)', 16 octobre 1970, C.L.V. No. 555, p.1-3, 1.

³⁵² Ibidem, 2.

to respond to Madame Binh's proposition³⁵³, they additionally do not offer anything new. Based on the current propositions Froment-Meurice concludes that the positions of the warring parties are still too far apart.³⁵⁴ Besides, Nixon's remark to be "prepared to negotiate the withdrawal in the framework of a global settlement"³⁵⁵ insinuates that a solution of the Indochinese problem is now condition to the American retreat.³⁵⁶ Similarly, Xuan Thuy has made the connection between the military and political issues when rejecting a cease-fire without guaranties on fundamental (political) questions. The package deal seems back on the table. Although Froment-Meurice doubts its feasibility, after all it had failed to work in the past.³⁵⁷ When confronting the Americans with their lack to respond, they hint incapable of detecting a truthful proposition. This leads Froment-Meurice to bluntly remark to Marshall Green³⁵⁸ that "if the Americans could not distinct their opponent's desire to come to peace negotiations in Madame Binh's seven points, how should the other side see that in Nixon's propositions?"³⁵⁹ Incapable to trust the word of the adversary at the negotiating table, the antagonism of the opponents' positions stands firm.³⁶⁰

« Il faut Vietnamiser la paix, non la guerre »³⁶¹

As Froment-Meurice points out in a conversation with Marshall Green, according to the French Hanoi's rejection of Nixon's proposals should be an indication of the incompatibleness of simultaneously pursuing Vietnamisation and negotiations.³⁶² To the French it has been clear for a while that the policy of Vietnamisation is greatly disturbing the peace negotiations. Nixon's Vietnamisation enjoys the support of the majority of the American public, stemming from its success to decrease the American casualties and its consequent withdrawals.³⁶³ In that fashion, it accomplishes exactly what it is designed to do. This leads the French to assume that Nixon estimates not to need peace to be re-elected in 1972. Consequently, behind the benevolent words, in practice, he possesses the ability to let Vietnamisation result in increasing military escalations and the extension of the hostilities over the whole Indochinese peninsula.³⁶⁴

Meanwhile Kissinger, who had continued to advocate escalation because of the deadlock, at this point realises how Vietnamisation places him in a disastrous position. As expectations at the home front grow, the gradual withdrawal – designed to be halted if the North Vietnamese do not show leniency at the negotiating table – loses its exit strategy. And the North Vietnamese indeed do not budge. Forthcomingly, momentum could turn to the disadvantage of the Americans. Leaving Kissinger to wonder how to achieve an honourable peace when they are gradually giving away their

³⁵³ MAE, AO, 'de l'Analyse présentée par M. Xuan Thuy de la position de cinq points du président Nixon', 21 octobre 1970, 2.

³⁵⁴ MAE, AO, '[sans titre]', 13 octobre 1970, p. 1.

³⁵⁵ MAE, AO, 'de l'Analyse présentée par M. Xuan Thuy de la position de cinq points du président Nixon', 21 octobre 1970, 3.

³⁵⁶ MAE, AO, 'Des réactions du camp socialiste au discours Nixon (7 octobre)', 16 octobre 1970, C.L.V. No. 555, p.1-3, 2.

³⁵⁷ MAE, AO, '[sans titre]', 13 octobre 1970, p. 1.

³⁵⁸ Marshall Green is the Assistant Secretary of State to East Asian and Pacific Affairs (1969-1973).

³⁵⁹ MAE, AO, 'Entretien avec M. Marshall Green sur l'Indochina', 10 novembre 1970, KB/SV, p.1-3, 2.

³⁶⁰ MAE, AO, 'Les Etats-Unis et le Vietnam (en vue du voyage de Alphand à Washington)', 4 décembre 1970, C.L.V. No. 630, p. 1-4, 2.

³⁶¹ Translation: one should vietnamise the peace, and not the war. A remark by Froment-Meurice which soon finds widespread audience and becomes commonly used expression. Froment-Meurice, *Journal d'Asie, 1969-1970*, 41.

³⁶² MAE, AO, 'Entretien avec M. Marshall Green sur l'Indochina', 10 novembre 1970, 3.

³⁶³ MAE, AO, 'Les Etats-Unis et le Vietnam (en vue du voyage de Alphand à Washington)', 4 décembre 1970, 2.

³⁶⁴ Ibidem, 1-3. MAE, AO, 'Entretien du Ministre avec M. Mai Van Bo', 13 décembre 1970, No. 317/AS, p. 1-4, 1-4.

negotiating cards? At their height in early 1969, 540.000 American troops are stationed in South Vietnam, which is downsized to almost half (280.000) by the end of 1970. At this time, these numbers are expected to decline as fast as to 140.000 in 1971 and to 24.000 in 1972. Kissinger can no longer deny that from a North Vietnamese perspective it will be just a matter of time for the Americans to leave South Vietnam.³⁶⁵

“Nixon talks about peace, but in reality makes war”³⁶⁶

The heavy American bombardments on North Vietnamese targets on 21 and 22 November 1970 confirms the French and Communists expectations that Nixon’s speech intended to simply appease the American public while continuing along the familiar lines of coercion.³⁶⁷ In the light of these events – Nixon’s declaration of October 7, the perseverance of the antagonistic positions, and the renewed bombing of North Vietnam – Schumann declares in the *Conseil des Ministres* of December 2, that “if anything is moving forward, it apparently is in favour of war instead of peace”³⁶⁸.

The French conclude that regardless of the obvious disadvantages of Vietnamisation, the Nixon Administration will not revise their policy. Consequently, Schumann estimates the chances for a ‘French solution’ of a negotiated settlement assuring a zone of neutrality on the basis of the Geneva Accords are limited at this point in time.³⁶⁹ After all, according to the French analysis, Nixon does not need peace for a re-election in 1972. The gradual retreat of troops aims to reduce the American losses, which is far from equal to a determination to end the war. As long as Nixon enjoys popular support for his Vietnam policy, he will not feel inclined to revise it. As a result, the U.S. appears the more and more reluctant to the recommendations and suggestions of foreign powers. Nixon clearly demonstrates this in response to the criticism following the bombardments of 21 and 22 November. He thereby lends himself a free hand to let the hostilities disperse over the Indochinese peninsula.³⁷⁰ Moreover, neither for Hanoi is peace a priority. They may, instead, prefer to await the point when the American disengagement will disclose the South Vietnamese vulnerability. In the eyes of the French, both parties will be more prone to be ruined than to surrender to the military pressure of their opponent. Thus, the gradual retreat of American troops simply contributes to a prolongation of the war on different levels.³⁷¹

Accordingly, Froment-Meurice and Schumann determine that to set a change in motion, the only slight hope left is through the presidential elections in Saigon of 3 October 1971. Although Nixon enjoys popular support for his policies in Vietnam, he is not capable of fully distancing himself from the political question in Saigon. The presidential elections in Saigon could, therefore, serve as an acceptable way to change the political leadership of Thieu in Saigon in favour of personalities more

³⁶⁵ Hanhimäki, *A Price-Winning Performance?*, 12. And Hanhimäki, *la négociations dans les combats*, 56-57.

³⁶⁶ Pronouncement of Mai Van Bo in private conversation with Henri Froment-Meurice. MAE, *Asie-Océanie*, ‘Bombardements au Nord-Vietnam’, 23 novembre 1970, No. 298/AS, p. 2.

³⁶⁷ *Ibidem*, 1-3.

³⁶⁸ MAE. AO, ‘La Situation en Indochine (pour le Conseil des Ministres du 2 Décembre)’, le 1^{er} décembre 1970, No. 304/AS, p.1-3, 1.

³⁶⁹ *Ibidem*, 1-3.

³⁷⁰ MAE. AO, ‘La Situation en Indochine (pour le Conseil des Ministres du 2 Décembre)’, le 1^{er} décembre 1970, 1-3. And MAE, AO, ‘Les Etats-Unis et le Vietnam (en vue du voyage de Alphand à Washington)’, 4 décembre 1970, 3.

³⁷¹ MAE, AO, ‘Bombardements au Nord-Vietnam’, 23 avril 1970, p. 2.

inclined to make peace without betraying Thieu.³⁷² Hanoi has already expressed its willingness to engage in negotiations under such circumstances. That is, with the representatives of this new political wind in Saigon.³⁷³ Moreover, a change of the political leadership in Saigon would mean that the U.S. will terminate its unconditional support for Thieu and thereby comply with the PRG's main demand of a policy change.³⁷⁴ Additionally, the French continue to aspire for the Chinese to exercise their influence in favour of a neutralist South Vietnam, out of fear of the emergence of a strong unified Vietnam at its Southern border.³⁷⁵ To summarize, according to the French, a change of the political leadership in Saigon through the presidential elections in October 1971 is, under the current circumstances, the only way to break the blockage in the negotiations.³⁷⁶

Presidential Elections, the last sparkle of hope

December 1970 – 3 October 1971

« Il y a quatre boules sur le billard : le cessez-le-feu, la date pour le retrait américain, la libération des prisonniers américains, le changement de Gouvernement de Saigon, mais je ne sais pas quelle est la boule rouge. Je me demande même si chacun n'a pas une boule rouge différente de l'autre. » Mon impression, malgré tout, est que la boule rouge, c'est le changement de gouvernement à Saigon.

Henri Froment-Meurice³⁷⁷

On January 14, 1971 General Duong Van Minh confirms his candidacy for the presidential elections in October. Following this announcement the French internally underscore their assessment of the fruitful role Big Minh can play in placing the Thieu clique to the background. The presidential elections can credibly and discretely set in motion the fundamental change in domestic Saigon politics that is required to get ahead in the negotiations.³⁷⁸ Moreover, in the U.S., the Laotian debacle and following Spring season peace demonstrations, an ailing economy, rising unemployment, a growing budget deficit and the declining value of the dollar place a tightening rope on Nixon's domestic and foreign policies. This surely accounts for the Vietnam dossier, since the international monetary crisis, and its domestic consequences listed, are in no small part related to the expenditures on the Vietnam War.³⁷⁹ In addition, even the Chinese seem to favour, step by step, a negotiated end. The French cherish hope that these evolutions will incline the Americans to let the presidential elections take its course and drop their unconditional support for President Thieu, thereby, instead, opting for the neutralist solution.³⁸⁰

³⁷² MAE, AO, 'Les Etats-Unis et le Vietnam (en vue du voyage de Alphand à Washington)', 4 décembre 1970, 3.

³⁷³ MAE, AO, 'entretien du Ministre avec Mai Van Bo', 13 décembre 1970, No. 317/AS, p. 1-4, 2.

³⁷⁴ Ibidem, 3. Point 3 of Madame Binh's proposals of 17 September 1970.

³⁷⁵ MAE, AO, 'Les Etats-Unis et le Vietnam (en vue du voyage de Alphand à Washington)', 4 décembre 1970, 3.

³⁷⁶ MAE, AO, 'entretien du Ministre avec Mai Van Bo', 13 décembre 1970, p. 2.

³⁷⁷ Froment-Meurice, *Journal d'Asie, 1971-1972*, (In conversation with Oberenko, 8 June 1971)

Translation : There are four balls on the billiard table: the cease-fire, a date for the American retreat, the liberation of POWs, and the change of the Saigon government, I do not know which one is the red ball. I even wonder if not everyone has a different red ball. My impression, despite everything, is that the red ball, that is de change of the Saigon government.

³⁷⁸ MAE, AO, 'La situation en Indochine', 14 janvier 1971, ?? p. 1- ?, p. 3.

³⁷⁹ J.P. Kimball, *Nixon's Vietnam War* (Lawrence, 1998), 249.

³⁸⁰ MAE, AO, 'Du problème Indochinois', 13 avril 1971, C.L.V. No. 174, p.1-6, 3-4.

Operation Lam Son 917

In March 1971 television footage of the hastened evacuation of South Vietnamese troops (Army of the Republic of Vietnam, ARVN) by American helicopters, stuck in a perilous situation in Laos, enter the American homes. What is launched on 8 February 1971 as a pre-emptive strike of five days, to sabotage the flow of personnel and supplies over the Ho Chi Minh Trail into South Vietnam and to boost the confidence of the ARVN troops, turns into a five week battlefield and the final flee of ARVN troops.³⁸¹ Although the American military leaders publicly praise the development made by the ARVN troops, being able to take on the responsibility to conduct this offensive independently and gain a six months advantage for Vietnamisation, the true effect on the functioning of the Ho Chi Minh Trail is very limited. The traffic of people and goods only decreases with 20%.³⁸² Resultingly, the French conclude their analysis of the military consequences of Lam Son 917 as a zero-sum game, since both sides have suffered great losses.³⁸³ The American public judges the operation as a disaster for both the U.S. and South Vietnam. The discrepancy between the optimism expressed by the spokesmen of the Nixon administration and the news footage leads to a credibility gap.³⁸⁴ Vietnamisation seems more of a expedient than a functioning policy, making the American people doubt whether the South Vietnamese will be able to resist their Northern enemy without American support.³⁸⁵

The failure of the offensive in the eyes of the international public recaptures their attention for the Vietnamese affair, placing a projector on the evolution of the peace negotiations and the political developments in the Saigon government.³⁸⁶ In spite of the American expectations, none of the positions at the negotiating table evolve in the wake of these events.³⁸⁷ After all, with the exposure of the South Vietnamese vulnerability, and the resulting discontent of their people and political malaise in Saigon³⁸⁸, the North Vietnamese and the NLF do not feel inclined to such measures.³⁸⁹ These events strengthen the French in their long-term conviction. As consequently proclaimed by de Gaulle in Phnom Penh and by Pompidou in his 1st of April Speech: it does concern the whole of Indochina and a military solution is unfeasible, only diplomatic ways may offer an exit.³⁹⁰ In addition, both the Soviets and the Chinese demonstrate their increasing concern with regard to these escalations.³⁹¹ Leading the Soviets to request a French demarche to instigate a communal condemnation by all Geneva signatories of the American violation of the Indochinese neutrality.³⁹² With regard to the Chinese, the French cannot for certainty exclude an intervention similar to the one in Korea, albeit it will require an explicit North Vietnamese request.³⁹³ As the pressure on the Nixon administration builds up, these developments thus render the French confident that a

³⁸¹ Herring, *America's Longest War*, 296-301. And MAE, AO, 'Argumentation du document (C.I.A. – 17/2/71)', 27 février 1971, B.P.M. p. 1-3.

³⁸² MAE, AO, 'Conséquences de l'Operation « Lam-Son »', 23 juin 1971, p. 1-5, 1-3.

³⁸³ Ibidem, 3.

³⁸⁴ Ibidem, 4.

³⁸⁵ MAE, AO, 'Du problème Indochinois', 13 avril 1971, C.L.V. No. 174, p. 3.

³⁸⁶ Ibidem, 3.

³⁸⁷ MAE, AO, 'Conséquences de l'Operation « Lam-Son »', 23 juin 1971, p. 1-5, 4.

³⁸⁸ Ibidem, 4-5.

³⁸⁹ Hanhimäki, *A Price-Winning Performance?*, 57-58.

³⁹⁰ MAE, AO, 'Du problème Indochinois', 13 avril 1971, 3-4.

³⁹¹ MAE, AO, 'Indochine', 2 mars 1971, p. 2. And MAE, AO, 'de l'URSS et l'Indochine', 21 avril 1971, C.L.V. No. 200, p. 1-7, 1-4

³⁹² MAE, AO, 'de l'URSS et l'Indochine', 21 avril 1971, C.L.V. No. 200, p. 1-7, 1-4. The French decided not to execute such a demarche. The Soviet desire to deploy such action decreased after the publicly humiliating retreat of the ARVN troops.

³⁹³ MAE, AO, 'le problème Indochinois', 13 avril 1971, 6.

“evolutionary phase”³⁹⁴ awaits. The warring parties will now be more receptive to their proposal for neutralist politics in Saigon.³⁹⁵

Breakthrough in the Chinese attitude

As the Vietnam conflict spreads over the Indochinese peninsula and the military stalemate prevails, the Chinese abandon their perseverant position of rejecting all forms of negotiation and of urging Hanoi to proceed their pursue of a military victory. Instead, they adopt an attitude more receptive to a negotiated end of the hostilities. In the light of the developing Soviet-American detente, the Chinese will want to prevent, at all times, a Soviet-American collusion to reach an agreement on Vietnam. Thus, the Chinese publicly declare itself in favour of Madame Binh’s eight points on 13 December 1970. By consciously withholding from assaulting their arch-opponent the USSR in their speech, the Chinese, according to the French analysis, refrain from embarrassing their Vietnamese partner.³⁹⁶ After all, the Chinese will want to avoid at all expenses the establishment of a hostile and too strong – unified – influence at its Southern border.³⁹⁷ This declaration is the first sign of Chinese relaxation with regard to the negotiations in Paris.³⁹⁸

Like Hanoi, the Chinese regard the withdrawal of the American troops as key to the settlement.³⁹⁹ In a conversation with Ambassador Manac’h, Zhou Enlai stresses the Chinese attachment to the principles of Geneva and to the idea of neutralisation of the Indochinese states of Cambodia, Laos and South-Vietnam. The latest developments in both Laos and Cambodia are sensitive to the Chinese.⁴⁰⁰ China will not tolerate any further escalation of the war in her backyard. After all, this indirectly threatens the Chinese (interior) security.⁴⁰¹ Though, with the memory of Korea fresh in mind, the Chinese express their doubts whether the Americans will actually leave after a cease-fire. On the basis of Ambassador Manac’h’s conversation, the Quai d’Orsay concludes that a Chinese intervention is improbable, though not excluded.⁴⁰² As the American actions leads them to be further dredged in the Vietnamese conflict, this increases, to the French estimation, the Chinese leverage vis-à-vis the Americans. Moreover, in accordance with the American position, the French are convinced of the Chinese preference for two separate Vietnams for a certain laps of time before a pacified reunification will set in.⁴⁰³

If the French analysis of a Chinese *diplomatie d’ouverture* is correct, Vietnam could well serve as the issue of introduction to a Sino-American rapprochement.⁴⁰⁴ This estimation becomes even more probable after the publication of Edward Snow’s interview with Mao Zedong in April, in which he

³⁹⁴ MAE, AO, ‘le problème Indochinois’, 13 avril 1971, 3.

³⁹⁵ Ibidem, 3-4.

³⁹⁶ MAE, AO, ‘La situation en Indochine’, 14 janvier 1971, p. 2.

³⁹⁷ MAE, AO, ‘des prises de positions chinoises sur le problème vietnamien’, 4 janvier 1971, C.L.V. No. 11, p. 1-9, 8.

³⁹⁸ MAE, AO, ‘La situation en Indochine’, 14 janvier 1971, p. 2.

³⁹⁹ MAE, AO, ‘des prises de positions chinoises sur le problème vietnamien’, 4 janvier 1971, C.L.V. No. 11, p. 8.

⁴⁰⁰ MAE, AO, ‘Entretien Manac’h avec Chou En-Lai’, le 1^{er} avril 1971, No. 55/AS, p. 1-3.

⁴⁰¹ MAE, AO, ‘le problème Indochinois’, 13 avril 1971, 6.

