

COLD WAR

➤ How and Why America got out of Vietnam

Source 1

The Foreign Secretary informed the Cabinet that the prospects of resolving the conflict in Vietnam remained confused and uncertain; but they were perhaps slightly more hopeful than hitherto. We ourselves were maintaining our efforts, both in public and by confidential diplomatic discussions with the Governments of the United States and the Soviet Union, to promote some form of mediation between the parties to the dispute; and there now seemed to be some prospect, as the result of recent developments, that contact between them might perhaps be established. Meanwhile, although we must continue to deplore the United States bombing of North Vietnam, it would be impolitic to dissociate ourselves from United States policy, especially since we had reason to believe that the United States President, although determined not to expose United States prestige to a rebuff, was continuing to resist pressure within his Administration for the adoption of more extreme military measures against North Vietnam. Nevertheless, the risk of escalation would clearly increase if the conflict persisted; and it therefore remained urgent to take advantage of any opportunity to bring the hostilities to an end.

Notes from British Cabinet discussions of the war in Vietnam 1966

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Source 3

The Foreign Secretary informed the Cabinet of the latest initiative by the President of the United States, President Johnson, to end the war in Vietnam - an initiative which took the form of an undertaking to restrict the United States bombing of North Vietnam in the hope that the reaction of the Government of North Vietnam would enable the United States Government thereafter to suspend the bombing altogether and so to satisfy the condition which the Government of North Vietnam had always attached to the launching of any negotiations for a peaceful settlement.

In response to a request from President Johnson that in our capacity as one of the co-chairmen of the Geneva Conference on Vietnam, we should use our influence to promote this initiative with the Soviet Union as the other co-chairman, he had requested the Soviet Ambassador, M. Smirnovsky, to represent urgently to the Soviet Government the importance of eliciting a favourable response to this offer from the Government of North Vietnam.

...

If the latest United States initiative failed, public opinion in the United States would be liable to revert to a less conciliatory attitude towards the Government of North Vietnam and to press for an Intensification of the military effort. We should not allow ourselves to be ranged, in that event, automatically on the United States side; and we should therefore take the present opportunity to prepare to move towards a position in which we were seen to be not unsympathetic towards the United States but no longer in declared support of her policies.

Notes from British Cabinet discussions of the war in Vietnam, 1968

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Source 4

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US Secretary of Defence Clark Clifford on the impact of the Tet Offensive, 1968

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Source 5

Vietnam

(Previous
Reference:
CC (69) 15th
Conclusions,
Minute 4)

The Foreign and Commonwealth Secretary said that there had been some movement in the Paris negotiations on Vietnam. The North Vietnamese National Liberation Front had put forward their ten-point plan; and the President of the United States, Mr. Nixon, had on 14th May announced a series of measures aimed at the withdrawal of foreign forces from South Vietnam and the termination of hostilities. In his speech President Nixon had made it clear that

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the United States were not simply going to abandon the South Vietnamese. Any withdrawal of United States troops would be conditional on the withdrawal of North Vietnamese troops from South Vietnam, Laos and Cambodia, and the creation of conditions in which the South Vietnamese could freely choose their own government. It was of interest that, in the course of the current exchanges, the North Vietnamese had for the first time overtly admitted that there were North Vietnamese troops in South Vietnam.

Notes from British Cabinet discussions of the war in Vietnam, 1969

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Source 7



British cartoon commenting on US President Nixon's Vietnam policies, 1972

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Source 8



British cartoon commenting on US President Nixon's Vietnam policies, 1973