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On January 10, 1971, a South Vietnamese delegation arrived in Bangui, capital of the Central African Republic, escorted in style aboard President-for-Life Jean-Bédel Bokassa's private jet. Flanked by Vietnamese Foreign Ministry and Intelligence personnel, seventeen-year-old Martine Thị Nguyễn, a cement factory worker from the outskirts of Saigon, emerged from the aircraft and was seated at the center of a motorcade to the palace, where Bokassa and his cabinet were waiting. The President immediately pulled down her trousers – and, confirming that she indeed bore a telltale scar, embraced Martine before bursting into tears. It appeared Bokassa, a famously licentious French army sergeant posted to Saigon during the Franco-Vietnamese War, had reunited at last with his long-lost out-of-wedlock Vietnamese daughter.[1]

Martine Thị Nguyễn was not, however, the first mixed-race Vietnamese debutant presented as Bokassa's daughter on the Central African social scene. Two months earlier, Martine Nguyễn Thị Bái, a cigarette vendor living in a Saigon shack made from crushed soda cans, had been feted in Bangui with more much lavish celebrations, complete with several days of ceremonies, banquets, and balls. But when tabloid Tr*ắng đe*n revealed the first Martine to be an imposter, an enraged Bokassa threatened to retaliate by severing relations with Saigon and endorsing the Vietnamese communists. Matters were not helped when Fidèle Obrou, the first Martine's Central African husband from a hastily-arranged marriage, was sent to the firing squad for orchestrating a botched assassination plot against Bokassa.[2] Desperate to secure international recognition and counter Hanoi's impressive sympathetic African voting bloc, the South Vietnamese Foreign Ministry sprang into action, hoping to woo the mercurial President-for-Life back to fold. Assisted by Tr*ắng đe*n's sensationalized coverage of the search for Saigon's "African fairy-tale princess," Ministry officials managed to procure and dispatch the "real"

[1] Author Interview with Phan Công Tâm, Republic of Vietnam Central Intelligence Organization Director of the Office of Operation Plans/Assistant to the Commissioner for Special Operations. August 22, 2015, Ithaca, NY.
[2] Brian E. Titley, Dark Age: The Political Odyssey of Emperor Bokassa (Montreal, 1997), 63.

Martine, cementing one of the Cold War's unlikelier partnerships.[3] And though the second "real" Martine's arrival was a more subdued affair, Bokassa nonetheless treated his guests by producing a guitar after several celebratory drinks, and serenading them in Vietnamese with a selection of 1940s bar tunes.[4]

Beyond merely an obscure if colorful episode in Cold War-era diplomacy, the encounter in Bangui reveals the surprisingly global scale of South Vietnam's diplomatic ambitions, belying the presumed insularity of a government often dismissed as little more than a puppet regime of the United States.[5] In fact, while diplomacy had not been a priority for President Ngô Đình Diệm (1954-1963) or during the turbulent period of coups, intrigue and regional insurrection that followed his deposal, the return to constitutional government in 1967 led to a rapid revival of interest in forging new international partnerships. After American peace negotiations with Hanoi and the spectre of a Democratic Party victory in the 1968 Presidential Election led to widespread doubts in Saigon over American intentions, the need for alternative alliances grew all the more imperative. Facing budgetary shortfalls of up to 70% absent American aid by 1970, the state's very existence was at stake. As one Foreign Affairs Ministry planning memo put it, "from 1965 to March, 1968, the United States completely focused on military victory... We only needed to explain that our reason for fighting was to resist communism. But since 1968… the great majority of political observers no longer doubt that America will pull all of its military forces out of South Vietnam. Our destiny now lies in our own force and ability."[6]

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[3] "Martine Bokassa, món quà xuân cho Jean Bedel Bokassa," Tr*ắng đen*, (Saigon, Spring 1971).
[4] Phan Công Tâm, "Testimony of a Senior Officer, Central Intelligence Organization," Voices from the Second Republic of South Vietnam (1967-1975). K.W. Taylor ed. (Ithaca, NY, 2014), 28.
[5] See, for instance, David Halberstam, The Making of a Quagmire: America and Vietnam During the Kennedy Era. Revised ed. (New York, 1988), 16-19; James M. Carter, Inventing Vietnam: the United States and State-Building, 1954-1968 (New York, 2008), 10-14.
[6] Phùng Nhật Minh, "Công tác Ngoại giao," August 27, 1971, HS1772, Phủ Tổng thống Đệ nhị Cộng hòa (hereafter PTTDIICH)/Vietnam National Archives Center II (hereafter VNAC2).

