

thieu 1 (park/deepe)

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thieu 2 (park/deepe)

The whole chain of Palace discussions in which the Vietnamese leadership ended up directly repudiating the Johnson Administration in Washington must also be viewed—at least from this vantage point—against a background of the American elections. As the American-South Vietnamese discussions, which dramatically began with Ambassador Bunker's dramatic visit to the Presidential Palace at 6:45 a.m. on October 16—as these discussions unraveled it became increasingly clear to both the Vietnamese government and the American and diplomatic communities here that the American President had geared up the bombing halt of North Vietnam and the upcoming peace negotiations to coincide with the American election on November 5. Even senior American officials here—including life-long Democrats and fervent Johnson supporters—sensed and expressed their private view that, as one said, "this is a most vulgar display by Johnson of outright political expediency." And as another said—"This is an out and out political machination by Johnson either to get Humphrey elected or else to go down in boldface type in the history books."

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thieu 3 (~~morrissey/roberts~~) (park/deepe)

Even senior Vietnamese government officials—including those ~~participating~~ participating in the Palace discussions expressed believe that Johnson was playing politics with peace during the three weeks preceding the American election and they were becoming acutely aware that ~~Washington~~ ^{Bunker} was frenetically attempting to bundle them off to Paris, ~~irregardless~~ regardless of the tactics he ~~used or~~ ^{employed} the consequences to South Vietnam itself.

Now, in Saigon, the tactics of the American Ambassador and his deputy, ~~Samuel~~ Samuel Berger, have become even more of the focus than the merits of the peace ~~g~~ package deal. Some members of the American community and ~~a~~ pro-American diplomats have become "outraged"—as one source said—at Bunker's tactics while simultaneously ~~shrieking~~ shrieking and "American sell-out" on the ~~at~~ crucial point of the NLF representation in Paris.

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thieu 4 (park/deepe)

The first ~~questionable~~ questionable tactic ~~was~~ was the "streamroller process," used the very first day when Bunker met Thieu on October 16th at 6:45 a.m. In the words of one pro-American diplomat who followed developments closely, "Bunker simply handed Thieu the typewritten joint communique on the bombing halt Washington wanted to send out and expected him to sign on the dotted line in a matter of hours. This whole approach seemed incredible since the Americans had been secretly negotiating with Hanoi for days on the peace package that ~~virtually~~ ^{virtually} affected South Vietnam—and the South Vietnamese government itself became the last party ~~to~~ to know. And, at that, Saigon was given only a few hours deadline time by Washington to make its decision. It hardly seemed the way to treat an ally for which 29,000 Americans have already died.

"One theory is that Bunker went to the Palace at such an undiplomatic hour in hopes of catching Thieu half-~~aw~~ asleep. But, by god, at six in the morning all Orientals are wide-awake and Thieu certainly was."

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thieu 5 (park/deepe)

Thieu's answer was he ~~am~~ would have to consult the rest of the government. Other ~~officials~~ Vietnamese officials pointedly reminded the Americans that the Vietnamese constitution—which the Americans had once been so keen for the Vietnamese to adopt—provided in ~~Article~~ Article 39 that on matters of war and peace the President was obliged to get agreement from the two-house legislature.

"But, this time, the Americans didn't care about the constitutional process after ~~they~~ all the pains they had gone through to initiate it here,¹⁾ one senior Vietnamese said.

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thieu 6 ~~xxxxxxxxxxxx~~ (park/deepe)

Variations of these tactics also occurred during the three weeks of Palace ~~also~~ confrontations. There was the "soft-sell" approach in which American Embassy officials invited numerous influential Vietnamese to dinners and lunches and ~~the~~ proceeded to "feed us full of baloney that we were strong enough to negotiate at this time," one Vietnamese diner explained. ~~XXXXXXXXXXXXXXXX~~ There was the "hard-sell" in a discreet war of nerves in which several American economic aid officials ~~offish~~ *off-HANDLY* ~~maintainly~~, but ~~do~~ deliberately ~~also~~ broadcast around Saigon that the U. S. "could" start cutting economic aid. Another tactic was the traditional "divide and rule" approach of attempting to split the senior Vietnamese officials. At one time, ~~xxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxx~~ one of the American ambassadors called on Vice President Nguyen Cao Ky privately and urged him to give his personal agreement to the American plan so that Washington could be notified. Ky politely said he served the Vietnamese President. ~~This~~

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thieu 7 (park/deepe)

This latter approach was the most pathetically ironic of all—because during the past 15 months, the American officialdom here had been urging Thieu and Ky to work together, while instead they fought like cats and dogs. But—now with the increased pressure at the Palace confrontations, Thieu and Ky politically coalesced at the time the American Embassy least expected—or wanted it. The Thieu-Ky alliance from the very first day of the Palace meetings was the internal political turning point for the Vietnamese—and from that time more and more Vietnamese leaders in and out of the government were magnetized to Thieu as the American pressure grew.