⁴⁰² MAE, AO, ‘Entretien Manac’h avec Chou En-Lai’, le 1^{er} avril 1971, No. 55/AS, p. 2. And

⁴⁰³ MAE, AO, ‘des prises de positions chinoises sur le problème vietnamien’, 4 janvier 1971, C.L.V. No. 11, p.7-9.

⁴⁰⁴ MAE, AO, ‘Ci-après, à toutes fins utiles, trois idées’, 17 mai 1971, p. 1-2, 1.

welcomes the idea to receive Nixon.⁴⁰⁵ With the thought in mind that these developments – both the consequences of Lam Son 917 and the Chinese overture – will have positive repercussions on the American preparedness to move forward⁴⁰⁶, the French set out to place themselves even more properly in the midst of the Washington-Beijing dialogue.⁴⁰⁷

Bilateral commercial accord

Slowly and discretely the French reap the fruits of the improvement of their relations with the parties involved by concluding bilateral accords. After signing three minor bilateral accords with regard to medical and technical cooperation and French education in South Vietnam earlier in 1970 and 1971, the French sign a commercial accord with the DRV on 28 May 1971.⁴⁰⁸ Although its content is of a limited scope, it seals France's future role as it aims to "maintain the principle of our economic relations with North Vietnam in prevision of the post-war"⁴⁰⁹. Likewise, with both Cambodia and Laos France concludes an economic and financial accord in respectively 1970 and 1972 – only weeks before the coup d'état in Phnom Penh – in addition to more technical agreements regarding air traffic and television.⁴¹⁰

These accords is in line with Froment-Meurice's assessment from his trip through Indochina that the uncertainty of the current situation in Indochina may not be a pretext to disengagement. Instead it should lead France to seek to further improve their relations. Through its presence in Indochina – language, culture and products – France can play a capital role in the future of Indochina. It should therefore ensure a constant support of French assistance to these countries for them to resist outside influences and maintain their independence.⁴¹¹

The signing of a commercial accord with the DRV, leads, on the one hand, to parliamentary allegations of partiality on the address of foreign minister Schumann. Schumann counters these allegations of partiality in favour of Hanoi over Saigon by arguing that the long-time history and close relations of France with Indochina renders France incapable of remaining entirely neutral. Moreover, France's policy and objectives have always been consistent and in line with the expectations of the Indochinese peoples.⁴¹² Quite to the contrary, simultaneously, representatives of French businesses in Indochina set in for the restoration of the diplomatic relations. They independently undertake the initiative to discuss a possible restoration with both Saigon and Hanoi with Saigon's foreign minister Tran Van Lam. However, such overtures do not compel with France's policy of freezing the relations. In particular during these election times, maintaining the equilibrium is important. Though, Froment-Meurice does discretely encourage their proposition of a future visit to Saigon by a commercial

⁴⁰⁵ MAE, AO, 'Memorandum of Conversation, US/French discussions concerning China, South Asia, and Indochina', June 30, 1971, p. 1-6, 1-3.

⁴⁰⁶ MAE, AO, 'des prises de positions chinoises sur le problème vietnamien', 4 janvier 1971, C.L.V. No. 11, p. 4.

⁴⁰⁷ Without overlooking neither the Vietnamese nor the Soviet partners. MAE, AO, 'Ci-après, à toutes fins utiles, trois idées', 17 mai 1971, p. 2.

⁴⁰⁸ Diplomatie Française, MAE, dossier Vietnam, online via: <http://www.diplomatie.gouv.fr/fr/dossiers-pays/vietnam/>

⁴⁰⁹ MAE, AO, 'Conflit Vietnamien et relations bilatérales entre la France et la R.D.V.N.', 12 janvier 1972, C.L.V. No. 17, p. 1-6, 6.

⁴¹⁰ Diplomatie Française, MAE, dossiers Cambodge et Laos. Online via: <http://www.diplomatie.gouv.fr/fr/dossiers-pays/>

⁴¹¹ MAE, AO, 'Indochine : projet de note pour le Secrétaire Général', 1^{er} mars 1971, No. 32/AS, p. 1-3, 1-3.

⁴¹² MAE, AO, 'Projet de réponse du Ministre à des questions sur l'Indochine (débat parlementaire du 9 juin)', p. 1-3, 1-3.

And MAE, AO, 'Entretien avec une délégation de dirigeants de sociétés françaises en Indochine', 3 mai 1971, C.L.V. No. 216, p. 1-2, 1-2.

delegation headed by Antoine Pinay⁴¹³ to facilitate “the development of our economic and financial relations with Saigon, thus facilitate the position of our firms”^{414, 415}.

1st of July proposition

On the expiring date of the final U.S. retreat, July 1, the PRG revises its previous plan and proposes a new one, thereby taking several French suggestions into account. Forthcomingly, the PRG argues for an equal calendar of American withdrawal and the release of the POWs. Behind the scenes the condition to this proposal is that the U.S. drops its support for the Thieu clique prior to a political settlement. In addition, they plea for neutrality in Indochina, for international guarantees to the peace accords, and in favour of the retreat of all foreign troops from the South Vietnamese territory. And, like advised by the French, they adopt a more nuanced language, speaking of the establishment of a *gouvernement de concorde nationale* instead of a neutralist government. Thereby putting the means to the word that they welcome the participation of all Saigon affiliated politicians who pronounce in favour of peace.⁴¹⁶

The French assess this proposal is a first step ahead after a period of relative radio silence. While, the negotiations have gone slow, along the way the French do remark the positive development of a convergence in the positions. The North Vietnamese no longer insist on a unilateral retreat and the Americans slowly drop their demand of a mutual retreat. As a result, the question of final date is progressively linked to the POW question. The French regard such an exchange of *Date-Prisonnier* viable.⁴¹⁷ Besides, the French are correct in their estimation that the tightening circumstances may force the U.S. to make an overture. As Nixon’s triangular diplomacy starts to take on concrete forms, the Vietnam issue becomes the more and more an issue of irritation in this new diplomatic course.⁴¹⁸ Therefore, Kissinger secretly reveals an “accommodating offer” somewhat earlier, on 31 May 1971, whereby the Americans agree on a final date of withdrawal in exchange for a cease-fire and the release of all POWs.⁴¹⁹ By the lull in the activity and Le Duc Tho’s return to Paris, the Quai d’Orsay supposes secret talks are unfolding.⁴²⁰ However, it appears that they have remained in the dark about the details.⁴²¹

Madame Binh’s new proposition is enthusiastically welcomed by both the French and most Eastern countries, such as Singapore, India, Indonesia⁴²² and China.⁴²³ The Quai d’Orsay actively lobbies with

⁴¹³ Antoine Pinay is a conservative politician and the former *President du Conseil* (8 March 1952 – 23 December 1952).

⁴¹⁴ MAE, AO, ‘Voyage de M. Antoine Pinay à Saigon’, 22 juin 1971, No. 147/AS, p. 1-4, 1-4.

⁴¹⁵ Ibidem.

⁴¹⁶ Cesari, *Le Président Georges Pompidou et la Guerre du Vietnam*, 185.

However with the exception of Thieu, Ky and Huong, like precisely declared in the 17 September 1970 proposition.

⁴¹⁷ MAE, AO, ‘Question de la date limite des retraits américains au Vietnam’, 18 mai 1971, C.L.V. No. 242, p.1-7, 1-7. And MAE, AO, ‘Consultations Franco-Américains (Cambodge-Laos-Vietnam)’, 14 juin 1971, p. 1-9, 1-9.

⁴¹⁸ Hanhimäki, *A Price-Winning Performance?*, 58. And T. Szulc, ‘How Kissinger Did It: Behind the Vietnam Cease-Fire Agreement’, *Foreign Policy*, No. 15 (Summer, 1974), p. 21-69, 27-28.

⁴¹⁹ Szulc, *How Kissinger did it*, 26.

⁴²⁰ Froment-Meurice, *Journal d’Asie, 1971-1972*, 35. (8 juin 1971)

⁴²¹ The outlining of the DRV’s nine points can be retrieved from the French archives, though without a receiving date. Judging from the lay-out and the additional documents in this small dossier, it appears that the French received it later on. The same impression can be gathered from cables of this period.

⁴²² Cesari, *Le Président Georges Pompidou et la Guerre du Vietnam*, 185-186.

⁴²³ MAE, AO, ‘Point de vue français sur la question du Vietnam’, 7 septembre 1971, C.L.V. No. 414, p. 1-2, 2.

the Americans for them to take the proposal seriously. In that fashion, Froment-Meurice confides the Americans that “we indeed recognise a laudable effort of softening and of overture”⁴²⁴ in Madame Binh’s seven points. The diplomatic cable by Chief Negotiator David Bruce to Kissinger confirms that the French indeed have seized several occasions to urge the Americans to take the proposition seriously. The French argue that after all, the proposition demonstrates to be less rigid when linking the retreat to the POW question, adopting a more flexible attitude with regard to their troops in South Vietnam, and proposing reunification to set in even more progressively.⁴²⁵ Behind the scenes suggestions are dropped speaking of a ‘decent interval’ of ten to twenty years.⁴²⁶ Furthermore, the French entrust the Americans that Le Duc Tho expressed “the change of the Thieu government is key to a political settlement in Vietnam”⁴²⁷ and will be regarded as a test of desire to settle the problem in Vietnam. Moreover, Jean Sainteny argues, during his visit to Washington in May, to replace the Thieu government and to accept the political participation of the PRG delegated in domestic politics. In support, he stresses the vulnerability of the extensive corruption in South Vietnam and Hanoi’s inability to trust the Americans to truly leave Vietnam.⁴²⁸ Interestingly, in addition, Le Duc Tho gives away that a withdrawal will apply to all military personal including advisors, though he leaves out the military and economic support. He thereby implicitly consents to its prolongation. Madame Binh for her part, suggests a military settlement may precede the political settlement. In that fashion, coupled with Le Duc Tho’s comment that he is “not interested in a pursuit of the struggle, but places accent on the prospects of finishing the war”⁴²⁹, they both express their sincere commitment to end the war by negotiation. Moreover, they indicate the current Paris conference to be the right forum to come to terms.⁴³⁰ In this manner, the Quai d’Orsay has sought to convince the Americans of the sincerity of the proposition on the table.

Nixon, however, interprets Madame Binh’s proposal as a rejection of his ‘accommodating’ May 31 proposition.⁴³¹ During the forthcoming secret talks Le Duc Tho tries to further stretch the proposal by opting for the inclusion of political issues, leading him to make a nine point counterproposal three days before Madame Binh’s. Kissinger and Le Duc Tho continue their secret talks directly after Kissinger’s return from China. However, Kissinger’s complaintance of Hanoi’s intransigence during the secret meetings while appearing flexible in public interviews – thereby referring to Le Duc Tho’s

⁴²⁴ MAE, AO, ‘Point de vue français sur la question du Vietnam’, 7 septembre 1971, 2.

⁴²⁵ Ibidem, 1-2.

⁴²⁶ MAE, AO, ‘Consultations Franco-Américains (Cambodge-Laos-Vietnam)’, 14 juin 1971, p. 5-6. And MAE, AO, ‘Entretien avec M. Ho Thong Minh’, 19 mai 1971, No. 108/AS, p. 1-6.

⁴²⁷ DSNA, ‘French Conversations with Le Duc Tho and Madame Binh’, July 30, 1971, Memorandum for Dr. Kissinger, No. 00849, p. 1-4, 1.

⁴²⁸ DSNA, ‘Jean Sainteny observations on North Vietnam and China’, May 25, 1971, Memorandum of Conversation, Doc. No. 00276, p. 1-4, 1-4.

Jean Sainteny observations on North Vietnam and China DSNA 25 mai 1971 Top secret conversation Kissinger Transcripts Sainteny and his wife pay a visit to Washington to consult on Vietnam and China with high ranked U.S. officials, among others Kissinger and ...? Henri Froment-Meurice comes to learn of these meetings only after it has taken place (Journal d’Asie, 20 June 1971). Resultingly, one has to conclude Sainteny does so on a personal basis. Curiously though, Sainteny’s recommendations are quite in line with the French policy.

⁴²⁹ Ibidem, 3.

⁴³⁰ DSNA, ‘Jean Sainteny observations on North Vietnam and China’ May 25, 1971, 1-4. And MAE, AO, ‘Consultations Franco-Américains (Cambodge-Laos-Vietnam)’, 14 juin 1971, 4.

⁴³¹ Szulc, *How Kissinger did it*, 28.

Moreover, a few days earlier the New York Times disclosed sensitive information from secret Pentagon Papers of the Kennedy and Johnson time that further cracked the home front/infuriated the home front. Thus, the timing must have been very sensitive to Nixon as well.

interview with the New York Times on July 6 wherein he supports Binh's proposal⁴³² – hints the American incapability to trust their opponents intentions. Feeling cornered, by half of July, right about coincidentally with Nixon's announcement of a future trip to China, the U.S. State Department denounces the diplomatic pressure exercised by France and the Eastern countries. It become clear that the Americans will not be prepared to let Thieu loose. In response the DRV ceases all negotiations with the Americans as of July 19.⁴³³ Though, in practice, secret talks continue until halfway through September.⁴³⁴

Thieu's one-man-show

Presidential candidate General Big Minh is the *contre-image* of Thieu. His argumentation to end the 'Brother's war', to free South Vietnam of foreign interference, and to reconcile both North and South, and the different sentiments among the South Vietnamese people is quite opposite to Thieu advocating to fight the Communists until victory and to condemn their aggression. However, given his administrative and military power, according to the French, Thieu seems to hold the best trumps. In addition, in the preceding months Thieu achieves in the slight improvement of the economic and military situation which stems the South Vietnamese people hopeful.⁴³⁵ Though, since the Americans promise democratic practices, Ho Thong Minh argues, earlier that year in both the New York Times and Le Monde, that under such circumstances a candidate of peace, like General Minh, should easily obtain a majority.⁴³⁶

Like in 1967, Thieu succeeds in eliminating his opponents in the period up to the elections. In line with his policy of "Four No's"⁴³⁷ Thieu deliberately attempts to ruin the positions of his principal opponents, General Ky and General Minh.⁴³⁸ He does so, firstly, by opposing anyone who is willing to compromise to or enter in a coalition with the enemy, the Communists. Secondly, he submits an election law by the end of 1970 which sets the requirement to gather enough assembly deputies to support a presidential candidacy. Faced with a rejection of the Senate to pass the law in February 1971, Thieu finds a constitutional loop to simply override the will of the democratic institution.⁴³⁹ On the basis of this new constitutional law, the Supreme Court rules General Ky inadmissible as candidate. This Supreme Court decision "ruined any prospect of a serious test of voters' confidence"⁴⁴⁰. In response the An Quang Pagoda Buddhist persuade General Minh to withdraw voluntarily from the elections. Thereby consciously provoking a single candidacy of Thieu – a scenario feared by American officials as it may jeopardize the entire American commitment in Vietnam. In spite of his own resentment, on August 20, General Minh officially announces his withdrawal.⁴⁴¹

⁴³² Kimball, *Nixon's Vietnam War*, 269.

⁴³³ Cesari, *Le Président Georges Pompidou et la Guerre du Vietnam*, 185-186.

⁴³⁴ Hanhimäki, *la négociation dans les combats*, 62

⁴³⁵ MAE, AO, 'Consultations Franco-Américains (Cambodge-Laos-Vietnam)', 14 juin 1971, 7-8.

⁴³⁶ MAE, AO, 'Entretien avec M. Ho Thong Minh', 19 mai 1971, No. 108/AS, p. 1-6, 2.

⁴³⁷ No coalition with the enemy; No territorial concessions; No neutral foreign policy; No Communist political activities in South Vietnam.

⁴³⁸ His forthcoming actions are well prepared and well thought through, starting as early as 1968 by sending General Ky as chief negotiator to Paris, far away from Saigon.

⁴³⁹ Kirk, *The Thieu Presidential Campaign*, 610-616.

⁴⁴⁰ Ibidem, 617.

⁴⁴¹ Ibidem, 617-618.

Highly disappointed by Thieu's manoeuvre the American Ambassador to Saigon Ellsworth Bunkers recommends to publicly dissociate from Thieu and to demand for the postponement of the presidential elections.⁴⁴² Nixon and Kissinger, though, do not act on this recommendation and instead pressure the South Vietnamese Supreme Court to reverse its decision to ban Ky from running. This could, however, not change the faith of the presidential elections. General Ky digs his own grave when he supports his demand of Thieu to postpone the elections in order to organise a new campaign free of constitutional interference, with the implicit threat of a coup d'état. His effort of intimidation encounters, the beneath the superficial veneer of disorder, an internally secure and united Thieu government and backfires. In addition, the An Quang Pagoda Buddhists lose some of their political force and vitality, and as a result are neither they able to significantly weaken Thieu. After letting General Minh loose as their prime candidate, other outspoken voices seem to prefer to await an opportunity in the indefinite future rather than seriously opposing the current government. They fear Thieu unchallengeable at this point, since, after all, "Thieu is strong because he has the army"⁴⁴³. With the conviction in mind that a high turnout of voters would solidify Thieu's position even without facing opposition, Thieu and his supporters repress all forms of demonstration and opposition and troop people to the polls by loudspeakers and police prodding. On October 3, with a victory of 91,5%, the South Vietnamese people re-elect Thieu as their president.⁴⁴⁴

*Échec définitif*⁴⁴⁵

The fiasco of the "scandalous"⁴⁴⁶ presidential elections scatters all preceding hope for change that would definitively break the deadlock, leading the impasse to set back in. After having refrained from any further discussions at Kléber by half of July, the DRV in response to Minh's withdrawal from the elections ceases all secret negotiations with Kissinger as of mid-September.⁴⁴⁷ Pompidou, for his part, has to conclude, on the basis of Minh's withdrawal and Nixon's refusal to dissociate himself from Thieu's actions, that despite their demarches and recommendations, like Johnson with de Gaulle, neither will Nixon act on the recommendations of the French. Fearful a change in their policy will lead to an uncontrollable situation, the Americans prefer to guard the status quo and continue their Vietnamisation.⁴⁴⁸ Consequently, to the heartfelt disappointment of Schumann and Messmer, Pompidou sets in a 'policy of abstention'.⁴⁴⁹ France will itself more to the background.

Moreover, Nixon and Kissinger's Triangular Diplomacy does not produce what they longed for, but may even turn out counterproductive. Trying to play the Chinese off against the Soviets and vice versa, for the time being, does not result in them helping the negotiations go forward. Instead Soviet

General Minh declared not to averse continuing his candidacy and if it came to it perhaps bargain a position within Thieu's new government. However, the An Quang Buddhist made clear to retract its support in case Minh decided not to withdraw. As Minh's candidacy highly depended on their support this left him no choice.

⁴⁴² Kimball, *Nixon's Vietnam War*, 265-275.

⁴⁴³ A comment by Ly Quy Chung, a victorious candidate from Saigon who pleaded for a boycott of the elections. Thieu was backed by a military establishment of over a million men. Kirk, 620.

⁴⁴⁴ Kirk, *The Thieu Presidential Campaign*, 618-624.

⁴⁴⁵ Translation: the definitive failure

⁴⁴⁶ Kirk, *The Thieu Presidential Campaign*, 609.

⁴⁴⁷ Hanhimäki, *A Price-Winning Performance?*, 62.

⁴⁴⁸ MAE, AO, 'Indochine (en vue de la visite de Mme Gandhi)', 20 Octobre 1971, C.L.V. No. 477, p. 1-4, 1.