Beginning in earnest in 1968, South Vietnam embarked on a sweeping worldwide campaign to rebrand itself as a progressive alternative to the communist North, hoping to secure new channels of support beyond Washington, and to attain international credibility after years of effectively ceding diplomacy and public relations to both the United States and the Vietnamese communists. At the heart of this effort was Saigon's apparent domestic political progress, beginning with a new constitution and nationwide elections for President and a new bicameral legislature in 1967. Almost from the outset however, the initiative faced formidable obstacles. The sheer scope of the endeavor pushed the Foreign Ministry's financial and administrative capabilities to the limit, with South Vietnamese envoys hindered by language barriers and often comically misinformed about their destinations. A series of ill-conceived associations with sympathetic but politically-toxic local fringe parties ensued, reinforcing rather than rehabilitating South Vietnam's pariah status. Worse still, rather than promote Saigon's ostensible democratic transition, traveling delegates from the newly-established National Assembly seized on the international platform now afforded them to denounce President Nguyễn Văn Thiệu's interference with the legislature. Beyond these administrative difficulties, South Vietnam also struggled to position itself in a rapidly changing region, where Sino-American rapprochement and reduced U.S. commitments saw Southeast Asian statesmen reconciling with Beijing and revising their strategic assessments of the Vietnam War.

But by far the biggest challenge to effective foreign policy was the profound contradiction between Saigon's diplomatic and domestic imperatives. In the wake of South Vietnam's contentious 1967 elections, incoming President Gen. Nguyễn Văn Thiệu partnered with vehemently anti-communist northern Catholic political parties, whose disciplined grassroots organization helped them triumph in the Assembly elections despite numerical disadvantages.

Alarmed by developments in Washington and Paris, these newly-elected hawks hastened to assert themselves by condemning the peace talks and lashing out against a Foreign Ministry eager to present a progressive image to attract overseas support. On the other side of the spectrum, a coalition of mostly southern liberal religious and political groups pressed the government to play a constructive part in deliberations with Hanoi, anticipating that the United States would respond to an obstinate South Vietnam by excluding it from negotiations altogether.

Exasperated by the two camps' deteriorating relations and increasingly dramatic exchanges, Nguyễn Văn Thiệu lost patience with civilian politics altogether, effectively binding himself to hardliners who accepted his growing authoritarianism in exchange for patronage and an intransigent position in Paris. This process culminated in Thiệu's blatantly rigged and widely condemned uncontested 1971 re-election. But in crushing Saigon's burgeoning if chaotic constitutional government, Thiệu betrayed the basic premise of South Vietnamese diplomacy, infuriating American congressional patrons and severely compromising South Vietnam's search for alternative partners. At a time when Sino-American rapprochement seemed to negate Saigon's strategic importance, prospective allies saw few incentives for associating with a weak and unpopular regime. Thus, in simultaneously failing to address the internal shortfalls that necessitated indefinite foreign aid while repelling international observers with its domestic crackdown, the Thiệu government contributed greatly to the timing and the severity of the fateful 1973 U.S. settlement with North Vietnam. This significant if indirect impact has been largely overlooked in studies of the war's denouement, which have focused primarily on United States-North Vietnamese negotiations in Paris, where Saigon was a marginal player.[7]

[7] Examples include Jeffrey Kimball, *Nixon's Vietn*am War (Lawrence, 1998); Pierre Asselin, A Bitter Peace: Washington, Hanoi, and the Making of the Paris Agreement (Chapel Hill, 2002).

Additionally, while studies purporting to provide an "international" history of the Vietnam War date back over thirty years, newly accessible official Vietnamese sources have led to a wave of publications exploring Vietnamese perspectives of the war, though South Vietnam's Second Republic (1967-1975) remains almost wholly neglected.[8] This burst of output coincides with the overall trend in diplomatic history towards multinational archival research in which non-state actors play an ever more prominent role.[9] Particular attention has been devoted to the 1970s, when a series of interconnected political, economic and intellectual crises forced heads of state to confront complex challenges stemming from a surge in global interdependence.[10] The conflict in Vietnam was a key factor in this prevailing sense of turbulence: "perhaps no other crisis contributed more to the global shock of the 1970s than the Vietnam War," writes historian Lien-Hang T. Nguyen, noting Vietnamese involvement in Central American and Africa.[11] During a recent keynote address, Nguyen goes further, suggesting that Vietnamese communists saw themselves as engaged in a common global struggle against the same structural forces contested by radical Palestinian women's groups.[12]