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thieu 8 (normass/deepe)

But, the real American chicanery began later. At the best, the Americans must be ~~seen~~ ^{known} were accused of gross misrepresentation; at the best, of low-level lying to the Vietnamese government on the status of the NLF at the expanded peace talks. The degree of American malpractices was probably accurately described by one pro-American diplomat when he said: "Bunker ~~stretched~~ diplomatic language to the limit without going to the brink of telling an outright lie."

The whole American-South Vietnamese affair became un-hinged when Thieu found out the wild discrepancies between what ~~Harriam~~ ^{Harriman} Harriman was telling South Vietnamese ~~delegatic~~ ^{delegation} delegates in Paris—that there would be a four-power conference with the NLF separately represented—and what Bunker was telling the Saigon government in Saigon—that Paris was to be a tripartite affair.

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thieu 9 (park/deepe)

This stage began on October 25 when the Vietnamese presented the Americans with two new drafts of the joint communique to end the bombing. With reluctance, Bunker accepted the mildest version—the one making it seem ~~lead~~ likely Hanoi had made any concessions. ^B ~~both~~ both drafts, however, ~~had~~ had specified the crucial phrase ^{of} ~~that~~ "direct and ~~and~~ serious talks between the Republic of Vietnam and the ~~South~~ Democratic Republic of Vietnam." Thus, it specified the direct Saigon-Hanoi conversations that Thieu had wrung from ~~President~~ Johnson in writing in the ~~San~~ Honolulu communique last July. ^{then} The Americans said in effect—hey, what about us, and the Vietnamese said ~~sure,~~ ^{The Americans could go, too.} Hence, the direct Saigon-Hanoi ~~conversations~~ talks were phased into a three-power talk—but the South Vietnamese stated ^{that} in no shape or fashion could the NLF be in Paris as a separate delegation, ~~but~~ ^{through the} could only join the Hanoi representatives. Bunker took the Vietnamese draft which contained this crucial provision on which the composition of the Paris conference hinged—and ~~we~~ sent it to Washington.

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thieu 10 (park/deepe)

The last week of October was the cruncher. On Sunday, October 27, Hanoi gave its final approval to the Americans on Harriman's ~~proposed~~ peace package. On October 29, Thieu asked Ky to prepare to head the new Saigon delegation to Paris because he believed the bombing halt was imminent. Then, the same day, at 6 p.m. Bunker came in to tell Thieu that everything was fixed, ~~and the bombing halt would be the next day.~~ Ky specifically asked Bunker if Washington okayed Saigon's draft communique ^{mentioning} ~~mentioning~~ the three-way conference. Bunker said yes. Ky asked if Hanoi approved. Bunker said ~~yes~~ yes. ^{Said yes.} Bunker said the bombing halt would be the next day and that the expanded peace talks would begin on November 2. In rough translation, the Vietnamese replied, "baloney. We can't get a national delegation there in five days. We agreed to go to Paris, but not on November 2." They reminded the Americans it had taken Hanoi ^{one} ~~two~~ months to send a delegation to Paris after ^{had} ~~its~~ first acceptance.

Bunker and Berger both reportedly flew into "a rage." This "fisticuff" went on for at least three hours.

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thieu 11 (mark/deepe)

"Then the ~~damnest~~ thing you ever saw happened," one Vietnamese who kept a brief diary of the whole event explained. "While we were haggling with Bunker about whether we'd go on ~~November~~ November 2 or not, an aide came in with a cable from Lam in Paris (South Vietnamese ~~to~~ Ambassador Pham Dang Lam). He had an angry session with (Philip) Habib and Harriman in Paris. Harriman told Lam Hanoi had not repeat not agreed to any damn thing and all you^{re} ~~pretensions~~ ^{not} pretensions are out of this world. Hanoi^{re} did not repeat accept your ~~proposal~~ (for a three-power conference) and we did not repeat not even Hanoi to accept them. Then Harriman ended up with that sentence Newsweek quoted correctly—your government does not repeat not represent all of South Vietnam, Mr. Ambassador, and you would do well to remember that./

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thieu 12 (park/deepe)

"Well, the faces of Thieu and the Vietnamese crumbled and the Palace broke out in pandemonium. Bunker was asked to go to the next room so the Vietnamese could talk among themselves. Everyone ~~was~~ on the Vietnamese side was shocked at the discrepancy between Harriman and Bunker. Even (Prime Minister) Huong said ~~that~~ this must be 'blatant duplicity' on the part of the Americans, and Thieu said obviously someone was lying.