⁴⁴⁹ Cesari, *Le Président Georges Pompidou et la Guerre du Vietnam*, 192.

president Nikolai Podgorny agrees to upscale their supply of military equipment to the DRV during his visit to Hanoi in October 1971. Thereby strengthening Hanoi for what the future may bring.⁴⁵⁰

Thus, despite the different proposals within an ever tightening context, instead of a convergence of the positions, the antagonism of the warring parties in fact fortifies. By the end of 1971 one is no step closer to peace than at the beginning of Nixon's presidency in 1969. As back then, the negotiations are overshadowed by mounting military escalations aimed to forge concessions of the opponent, and characterized by a total inexistence of trust. Each side seems to have viewed the resume of talks in May 1971 as a last-chance effort at a negotiated settlement before turning to a last-resort round of military escalation. But, having invested so much blood, treasure and prestige in this war, it appears that both sides continue to assess it could gain its objectives by other means than compromise. Now, more than ever before, Nixon and Kissinger may play their 'back-up' card: "the massive, climatic bombing and mining of Hanoi and Haiphong"⁴⁵¹.

⁴⁵⁰ Hanhimäki, *A Price-Winning Performance?*, 59-62.

⁴⁵¹ Kimball, *Nixon's Vietnam War*, 260. In the corridors of the White House this last-resort was better known as the Madman theory.

Enlarging France's scope

New horizon

Events in the second half of 1971 change the geopolitical landscape in such a way for the Quai d'Orsay to place their Vietnam policy in a wider framework aimed to enlarge the scope of activity of France's diplomacy in Asia.⁴⁵² Nixon's announcement to visit Beijing in July 1971 reveals first and foremost the rapprochement of Sino-American relations. Additionally, it hints that the Americans will pay a price for this 'generous Chinese gift'⁴⁵³ by advancing on one of the three fundamental issues still hampering a normalisation. In the light of considerations of time and complicity the French exclude advancements on the issues of either the incompatibility of a possible recognition of both Taiwan and the People's Republic of China (PRC), or the American troops in Vietnam. The French are right to assess that leaves the Chinese admission to the United Nations (UN) and their acquirement of a permanent seat in the Security Council. In October 1971 the members of the UN indeed consent to the Chinese admission, signifying China's entrance on the international scene.⁴⁵⁴ Faced with the forthcoming new geopolitical realities close to home the countries of the Association of Southeast Asian Nations (ASEAN), on 27 November 1971 in Kuala Lumpur, communally pronounce in favour of "a zone of peace, of freedom, and of neutrality" in the whole of South-East Asia, free of interference by any foreign power.⁴⁵⁵

This Kuala Lumpur Declaration constitutes a decisive factor in the assembly of all twelve French Ambassadors in the South East Asian region in a *Conférence des Ambassadeurs* from 8 to 10 March 1972 in Jakarta. The objective of this conference is to "design a vision for the assembly of the region and to define the essential principles that will serve to orientate on future action"⁴⁵⁶. For long playing with the idea of such a regional conference, Froment-Meurice recognises in ASEAN's declaration a viable orientation for the future of the region, who, on top of it, proclaim exactly in accordance with the French chosen line for Indochina. At the conference the twelve Ambassadors unanimously agree on a new "global view on the region"⁴⁵⁷. No longer is it just to be a geographical region, but it should also become of political-economic importance to France. Accordingly, France ought to step up her support for ASEAN, in particular with regard to their objectives of national independence and neutrality. In addition, France shall strive for the enlargement of their economic-commercial presence to match the moral-political role they aspire to play in future time and not risk a possible distortion between the two.⁴⁵⁸

Furthermore, by acknowledging the French diplomacy's lack of capacity to take on this elaborate role solely, the Quai d'Orsay set out to promote a certain European presence in Asia under the leadership

⁴⁵² Fujisaku, *La politique asiatique de la France après de Gaulle*, 88-90.

⁴⁵³ Nixon is free to decide on a date of his trip somewhere before May 1972. Generously the Chinese lend him a hand to choose a date most convenient and opportune with regard to the presidential elections in November 1972. MAE, AO, 'M. Nixon à Pékin', 19 juillet 1971, No. 169/AS, 1-7, 1-5.

⁴⁵⁴ Ibidem, 4-7. And MAE, AO, 'France, Chine et Indochine (en vue de l'entretien entre le Ministre et Le Duc Tho)', 24 juillet 1971, No. 177/AS, p. 1-3, 1-3.

⁴⁵⁵ Fujisaku, *La politique asiatique de la France après de Gaulle*, 88-90.

⁴⁵⁶ Ibidem, 90.

⁴⁵⁷ Recommendation of Guillaume Georges-Picot, in: Fujisaku, *La politique asiatique de la France après de Gaulle*, 89.

⁴⁵⁸ MAE, AO, 'Conférences des chefs de poste dans le Sud-East asiatique', 4 avril 1972, No. 128/AS. In: Fujisaku, *La politique asiatique de la France après de Gaulle*, 89-92.

of the French. In the midst of the Lomé negotiations⁴⁵⁹ the French probably experience the utility of the European framework to facilitate their own diplomatic ambitions at the expense of the Community and to the detriment of the superpowers' interventions. Moreover, by shifting the focus towards an EEC framework the French anticipate on the Chinese desire to establish relations with the EEC.⁴⁶⁰ Thus, contrary to decay in impotence, the French aspire to play on the communal efforts, contributions and investments of the EEC through which France can consolidate her influence and leadership, in Asia and in Europe.⁴⁶¹

This new policy is a perfect example of how both President Pompidou and Head of *Asie-Océanie* Froment-Meurice, contrarily to de Gaulle, acknowledge the weaknesses of the French diplomacy, though, they bend it into a dynamic factor to enhance France's playing field in European and international politics.⁴⁶² Accordingly, they remain faithful to de Gaulle's final objective. Acting on Pompidou's assumption that Europe is to be the vehicle to reinforce and radiate France's influence, at home and abroad⁴⁶³, the Quai d'Orsay brings their Asian policy to a higher level.

Zone of Neutrality and Peace

If anything, recent developments have strengthened French believe in their Vietnam Policy. The prolongation of the conflict – both militarily as diplomatically – has been without decisive results. However, for the lack of realism, one currently closes their eyes for the principle obstacles still impeding peace. That is, Thieu's maintenance of power, the inexistence of a dialogue between the two Cambodian parties, the dispersion of the conflict across the Laotian and Cambodian border and the unwillingness of the U.S. to drop Vietnamisation as a policy.⁴⁶⁴ Moreover, the progressive recognition of the People's Republic of China by other Western European governments as of November 1970 and then toppled with Nixon's announcement of Sino-American rapprochement marks the success of de Gaulle's decision in 1964 to lure the People's Republic out of its self-imposed isolation. This adds a new dimension to the setting as it enhances the credibility for France's consistent policy. Although the speculations of a French intermediary in the brokering of Nixon's visit appear not to be true⁴⁶⁵, the French have at numerous times sought to incite both sides to engage in a dialogue, arguing that the Vietnam War cannot be sorted against China's will.⁴⁶⁶ Therefore, the

⁴⁵⁹ Lomé I Convention (1975) is a trade and aid agreement between the EEC and 71 African, Caribbean and Pacific (ACP) countries. Basically it is a European framework for the redefined ties with former colonies. In particular the former French colonies highly benefit from the convention sealing exclusive trade deals and cooperation responsibilities. For France is enables her to share that burden with its European partners.

⁴⁶⁰ G. Bressi, 'China and Western Europe', *Asian Survey*, Vol. 12, No. 10 (Oct., 1972), 819-845, 833.

⁴⁶¹ MAE, AO, 'Conférences des chefs de poste dans le Sud-East asiatique', 4 avril 1972, No. 128/AS. In: Fujisaku, *La politique asiatique de la France après de Gaulle*, 89-91.

⁴⁶² *Ibidem*, 92.

⁴⁶³ Kolodziej, *French international Policy under De Gaulle and Pompidou*, 399-405, 585-590.

⁴⁶⁴ MAE, AO, 'Indochine (en vue de la visite de Mme Gandhi)', 20 octobre 1971, C.L.V. No. 477, p. 1-4, 1.

⁴⁶⁵ The international press asserts France lend a helping hand, though in his diplomatic cable Froment-Meurice denies the French to have played such a role. Though, on the basis of the developments he concludes that "the discrete manner of France's action gives away that the French diplomacy did indeed influence the recent developments". MAE, AO, 'M. Nixon à Pékin', 19 juillet 1971, 2.

⁴⁶⁶ MAE, AO, 'France, Chine et Indochine (en vue de l'entretien entre le Ministre et Le Duc Tho)', 24 juillet 1971, No. 177/AS, p. 1-3, 1. And MAE, AO, 'M. Nixon à Pékin', 1-2 and 7.

Quai d'Orsay only slightly adjusts her policy to the new circumstances and remains faithful to the Phnom Penh principles and Pompidou's 1st of April Declaration.⁴⁶⁷

The installation of a Zone of Neutrality and Peace in Indochina in combination with a political settlement for Vietnam, thus, remain the core principles of France's Vietnam Policy. The French assess the U.S. to be the only party left to oppose the neutralist solution – including a form of a third neutralist force. Meanwhile all other parties have progressively come to see the advantages, in particular as it will safeguard or restore their independence from external influences.⁴⁶⁸ The French are conscience of the American resentment to the term neutralisation to prevent to set a precedent with South Vietnam's stature in the light of the ongoing Soviet-American talks on the future of Germany.⁴⁶⁹ Nonetheless, they remain hopeful the American will acknowledge neutrality to be the most suitable means to ensure the required stability to facilitate both the American disengagement and the Sino-American entente.⁴⁷⁰ Besides, Nixon's forfeit his trump cards with the military ventures in Cambodia and Laos. It will be just a matter of time before the American public opinion closes in on Nixon's Vietnam Policy. Thus, in this period the French mark time and place themselves more to the background. Their views on the matter are clear. It is time to let the circumstances play its role.

With regard to those circumstances, the unfolding of Kissinger's Triangular Diplomacy convinces the French that a solution to end the Vietnam conflict should still to be sought between Hanoi and Washington. A close official to Kissinger declares in early 1972 that with the unfolding of the Triangular Diplomacy the U.S. is "finally free to make use of all our forces to put an end to the war"⁴⁷¹. However, contrary to one's hopes, under the current circumstances, the French assess it unlikely that the Sino-American rapprochement will give the Americans a free hand nor will it facilitate a peace accord. The developments make Hanoi wary of a superpower play to evolve over their head, though sealing their faith. While risking an accusation to play part in a "complot of the big against the small"⁴⁷², China, as well as France, has a delicate role to play. As the French detect already in November 1971, that the relations between Hanoi and Beijing are deteriorating, it will be unlikely for China to encourage their ally to abandon its principal demands.⁴⁷³ Better yet, both Moscow and Beijing seem to lose grip of their influence over Hanoi.⁴⁷⁴ In other words, "the key to the solution will remain with Hanoi"⁴⁷⁵.

France's proposition of an enlarged conference after the example of the Geneva Conferences of 1954 and 1962 will be put on the long hold. For now the existing conference in Paris is the right forum for the parties who share in this conflict to come to a solution. An enlarged conference may always serve as a means to international guarantee the Paris accords. When Pompidou firstly brought the proposal forward in his Declaration of April 1 it is instantly rejected by all parties. Though, at several occasions references are made to such a conference. To top it off, the PRG includes the proposition

⁴⁶⁷ MAE, AO, 'Indochine (en vue de la visite de Mme Gandhi)', 20 octobre 1971, 3. And MAE, AO, 'Conflit Vietnamien et relations bilatérales entre la France et la R.D.V.N.', 12 janvier 1972, C.L.V. No. 17, p. 1-6, 3-4.

⁴⁶⁸ MAE, AO, 'Indochine (en vue de la visite de Mme Gandhi)', 20 octobre 1971, 2.

⁴⁶⁹ MAE, AO, 'Consultations Franco-Américaines (Cambodge-Laos-Vietnam)', 14 juin 1971, 7.

⁴⁷⁰ MAE, AO, 'Indochine (en vue de la visite de Mme Gandhi)', 20 octobre 1971, 2.

⁴⁷¹ Cited in: A.Coppolani, '« Diplomatie et outil militaire »: l'exemple des négociations sur la fin de la guerre du Vietnam, 1972-1973', 165-184, in : Journoud, P., and Menétry-Monchaeu, C., *Vietnam, 1968-1976: La Sortie de Guerre/Exiting a War* (Bruxelles, 2011), 168.

⁴⁷² MAE, AO, 'France, Chine et Indochine', 24 juillet 1971, 2.

⁴⁷³ Ibidem, 1-7.

⁴⁷⁴ Coppolani, « *Diplomatie et outil militaire* », 168.

⁴⁷⁵ MAE, AO, 'France, Chine et Indochine', 24 juillet 1971, 6.

of an enlarged conference to ensure international guarantee in their seven point plan of 1 July 1971. Thus, meanwhile its feasibility seems accepted. However, the complicated situation in Cambodia and the delicate Chinese role with regard to North Vietnam exclude this option for the time being.⁴⁷⁶ In addition, on the basis of Madame Binh's suggestions⁴⁷⁷ the French play with the idea to split such a conference into three *étapes*, as to separately addressing each country.⁴⁷⁸ And, while preserving the fundament of the previous Geneva Accord, the French foresee to introduce the possibility for the 'local' parties to freely negotiate the remaining political issues. That includes, for example, the reunification of the different political systems of North and South Vietnam, the reconciliation of the conflicting parties within the societies, and the design of neutrality. In this composition, the French continue to regard an enlarged conference similar to the preceding Geneva conferences as the most feasible means to conclude an all-comprising accord for all four Indochinese states.⁴⁷⁹

France will continue to consolidate the relations with the different parties and expand her influence in Indochina and the greater Asian region. Better yet, with taking on a more reserved attitude in their mediatory role, the French accord emphasizes on their external relations and influence with the different parties. With the exception of Cambodia⁴⁸⁰, the (bilateral) relations with, and French cultural, technical and economic influence in the Indochinese countries have modestly improved over the last three years, both at an intergovernmental as well as on the civil societal level. France has committed herself to contribute to the reconstruction of both Vietnams after the war, the French language has been reinserted in Vietnamese education, the diffusion of French lecture has been accomplished and the civil society negotiates two projects, in fishery and regarding the fabrication of (motor-) bicycles. Nonetheless, the hostilities and the complicating relations between the warring parties hamper further development in certain domains.⁴⁸¹ A striking example is Hanoi's blunt rejection of Swiss' intention to re-establish her diplomatic relations with Saigon after re-establishing their relations with Hanoi earlier on.⁴⁸² Moreover, the shattered economies of the war-torn states debar commercial accords to immediately be effective, but instead, foresee in meaningful cooperation as soon as the war has come to an end.⁴⁸³ In other words, the French are fortifying their presence of which to reap the fruits as soon as a peace is concluded.

⁴⁷⁶ MAE, AO, 'France, Chine et Indochine', 24 juillet 1971, 1-7.

⁴⁷⁷ MAE, AO, 'Entretien avec Mme Nguyen Thi Binh', 22 mars 1971, C.L.V. No. 126, p. 1-6, 1-2.

⁴⁷⁸ MAE, AO, 'Ci-après, à toutes fins utiles, trois 'idées' :', 17 mai 1971, p. 1-2, 1-2.

⁴⁷⁹ MAE, AO, 'Indochine', 13 juin 1972, 3-9.

⁴⁸⁰ As the French still do not recognise the government of Lon Nol the relations with Cambodia are since the coup d'état in 1970 complicated. MAE, AO, 'Positions Françaises concernant l'Indochine', 16 février 1972, C.L.V. No. 82, p. 1-4.

⁴⁸¹ MAE, AO, 'Conflit Vietnamien et relations bilatérales entre la France et la R.D.V.N.', 12 janvier 1972, 6.

⁴⁸² MAE, AO, 'Rapport franco-vietnamiens', 22 décembre 1971, C.L.V. No. 562, p. 1-2.

⁴⁸³ MAE, AO, 'Conflit Vietnamien et relations bilatérales entre la France et la R.D.V.N.', 12 janvier 1972, 6.

Play on the people's sentiment

*“The time has come to lay the record of our secret negotiations on the table. Just as secret negotiations can sometimes break a public deadlock, public disclosure may help to break a secret deadlock.”*⁴⁸⁴

Countering the allegations of an unwillingness to pursue negotiations intensively Nixon's lays bare the details of the secret negotiations that have been taken place in Paris between Kissinger, Le Duc Tho and Xuan Thuy in his address to the nation on January 25, 1972. Thereby answering to doubts over disappointing progress, he argues that the Americans pursued all paths and will continue to “pursue any approach that will speed negotiations”⁴⁸⁵, though “it takes two to negotiate”⁴⁸⁶. In addition, Nixon brings forward a new peace plan that is, in his words, “both generous and far-reaching”⁴⁸⁷. The proposal foresees, within six months of an agreement, in the withdrawal of all U.S. and allied forces from South Vietnam in exchange for the speedy return of all prisoners of war, a cease-fire throughout Indochina, and new presidential elections. These will be held under international supervision and organised by an independent body that will represent all political forces in South Vietnam, including the NLF. Significantly, and this is a first, Nixon informs of President Thieu and Vice-president Huong's preparedness to step down one month before the new elections. Well-aware of Hanoi's probable preparations of a new offensive, Nixon cleverly plays on the sentiment of the American home front as he leaves the “choice up to the enemy” and makes a bid for his re-election in November.⁴⁸⁸

This “protection-reaction”⁴⁸⁹, while awaiting the inevitable, is accompanied by the folding out of Nixon's Triangular Diplomacy and are both part of Nixon's diplomatic offensive. Having announced yet another round of troop retreats – leaving 69,000 U.S. men by May 1972 – the Nixon administration finally realises that they need to ensure a lasting peace to save face, before the last U.S. troops leave South Vietnam. With time closing in they have to find a solution that enables them to retreat gracefully while preventing South Vietnam to fall into the hands of the DRV or either one of the regional powers. In other words, the Americans require the assurance of both China and the USSR of the independence and non-alignment of the four states of Indochina.⁴⁹⁰

As Nixon's offer drops the inclusion of any sort of political settlement, leaving these issues to the Vietnamese to discuss among each other, the current proposal, according to the French, “brutally reverses”⁴⁹¹ all the propositions discussed in the summer and autumn of 1971. Accentuating in his speech the importance of his coming visit to China in February “to open to Vietnam the doors of peace”⁴⁹², Nixon renews his proposal to the Chinese leaders during his visit.⁴⁹³ Nonetheless, the

⁴⁸⁴ President Richard M. Nixon, ‘Address to the Nation on Plan for Peace in Vietnam (January 25, 1972)’, online via Miller Center in Charlottesville, the U.S. <http://millercenter.org/president/speeches/detail/3879>

⁴⁸⁵ Ibidem.

⁴⁸⁶ Ibidem.

⁴⁸⁷ Ibidem.

