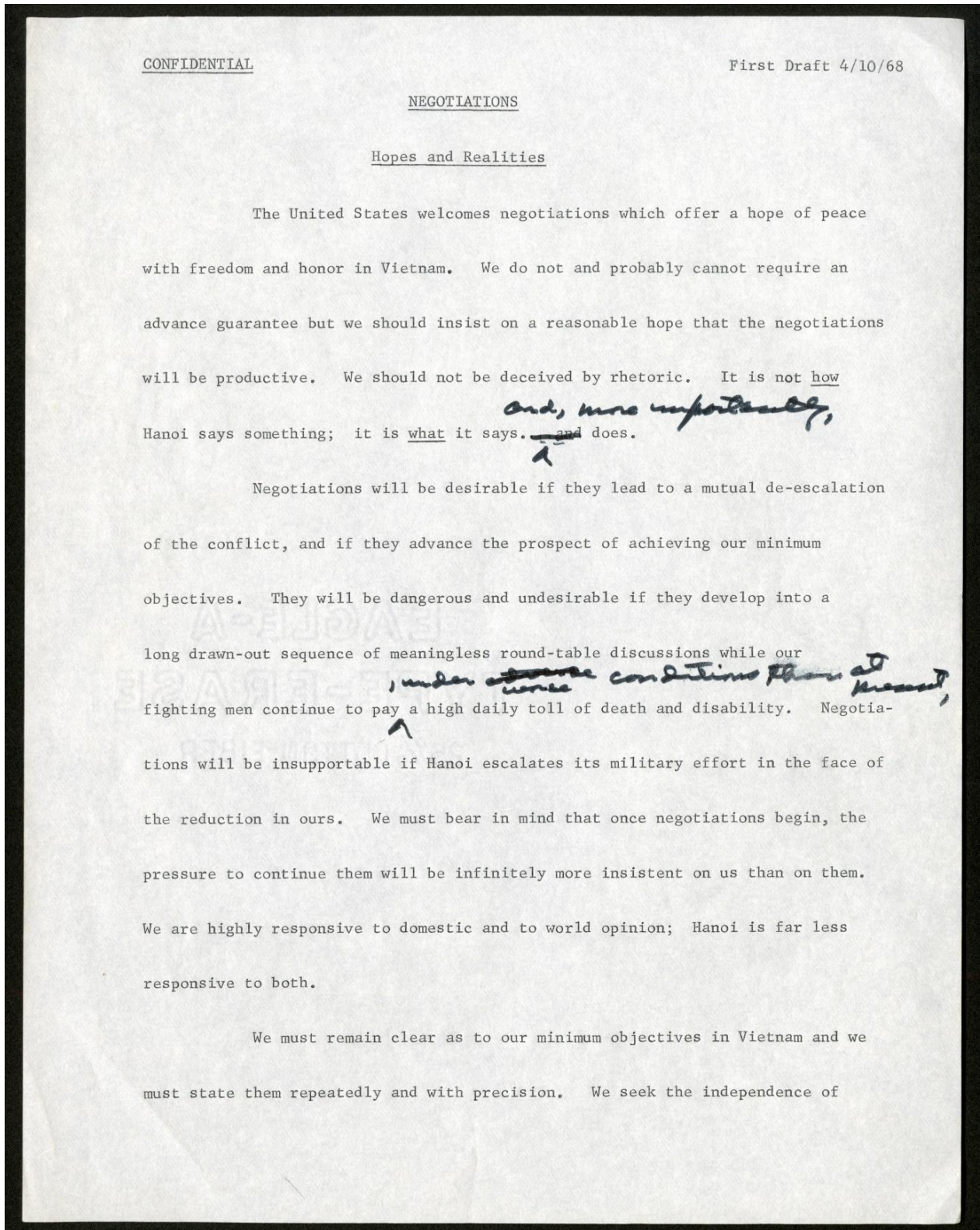


# Negotiations: Hopes and Realities, April 6, 1968

## Image



Negotiations: Hopes and Realities, April 6, 1968. (The Gilder Lehrman Institute of American History, GLC09911.02 p1)



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South Vietnam and its freedom from attack. Nothing could be simpler or clearer than that. The South Vietnamese either choose their own government or they do not. The aggression of the North either ends or it does not. The North either takes over the South or it does not. With these *alternatives before us* ~~guidelines~~, we shall experience little difficulty in knowing whether, and to what extent, we have succeeded or failed.

Regretfully, our Committee feels obliged to express its fear that many American citizens have been misled by both supporters and opponents of our commitment in Vietnam to place too high a value on negotiations or on "talks" with the other side - and to expect too much, too soon.

There is no necessary equation between negotiations and peace. Still less is there an equation between negotiations and a peace acceptable to the United States, *and the people we seek to help.* Negotiations are not an end in themselves - they are only a possible means to an end.

Americans may think of negotiations as the road to peace but there is unmistakable evidence that Mao Tse-tung and Ho Chi-minh think of negotiations as another way to fight a war - in effect, as another weapons system. Too many Americans think the question is fight or negotiate. The enemy, on the other hand,



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has developed a consistent policy of fight and negotiate.

Our experience at Panmunjom is eloquent testimony to the enemy strategy and a clear warning to us. Those Korean negotiations dragged on for two years with an enemy record of duplicity, deceit and deliberately abrogated agreements. Meanwhile our armed forces suffered 62,000 additional casualties with almost 13,000 dead. And true peace in Korea is not yet. This is a pattern that we must not permit to be followed again.

( We should adopt a realistic attitude toward negotiations. ) We must not allow our hopes and our expectations to outrun the harsh realities.