"Then we showed Bunker and Berger the cable from Lam. What about this— before we decide about going on November 2. Bunker diplomatically said ^{he} maybe Lam ~~was~~ misunderstood ~~by~~ Harriman. We said Lam's English isn't very good, but Habib's French is—and no one could misunderstand to that extent.

"In funeral silence, Bunker and Berger mounted ~~their~~ their armored car (automobile) back to the American Embassy. Meantime, ~~that~~ all the Vietnamese ordered chicken soup while ~~waiting~~ waiting for the Americans to return....One and a half hours later, they came back. Bunker handed Thieu a letter ~~and~~ dictated over the phone by President Johnson. Johnson said it was all a misunderstanding. Bunker is my representative at your side in Saigon. Everything Bunker says is right. I stand by him and my policy is what Bunker says."

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thieu 13 (park/deepe)

The subsequent arrival of the NLF in Paris as a separate delegation would seem to contradict the contents of President Johnson's letter.

The Vietnamese then said in essence they did not repeat not trust the Americans and that the Americans were not repeat not correctly arranging things on their behalf in Paris. But, Saigon would ~~again~~ still send a delegation to Paris to talk to the Communist directly—but preliminary talks to arrange the ground rules for themselves.

Again, pandemonium broke out, this time the Americans ~~not~~ accusing the Vietnamese of betraying them, and saying in essence ~~that~~ you want to go to Paris and then you don't.

The ~~final~~ final ~~conf~~ confrontation occurred ~~on~~ occurred on the evening of October 31, with the Vietnamese knowing the bombing halt was imminent. It was Thieu's first anniversary of his Presidential inauguration—and the meeting opened as the Communists were shelling the city. It was a tense, dramatic meeting, with strong words ~~from~~ ^{between} Thieu and Barger and Bunker ~~smoothing~~ smoothing ~~re~~ ^{smoothed} remarks away.

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thieu 14 (R) (park/deepe)

At one point, Berger turned to Thieu and said if ~~you cannot~~ ^{he insisted} on a mandate from Hanoi officially keeping the NLF out as a separate delegation, then ~~I~~ Berger did not repeat, think even the American government could support that demand.

Thieu pulled out a piece of paper, saying, oh is that right Mr. Ambassador, and begins to write down the exact statement. Thieu countered, ~~that~~ in that case, it sounded to him as though Berger was the deputy ambassador from Hanoi instead of the deputy American ambassador to Saigon. Bunker ~~said~~ ^{said} Berger's remarks were all a misunderstanding—and brushed it off.

The Vietnamese presented a ~~similar~~ ^{similar} draft text for the joint ~~communique~~ ^{communique} to their other draft, but included the word "preliminary" talks. At 4 a.m.—five hours before Johnson's bombing-halt speech—Bunker and Berger left with the draft ~~and~~ ^{they} returned two hours later with a counter-draft which had dropped the word "preliminary"—the word necessary for the South Vietnamese to set up their own procedural arrangements in Paris directly with the Communists, rather than trusting ~~to~~ ^{to} the American ~~arrangements~~ ^{arrangements}.

Thieu replied in that case the South Vietnamese could not repeat not join the Americans in the bombing halt communique or participate in the Paris peace talks.

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thieu ~~at~~ 15 (park/deepe)

Three hours later, Johnson announced the ending of the bombing, which the South Vietnamese declared ~~an~~ a unilateral action and a day later, Thieu dropped ~~his~~ his own bombshell about not repeat not going to Paris.

Now, ~~xxxxxxxx~~ the ~~Saigon~~ South-Vietnamese-American deadlock on Saigon's attending the Paris talks continues here, with the American Embassy ~~still~~ awaiting instructions from Washington and ~~the Saigon govern~~ Thieu government privately hoping for a new Republic Administration in the White House.

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