⁴⁸⁸ Ibidem. And MAE, AO, ‘Nouvelles propositions américaines de règlement au Vietnam’, 1 février 1972, C.L.V. No. 55, p. 1-3, 1-3. And MAE, AO, ‘Une nouvelle approche de la paix en Indochine’, *sans nombre, sans date*, p. 1-3, 1-3. And MAE, AO, ‘Positions Françaises concernant l’Indochine’, 16 février 1972, C.L.V. No. 82, p. 1-4, 1-4.

⁴⁸⁹ Coppolani, « *Diplomatie et outil militaire* », 168.

⁴⁹⁰ Ibidem.

⁴⁹¹ MAE, AO, ‘Vietnam’, 9 octobre 1972, No. 327/AS, p. 1-10, 10.

⁴⁹² MAE, AO, ‘Une nouvelle approche de la paix en Indochine’, *sans nombre, sans date*, p. 1-3, 3.

Communist parties continue their refusal of the offer.⁴⁹⁴ Although, Zhou Enlai underlines the importance of a negotiated settlement as he argues the prolongation of the war will intensify the Soviet influence over the peninsula which would make an American defeat even more painful and complete⁴⁹⁵, the Americans respond by suspending the negotiations at Kléber on March 23.⁴⁹⁶ However, as the preceding period made clear that neither of the parties is prepared to compromise what they have not lost on the battlefield, it comes as no surprise that one resorts to the battlefield.

A War for Peace

Increasingly uneasy with the Americans negotiating with their main allies – the USSR and China – North Vietnam launches a massive, conventional invasion of the South on March 30, 1972 to seize South Vietnam and to topple the Thieu government. The timing of their ‘Easter Offensive’ reveals their additional objectives. Launched right at the beginning of the presidential campaign in the U.S. they hope to strike a similar blow to Nixon as they did to Johnson four years earlier. Moreover, they aspire to disrupt the superpower play who will have their first Soviet-American summit in only seven weeks. Stunned by its swiftness and magnitude the offensive proves rather successful, though Washington responds forcefully. As, obviously, re-Americanisation of the war is out of the question, albeit they have nearly no combat troops left in Vietnam, the Americans opt for massive aerial bombings across the DMZ and, soon thereafter, also on Hanoi and Haiphong. Thus, on the eve of Kissinger’s visit to Moscow from April 20 to 24, the Americans for their part, show not to hesitate to resort to “forceful and brutal measures”⁴⁹⁷ when attacked.⁴⁹⁸

In the wake of these escalations both parties stipulate conditions further complicating a return to the negotiating table.⁴⁹⁹ As Washington urges for a cessation of the North Vietnamese offensive, Hanoi makes an American bombing halt and a return to the negotiations at Kléber condition to any future private meetings.⁵⁰⁰ Resultingly, to facilitate a private meeting between Kissinger and Le Duc Tho on May 3 the negotiators return to the table at Kléber. At the private conversation Kissinger makes explicit the American willingness to permit all North Vietnamese forces present prior to March 30 to remain in South Vietnam after a cease-fire. Where after he adds that the Americans shall be flexible regarding the political arrangement. However, the rapid progression and territorial gains – on the eve of the meeting Hanoi seizes the geographically important provincial town of Qiang Tri – renders the North Vietnamese confident of a victory leading them to bluntly reject Kissinger’s offer. This places Nixon in a difficult position.⁵⁰¹ Denouncing Hanoi’s “massive and brutal invasion” to be a “blatant contravention of the bombing halt understanding”⁵⁰² of 1968, Nixon announces on May 8 the mining of Haiphong, a naval blockade, and massive, sustained bombing of North Vietnam. What later

⁴⁹³ Hanhimäki, *La négociations dans les combats*, 61-62.

⁴⁹⁴ MAE, AO, ‘Nouvelles propositions américaines de règlement au Vietnam’, 1 février 1972, 1-3.

⁴⁹⁵ Hanhimäki, *la négociations dans les combats*, 61-62.

⁴⁹⁶ MAE, AO, ‘Négociations sur le Vietnam’, 14 avril 1972, A/S sans nombre, p. 1-6, 6.

⁴⁹⁷ As said by Hanoi Politburo, in: Coppolani, « *Diplomatie et outil militaire* », 170.

⁴⁹⁸ Ibidem, 168-170. Herring, *America’s Longest War*, 304-307. Hanhimäki, *la négociations dans les combats*, 63. And MAE, AO, ‘Situation au Vietnam (en vue du Conseil des Ministres le 19)’, 18 avril 1972, C.L.V. No. 177, p. 1-4, 1-4.

⁴⁹⁹ The Americans decides to suspend all further negotiations at Kléber as of March 23, 1972.

⁵⁰⁰ MAE, AO, ‘Situation au Vietnam (en vue du Conseil des Ministres le 19)’, 18 avril 1972, 2-3.

⁵⁰¹ Hanhimäki, *la négociations dans les combats*, 64-65. And Coppolani, « *Diplomatie et outil militaire* », 171. And Herring, *America’s Longest War*, 304-307.

⁵⁰² MAE, AO, ‘Text of letter from President Nixon’, 8 mai 1972, no number, p. 1-2, 1.

becomes known as Operation Linebacker would be the most drastic escalation since 1965, aimed to provoke a decrease of the pressure on the South and to show Hanoi and her allies the American determination to stand by South Vietnam. Fearless of deploying their aerial and naval means, Hanoi ought to “become conscious of the price”⁵⁰³. In other words, the parties openly resume their military efforts.

“Astonishing or sinister paradox: Nixon bombs Vietnam more than ever, nonetheless he is solemnly received at the Kremlin to sign an accord”, is the opening line of Froment-Meurice’s journal on May 28.⁵⁰⁴ Apparently, “the domains of common interests are more important than the disturbing effects provoked by Indochina”⁵⁰⁵. Nixon’s visit to both Beijing in February and to Moscow in May serves the occasion of rapprochement in the framework of détente, and in that fashion to discuss the Indochinese issue in long and difficult sessions. His Triangular Diplomacy succeeds in further inflaming the Sino-Soviet ideological struggle⁵⁰⁶, though in addition it invokes stubbornness with Hanoi over whom both Chinese and Soviet influence and leverage deteriorates.⁵⁰⁷ Hence, for both Summits accounts that it neither results in a solution nor an accord.⁵⁰⁸ Though, according to the French, the USSR appears more inclined than before to favour a settlement and will probably exercise its pressure on Hanoi in that sense.⁵⁰⁹

In their own sweet way

The return to the battlefield and the abstention of negotiations, both at Kléber as well as privately, places the French even more to the background, however they do not remain inactive. The military operations continue and leave a trail of destruction, in particular to the North Vietnamese economy. Meanwhile, as careful French analysis brings to light, no private meetings have taken place since January and no date has yet been fixed.⁵¹⁰ At several occasions Foreign Minister Schumann, therefore, publicly calls for all parties to return to the negotiating table, to resume the work, and argues to be “more than ever before convinced that the conflict should be countered with a political solution and that such a solution remains possible”⁵¹¹. Schumann’s denouncement of Vietnamisation in a declaration in Tokyo on January 18 set the tone for a rather critical French attitude. Moreover, Nixon’s 8 May announcement of Operation Linebacker results in a French denunciation of the intentional bombing of North Vietnam’s dikes.⁵¹² On May 18 this is followed by a declaration by Schumann before the National Assembly’s Committee of Foreign Affairs wherein he states that “a political solution is the central point and at the same time the principle obstacle”⁵¹³. He thereby defies Nixon’s January 25 proposal that leaves out a political settlement.⁵¹⁴ In addition, he argues for

⁵⁰³ MAE, AO, Situation au Vietnam (en vue du Conseil des Ministres le 19), 18 avril 1972, C.L.V. No. 177, p. 1-4, 1.

⁵⁰⁴ Froment-Meurice, *Journal d’Asie*, 75. (28 May 1971)

⁵⁰⁵ MAE, AO, ‘Indochine (en vue de l’entretien Gromyko – Schumann)’, 1^{er} juin 1972, C.L.V. No. 267, p. 1-11, 5.

⁵⁰⁶ MAE, AO, ‘Indochine (en vue du Conseil des Ministres le 14 juin)’, 13 juin 1972, C.L.V. No. 285, p. 1-2, 1-2.

⁵⁰⁷ MAE, AO, ‘France, Chine et Indochine’, 24 juillet 1971, 4-7.

⁵⁰⁸ MAE, AO, ‘Indochine’, 13 juin 1972, C.L.V. No. 287, p. 1-9, 3.

⁵⁰⁹ MAE, AO, ‘Indochine (en vue de l’entretien Gromyko – Schumann)’, 1^{er} juin 1972, 4-5.

⁵¹⁰ MAE, AO, ‘Négociations sur le Vietnam’, 14 avril 1972, A/S sans nombre, p. 1-6, 1-6.

⁵¹¹ MAE, AO, ‘Indochine (en vue de l’entretien Gromyko – Schumann)’, 1^{er} juin 1972, C.L.V. No. 267, p. 1-11, 5.

⁵¹² Journoud, *Processus de Paix*, 397.

⁵¹³ MAE, AO, ‘Indochine’, 13 juin 1972, 2.

⁵¹⁴ MAE, AO, ‘Indochine (en vue de l’entretien Gromyko – Schumann)’, 1^{er} juin 1972, 3-4.

the establishment of a government which is largely representative and reflects an indispensable reconciliation⁵¹⁵ with which he suggests to place Thieu to the background.⁵¹⁶

From a position behind the scenes the French, moreover, continue to search for viable formulas for a settlement to ensure a stable, independent and neutral South Vietnam and to fulfil their mediatory role. With different *interlocuteurs*, and in particular with Vietnamese (prominent) exiles, the French further explore on their idea of a *Troisième Force Neutraliste* and elaborate on the best candidates to head such a coalition government.⁵¹⁷ As a tripartite government by half of June seems to have little appeal to the neutralist tendencies in South Vietnam, the French declare it to be one alternative among others. Though, privately they remain convinced of its feasibility whereas it answers to the necessity to reflect a political reality, to reconcile the different political factions in the South, and to forge pacifistic coexistence between North and South.⁵¹⁸ Besides, by entering the dialogue, the French can well assess the sentiments at hand and keep the relations with all parties warm. In addition, the Quai d'Orsay discusses with Harriman the outline of the tacit accord of 1968 that sealed the 'unconditional' bombing halt to function as a source of inspiration to draw ideas from, as to how to overcome differences in the current context. Leading the French to conclude a similar tacit accord is a feasible option that would enable the parties to present the accord to the outside world differently and better acceptable to their public, than the true conditions accorded privately.⁵¹⁹

These actions encounter American resentment for their "French meddling"⁵²⁰ aspiring to suppress "any hair brain ideas the French may have as to a political solution in South Vietnam"⁵²¹. Irritated by forthcoming American requests⁵²² aimed to cut off the French "freedom of speech"⁵²³ to protect their plans and propositions without informing them, Froment-Meurice politely disobeys such 'orders'. Thus, the Quai d'Orsay continues to gather information, consult *interlocuteurs* and puts the resulting information into practice when discretely and impartially bringing suggestions forward.

Schumann's visit to China

In early July 1972 Foreign Affairs Minister Maurice Schumann pays a visit to China to expand the economic and cultural relations. The paramount objectives of this visit are to lay a solid fundament for future relations in order to prevent interruption by events like the Cultural Revolution and to preserve France's position "at the front of the Western, or more particular the European, peloton"⁵²⁴. After receiving Chinese Minister of Foreign Trade, Pai Hsiang-Kuo, in October 1971 and a parliamentary delegation in February 1972, Schumann is the first European Foreign Minister to have

⁵¹⁵ MAE, AO, 'Indochine', 13 juin 1972, 2.

⁵¹⁶ MAE, AO, 'Solution politique à Saigon (en vue de l'entretien du Ministre avec M. Phan Dang Lam)', 15 juin 1972, C.L.V. No. 295, p. 1-3, 1. Froment-Meurice broached the issue of Thieu's demission to Marshall Green.

⁵¹⁷ The French consult with, among others, Au Truong Thanh and Ngo Cong Duc.

MAE, AO, 'Entretiens avec des représentants des intérêts français au Vietnam', 3 août 1972, C.L.V. No. 353, p. 1-2, 1-2.

⁵¹⁸ MAE, AO, 'Solution politique à Saigon (en vue de l'entretien du Ministre avec M. Phan Dang Lam)', 15 juin 1972, 1-3.

⁵¹⁹ MAE, AO, 'Accord tacite de 1968 sur l'arrêt des bombardements au Vietnam', 22 avril 1972, No. 169/AS, p. 1-2, 1-2.

⁵²⁰ DSNA, 'French Meddling in Indochina Situation', April 12, 1972, Secret, Action Memorandum, No. 00343, p. 1-2, 1.

⁵²¹ Ibidem.

⁵²² Several requests "to uphold the greatest reserve" ao. via Ambassador Kosciusko – Morizet in Washington on July 7, 1972.

⁵²³ Froment-Meurice, *Journal d'Asie*, 79-80 (6 July 1972)

⁵²⁴ MAE, AO, 'Objectifs du voyage', 20 juin 1972, No. 228/AS, p. 1-13, 3.

political consultations with the Chinese leaders since World War II.⁵²⁵ In the negotiations with President Mao Zedong, Prime Minister Zhou Enlai and Foreign Affairs Minister Chi Peng-Fei Schumann broaches notably the issue of Vietnam, the normalisation with other non-communist countries, and further bilateral understandings. Schumann concludes his trip with the signing of an agreement on scientific, cultural and sport exchanges, including, among other things, a French exposition in Beijing and the exchange of linguistic students and teachers.⁵²⁶ In addition, Schumann and his counterpart decide to continue regular high level consultations, the first of which will be the visit of Minister Chi Peng-Fei to France. Although the preparatory negotiations in the economic domain have not advanced enough to conclude an agreement, Schumann and his counter partner do agree on the prolongation of the Air France-Shanghai line to include Beijing and on an industrial French mission to China in the coming year to “give rise to a new élan in commerce”⁵²⁷. Moreover, the “Chinese reaffirm their posture to continue to hand France an advantage in the economic domain over other supplying countries, with regard to quality, price and delivery time”⁵²⁸. Concerning the Indochinese conflict, the Chinese express to share the French hope for a favourable achievement of the negotiations in Paris, and proclaim the necessity of a cease-fire being simultaneously accompanied by a political settlement, in defiance of Nixon’s 8 May announcement.⁵²⁹

Schumann’s visit to China proves France an unneglectable player in international politics and affirms the emergence of a certain conception of multipolarity to the detriment of the bipolar world dominated by the superpowers. De Gaulle’s decision to pierce the bamboo curtain and the forthcoming exchange of Ambassadors signifies for both countries the provision of first-hand reports on developments and the ability of direct contact to intensify the climate of mutual understanding of one’s positions and actions. The resulting cordial, confidential and equal Sino-French dialogue certainly enables the French to lessen the Chinese fear of U.S. encirclement by clarifying the U.S.’s – and other European countries – intentions to revise their policy in favour of normalisation. The rapprochement with the U.S. allows Chinese foreign policy to become global. After all, this opens doors to the normalisation of relations with other Western governments and to international cadres such as the UN, and thereby strengthens the Chinese position to influence the balance of world power.⁵³⁰ France’s role in brokering these normalised relations with Western countries appears crucial. For its own account, the French aspire, and largely succeed, thereby, to be the mediator between East and West in the framework of détente. The development of relations over the last years which included visits of several high ranked French politicians, such as former Foreign Minister Maurice Couve de Murville and former Prime Minister Pierre Mendès-France, signals the Chinese appreciation of France as a reliable partner of first-rank importance. It proves to be a working dialogue that prevails the American rapprochement.⁵³¹ Beijing is to base its recently revived West European foreign policy on this relationship with France.⁵³² Moreover, China being the principal regional power in Asia, this relation is crucial to France’s aspirations in Southeast-Asia. Marking their

⁵²⁵ Bressi, *China and Western Europe*, 832-833.

⁵²⁶ MAE, AO, ‘Objectifs du voyage’, 20 juin 1972, 1-13.

⁵²⁷ MAE, AO, ‘Communication sur le voyage du Ministre à Pékin’, 13 juillet 1972, No. 257/AS, p. 1-9, 9.

⁵²⁸ Ibidem.

⁵²⁹ Ibidem, 5.

⁵³⁰ Bressi, *China and Western Europe*, 833-834.

⁵³¹ M. Albers, ‘All Paths Leading to Beijing?: Western Europe and Détente in East Asia, 1969-1972’, *The International History Review* (20 February 2014), 1-21, 3.

⁵³² Bressi, *China and Western Europe*, 839.

“communal attachment to an international community founded on relations of equality between states”⁵³³ they defy the bipolar system in which they communally claim leverage.⁵³⁴

Forge a diplomatic exit

The Chinese publicly question Nixon’s capacity to take the courageous decision, like General de Gaulle did in Algeria, to end the Vietnam War.⁵³⁵ By half of July the military, diplomatic and political circumstances force the parties to seek a diplomatic exit. After all, three months of intense combat lack results. Through their Triangular Diplomacy Nixon and Kissinger seek to localise the conflict, though China becomes the more and more vocal in her conviction of a negotiated settlement. And the Vietnamese affair, contrary to his endeavour, does mingle in Nixon’s presidential campaign. As the Americans confide to the French Ambassador in Washington, Jacques Kosciusko-Morizet⁵³⁶, a decisive phase in the negotiations is about to emerge.⁵³⁷ After two months of interruption the parties return to the negotiating table at Kléber on July 13, 1972, thereby giving away that a private session between Le Duc Tho and Kissinger will follow suit in only a few days.⁵³⁸ While regular negotiations take place in the months of July and August, it takes until September to reap its fruits.

Return to the negotiating table

“It’s always the same. It clashed on the same point: a cease-fire before or after the accord”⁵³⁹, are the words of Xuan Thuy as he reviews the private session he and Le Duc Tho had with Kissinger on July 19. Although, the Eastern Offensive is considered a semi-failure, the Communists have succeeded to maintain a strong presence, thereby improving their political and territorial position. The North Vietnamese translate this in a position of force at the negotiating table, as is rightly noticed by the French.⁵⁴⁰ Nonetheless, in the conversations with different *interlocuteurs* – though not with the Americans, since they do not initiate any meetings with the French – the French try to converge the positions. In that fashion, Froment-Meurice suggests Hanoi and the PRG to relax their demand of Thieu’s demission to approach the U.S.’s willingness.⁵⁴¹ Similarly, the North Vietnamese adopt the French suggestion to surpass the question to install a cease-fire before or after the accord by opting for the simultaneity between the conclusion of a political accord, a cease-face, and the start of POW release.⁵⁴² On the basis of his consultations Froment-Meurice remarks, for instance with French representatives in Indochina, that sentiments are changing as one no longer counts on the

⁵³³ MAE, AO, ‘Communication sur le voyage du Ministre à Pékin’, 13 juillet 1972, 2.

⁵³⁴ Albers, *All Paths Leading to Beijing* ?, 2-6. And Bressi, *China and Western Europe*, 832-833, 839-840.

⁵³⁵ MAE, AO, ‘Vietnam’, 18 juillet 1972, C.L.V. No. 336, p. 1-4, 3.

⁵³⁶ Jacques Kosciusko-Morizet succeeds Charles Lucet as French Ambassador in Washington in 1972.