But while internationally-oriented studies of the Vietnam War have thus far focused on communist "people's" or "guerilla" diplomacy, in common with other accounts of Cold War-era conflicts whose protagonists prevailed by "internationalizing" local grievances to their advantage, Saigon's no less globally ambitious foreign policy after 1967 has thus far been all but

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[8] See, for example, R.B. Smith, An International History of the Vietnam War: Revolution vs. Containment, 1955-1961. Vol. I. (New York, 1983); Edward Miller, Misalliance: Ngo Dinh Diem, the United States, and the Fate of South Vietnam (Cambridge, MA, 2013).
[9] Examples include Matthew Connelly, Fatal Misconception: The Struggle to Control World Population (Cambridge, MA, 2008); Erez Manela, "A Pox on Your Narrative: Writing Disease Control into Cold War History," Diplomatic History, 34, no. 2 (April 2010).
[10] ed. Niall Ferguson et al., The Shock of the Global: the 1970s in Perspective (Cambridge, MA, 2010).
[11] Lien-Hang T. Nguyen, "The Vietnam Decade: the Global Shock of the War," The Shock of the Global: the 1970s in Perspective, ed. Niall Ferguson et al. (Cambridge, MA, 2010).
[12] Nguyen, "Revolutionary Circuits: Toward Internationalizing America in the World," Diplomatic History, 39, no. 3 (June 2015): 420.

ignored. Its political class however, present at the outset of non-alignment at the 1955 Bandung Conference, saw itself as embodying a global spirit of post-colonial national liberation, as determined if unsuccessful efforts to resist American influence attest.[13] Faced with its own "shock of the global" when American support grew uncertain after 1968, the Second Republic undertook a frantic if largely failed search for international assistance.

South Vietnam then represents an instructive counter to more familiar emblems of non-alignment, which succeeded where the Thiệu regime failed despite its similar pursuit of what one historian describes as "diplomatic revolution" – securing domestic objectives through external support and legitimacy.[14] As the diverse network of right-wing state and non-state actors which embraced South Vietnam suggests, the globalization of post-colonial struggles was hardly the exclusive preserve of the left, though progressive movements fared rather better attracting public and scholarly attention. Considering failed bids to internationalize local conflicts is critical however if we are to transcend a mere victor's history of diplomatic revolution, where global outreach becomes a teleological process which invariably propels local contenders to victory. At a time when diplomatic history has grown ever more cosmopolitan to interpret an increasingly interdependent world, Saigon's revealing failure serves as a reminder that the pursuit of international legitimacy often proves elusive absent a demonstrable domestic support base.

ORIGINS OF DIPLOMATIC DEPENDENCY

Perhaps surprisingly given its subsequent pariah status, South Vietnam was initially seen to have surpassed its communist neighbor's diplomacy. Writing in 1963, French journalist and Vietnam expert Bernard Fall observed that "in the field of foreign relations… South Viet-Nam

[13] Edward Miller, "The Diplomacy of Personalism: Civilization, Culture, and the Cold War in the Foreign Policy of Ngo Dinh Diem," Connecting Histories: Decolonization and the Cold War in Southeast Asia, 1954-1962. eds. Christopher E. Goscha and Christian F Ostermann (Washington, 2009), 381-385.
[14] Matthew Connelly, *A Diplomatic Revolution: Algeria's Fight for Independence and the* Origins of the Post-Cold War Era (New York, 2002).

has been far more successful than its Northern counterpart… [it] has succeeded in gaining acceptance from countries of the Afro-Asian bloc to an extent the dour North Vietnamese rulers have thus far been unable to match."[15] Still, cracks were beginning to show towards the end of President Ngô Đình Diệm's reign. Wesley Fishel, one of Diệm's earliest American proponents, lamented in the in-house journal of pro-South Vietnam lobby group American Friends of Vietnam that Diệm had "minimized the importance of international affairs for his country, and underestimated the contribution which a constructive diplomacy could make to his own cause."[16] And with South Vietnam subsumed by chaos following Diệm's 1963 assassination, foreign policy fell by the wayside in Saigon, allowing the communists to pull ahead.

