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# The Main Issue: Who Will Govern in Saigon?

By Murrey Marder

WASHINGTON, June 27 (WP). —The disclosures last summer of the Pentagon papers gave the public its first clear look at government insiders' own perceptions of how the Vietnam war evolved through the Truman, Eisenhower, Kennedy and Johnson administrations. Deleted from those unauthorized disclosures were the four volumes of diplomatic history of what was originally a 47-volume Defense Department study of the U.S. involvement in the war.

That omission can now be filled in through unofficial access to the central portions of the diplomatic history. The Washington Post requested and obtained copies of these documents from columnist Jack Anderson. (A report on peace-making efforts in these documents was printed in the International Herald Tribune on June 15.)

This newly acquired record reveals that at no time during the frustrating years of struggle to end the war by diplomacy was the key issue any of the subjects that have inflamed public debate, with one exception. The underlying problem never has been the speed or the rate of U.S. troop withdrawals, or the terms of a cease-fire, or international supervision, or the release of American prisoners of war.

### What It's Really About

Calls on the Communist side for a "coalition government" in South Vietnam, and U.S. calls for "free elections," did, and do, symbolize what the war is really about.

The core issue was, and is: who shall rule in Saigon after U.S. troops withdraw and what will be that government's relations with Washington, Hanoi, Moscow and Peking?

At their highest official levels, the United States and North Vietnam, the history shows, clearly recognized through the years what was required to produce a settlement.

There were potential chances for face-saving settlements, the newly available history indicates, if there had been a mutual desire to end the war with a standoff on the totally divergent goals for the control of power in South Vietnam.

There is evidence that miscalculations and misperceptions aborted opportunities to narrow differences, but there is no evidence in this record that any near-agreement on peace was thwarted by misunderstanding. The two sides never got that close.

### Some Futile Missions

Diplomats often were sent on futile missions—sometimes by countries other than the United States, for what U.S. officials assessed in this account as a desire to enhance their national interests.

fully said he had "traveled 10,000 miles to present a feather."

Throughout the diplomat record now available, the overriding North Vietnamese concern was—and is—that "the United States intends to stay permanently in Vietnam," not necessarily with troops, but with material support for the anti-Communist, pro-Western government in Saigon.

None of the U.S. withdrawal pledges or troop-reduction commitments have removed the North Vietnamese belief that the United States seeks to "stay" in South Vietnam, meaning to preserve it as an anti-Communist country.

A fundamental point that another Canadian diplomat, J. Blair Seaborn, and successor intermediaries tried to make to North Vietnam was that it is the U.S. objective to restore the Geneva accords of 1954, which is also a priority goal for North Vietnam.

### Dispute on Accord

While the United States contends that those accords limited North Vietnam to territory above

the 17th Parallel—and that therefore the war in the South is "aggression from the North."

Hanoi says that this was only a "temporary" boundary and that if the United States had not "violated" the Geneva accords, the 1956 election proposed in them would have produced a unified Vietnamese state with the late Ho Chi Minh as its leader. Many Western specialists agree with that premise.

When the United States began heavy bombing of North Vietnam on March 2, 1965, Mr. Seaborn was back in Hanoi on another mission for the United States, in which he was instructed "to leave the initiative" to North Vietnam's leaders.

"Hanoi's interpretation, he believed, was that the U.S. realized it had lost the war and wanted to extricate itself; hence it was in Hanoi interest to hold back—a conference then, might, as in 1954, deprive it of total victory," the history says.

When the bombing was in full force, Hanoi's Ambassador to China, Ngo Loan, told the Norwegian Ambassador, Ole Algard, in Peking in June, 1967, that:

"The Geneva agreement stipulated that Vietnam should be unified with two years. 'Our objective today,' he said, 'is considerably lower.' The question of unification is postponed to an indefinite point of time in the future. North Vietnam is today ready to accept a separate South Vietnamese state which is neutral and based on a coalition government. Such a government could have connections both with East and West and accept assistance from countries that might wish to give such assistance."

"We are," said Ambassador Loan, "ready for very far-reaching compromises to get an end to the war."

Mr. Algard reported that the North Vietnamese "were deeply mistrustful of America intentions in Vietnam. Steady escalation and sending of new troops indicated Americans had intentions of staying permanently in Vietnam."

Ambassador Loan said he hoped developments would not take such form that North Vietnam must ask for foreign, and in first instance, Chinese, help. That was one thing they would do their utmost to avoid."

Chester Ronning, a retired Canadian diplomat and a China specialist who is described in the Pentagon study as "known to hold a critical view of U.S. policies toward China and U.S." for example, went to Hanoi in March 1966, to try to convince the North Vietnamese that they should accept US terms for a halt of the bombing. Mr. Ronning is unable to arouse any interest in Washington's terms, re-

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