⁵³⁷ DSNA cable of July 7, 1972, No. 4705. Via Cesari, *le président Georges Pompidou et la guerre du Vietnam*, 186.

⁵³⁸ MAE, AO, ‘Vietnam’, 18 juillet 1972, 1-4.

⁵³⁹ MAE, AO, ‘Vietnam’, 21 juillet 1972, 1.

⁵⁴⁰ Hanhimäki, *la négociations dans les combats*, 67.

⁵⁴¹ MAE, AO, ‘Solution politique à Saigon (en vue de l’entretien du Ministre avec M. Phan Dang Lam)’, 15 juin 1972, 1-2.

⁵⁴² MAE, AO, ‘Vietnam’, 21 juillet 1972, No. 261/AS, p. 1-2, 1.

perseverance of the Saigon government.⁵⁴³ Finally, the idea of a *troisième force* is gaining momentum.

As decisive progression at the negotiating table remains inexistent, the opportunistic sentiments in Hanoi and their apparent fearlessness of the consequences of a probable re-election of Nixon lead them to set in a second phase in their Easter Offensive by the end of August. The opening up of new fronts painfully lays bare the limits of Nixon's Blockade Strategy, since a complete isolation proves unfeasible due to the Chinese sabotage.⁵⁴⁴ However, unlike before, this new wave of hostilities does not seem to disrupt the negotiating process.⁵⁴⁵

On September 12, the Americans – through the Chinese – invite Prince Sihanouk to return to Cambodia to head a provisory coalition government. According to the French, this hints the American will to advance on their primary preoccupation to establish a cease-fire in all of Indochina in order to retreat their troops. After all, with regard to the Laotian and Vietnamese conflict advancements are in the making, though, the deteriorating Cambodian situation still poses an essential difficulty to which no solution had been provided just yet.⁵⁴⁶ As he calls himself "*le Thieu de la résistance*"⁵⁴⁷ Prince Sihanouk has shown to oppose all compromise as he refuses a cease-fire as well as any form of dialogue with his opponent Lon Nol. Instead, he persists in his battle until victory. Prince Sihanouk continues his recalcitrance by declining the American invitation as he fears "to lose 'the coat of legitimacy'"⁵⁴⁸.

In addition, Kissinger makes an offer to his counterpart during their private meeting of September 15 of which Soviet Ambassador Abrassimov discloses the promising progress to Schumann. His *interlocuteur* recognises a display of relaxation in the American attitude. Since, in all secrecy, they have shown willing to accept the idea of three components, albeit applied to an electoral committee instead of to a (provisional) coalition government. Moreover, they appear open to the Vietnamese proposition of simultaneity between the conclusion of a political accord, a cease-face, and the start of the POW release.⁵⁴⁹ Besides, 'Plan Kissinger' foresees in presidential elections to be held five months after the cease-fire, under international supervision and organised by the electoral committee.⁵⁵⁰ The Americans themselves are confident as well, as Kissinger confides Pompidou that there is a 50/50 chance of an agreement.⁵⁵¹ Thus, in spite of the revival of the military offensive

⁵⁴³ MAE, AO, 'Entretiens avec des représentants des intérêts français au Vietnam', 3 août 1972, 2.

⁵⁴⁴ MAE, AO, 'Vietnam (en vue du Conseil des Ministres le 30)', 29 août 1972, C.L.V. No. 376, p. 1-3, 1-3. And MAE, AO, 'Entretiens avec des représentants des intérêts français au Vietnam', 3 août 1972, 2.

⁵⁴⁵ Ibidem, 1.

⁵⁴⁶ MAE, AO, 'Cambodge', 12 septembre 1972, C.L.V. No. 397, p. 1-2, 1-2. And MAE, AO, 'Indochine (en vue de l'entretien Gromyko – Schumann)', 1er juin 1972, C.L.V. No. 267, p. 1-11, 6-7.

Since the coup d'état in March 1970 the situation in Cambodia is chaotic and divided in two camps who refuse to negotiate. Meanwhile the prohibition for South Vietnamese (and American) troops to execute missions on Cambodian territory ever since the Senatorial amendment of June 1970 is taking its toll with continued territorial gain to the Khmer rouge to the detriment of Lon Nol's governmental troops. Coupled with his unclever political choices, the Lon Nol government becomes in increasing discredit, both with its people and its American ally. The French analysis reveals as well, that the arrival of a new leadership in Phnom Penh may permit the opening of political negotiations, fiercely required to end the chaos.

⁵⁴⁷ Froment-Meurice, *Journal d'Asie*, 96. (6 October 1972)

⁵⁴⁸ MAE, AO, 'Cambodge', 12 septembre 1972, 2.

⁵⁴⁹ MAE, AO, 'Entretien Kissinger – Le Duc Tho', 19 septembre 1972, No. 313, p. 1-3, 1-2.

This was originally a French suggestion brought forward by Froment-Meurice to Xuan Thuy on July 21.

⁵⁵⁰ Cesari, *Le Président Georges Pompidou et la Guerre du Vietnam*, 186-187.

⁵⁵¹ Froment-Meurice, *Journal d'Asie*, 90-92. (20 and 30 September 1972)

against South Vietnam, the circumstances force the parties to continue the negotiations. The private meeting of September 15 is to set things in motion.

A peace at hand⁵⁵²

Following the alleged breakthrough of September 15 the French are at first sceptical. Considering the ever-existing disagreements and ambiguities they wonder, “without Diên Biên Phu, could there be a Geneva?”⁵⁵³ However, simultaneously they acknowledge that both sides have made considerable steps forward, in particular regarding the acceptance of the idea of tripartite. Besides, a setback in the negotiations would be “unforgivable”⁵⁵⁴ and “the current negotiations are the most serious and the most profound”⁵⁵⁵ seen so far. As the French detect a change in the North Vietnamese normally so negative language regarding the progress of the negotiations and American attitudes, they assume progress is about to be realised.⁵⁵⁶ And indeed, a series of private talks in September and October lead to a draft accord by half of October. Kissinger and Le Duc Tho agree on the removal of all remaining U.S. troops and the return of American POWs within sixty days after a cease-fire. A tripartite National Council of Reconciliation and National Concord is to sort out the political future of South Vietnam.⁵⁵⁷ Both chief negotiators are responsible for the compliance of their companion. October 31 is set as the signing date, preceded by a bombing halt.⁵⁵⁸

For France some of the puzzle pieces are falling in place. The draft accord takes account of France’s principles of a tripartite political structure (point 4) and the maintenance of South Vietnam assured for several years before reunification (point 6). Moreover, as point 1 speaks of “the respect of the fundamental rights of the Vietnamese people”⁵⁵⁹ of independence, sovereignty, unity and territorial integrity it makes a reference to the Geneva Accords of 1954. While explicitly mentioning neutrality for Laos and Cambodia in point 7, no such reference is made for Vietnam. Though, a direct reference to neutrality and the Geneva Accords of 1954 and 1962 would imply that the American do violate these accords by politically meddling in South Vietnam and that the state now regains its independence. Though, according to the French, this can be read between the lines. Additionally, although neither its composition nor location is agreed completely, the draft foresees in the establishment of an international conference on Indochina to guarantee the implementation of the peace accord.⁵⁶⁰ In a secret conversation Le Duc Tho ensures Schumann of their consent to France’s participation therein.⁵⁶¹

Even before the content of the draft becomes public the French assess the great lines to be worked out and as much in accordance with their vision as possible. Consequently, the French role as of

⁵⁵² Henry Kissinger’s ‘Election Promise’ made in his speech before the White House on October 26, 1972 following Thieu’s spin. He turns out to be wrong.

⁵⁵³ MAE, AO, ‘Vietnam’, 9 octobre 1972, 3.

⁵⁵⁴ Ibidem, 1.

⁵⁵⁵ MAE, AO, ‘Négociation Vietnamiennne’, 29 septembre 1972, No. 322/AS, p. 1-11, 11.

⁵⁵⁶ MAE, AO, ‘Vietnam: Etat de la négociation’, 19 octobre 1972, p. 1-11, 1.

⁵⁵⁷ MAE, AO, ‘Projet de règlement au Vietnam et en Indochine’, 14 novembre 1972, sans nombre A/S, p. 1-7, 1-7. And Hanhimäki, *la négociations dans les combats*, 67.

⁵⁵⁸ MAE, AO, ‘Vietnam : Etat de la négociation’, 19 octobre 1972, No. 340/AS, p. 1-11, 11.

⁵⁵⁹ MAE, AO, ‘Projet de règlement au Vietnam et en Indochine’, 14 novembre 1972, 2.

⁵⁶⁰ Ibidem, 1-7.

⁵⁶¹ Froment-Meurice, *Journal d’Asie*, 96. (6 October 1972)

September is of a supportive nature: to converge the positions on the last disagreements and to convince all parties of the necessity to conclude a peace. Interestingly, in a private meetings between Kissinger and Schumann on September 22, the Americans even request the French to help forge a resolution and to help surpass the last disagreements.⁵⁶² Kissinger got word of the French acquaintance of his September 15 proposal, and responding on the apparent inability of the American to lock out the French⁵⁶³ he promises, instead, to keep the French directly informed. Schumann makes use of the occasion to entail Kissinger of the promising developments he notes. Notably, Ambassador Abrassimov's disclosure gives him the impression that "the Russians are trying to help you"⁵⁶⁴ and his trip to China in July has convinced him of the Chinese desire to openly lead a policy of rapprochement with the U.S. as soon as the Vietnam dossier is closed.⁵⁶⁵ Similarly, the French ensure Le Duc Tho of Nixon's intention to end the war is sincere and aimed "not to be re-elected, but to start his new term with a clean slate"⁵⁶⁶. Moreover, assessing the remaining difficulties that still hamper an agreement, the French discretely suggest solutions. An example is Froment-Meurice's suggestion to surpass the discussion of the competences of a tripartite committee (U.S.) or government (DRV) by proposing the establishment of a 'provisional executive committee of national reconciliation', after the example of Algeria, an idea brought up several times earlier on.⁵⁶⁷ With respect to the divergence in sequence between presidential elections proposed by Washington, and general elections the French note that presidential elections can be hardly compatible with the notion of tripartism which had now been adopted as the fundament of any agreement.⁵⁶⁸ Thus, as of half September major steps still had to be taken to arrive at the draft accord by half of October.

Stumbling towards the finish line

However, Thieu throws a spanner in the works. On October 25, only days before the American elections, he vehemently opposes the draft accorded by Kissinger and Le Duc Tho as he publicly declares a cease-fire to be acceptable "only if it was Indochina-wide, and guaranteed and provided for the withdrawal of all North Vietnamese troops from the South"⁵⁶⁹. In response the North Vietnamese divulge the draft, underlining its own concessions and demonstrating the international public Thieu's – and thereby Nixon's – responsibility of this failure. Thieu is enraged by his companion negotiating over his head with the Communists. He disapproves the American consents to the maintenance of North Vietnamese troops in the South, the acknowledgement of the NLF as a legitimate political party, and the accordance of the competences comparable to a coalition government to what is formally called a tripartite committee. He, additionally, insists on the

⁵⁶² DSNA, Review Vietnamese Peace Talks with Maurice Schumann, Top Secret, Memorandum of Conversation, November 24, 1972, No. 00609, p. 1-6, 1-2.

⁵⁶³ The Americans have in the previous period lacked to contact and inform the French while the Quai d'Orsay and its Minister see delegation heads regularly. To the displeasure of Froment-Meurice, the Americans have sought to incite the French to adopt a discrete tone in order not to disrupt negotiations.

⁵⁶⁴ DSNA, Discussion with French Foreign Minister Schumann and Ambassador Kosciusko-Morizet, Secret, Memorandum of Conversation, September 22, 1972, No. 00570, 1

⁵⁶⁵ *Ibidem*, 3-12.

⁵⁶⁶ Froment-Meurice, *Journal d'Asie*, 96. (6 October 1972) And DSNA, Review Vietnamese Peace Talks with Maurice Schumann, November 24, 1972, 4.

⁵⁶⁷ MAE, AO, 'Vietnam', 9 octobre 1972, 2. Froment-Meurice elaborated on the idea with Zelentsov on September 30.

⁵⁶⁸ *Ibidem*, 5.

⁵⁶⁹ G. Rose, *How Wars End : Why we Always Fight the Last Battle* (New York, 2011), 174

maintenance of and explicit reference to the DMZ.⁵⁷⁰ Having carefully analysed the now public draft, the French make note of several imprecisions and ambiguities still incorporated.⁵⁷¹ Moreover, they are well-aware of the circulating rumours of Kissinger's troubling visit to Thieu in Saigon and of possible objections by the PRG.⁵⁷² As a result of which the French are not surprised by these events.⁵⁷³ However, their disappointment is vividly expressed by Schumann as he states "I am sure that you understand and share my anxiety on the thought that the ship of peace was about to enter the port, when it was rejected at large"⁵⁷⁴.

Thieu's obstinate opposition forces Kissinger to reopen the negotiations to incorporate reconsiderations. As the NLF is similarly dissatisfied with the draft at hand, Le Duc Tho is pressured to bring forward (new) demands of their own, even reviving the insistence on the demission of Thieu.⁵⁷⁵ Between 20 and 25 November the discussions reopen around three issues. That is, the remaining North Vietnamese troops in South Vietnam; the competences of a tripartite committee or government to seal the political future of South Vietnam; and the civil Prisoners of War in South Vietnam.⁵⁷⁶ The French are satisfied to see the negotiations recommence to facilitate a peace instead of falling back on military reprisals.⁵⁷⁷ To elaborate on how to surpass the current obstacles the French re-evaluate the circumstances around the conclusion of the 1954 Geneva Accord. This results in, among other things, their recommendation to adopt supplementary commentaries in the agreement and to adapt the signatory procedure.⁵⁷⁸ Once again requested by Kissinger, the French engage in forging an acceptable solution to refer to the North Vietnamese troops remaining in South Vietnam.⁵⁷⁹ Though, Froment-Meurice does not lose sight of the political and diplomatic interests that play part – with each side pointing an accusing finger to the other – and consciously safeguards France's impartiality.⁵⁸⁰

With the draft out in the open, the French can adequately play in on the vacant chances or remaining pitfalls to safeguard France's (additional) interests. In that fashion, the revived negotiations offer the opportunity to further interrogate the Nixon administration on their prevision of Laos and more importantly Cambodia, and the question of Prince Sihanouk status.⁵⁸¹ Still, the return of Sihanouk would safeguard France's interests in Cambodia and the wider region. Through the Brits the French are informed of the Chinese consent to Sihanouk's return as soon as peace sets in, revealing Chinese shared belief in the Prince's alignment to the principles of peace and neutrality.⁵⁸² Though, considering the complexity of the hostilities and recalcitrance of the belligerents, Cambodia may as well be on the verge of a civil war.⁵⁸³ In addition, after more or less safeguarding her participation in

⁵⁷⁰ Zhai, *China and the Vietnam Wars, 1950-1975*, 205-206. Herring, *America's Longest War*, 312-317. And Froment-Meurice, *Journal d'Asie*, 105. (27 October 1972)

⁵⁷¹ MAE, AO, 'Projet de règlement au Vietnam et en Indochine', 14 novembre 1972, 7.

⁵⁷² MAE, AO, 'Vietnam: Etat de la Négociation', 19 octobre 1972, No. 340/AS, p. 1-11, 10-11.

⁵⁷³ Froment-Meurice, *Journal d'Asie*, 104-105. (25 October 1972)

⁵⁷⁴ *Ibidem*, 104.

⁵⁷⁵ Zhai, *China and the Vietnam Wars, 1950-1975*, 205-206. Herring, *America's Longest War*, 315-317.

⁵⁷⁶ MAE, AO, 'Indochine', 28 novembre 1972, C.L.V. No 505, p. 1-6, 1-2. And MAE, AO, 'Négociation vietnamienne', 5 décembre 1972, C.L.V. No. 511, p. 1-3, 1-3.

⁵⁷⁷ MAE, AO, 'Indochine', 28 novembre 1972, 1.

⁵⁷⁸ MAE, AO, 'Conclusion en 1954 des Accords de Genève', 26 octobre 1972, sans nombre A/S, p. 1-4, 1-4.

⁵⁷⁹ DSNA, Review Vietnamese Peace Talks with Maurice Schumann, November 24, 1972, 4.

⁵⁸⁰ Froment-Meurice, *Journal d'Asie*, 109-110. (2 November 1972)

⁵⁸¹ *Ibidem*, 97 (10 October 1972). And DSNA, Review Vietnamese Peace Talks with Maurice Schumann, November 24, 1972, 3. And MAE, AO, 'Entretien entre le Ministre et M. Kissinger', 25 novembre 1972, No. 383/AS, p. 1-5, 4-5.

⁵⁸² MAE, AO, 'La Chine et l'Indochine', 30 Octobre 1972, C.L.V. No. 470, p. 1-3, 2.

⁵⁸³ MAE, AO, 'Indochine', 28 novembre 1972, 4.

the International Conference on Indochina, eventually formally in the function of a permanent member of the Security Council⁵⁸⁴, Schumann lobbies for France's "preparedness" to host the International Conference.⁵⁸⁵

"It would be impossible to get closer to an agreement without actually arriving at one"⁵⁸⁶ are the optimistic words of Kissinger in early December. Nonetheless, Thieu's recalcitrance in combination with Nixon's continued support of Thieu causes the October agreement to break off.⁵⁸⁷ As Kissinger has announced in a private conversation with Schumann, in the unlikely event that the negotiations do break off, the U.S. would "consider some approach with massive and overwhelming impact"⁵⁸⁸. Without true military goals, but with the simple objective to break Hanoi's recalcitrance and to reassure Thieu, Nixon orders massive bombing of North Vietnam on December 17, 1972. These so called Christmas bombings are to be the most intensive and destructive attacks the war has seen, exceeding the total tonnage of bombs dropped from 1969 to 1971 in a only two weeks.⁵⁸⁹ As the French government opposes the return to the battlefield, President Pompidou urges Nixon to halt his bombings in a personal letter dated December 27.⁵⁹⁰ It has often been claimed – not for the least by Nixon and Kissinger themselves – that the Christmas Bombings finally force the Communists to yield for the American superiority and return to the negotiating table. Surely, the bombings encourage Hanoi to resume the negotiations. In addition, the effective North Vietnamese air defence brings down fifteen B-52's leaving ninety-three crew members missing and making an additional thirty-one American POWs which gives Nixon compelling reasons to return to Paris as well.⁵⁹¹ On January 3 technical negotiations resume and rapidly conclude in a final accord that barely differs from the October draft.⁵⁹² All parties sign the Paris Peace Accords on January 27, 1973.

⁵⁸⁴ MAE, AO, 'Indochine', 28 novembre 1972, 3.

⁵⁸⁵ DSNA, Review Vietnamese Peace Talks with Maurice Schumann, November 24, 1972, 5.

⁵⁸⁶ DSNA, Discussion on Vietnamese Peace Talks with Maurice Schumann, Secret, Memorandum of Conversation, December 7, 1972, No. 00629, p. 1-8, 2.

⁵⁸⁷ MAE, AO, 'Vietnam', 19 décembre 1972, No. 410/AS, p. 1-6, 2.

⁵⁸⁸ DSNA, Review Vietnamese Peace Talks with Maurice Schumann, November 24, 1972, 4.