An enduring effect of the late and post Diệm years was the estrangement of neutralist states like India, Indonesia, Cambodia and Laos, which Saigon shunned for refusing to sever ties with North Vietnam. This approach, likened by American observers to Bonn's "Hallstein Doctrine" of suspending relations with states that recognized East Germany, ensured that through no real effort on Hanoi's part, opportunities to engage with much of Southeast Asia were effectively surrendered by South Vietnam, a setback which the Second Republic struggled to overcome. During the turbulent years of military coups and regional and religious polarization following Diệm's ouster, South Vietnamese diplomacy lagged at a time when the much-more internationally savvy Vietnamese communists made significant global public relations progress. Consular appointments were often selected to enrich elite military families; as a face-saving means of exiling out-of-favor commanders; or as platforms for rival generals to expand their drug-smuggling empires. In 1967, when U.S. officials lobbied Foreign Minister Trần Văn Đỗ to appoint an Ambassador to Laos, the beleaguered statesman explained that his efforts had been

[15] Bernard Fall, The Two Viet-Nams: A Political and Military Analysis. (New York, 1963), 388.
[16] William Henderson and Wesley R. Fishel, "The Foreign Policy of Ngo Dinh Diem." Vietnam Perspectives, 2, no. 1 (August 1966): 5.

thwarted for years by Prime Minister Gen. Nguyễn Cao Kỳ, who "wanted to …use this post for various profitable activities such as the gold and opium traffic." "Vientiane," Đỗ added, "was by no means the only post where he had encountered this problem."[17] Reports of official complicity in the narcotics trade complicated Saigon's most critical overseas alliance, as Americans increasingly pondered the pointed question posed by Senator Ernest Gruening in a speech titled "Corruption in South Vietnam: Must Our Boys Continue to Die to Protect It"?[18]

Its formal channels limited, South Vietnam instead resorted to domestic political machinations to project diplomatic signals, often by cooperating with ferociously anti-communist northern Catholic refugee groups. In February 1967, after Charles de Gaulle issued the latest periodic French proposal to end the war by neutralizing Southeast Asia, the Catholic Citizens Bloc staged an "Anti-Peace" rally at the Saigon Cathedral, burning effigies of de Gaulle, U Thant, William Fulbright, John F. Kennedy, and Ho Chi Minh.[19] Two days later, the French Consulate was stormed by a mob smashing and burning whatever it could lay hands on.[20]

In Paris and Washington, suspicion that the government was behind the violence was confirmed when more moderate Catholic leaders, eager to distance themselves from the Consulate raid, made it known that they had declined invitations to join Gen. Nguyễn Cao Kỳ's Anti-Corruption Youth in attacking the compound.[21] On March 1, an irritated U.S. Ambassador Henry Cabot Lodge warned de facto leader Kỳ that the episode made South Vietnam appear "immature and clumsy," noting that while "it was perfectly alright for people to parade and carry

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[17] Telegram 10911 Saigon to State Department, November 11, 1967, POL 15-1 Viet-S, 1967-1969 Central Foreign Policy File (hereafter CFPF), box 2764, Record Group 59 (hereafter RG59), National Archives (hereafter NARA).
[18] Ernest Gruening, "Corruption in South Vietnam, IV – Must Our Boys Continue to Die to Protect It"? , Congressional Record – Senate, 90th Cong., 2nd. sess., March 8, 1968 (Washington, DC), 5863.
[19] Telegram 18953 Saigon to State Department, February 25, 1967, POL 23-8 Viet-S, 1967-1969 CFPF, box 2772, RG59, NARA.
[20] Telegram 19058 Saigon to State Department, February 27, 1967, POL 23-8 Viet-S, 1967-1969, CFPF, box 2772, RG59, NARA.
[21] Telegram 19045 Saigon to State Department, February 27, 1967, POL 23-8 Viet-S, 1967-1969, CFPF, box 2772, RG59, NARA.

signs …what reminded everyone of communist techniques was when they broke into the Consulate General and started to burn and beat people up."[22] Though France bore the worst of the diplomatically-motivated demonstrations, it was hardly the only country to face Saigon's less than subtle wrath. After India agreed to host the communist Provisional Revolutionary Government's (PRG) Nguyễn Thị Bình, Foreign Minister Trần Văn Lắm warned that "there are many Indians living in Saigon, and her visit might cause street demonstrations against them."[23] Sure enough, as Mme. Bình arrived in New Delhi, the Indian Consulate in Saigon was swarmed by students who tore down the Indian flag. The next day, U.S. Embassy reported that "a group of 'veterans' staged a second demonstration," prompting an angry Indian communique condemning "regrettable events" in Saigon.[24]