No negotiations will be valuable or productive unless both sides feel that it is in their interest to achieve an end to the conflict and a negotiated settlement of the issues. Thus, we cannot expect to win at the conference table *so far* what we have failed to win on the battlefield, *even though that has been* But, equally, we should avoid *considerable* losing at the conference table what we have fought so hard, and given so much, to protect.

The negotiating table will reflect the military, economic and political strength of the opposing forces in Vietnam. One of the greatest of these strengths is resolution - the determination to see the thing through - and the communication of that determination to the enemy. We would be foolish to expect



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Hanoi to genuinely negotiate a mutually satisfactory settlement of the war while the resolution of the United States and South Vietnam is failing - or while Hanoi thinks that it is failing. One of the greatest threats to successful negotiations is that Hanoi may under-estimate America's resolve. All Americans can contribute to removing that threat, keeping in mind that the conflict may well be a race between the erosion of public <sup>confidence</sup> ~~support~~ in the United States ~~for our commitment~~ and the decline of the Viet Cong in South Vietnam.

We must unceasingly make it clear to Hanoi that we do not seek nor will we accept a face-saving peace or a camouflaged surrender. The consequence

of such a defeat would be that the United States is "writing off" South Asia for ~~at least the near future and probably for far longer.~~ <sup>foreseeable.</sup> ~~We believe that America~~ <sup>Possibly, as a power</sup>

~~more isolated and less implemented nations we could survive such a consequence but our citizens should be clear as to exactly~~ ~~could survive such a catastrophe - but our one citizen~~ ~~should be clear as to the consequences. These~~ ~~what we would be doing.~~ <sup>serious, if not fatal, consequence has been</sup> <sup>which</sup>

~~deliberately obscured by the loud and sometimes eloquent advocates of retreat~~ <sup>persuasive</sup>

and withdrawal. ~~Now~~ <sup>however</sup> these advocates faced up to the fact that our

withdrawal, in defeat, would mean the almost immediate massacre of <sup>possibly</sup> ~~up to~~ hundreds

of thousands of South Vietnamese who have stood by our side. On moral grounds alone, this cannot be permitted.

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Mao Tse-tung long ago gave us, in his own words, a capsule definition of our opponents' consistent strategy:

"Enemies advance, we retreat

"Enemies halt, we harass

"Enemies tire, we attack

"Enemies retreat, we pursue."

The tactics vary; the strategy remains the same.

It has been observed that our opponents view the conflict as being fought in three areas -- time, space and cost. They appear convinced that all three factors are now working in their favor.

Time: America appears impatient to end the war. We think in terms of weeks and months. Hanoi thinks in terms of years and decades, ~~and even longer.~~

Space: America wishes, ~~and~~ rightly, to confine the area in which the conflict takes place. Hanoi has sought, with some success, to expand it -- spending lives to expand space.

Cost: We appear unwilling to pay the continuing costs of the conflict. They appear resigned to their proportionately far heavier costs, particularly in human casualties.

In all three areas -- time, space and cost -- impatience may indeed be our deadliest enemy.



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*is reasonable*  
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If the above analysis ~~is correct~~, the chances for productive negotiations ~~are~~ <sup>do appear</sup> not substantial at this time. Hanoi's willingness to engage in genuine negotiations is, in our judgment, inversely related to how well they think they are doing in the war.

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One cannot overemphasize what we do not seek in Vietnam; we do not seek the surrender of North Vietnam or to destroy it or its people. Rather, we seek freedom for South Vietnam and an end of the aggression directed from the North. We fight for peace with freedom and honor, -- not for military victory. We seek a South Vietnam which is free, united, independent, politically stable and economically expanding. To the degree that these goals are attained, we will achieve our "victory."

"Instant" victory is, unfortunately, not available to us on the battlefield or at the negotiating table. In both arenas, we must beware of impatience, disillusionment, and extremist and simplistic answers to complex problems. Particularly, if negotiations should break down, we must not fall into the trap of over-reacting and of sharply escalating our military effort in search of a quick "victory." "Winning" in Vietnam at the expense of losing our position in the world would be a Pyrrhic triumph.



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America has, by its unilateral and unconditional de-escalation of the conflict, demonstrated to the world our devotion to the peaceful resolution of differences between nations and peoples.

It would now seem both prudent and warranted for us not to make any further concessions prior to, or during, negotiations without reciprocal acts from the other side. Mutual de-escalation is by definition a two-way street. Hanoi cannot always take and never give; always demand everything and never concede anything.

We believe there is one thing that the United States should not do under any conceivable circumstances. We should not exert pressure on South Vietnam to accept a coalition government. If there is to be representation of the National Liberation Front in the political structure of South Vietnam, it should not occur at our urging or insistence. History is replete with examples of Communist takeovers of governments by obtaining control of key ministries such as defense, justice, interior (police) and propaganda.

Lastly, America must not expect too much to flow from a resolution of the conflict in Vietnam. ~~Peace, as we have previously known it, is probably not possible in our lifetime.~~ We live in a world of great historical forces which are anti-pathetic to each other. There is no early prospect for world peace in the traditional sense. There is conflict in today's world and conflict -

*political, economic or even military -*



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will unquestionably continue at various levels and in various places for the foreseeable future.

Our basic continuing objective is to hold such conflict within the bounds that permit the survival of mankind. That is why we, the most powerful nation in the history of the world, adhere to our ~~new, unique,~~ generous and far-sighted doctrine -- the willingness to fight a limited conflict, with limited means, at limited risk for limited objectives.

The success or failure of that doctrine may well be decisive in shaping not only the destiny of South Vietnam and of Southeast Asia but of the entire world.