⁵⁸⁹ Zhai, *China and the Vietnam Wars, 1950-1975*, 205-206.

⁵⁹⁰ Cesari, *Le Président Georges Pompidou et la Guerre du Vietnam*, 188. And MAE, AO, 'Attitude de la France à l'égard de la reprise des bombardements américains sur le Nord-Vietnam', 19 décembre 1972, C.L.V. No. 523, p. 1-2, 1-2.

⁵⁹¹ Herring, *America's Longest War*, 315-317.

⁵⁹² MAE, AO, 'Vietnam', 23 janvier 1973, No. 22/AS, p. 1-7, 3-5. MAE, AO, 'Accords de Paris', 26 janvier 1973, No 24/AS, p. 1-9, 2-9.

Striking diplomatic craftsmanship

The Gaullist Georges Pompidou

De Gaulle's extraordinary vision

On the basis of his experiences as a General and a national leader in Algeria and Indochina Charles de Gaulle has a unique and profound understanding of the ideological and military nature of the conflict in Vietnam. Particularly as he acknowledges the strength of the National Liberation Front (NLF) to stem more from Third World nationalism than from the Communist ideology. Hence, de Gaulle does not fear a possible reunification of Vietnam under the communist North to result in the spill of communism over the peninsula. The terrain does not lend itself for a military victory for either side of the conflict. Moreover, they have an endless access to military means. Therefore, the civil conflict should be freed of foreign interference and ended through a negotiated political settlement that safeguards the principle of self-determination for the Indochinese people. Neutrality of Indochina will not endanger the global position of the West vis-à-vis the Communist world, but would simply bring peace and stability to the region.

De Gaulle's Phnom Penh speech on September 1, 1966 should not be regarded as a simple condemnation of American policy, but as a final attempt to sell his assessment of the Vietnam Conflict. He urges to address the four major themes that have been constantly hammered away by the Americans: the necessity to recognise the principle of self-determination, to withdraw the American troops, to accept neutrality for the Indochinese states, and to deal with China directly. These Phnom Penh principles will remain at the core of France's Vietnam policy. If one looks past the harsh words, his Phnom Penh speech reveals a sincere engagement with the Indochinese faith. That is a sentiment that is shared by the French people. Nowhere in the world are the anti-Vietnam protests as fierce as in France.

As is brought to light, de Gaulle purposely lobbies and undertakes three *filières* to bring the peace negotiations between the belligerents of the Vietnam War to Paris and to acquire the role of mediator. He has clear objectives in mind with regard to that role that fit perfectly in his larger Grand Design. These objectives are two folded. By helping broker a negotiated peace France will give prove of her indispensability and her independent position vis-à-vis the super powers, and it would resultingly contribute to the dissolution of the bipolar world in which France is now a second ranked state. Moreover, there is no role to play for France in a (escalating) war, whereas in negotiations France can enter the stage and be a useful intermediary. Thus, the mediatory role would enable France to put itself back on the map among the Great Powers. Secondly, by bringing peace and stability to Indochina France hopes to regain prestige in Vietnam⁵⁹³, to preserve a positive influence in the region, and thereby to safeguard and expand its current interests and influence in Indochina and the wider Asian region. In that fashion, France avails of peace and stability. The prolongation of the war increasingly obstructs the French interests, not for the least reason since the economies of

⁵⁹³ The relations with the other former colonies of Cambodia and Laos have remained amicable after their independence, while the relations with both South and North Vietnam have deteriorated in the 1960s. This deterioration is marked with Saigon's decision to break the diplomatic ties with France in 1965.

their future trading partners are being destroyed. The French are convinced that their relations on both sides of the Iron Curtain as well as their extensive knowledge of Indochina makes them the most suitable candidate for the job. These objectives are in accordance with de Gaulle's aim to promote France's sovereignty and grandeur on the global stage.

In safe hands

The events of 1968 mark a turning point in French Foreign Policy in the light of which de Gaulle's successor Georges Pompidou opens up to new perspectives, strategies and policy means, better suited for these circumstances, to give new meaning to the principle elements of Gaullism. The May Riots and, particularly, the resulting crisis of the Franc in the fall of 1968 expose France's weakness and prove that de Gaulle's claimed (economic and financial) independence from the U.S. will not hold up. France is not and never will be the economic power de Gaulle aspires for her future. Pompidou acts upon the unresponsiveness of de Gaulle's policies to France's national needs and the over-exceeding diplomatic ambitions by adopting a new approach. "Foreign policy and France's alignment abroad are to reinforce domestic political stability and to promote France's economic growth", instead of the other way around. Thereby Pompidou prioritises the domestic economic well-being of France, *Bonheur*, over France's foreign objectives, *Grandeur*. To transform France into the competitive commercial and industrial power Pompidou wants it to become, he makes an end to de Gaulle's financially unbearable Power Politics by cutting back on nuclear military and global foreign aid expenditures. Acknowledging the limits of France's capacity, Pompidou accentuates regionalism over globalism and pursues to anchor itself firmly in the West. Through skilled multilateral diplomacy Pompidou lays emphasis on the economic foreign relations, and the expansion of the private sector and private investments abroad. In that fashion, he focuses on regions that are originally in France's sphere of influence. These are the Mediterranean, French Africa, and to a lesser extent, Indochina. In addition, Pompidou regards the EEC to be the vehicle to reinforce and radiate France's influence, at home and abroad. And to secure both the Anglophone markets and the American commitment to defend Europe he sets in for the normalisation of the Franco-American relations, for which he adopts a more modest and cooperative posture. In other words, the Gaullist elements of independence and France's enhanced status in the world prevail at the core of Pompidou's policy, albeit pursued in less provocative terms and with different means.

Pompidou indeed is, like Pierre Journoud argues, a "less visionary heir"⁵⁹⁴ of de Gaulle's Vietnam Policy. Nevertheless, he remains faithful to de Gaulle's Phnom Penh principles. Unlike de Gaulle does not feel the same alliance with the Indochinese people. Lacking the vision to see past the communist propaganda, Pompidou does not nourish a certain wariness towards global communism. As a result, he chooses to be much less personally engaged with the dossier than de Gaulle, leaving the Quai d'Orsay to play a central role under his leadership. Faced with the Gaullist prominents Pompidou does not utterly change France's Vietnam Policy. More importantly, there is no reason to adjust the Vietnam policy of de Gaulle. The negotiations are well on its way and Pompidou's task is to uphold the Gaullist party by addressing the domestic deficiencies of the preceding government of which he was Prime Minister from 1962 until 1968. His task is not to revise the foreign policy where this does not obstructs France's well-being. Thus, in his Declaration of April 1, 1970 he confirms his loyalty to

⁵⁹⁴ Journoud, *De Gaulle et le Vietnam*, 419.

the line set out by de Gaulle. A slight nuance in the choice of words, though, reveals Pompidou's wariness for the communism as he pronounces in favour of four Indochinese states. Moreover, he advocates the retreat of all foreign troops from the Vietnamese soil, implying the retreat of the North Vietnamese troops in addition to the American troops. De Gaulle would have abstained from either one of these remarks. However, this is in accordance with the more cautious and modest attitude that substitutes de Gaulle's baldness.

Likewise, Pompidou moderates de Gaulle's mediatory objectives while remaining faithful to their essence. He acknowledges the restoration of a Great Power status for France is in the light of the 1968 events unfeasible. Therefore he adjusts de Gaulle's objective to the enhancement of France's position in world politics, notably through the EEC. In addition, Pompidou continues to expand France's influence in Indochina and the wider Southeast-Asian region, though in a manner that is less (sensitive) political. As the analysis in this conclusion will reveal, Pompidou's focus on regionalism and economic alignment in combination with more modest and less competitive (political) global ambitions create to a certain extent more favourable conditions to facilitate these objectives, particularly the radiation of influence in Indochina.

Several developments in the period from 1969 until 1971 strengthen France's believe in a negotiated settlement that addresses both the military and the political issues and that opts for neutrality for Indochina in order to safeguard peace and stability. The prolongation of the conflict – both militarily and diplomatically – has been without decisive results, and instead only contributes to further deterioration of the situation. For lack of realism, the belligerents close their eyes for the principle obstacles still impeding peace. Their stubbornness hints their unwillingness to conclude a peace at the negotiating table. Nonetheless, a global negotiated settlement continues to offer the solution to all those problems left. To conclude, France's Vietnam policy thus remains consistent during the entire period of the negotiations. And in the light of the 1968 events Pompidou only slightly moderates de Gaulle's *grandes* aspirations.

Mission Accomplished?

Whereas the methods deployed by other authors, such as Pierre Journoud, Laurent Cesari, Vu Son Thuy and Marianne Sullivan, have been inadequate, this research takes on a more appropriate and elaborate approach. Having examined purely the role of France as mediator in the peace negotiations, and particularly reviewing the contribution of the French points of view by looking at those incorporated in the final accord of January 1973, these authors conclude that the French role is marginal or limited. Contrarily, this is the first research that examines the total picture. That is, to not only look at the role of France as mediator, but to examine this role in the context of its objectives and therefore to look at the French diplomacy accompanying the mediatory role. After all, France's aspirations go beyond a simple mediatory participation.

Laurent Cesari concludes his study by stating that "the only French contribution to the content of the Paris Accords consists of the articles 19 and 20 which foresee in the intention to an international conference on Indochina to guarantee the settlement for Vietnam and to extend the scope to include

Cambodia and Laos”⁵⁹⁵. Journoud underlines the modest means available to the Quai d’Orsay, but argues their contribution to stimulate peace has been “without doubt not negligible”⁵⁹⁶. By looking into the matter from a larger perspective and into more detail this study brings to light that indeed the circumstances under which the French operate are at times restricting, though *dans les coulisses* France’s role and contribution have stretched further than previously acknowledged. Moreover, France largely succeeds in accomplishing the two accompanying objectives.

France’s mediatory role

The mediatory role places France exactly where it wants to be: at the crossroad of the different parties interested in a settlement of the Vietnam War. Therein the Quai d’Orsay is a mandatory stop on the pathway to peace. Having in the preceding years intentionally built on her relations with all parties involved, France is now to reap the fruits. Like a spider in its web the French are able to make use of their connections to “play the role of informant, of analyst, of intermediary, and even of consultant”⁵⁹⁷. This is strikingly described by the head of the department *Asie-Océanie* at the Quai d’Orsay, Henri Froment-Meurice, in the following remark dated November 28, 1972:

*“The good relations that we uphold with the different parties, which places us in a privileged position, allows us to have frequent conversations with both sides, to endeavour the points of view at hand to be better appreciated, and to circulate, if the opportunity presents itself, certain suggestions on this and that point.”*⁵⁹⁸

Due to France’s large and diverse range of connections, rendering them unique access to information, in combination with their knowledge of and experiences in Indochina the French play a constructive and rather successful mediatory role. France’s constructiveness is two folded: they contribute to the convergence of the points of view by putting suggestions forward and they help broker relations. On January 25, 1972 Nixon says “I would like to take the opportunity to thank President Pompidou of France for his personal assistance to make arrangements for these secret talks”⁵⁹⁹ by which he discloses the role French personalities have played in the establishment of a secret channel between the Americans and the North Vietnamese. Likewise, France plays an indirect role in the diplomatic overture of the Chinese towards the U.S.. The French are able to lessen the Chinese fear of U.S. encirclement by clarifying the American intentions to revise their containment policy and normalise the relations. Meanwhile, France at numerous times incites the Americans to this normalisation.

“The conflict in Vietnam has not let France indifferent neither inactive”⁶⁰⁰. The French accurately tag the developments, at the negotiating table, on the battlefield as well as in the diplomatic arena. Through France’s extensive relations she disposes of elaborate and complete information. These relations include the warring parties, the Asian powers of the Soviet Union (SU) and China, varying

⁵⁹⁵ Cesari, *Le Président Georges Pompidou et la Guerre du Vietnam*, 189.

⁵⁹⁶ Journoud, *Le Quai d’Orsay et le Processus de Paix*, 400.

⁵⁹⁷ MAE, AO, ‘Vietnam’, 2 juillet 1969, p. 4.

⁵⁹⁸ MAE, AO, ‘Indochine’, 28 novembre 1972, C.L.V. No 505, p. 1-6, 5.

⁵⁹⁹ President Richard M. Nixon, ‘Address to the Nation on Plan for Peace in Vietnam (January 25, 1972)’, online via Miller Center in Charlottesville, the U.S. See also the youtube films available.

⁶⁰⁰ MAE, AO, ‘les idées françaises dans le règlement vietnamien’, 16 janvier 1973, projet, sans nombre, p. 1-6, 1.

North and South Vietnamese *exilés* living in France, and representatives of French businesses in Indochina. The French knowledge of and acquaintance with the Indochinese culture, the terrain, as well as with the Communist ideology – at home and abroad – enables them to uniquely and sensitively interpret the information available to them. Besides, one can only guess what the contributions are of the shared French language and of the shared (educational) culture to improving the mutual understanding between the French and the Vietnamese parties.⁶⁰¹ The access to this level of reliable and complete information enables France to act as the liaison who clarifies or further elucidates on the meaning of positions, demands, and intentions of the counterparty. Thereby the French help forge trust between the belligerents. Furthermore, it enables the Quai d’Orsay to devise the requirements to break the impasse, to open discussions, and to converge and reconcile points of view. The Quai d’Orsay acts upon this knowledge by bringing suggestions forward, both privately and publicly. The French show to work skilled and sensitively.

The French constructiveness and their ability to reconcile the opposing positions is demonstrated by the fact that three originally French suggestions, which have been discretely put forward in their consultations with the belligerents, are incorporated in the final peace accords. First of all, the National Council of Reconciliation and National Concord comprises the French idea to establish a provisional authority charged to organise free elections that would be made up of a third political force of neutralists alongside the Saigon government and the Provisional Revolutionary Government (PRG), the *Troisième Force Neutraliste*. As of January 1970 the French at numerous occasions have brought this idea forward. Secondly, after having laid the proposition before Le Duc Tho, Andrei Gromyko and Pham Dang Lam from March to June 1972, Froment-Meurice’s suggestion of simultaneity between the conclusion of a political accord, a cease-fire, and the start of the release of the Prisoners of War (POWs) is soon adopted by the North Vietnamese as their own. The peace accords incorporate a simultaneity between the three issues followed by the retreat of all American troops sixty days later. The first POWs return to the U.S. in February 1973. Thirdly, the French suggestion to make a parallel between the retreat of troops and the release of POWs – *retrait-prisonniers* – is, in only a few days after Froment-Meurice’s conversation with Xuan Thuy, included in the PRG’s 1 of July proposition. Article 8 (a) of the Paris Peace Accords states that “the return of captured military personnel and foreign civilians of the parties shall be carried out simultaneously with and completed no later than the same day as the troop withdrawal mentioned in Article 5”⁶⁰².⁶⁰³

Next to that, several of France’s principal (Phnom Penh) arguments can be retraced in the Paris Peace Accords. To start off with, article 1 speaks of the necessity to “respect the independence, sovereignty, unity, and territorial integrity of Vietnam as recognized by the 1954 Geneva Agreements on Vietnam”⁶⁰⁴. While explicitly mentioning neutrality for Laos and Cambodia in Article 20, the accords limit to the safeguarding of non-alignment for Vietnam. A direct reference to neutrality for Vietnam would imply the Americans to have violated it, and is therefore out of the question. Nonetheless, the accords orientate towards the establishment of a ‘Zone of Peace and Neutrality’ for Indochina as consistently proclaimed by de Gaulle. In addition, one could argue that in the end the

⁶⁰¹ The majority of Vietnamese officials will have had their education in French in which they are resultingly all fluent. In each case I personally remark an apparent amicable and trustful interaction between the French and the North Vietnamese.

⁶⁰² Vassar College (Poughkeepsie, U.S.), ‘Excerpts from the Paris Accords, January 27, 1973’, original source: U.S. Secretary of State (ed.) United States Treaties and Other International Agreements, 1974, *passim*. Online via <http://vietnam.vassar.edu/overview/doc16.html>

⁶⁰³ MAE, AO, ‘les idées françaises dans le règlement vietnamien’, 16 janvier 1973, projet, sans nombre, p. 1-6, 4-6.

⁶⁰⁴ Vassar College (Poughkeepsie, U.S.), ‘Excerpts from the Paris Accords, January 27, 1973’.

accords answer to de Gaulle's appeal for a negotiated political settlement and for the withdrawal of American troops. Furthermore, it responds to Pompidou's 1st of April appeal, when it speaks of the maintenance of an independent South Vietnam for a certain period of time before reunification. Likewise, as the accords aim to incorporate a settlement of the hostilities for the whole of Indochina instead of solely for Vietnam.⁶⁰⁵ And lastly, as mentioned by Cesari, the accords provide for an International Conference on Indochina to guarantee the implementation of the agreements, which is to be held in Paris from February 26 until March 2, 1973. One should note that these written engagements to respect the neutrality of Indochina in practice appear for the greater part worthless.

Restricting circumstances

In spite of these eventual positive results, the overall sentiment this study brings palpably to the surface, and which other authors rightly remark as well, is that the circumstances are at times frustrating. Journoud strikingly captures the French impression of their own role to be "*un interlocuteur sinon entendu du moins souvent écouté*"⁶⁰⁶. France is not able to accelerate the course of the negotiations. To explain their frustration, one ought to note marginal comments to highlight why certain circumstances are unworkable for the French, or any mediator for that matter, laying restrictions on their mediatory role.

First of all, this accounts for the prevalence the Americans and the North Vietnamese accord to the military battlefield over the negotiating table. The mounting escalations instigated by a continued belief in a military victory, result in a constant lack of confidence between the belligerents, the dispersion of the conflict over the peninsula, and the deterioration of the stability in the region. With his expedition in Cambodia in April 1970 Nixon forfeits his trump cards. Both the Senate and the American Public now interfere with his manoeuvring power in Indochina and additional appeasement of the home front through retreats will be required. Moreover, Hanoi is well aware of the fact it will be just a matter of time before South Vietnam is on its own. Nonetheless, it takes until 1972 for Nixon to realise this and act upon it. Despite France's efforts to convince both parties of the necessity to negotiate, the unwillingness by both sides to conclude a peace prevails.

Secondly, the peace talks in itself are complicating, largely due to the fact that they run along two tracks. On the one hand public negotiations take place at Avenue Kléber. In addition, special negotiators Henry Kissinger and Le Duc Tho private and secretly negotiate. Apart from the fact that it is hard and delicate for the French to anticipate on the developments of these two tracks. Meanwhile Kissinger's moves at the private sessions are not known to the official American negotiators, thereby separating these negotiating two levels from one another.

Thirdly, there are additional incidents and circumstances which complicate the ability of a mediator to influence the course of events. In retrospect President Nixon has a very suspicious and manipulative character. For anyone, even his National Security Advisor and close partner Kissinger, it is hard to take account of and to anticipate his fickleness, let alone for the French. For example, when Kissinger and Le Duc Tho agree on the October Accord, Kissinger surpasses his instructions and

⁶⁰⁵ MAE, AO, 'les idées françaises dans le règlement vietnamien', 16 janvier 1973, 1-3. MAE, AO, 'Projet de règlement au Vietnam et en Indochine', 14 novembre 1972, 1-7.

⁶⁰⁶ Translation: An interlocutor heard but the less often listened to.

encounters Nixon's suspicion of rival aspirations. In response Nixon condemns all new propositions made in the November 1972 negotiation rounds and, once again, takes up the arms.⁶⁰⁷ A second example is an incident like President Thieu's manoeuvring in South Vietnam's domestic politics by which he forces the elections to his will.

Back on the map?

Through its mediatory role France improves its bilateral relations with the USSR and, in particular, with China. The moderation of de Gaulle's Grand Design aspirations under the leadership of the less vocal Pompidou contributes to this development. De Gaulle and thereafter Pompidou consistently advocate that the Vietnam War cannot be concluded against China's will and China should therefore be involved. In this line of thought the French lure China out of their self-imposed isolation and are the first to recognise the People's Republic in January 1964. Likewise, de Gaulle's overture of détente to the USSR unfolds as of 1960. France's mediatory role serves the legitimate reason to drive up the frequency of the consultations. Pompidou's decision to downgrade de Gaulle's ambition of restoring France's status of a Great Power, equally means the toning down of France's political aspirations in Asia. As a result France is no longer a rival to Chinese and Soviet interests in the region, but instead a confidential partner. This impression is further confirmed during the bilateral consultations – that touch France's mediatory role – wherein France proves a sincere and reliable partner, that safeguards the confidentiality⁶⁰⁸, and that continues to operate independently from the U.S.. These frequent consultations result in cordial, confidential and equal working dialogues between the French and the Chinese, and the French and the Soviets. This is strikingly exemplified with Ambassador Abrassimov disclosure to Foreign Minister Schumann as well as Schumann's meaningful visit to Beijing two months earlier, in July 1972. Both these events signify that one, and particularly the U.S., cannot disregard the French presence at the international stage.

The improvement of relations on the other side of the Iron Curtain enhances France's independent stance in world politics and places France at the front of the European peloton⁶⁰⁹. The working dialogues with the USSR and China enhance France's freedom of movement on the global stage. That is, to enhance and spread its economic relations, to continue to take on an independent position, and to loosen its dependability upon the U.S. and the Atlantic Alliance. Being the first Western (European) country disposing over functioning diplomatic relations with China (and the USSR), France plays a crucial role in brokering relations between other European countries and China. The entrance of China on the world stage, particularly after Nixon's announcement to visit Beijing in July 1971, strengthens the Chinese position to influence the balance of world power, which is as of now no longer solely dominated by the two superpowers. Moreover, China's entrance at the world stage strengthens the credibility of the French policy to include China and thereby enhances the legitimacy of France's independent and recalcitrant attitude. These developments reflect France's aspiration, in which they hereby largely succeed, to be the mediator between East and West in the framework of détente. Additionally, these relations of détente respond to de Gaulle's desire to be able to sort conflicts with the USSR directly in order to safeguard the European security independent from the

⁶⁰⁷ MAE, AO, 'Vietnam', 19 décembre 1972, No. 410/AS, p. 1-7, 2.

⁶⁰⁸ Through his public announcements de Gaulle every now and then also provoked his partners, putting them on the spot. This tactic lost its effect. For the current time, Pompidou safeguards a better balance between public and private pressure.

⁶⁰⁹ MAE, AO, 'Objectifs du voyage', 20 juin 1972, No. 228/AS, p. 1-13, 3.

U.S. and from the Superpower Play. As the EEC-partners for now still lack such working dialogues the French take the lead.

The fact that France becomes both a signatory to and the host of the International Conference on Indochina from February 26 to March 2, 1973 is the result of France's undeniable presence at the crossroad of the interested parties. Once again the Americans are the last to oppose Paris as sight, proposing either Geneva or Vienna instead. The twelve participating states – all permanent members of the Security Council, the members of the assembled ICC⁶¹⁰ and the actors in the war – and the Secretary-General of the UN take on the responsibility to guarantee the implementation of the Paris Peace Accords to ensure peace for Vietnam, Laos and Cambodia. De Gaulle anticipated this International Conference to be a reconfirmation of France's Great Power status, though the nature of the conference does not lend itself to be this reconfirmation. It would be never be known as a Conference of Potsdam, or earlier Conferences of Geneva in 1954 and 1962. The Fall of Saigon in 1975 probably contributed to that.

New horizons to France's Asian policy

The mediatory role appears to take away the Vietnamese reticence regarding the French aspiration to restore its influence – an heritage from the colonial days –, and by 1973 France is well along the way to redefine its relations with the Indochinese states. Little by little they come to see the French affiliation in the region as beneficial. Commercial and financial links with France enlarge their customer's market, but more importantly, diversify their foreign investments, in particular vis-à-vis the Communists' primary allies, China and the SU. If anything this war makes, notably, North Vietnam increasingly dependent upon Chinese rice and Soviet military supplies. This enhances their leverage to intrude in North Vietnamese domestic and foreign affairs, decreasing Hanoi's freedom to act. Sophisticatedly remarked, the French overture plays in on these developments as the French determined to ensure a constant support of French assistance to the Indochinese countries for them to resist outside influences and preserve their independence.

With the exception of Cambodia⁶¹¹, the (bilateral) relations and France's cultural, technical and economic influence in the Indochinese countries modestly improve of the years of the negotiations, 1969-1972, both at a intergovernmental as well as on the civil societal level. From 1970 to 1971 three Franco-South-Vietnamese accords are signed regarding medical and technical cooperation, French education, and bilateral trade with North Vietnam. The French language is reinserted in Vietnamese education, the diffusion of French lecture is accommodated, and in South Vietnam the civil society negotiations a project in fishery and regarding the fabrication of (motor-) bicycles. With both Cambodia and Laos France concludes an economic and financial accord in respectively 1970 and 1972 in addition to more technical agreements regarding air traffic and television. In other words, having built on the bilateral relations, the encouragement of private investments and the *francophonie*, these French efforts aim to consolidate its position in Indochina to become the

⁶¹⁰ The ICC is the International Control Commission, to be replaced by the International Commission of Control and Supervision to supervise the implementation of the Peace Accords. It comprises of Poland, Indonesia, Canada and Hungary.

⁶¹¹ The bilateral relations with Cambodia were outstanding at the beginning of 1968 and Prince Sihanouk was particularly receptive to France's cooperation policies. However, the French do not recognise the Lon Nol government, leading the relations with Cambodia to deteriorate as of the coup d'état in March 1970. In addition, the situation in the country becomes increasingly critical with the Khmer Rouge progressing and two political rivals who refuse to negotiate.

*“partenaire privilégiée et principal interlocuteur en Europe”*⁶¹² it now claims to be. To continue in this direction France’s commits itself to the reconstruction of the war-torn countries – both bilateral as well as in an international context – and grants an equal amount of 100 million francs in economic assistance to both North and South Vietnam by the end of 1973.⁶¹³

With Pompidou’s regionalism Indochina takes on a more important role within the wider spectrum of French Foreign Policy. The *Conférence des Ambassadeurs* in March 1972 marks a further attachment to the region and takes France’s Asian policy to a higher level. By placing a global view on the region, Southeast-Asia is to no longer be just a geographical region, but envisions it to become of political-economic importance to France. Accordingly, France ought to step up her support for ASEAN, and shall strive for the enlargement of their economical-commercial presence to match the moral-political role they aspire to play in future time and not risk a possible distortion between the two. Indochina should be the focal point in this vision.

Thus, at the time the signatures are placed under the Paris Accords on January 27, France is exactly where it desires to be: she fortified her position in Indochina and the region is the anchor of a larger policy for Southeast-Asia. In the line with expectations, directly after the conclusion of the peace accords France re-establishes the diplomatic relations with the Republic of Vietnam (South Vietnam) and the Democratic Republic of Vietnam (North Vietnam) and exchanges ambassadors. However, Pompidou refrains from according the PRG the same diplomatic recognition as Saigon. A striking decision since the Paris Peace Accords and in its wake the International Conference on Indochina – to which France is a signatory – recognise two legitimate South-Vietnamese parties. While the official justification is that France recognises states, not regimes, great speculations exist regarding Pompidou’s *“froideur”*⁶¹⁴. Certainly, France’s continued difficulties with the representation in Cambodia plays a part in this decision. Likewise, the considerations of France’s economic interests concentrated in Thieu’s zones in South Vietnam, and Communists regimes being much less receptive to private investments and businesses are probably weighed.⁶¹⁵ Having played so politically sensitively, this move may revive distrust for France’s primary (imperial) motives, shattering what she has built in the previous years.

This research revealed France’s ability to enhance its diplomatic liaison with the Indochinese countries and to conclude beneficial economical and political agreements. However, the scope of this research has been too limited to determine the true growth or share of France’s diplomatic and economical relations in the region vis-à-vis its principal competitors, such as the U.S., the UK, the Netherlands or the FRG. As a result, on the basis of this study one cannot conclude if France through these relations succeeds in enhancing its position vis-à-vis its competitors in world politics. A research proposal is vacant to map out the development of the Indochinese relations of each of these countries in order to answer this question.

⁶¹² Translation : privileged partner and principal interlocutor of Europe. MAE, Ambassade de France à Hanoi, ‘les relations bilatérales franco-vietnamiennes’, 21 mars 2014, online via: www.ambafrance-vn.org

⁶¹³ Sullivan, *France and the Vietnam Peace*, 319 and 323.

⁶¹⁴ Cesari, *Le Président Georges Pompidou et la Guerre du Vietnam*, 190. Translation frigidness

⁶¹⁵ Ibidem, 189-192. MAE, AO, ‘Relations de la France avec les Vietnams’, 31 janvier 1973, No. 27/AS, p. 1-6, 4. And Sullivan, *France and the Vietnam Peace*, 318-324.

Strike the Balance

Charles de Gaulle has a unique understanding of the conflict in Vietnam that is at the basis of France's Vietnam policy. Pompidou's succession of power after de Gaulle's resignation in 1969 does not change France's policy nor the objectives for a mediatory role, but signifies a prolongation of de Gaulle's objectives by different means and in a different manifestation. By focusing on the economic and internal well-being of France through a regionalist foreign policy that promotes economic alliances and private investments, Indochina takes on a more prominent place in the wider spectrum of France's foreign policy. In that fashion, Pompidou creates to some extent more favourable circumstances to accomplish de Gaulle's objectives of radiating France's influence in the wider Southeast-Asian region. France proves to play a constructive mediatory role within the restricting circumstances. This is due to the fact that the French dispose of a unique access of information from its diverse range of connections and their knowledge and experiences in Indochina to interpret the information skilfully and sensitively. In that sense, no other country could have played a similar role. More importantly, through its mediatory role France is able to accomplish her larger objectives. France amplifies her independent position in world politics by improving its relations with the USSR and China, thereby placing itself at the front of the European peloton. In addition, France enhances its influence in Southeast-Asia, making Indochina the anchor of the French Asian policy.

In comparison to the existing literature, this study draws a similar conclusion when strictly spoken of the concrete mediatory role played by the French. That particularly accounts for Journoud's conclusion in his article *Le Quai d'Orsay et le Processus de Paix*. Journoud found the same diplomatic document that summarizes the French's own assessment of their contribution revealing the incorporation of their discrete suggestions.⁶¹⁶ This led him to conclude that "the Quai d'Orsay contributed incontestably at reconciling the positions of the belligerents"⁶¹⁷. However, his research would have been too limited to come to the same conclusions would he have not found that document, whereas this study illustrates the circumstances wherein these suggestions come about. Cesari, evidently, did not find this document and therefore comes to a less-appreciative conclusion of the French contribution. What all preceding studies argue, and this study further stipulates, is that France's capacity to contribute in such a fashion is the direct result of its extensive connections and profound knowledge and understanding of the different cultures.

Having looked into the matter in detail and taking particular account of the evolution of the French Vietnam Policy this study counters Journoud's and Cesari's argument that with the arrival of Pompidou the importance attached to France's mediatory role fades. I have argued that indeed, Journoud is right when he says that Pompidou is a "less visionary heir"⁶¹⁸ of the Gaullist Vietnam Policy, as he lacks the vision to see past the Communist propaganda and nourishes a wariness towards global communism. However, being much less engaged with the dossier, Pompidou leaves the Quai d'Orsay to play a central and independent role through which they are able to ensure consistency in their policy. Moreover, Pompidou's regionalism offers the Quai d'Orsay points of impact to accentuate Indochina and the Asian region within the wider spectrum of foreign relations. His less vocal and explicit attitude contributes to the improvement of trust and cordiality in the

⁶¹⁶ MAE, AO, 'les idées françaises dans le règlement vietnamien', 16 janvier 1973, p. 1-6.

⁶¹⁷ Journoud, *Le Quai d'Orsay et le Processus de Paix*, 399.

⁶¹⁸ Journoud, *De Gaulle et le Vietnam*, 419.

relations with the U.S., the USSR and China. It may have been true that Pompidou only saw a “minor theatre for French diplomacy” with uncertain earning capacity⁶¹⁹. Though, Pompidou’s choice to not be closely involved with the Vietnam dossier facilitates favourable conditions for the Quai d’Orsay to act on France’s second agenda.⁶²⁰

The course of the negotiations, as this study outlines, gives away that the principle problem obstructing the negotiations is the fact that both sides continue to nourish hope to seize a military victory. Indeed this study endorses the conclusion of earlier studies that there is an “absence of willingness of all parties to reach an accord”⁶²¹. As early as 1969 the French recommendations to urgently withdraw the American troops within a fixed time scheme is answered by the launch of Operation MENU in Cambodia and the announcement of Vietnamisation as a policy. As France vainly argues at numerous times, Vietnamisation undermines any building of trust between the belligerents and instead fortifies the antagonism. By the end of 1971 the parties are no step closer to peace than at the start of 1969. Illustrating their unwillingness to compromise what they have not lost at the battlefield just yet, the North Vietnamese return to military measures in early 1972. In other words, in this context the French, or any other mediator, are unable to accelerate the course of events.

Cesari is right when he says the French are not able to truly mark the content of the accords. However, this has never been an objective of France’s mediatory role. The French goal is to establish peace and stability in the region and to participate in that negotiated settlement as this would play in on their paramount objectives to safeguard their interests in Indochina and to improve their position in world politics. De Gaulle’s provocation for Neutrality signifies a formula of which the French are convinced to bring a lasting peace that will be acknowledged by the region powers. But would the belligerents have found a different formula with the same outcome that would have pleased the French equally.

In other words, the value-added of this study is that this is the first study to review France’s mediatory role in the light of its paramount objectives and resultingly comes to a different appreciation of the France’s role than previous studies. The underexposing of this component by preceding authors leads them to assess a role in the context of wrongly assumed objectives. Their conclusions are consequently insufficient. Not only does this study reveal that France’s mediatory role is more successful than previously acknowledged. More importantly, it is through this role that France accomplishes at its larger objectives of fortifying its influence in Indochina and improving its position in world politics.

⁶¹⁹ Cesari, *Le Président Georges Pompidou et la Guerre du Vietnam*, 179.

⁶²⁰ A marginal note may suffice. To the disappointment of Froment-Meurice Pompidou eventually refrains from broaching the Vietnam topic with Nixon during his visit to Washington in 1970. He thereby proves unwilling to compromise his improved relations over Vietnam. At the same time, his less vocal and less recalcitrant stance facilitates in turn the mediatory role. Moreover, this is the single incident that unfolds out off this study.

⁶²¹ Sullivan, *France and the Vietnam Peace Settlement*, 318.

It has been a journey

I came across a book wherein the author in the first sentence states that he ended up studying the Spanish history by accident. My affiliation with France's foreign relations is no accident. When, back in 2009, I decided to switch studies from Medicine to History I set myself the objective to learn either French or German in order to stand out from the crowd. Considering its utility in international organisations and in world politics, French it was to be. And so I left for the Sorbonne in Paris to learn French and hopefully successfully fulfil some classes. Somehow I did not anticipate on what I found. Despite the minor distance, the Netherlands and France are two worlds apart. Though, that French 'thing' is both attractable and highly mockable. A trip to Thailand and former Indochina followed. And when it came to choosing an internship, I found the perfect spot, combining my possible diplomatic ambitions and my interests to France's (colonial) alliances at the Dutch Embassy in Rabat, Morocco. The choice for France's mediatory role and the accompanying diplomacy to end the Vietnam War is the product of the preceding year and a half. It is right at the crossroad of my interests in France's foreign policy and her alignments with its former colonial empire, political-diplomatic developments on the world stage and to keep up my French. In that sense, I have, or still do, personally experience(d) the binding power of the French language and culture.

During my time in Rabat, François Hollande paid a three-day visit to Morocco and for the occasion signed 19 bilateral accords. This is a striking example of how my experiences in Morocco have greatly helped me in the coming about of this study. It provided me with firsthand experience of, and an extraordinary insight into the reach and potential value of France's diplomacy in former colonial countries as well as the ins and outs of diplomacy in general terms. What are the different means available to a diplomat? What are the functions of demarches? How can suggestions be brought forward and what different kind of conversational techniques can be applied? And let's not forget the fact that I independently wrote the same kinds of cables, giving me particular insight into the process behind their establishment.

The process of writing a thesis I usually describe as "a journey". One that extends the physical trip to Paris .. By its independent character, writing is a personal and sometimes lonely activity. The size of the work makes it inevitable to lose sight of your objectives and focus every now and then. Writer's block, questioning your own abilities .. Why did I want this again? What am I doing exactly? At the same time, it is your moment to shine. I felt the urge to fulfil this study at the top of my capacity. To demonstrate the growth of the past years and to carry on along that road, both personally and academically. For me that meant that I came across my long-time friend perfectionism. Where to draw the line that this is not a PhD. I don't have to answer all the questions that unveil along the way. Luckily, I have had my Sounding Board to listen, to converse and to dissent, and thereby to structure ideas and safeguard coherence. One that is not easy to find since most people tend to blink and nod as you try to explain your topic to them. Though they have admired my enthusiasm. And indeed, fortunately, the unfolding of the skill and finesse of the French diplomacy held my attention and increased my fascination. It has been a perfect choice. I am rather satisfied with the result.

.. One I aspire to proceed

Anouk Lodder

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Keesings Historisch Archief

online via <http://www.kha.nl/>

Timeline

1954	Battle at Dien Bien Phu
May 1961	Private conversation wherein Charles de Gaulle tries to convince John F. Kennedy not to proceed to a military intervention in Vietnam
11 June 1963	self-immolation of a Buddhist monk in Saigon
29 August 1963	De Gaulle's speech on Neutralisation for Vietnam before the Assemblée Nationale
1 November 1963	Coup on Diem
27 January 1964	French recognition of the People's Republic of China
23 July 1964	De Gaulle publicly warns the U.S. not to go to war in Vietnam
2 August 1964	Tonkin Incident
1965	
1965	Charles de Gaulle re-establishes relations with North Vietnam
February – March 1965	Rolling Thunder: First American bombardments on North Vietnamese targets
7 April 1965	President Johnson's Baltimore Speech
June 1965	South Vietnam breaks off the diplomatic relations with France
Summer 1965	Preliminary secret contacts between the U.S. and North Vietnam, in Paris
October 1965	Anti-War Demonstrations in the U.S.
26 November 1965	<i>La Mobilisation</i> Anti-War Demonstrations in France, organised by the PCF
11 December 1965	Meeting Jean Chauvel – Pham Van Dong in Hanoi. Part of his <i>filière</i> to Hanoi and Beijing
..? 1965	Foreign Minister Couve de Murville official visit to Moscow
End of 1965	Appeal for Peace: halt in the bombardments
1966	
24 January 1966	Ho Chi Minh sends over 60 countries a letter to
March 1966	Retreat French troops from NATO
6-7 June 1966	Manac'h meetings with NLF representatives in Algiers
20 June 1966	Official visit of de Gaulle to Moscow
1 July 1966	Meeting Sainteny – Ho Chi Minh and Pham Van Dong, in Hanoi. Part of his <i>filière</i> to Hanoi, Phnom Penh and Beijing on the instruction of de Gaulle
1 September 1966	De Gaulle's Phnom Penh Speech
1967	
5-10 June 1967	Six Day War
21 June 1967	De Gaulle makes the parallel between the American involvement in Vietnam and the Six Day War
23-24 .. 1967	Meeting Aubrac and Marcovich – Pham Van Dong, in Hanoi (Filière Pennsylvania)
29 September 1967	San Antonio Proposal by Johnson
29-30 December 1967	Announcement of the North Vietnamese Ministry of Foreign Affairs to be prepared to negotiate as soon as the American bombardments halt
1968	
20 January 1968	André Roussel's visit to Hanoi to fathom the idea of peace talks in Paris

30 January – Feb.	Tet Offensive
16 March 1968	My Lai Massacre
31 March 1968	Johnson's announcement to unilateral de-escalate the war
1 April 1968	Partial bombing halt
3 May 1968	Official publication Paris sight of the peace negotiations
6 June 1968	Assassination of Robert Kennedy
May – August 1968	Mini-Tet
10 May 1968	Start negotiations in Paris
May 1968	May Riots in Paris
4 June 1968	Letter by Soviet Premier Alexei Kosygin "good reason to believe the North Vietnamese are prepared to negotiate an agreement, on the condition the U.S. ceases its bombing campaign"
31 July 1968	Hard-line Press Conference by Johnson
August 1968	Invasion Tsjecho-Slovakia
11 October 1968	French government allows the NLF to open a (information) office as representation (in light of the negotiations)
31 October 1968	Unconditional American bombing halt
1 November 1968	End of Rolling Thunder
3 November 1968	Peace proposition by Madame Binh
5 November 1968	Election of Richard Nixon to president
November 1968	Chennault – Thieu – Kissinger Triangle
December 1968	Sequel consultation filière Pennsylvania

1969

18 January 1969	Start negotiations among four parties at Kléber
22 February 1969	Another Mini-Tet: North Vietnamese attacks on 160 targets (provincial capitals and allied military bases)
22 February 1969	Start Europe Tour of Nixon
February 1969	Meeting Nixon – de Gaulle in Paris
Early March 1969	Official visit of Nixon to France
17 March 1969	Start Operation MENU
28 April 1969	Referendum in France « le grand prêtre de la politique »
29 April 1969	Resignation of De Gaulle
May 1969	Consultations Jean Sainteny
8 May 1969	10 point Peace Proposal by the NLF
14 May 1969	Nixon's address to the Nation : announcement peace proposal
8 June 1969	Meeting Nixon and Thieu at Island of Midway. Announcement first troop withdrawal
	Formation of the Provisional Revolutionary Government of the Republic of South Vietnam (PRG)
16 June 1969	Election Georges Pompidou to president of France
15 July 1969	Personal Letter from Nixon to Ho Chi Minh: appeal for peace and ultimatum of November 1, delivered through Jean Sainteny
4 August 1969	First secret meeting between Kissinger and Xuan Thuy at Sainteny's apartment in Paris
25 August 1969	North Vietnamese rejection of Nixon's 15 July letter
2 September	Death of Ho Chi Minh
September 1969	First French secret initiative
27 September 1969	Nixon Address to the Nation to announce Duck Hook
15 October 1969	National Moratorium Antiwar Demonstrations against Operation Duck Hook
1 November 1969	Nixon's Ultimatum

3 November 1969 Nixon's public announcement of Vietnamisation
 December 1969 Cabot Lodge resigns as Chief U.S. Negotiator in the Paris

1970

February 1970 Launch of second secret French initiative
 23 Febr. – 3 March Official visit Pompidou to the U.S.
 18 March 1970 Coup d'Etat by Lon Nol in Phnom Penh
 1 April 1970 Pompidou's 1st of April Declaration. Public initiative for a International Conference on Indochina after the example of the Geneva Conferences in 1954 and 1962
 20 April 1970 Nixon announces additional 150.000 troops to retreat in the spring of 1971
 24-25 April 1970 Indochinese Summit in China (Cambodia, North Vietnam and Laos)
 26 April 1970 Start covert (counter-) operation in Cambodia
 30 April 1970 Nixon makes Operation in Cambodia public
 4 May 1970 Kent State Incident
 30 June 1970 Nixon retreats all American troops from Cambodian soil
 September 1970 Senatorial elections in South Vietnam
 1 September 1970 Duong Van Minh announces to run for president in South Vietnam
 17 September 1970 PRG's proposition « gouvernement à trois composantes »
 7 October 1970 Nixon's "Major New Initiative for Peace" Speech and the announcement of additional withdrawal of troops to 280.000 men by the spring of 1971
 21-22 November 1970 Heavy American bombardments on North Vietnamese targets
 13 December 1970 The Chinese publicly pronounce in favour of Madame Binh's 17 September proposal

1971

8 February 1971 Launch Operation Lam Son 719
 7 April 1971 Nixon announces withdrawal additional 100.000 troops before the end of the year
 28 May 1971 Conclusion of a Franco-North Vietnamese Commercial Accord
 31 May 1971 Kissinger's 'Accommodating Offer'
 26 June 1971 Le Duc Tho's counterproposal to Kissinger's Accommodating Offer
 30 June 1971 Publication of the Pentagon Papers (first part)
 1 July 1971 1st of July 10 point peace proposal by the PRG
 9 – 11 July 1971 secret visit of Kissinger to China
 15 July 1971 Nixon's announcement to visit China in 1972
 August 1971 Adhesion of the People's Republic of China to the UN
 20 August 1971 General Duong Van Minh stands down his candidacy
 13 September 1971 Secret negotiations break off
 3 October 1971 Re-election of Thieu as president of South Vietnam
 October 1971 Visit of Soviet Premier Nikolaï Podgorny to Hanoi
 October 1971 Visit of Chinese Minister of Foreign Trade Pai Hsiang-Kuo to France
 November 1971 Unofficial trip of Mendès-France to China, North Vietnam and ..
 27 November 1971 Kuala Lumpur Declaration of ASEAN

1972

13 January 1972 Nixon announces new withdrawal of 70.000 men in coming three months
 18 January 1972 Schumann's Declaration at the Peace Conference in Tokyo
 25 January 1972 Nixon's address to the nation 'Plan for Peace in Vietnam': reveals secret peace talks between Kissinger and Le Duc Tho and makes a new proposal

21-28 February 1972	Nixon's visit to China
8 – 10 March 1971	<i>Conférence des Ambassadeurs</i> in Jakarta
23 March 1972	American stage a boycott at Paris Peace Negotiations
30 March 1972	Start Easter Offensive
10 April 1972	Massive B-52 retaliation bombardments on Hanoi and Haiphong
April 1972	Secret visit Kissinger to Moscow to meet Brezhnev
May 1972	Launch Operation Linebacker
1 May 1972	Vietcong takeover of Quang Tri
2 May 1972	Disappointing secret meeting Kissinger and Le Duc Tho in Paris
8 May 1972	Nixon address to the nation regarding Easter Offensive and the launch of Operation Linebacker
18 May 1972	Schumann's Declaration before National Assembly's Committee of Foreign Affairs
22-30 May 1972	Moscow Summit between Brezhnev and Nixon to sign SALT I
6-11 July 1972	Visit of Foreign Minister Schumann to China
19 July 1972	Resume of secret and public negotiations
15 September 1972	Kissinger's Proposal
29 Sept – 4 Oct. 1972	Major General Haig to Vietnam to support in negotiations with Thieu
12 October 1972	Draft Accord finalised
19-23 October 1972	Kissinger to South Vietnam to convince Thieu
31 October 1972	Original signing date draft accord
7 November 1972	Re-election of Nixon
25 Nov. – 4 Dec 1972	Halt in the negotiations
4-13 December 1972	Resume of Negotiations of Draft Accord
18-29 December 1972	Christmas Bombings
26 December 1972	North Vietnam expresses prepared to resume negotiations on the condition the Americans halt their bombardments
27 December 1972	Pompidou's letter to Nixon urging him to stop the bombings

1973

3 January 1973	Start technical discussions towards a Peace Accord
8 January 1973	Resume of negotiations between Kissinger and Le Duc Tho
13 January 1973	Conclusion of an Accord
21 January 1973	Thieu acceptance of the accord
23 January 1973	Paragraphing of the Peace Accord
27 January 1973	Official signature of the Paris Peace Accords
...	
31 May 1973	Franco-American Summit in Reykjavik (Pompidou – Nixon)
December 1973	Bilateral Accords regarding Reconstruction with North and South Vietnam
2 April 1974	Death of Pompidou

ABC Personalia

André Rousset French Professor at the Pasteur Institute in Paris. President of the Franco-Vietnamese Medical Association (AMFV), Involved with a filière in early 1968.

Andrei Gromyko Soviet Minister of Foreign Affairs (1957-1985). Under Brezhnev he helped build détente between the U.S. and SU.

Anna Chennault Influential Chinese-American businesswoman and head of Nationwide Republican Woman for Nixon.

Au Truong Thanh Former minister of Economy (1964-1967) and former presidential candidate South Vietnam in 1967. Acknowledged to be one of the 'opponents' and therefore held under protection of the police during Tet offensive, thereafter left to reside in France since 1968. Became a lecturer at the faculty of Law of the University of Tours. The French consider him to be an important 'neutralist' personality among Vietnamese exiles living in France.

Bao Dai Thirteenth and last Vietnamese Emperor of the Nguyen Dynasty (1926-1945).

Bernard Fall Vietnam expert and war correspondent, who died in Vietnam in 1967 when he was travelling along with the Americans. He taught about Vietnam at American universities and published a lot of articles on the war.

Charles Lucet French Ambassador to the U.S. (1965-1972)

Clark Clifford an American lawyer who became Secretary of Defence on 19 January 1968 to 20 January 1969, succeeding Robert McNamara. He was chairman of the President's Intelligence Advisory Board from (1963-1968). Clifford had served frequently as an unofficial counsellor to the White House, often regarding Vietnam or other Asian countries.

Cyrus Vance an American politician and diplomat. From 1964 to 1968 he was Deputy Secretary of Defence after which he was appointed as a delegate to the peace talks in Paris. He would later become Minister of Foreign Affairs under Jimmy Carter (1977-1980).

David K.E. Bruce American chief negotiator to Paris Peace Talks (1970-1971). Before and afterwards he held several Ambassador positions, in France, the UK, NATO and emissary in China.

Dean Rusk Secretary of State under President Johnson

Duong Van Minh a Vietnamese general and politician. He is a senior general in the ARVN under Diem, he became president after leading the 1963 Vietnamese coup against Diem's presidency. Presidential Election candidate for elections of October 1971, Saigon.

Edmund Gillion a former American diplomat. His first posting was in Marseille, followed by terms in Saigon (1949-1952) and Leopoldville (1961). He is fluent in French and considered a Hawk, though with slightly adjusted in the light of his first hand knowledge. Founder of the Edward R. Murrow Center of Public Diplomacy which established the notion of public diplomacy.

Ellsworth Bunker American Ambassador to South Vietnam. (1967-1973) Known to be a hawk.

Etienne Manac'h Head of *Asie-Océanie* at the Quai d'Orsay (1960-1969). Thereafter he becomes Ambassador in Beijing (1969-1975). Previous postings in Bratislava and European Affairs.

François de Quirielle French Delegate General to North Vietnam (1966-1969)

Henri Bolle Head of Cambodia-Laos-Vietnam at Quai d'Orsay under Henri Froment-Meurice (successor of Jean Brèthes)

Henri Froment-Meurice Head of *Asie-Océanie* at the Quai d'Orsay (1969-..), the successor of Etienne Manac'h. Earlier posting as Ambassador in Japan, after head of AO functions of Ambassador in the SU (1967-1982) and Ambassador in FRG (1982-1983).

Henry Cabot Lodge American chief negotiator to the Paris Peace Negotiations (1969). Former Ambassador to the UN (1953-1960), to South Vietnam (1963-1964 and 1965-1967) and to West-Germany (1968-1969). He had been Nixon's running mate in the 1960 presidential elections.

Herbert Marcovitch French biologist of the Pasteur Foundation in Paris. As Pugwash member he is involved with the Pennsylvania filière.

Hervé Alphand a French diplomat. Used to be Ambassador in Washington (1956-1965), then he returned to Paris in the function of Secretary General of the Ministry of Foreign Affairs (1965-1972). A close advisor to de Gaulle.

Ho Chi Minh a Communist Revolutionary leader who played a key role in the establishment of the communist-based Democratic Republic of Vietnam in 1945. He was prime minister (1945-1955) and president (1945-1969) of the DRV. He first came in touch with communism when he was living in Paris (1919-1923) and thereafter left for Moscow in 1923. In 1941 he returned to Vietnam to the Viet Minh independence movement against the French colonisation.

Ho Thong Minh Vietnamese exile in Paris since 1955, regular contact of the Quai, former Minister for Defence in Ngo Diem's government (1954-1955)

Huynh Van Tam Chief Permanent Representative of the NLF in Algiers, Algeria.

Jacques Kosciusko-Morizet French Ambassador in Washington (1972-1977)

Jean Brèthes a French diplomat. Head of Cambodia-Laos-Vietnam at Quai d'Orsay under Etienne Manac'h.

Jean Chauvel a former French diplomat. Deputy Head of negotiation delegation of the French Government in the 1954 Geneva Conference on Indochina.

Jean Sainteny Former French Delegate General to North Vietnam (1954-1958). As representative of the French government he negotiated peace with Ho Chi Minh in 1945. Acts as intermediary between the French and Americans, and the North Vietnamese (1966-1971)

Le Duc Tho a North Vietnamese politician and diplomat. He is a founding member of the Indochinese Communist Party in 1930. He is part of the DRV's delegation to the peace negotiations and held regular secret meetings with Henry Kissinger (1969-1973)

Leonid Brezhnev General Secretary of the Soviet Communist Party, Head of State (1964-1982)

Madame Nguyen Thi Binh Chief Negotiator of the NLF/GRP at the Paris Peace Negotiations (1969-1973). Foreign Minister of the GRP as of 1969. Vietnamese Communist leader. Minister of Education of the Socialist Republic of Vietnam, and Vice President of Vietnam (1992-2002)

Mai Van Bo North Vietnamese Delegate General to France

Mao Zedong Chairman and founding father of the People's Republic of China (1949-1976)

Marshall Green American Assistant Secretary of State to East Asian and Pacific Affairs at the Ministry (1969-1973). American diplomat who focused his career on East Asia. Held positions as Consul General in Hong Kong and Ambassador in Indonesia and Australia.

Maurice Couve de Murville He is Minister of Foreign Affairs from 1958-1968 followed by the function of Prime Minister from 1968-1969, both under General de Gaulle. Before that o.a. Ambassador in the U.S. (1956-1965).

Maurice Schumann French Minister of Foreign Affairs under Georges Pompidou (1969-1973).

Melle Byrne American chief negotiator to the Paris Peace Negotiations (period unclear)

Ngo Dinh Diem President and Chief of State of the Republic of Vietnam (1955-1963).

Nguyen Cao Ky General of the Vietnam Air Force, Prime Minister (1965-1967) and thereafter Vice-President General of the Republic of Vietnam, under bitter rival Nguyen Van Thieu (1968-1971). Briefly sent to Paris as chief negotiator.

Nguyen Huu Chau Vietnamese exile in Paris, Teacher in law, former Secretary of State, of the State to Vietnam (1952-1953)

Nguyen Minh Vy North Vietnamese chief negotiator to the Paris Peace Negotiations

Nguyen Van Tam Vietnamese exile in Paris, regular contact of Quai, Former Prime Minister to the State of Vietnam, under emperor Bao Dai (1952-1953)

Nguyen Van Thieu President of the Republic of Vietnam (1965-1975). Before he was a General in the Army of the Republic of Vietnam (ARVN) and he participated in the military junta against Diem in 1963.

Nguyen Quoc Dinh Former Minister of Foreign Affairs of the State of Vietnam (1952-1953)

Norodom Sihanouk King of Cambodia until 1955, thereafter Prince of Cambodia (1955-1970)

Paul Mus French scientist, expert in Vietnamese affairs.

Peter Abrassimov Soviet Ambassador to France (1971-1973)

Pham Van Dong Prime Minister of North Vietnam (firstly under Ho Chi Minh, from 1955-1976). Thereafter he is Prime Minister of the unified Vietnam from 1976-1987. He signed the Geneva Accords of 1954 with France.

Pham Dang Lam South Vietnamese Ambassador to France

Philip Habib American diplomat part of the Paris Peace Negotiations Delegation in 1968.

Philippe Devillers French journalist, expert in Vietnamese/Indochinese affairs.

Pierre Messmer French Prime Minister from July 1972 until May 1974. Former Minister of Defense (1960-1968) under the presidency of General de Gaulle.

Raymond Aubrac a socialist engineer for the Food and Agricultural Organisation (FAO) in Rome, and a French resistance hero as well as a personal friend of Ho Chi Minh. As Pugwash member he is involved with the Pennsylvania filière.

Souvanna Phouma Prince of Laos, leader of the neutralist faction and Prime Minister (1962-1975)

Thinh Nhat Hanh President of movement Buddhism in Vietnam

Tran Thien Khiem Prime Minister of the Republic of Vietnam, under President Thieu (1969-1975)

Tran Van Huong Prime Minister of the Republic of Vietnam, under President Thieu (1968-1969)

Tran Van Huu a Vietnamese exile in Paris since 1955, regular contact of the Quai d'Orsay, Former Prime Minister of the State of Vietnam under Emperor Bao Dai (1950-1952).

Tran Van Lam Minister of Foreign Affairs of the Republic of Vietnam (South-Vietnam, 1969-1973). He signed the Paris Peace Accords. In 1973 he becomes President of the Senate.

Tri Quang Principal chairman Buddhism in Vietnam, regular contact of the Quai d'Orsay

Valentine Oberenko Counsellor at the Soviet Embassy in Paris

Vo Van Sung Delegate General of the Democratic Republic of Vietnam in Paris (1972 - ?)

Walt Rostow an American economist. From 1964 to 1968 he is Special Assistant for National Security Affairs to president Johnson.

W. Averell Harriman Ambassador-at-large who represented the U.S. as chief negotiator in the Paris Peace Negotiations (1968), under president Johnson. Previous postings as Ambassador in the SU and in Britain. During the Kennedy Administration he held the function of assistant-minister for the Far East.

Xuan Thuy North Vietnamese politician who had been minister of Foreign Affairs of the DRV (1963-1965). In 1968 he was appointed chief negotiator to the peace negotiations in Paris.

Zhou Enlai Chine Prime Minister under Mao Zedong (1949-1976).