While such outbursts allowed the government to both signal displeasure and channel domestic anxieties abroad, they were hardly an effective means of pursuing overseas interests much less the basis of a coherent foreign policy, as cooler heads in the Foreign Ministry hastened to note. But when South Vietnam began seeking to repair its neglected diplomacy, with mounting urgency after U.S.-North Vietnamese peace talks commenced in 1968, it confronted a strategic landscape that had changed dramatically since the Diệm era, due in no small part to massive American escalation of the war on Saigon's behalf. Alarmed by a spiralling anti-war movement, the Johnson Administration sought to enhance the war's credibility by recruiting sympathetic heads-of-state and troop-contributing allies, effectively bypassing South Vietnam in the conduct of its own international affairs. This initiative, widely known as the "Many Flags"

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[22] Telegram 19263 Saigon to State Department, March 1, 1967, POL 15-1 Viet-S, 1967-1969, CFPF, box 2763, RG59, NARA.
[23] Telegram 7135 Saigon to State Department, May 5, 1970, POL 1 Viet-S, 1970-1973, CFPF, box 2802, RG59, NARA.
[24] [Quotations in original] Telegram 12080 Saigon to State Department, July 28, 1970, POL 2 Viet-S, 1970-1973, CFPF, box 2803, RG59, NARA.; Telegram 12472 Saigon to State Department, 4 August 1970, POL 7 Viet N,1970-1973, CFPF, box 2816, RG59, NARA.

campaign, was explicitly premised on Saigon's ostensible efforts to implement progressive reforms like land redistribution, rural development, and transparent elections. Allied belligerents, for their part, pledged to proactively pursue a peace settlement.[25] Faced with growing political pressure over the war, the White House would often cite purported international support - "the strongest argument we have for our presence in South Vietnam is that other nations in the area want us there," offered Secretary of Defense Robert McNamara - when considering how to "sell our product to the American people," as Johnson put it.[26]

In practice, however, newly-enlisted international advocates of the war were more likely motivated by the promise of American good graces and largesse than by informed strategic assessments, as an Embassy report on Malawi's declaration of solidarity with South Vietnam suggests: "While [Prime Minister Hastings Banda] correctly refers to rebellious elements of South Vietnam as Viet Cong, [he] terms those loyal to government as Viet Ming [sic]. Nevertheless, speech is …possibly of considerable local usefulness. Banda aware and concurs transmittal copies for exploitation to advance free world interests in any way possible."[27] And while the troop-contributing countries – Australia, New Zealand, Thailand, South Korea and the Philippines – were no doubt better informed about conflict's basic participants, they too often explicitly linked participation to American military and financial aid. A 1972 Defense Department report reveals the scale of the spoils, with the two South Korean divisions alone costing the United States more in 1969 than the entire combined Soviet and Chinese assistance to

[25] "1966 Manila Summit Conference Joint Declaration," October 25, 1966, Public Papers of the Presidents: Lyndon B. Johnson, 1966 vol. II (Washington, DC, 1967), 1259-1265.
[26] "Notes of the President's Meeting," October 4, 1967, Digital National Security Archive, document #VIO1818.
[27] Telegram 1130 Blantyre to State Department, January 10, 1967, POL 27 Viet-S, 1967-1969, CFPF, box 2772, RG59, NARA.

Hanoi that year.[28] Small wonder then Defense Minister Yi Tong Won would describe Seoul's Southeast Asia policy as "digging for gold in the jungles of Vietnam."[29]

Compounding matters were the allies' very different domestic priorities. While Bangkok and Seoul broadcast the rewards of intervention in Vietnam to demonstrate tangible returns for their constituents, Manila, where anti-American sentiment ran high, kept its enticements obscure, lest President Marcos be accused of militarism or mercenary behaviour from critics back home.[30] "He might plunge 33 million Filipinos into a suicidal war… just to affirm one's loyalty to a Texan," warned one Manila paper.[31] These intricacies posed a challenge for South Vietnam's eager but inexperienced diplomats. While planning a 1970 Troop-Contributing Countries summit, Foreign Minister Trần Văn Lắm provoked a scandal in Manila by formally inviting the Philippines, which was portraying its role in the war as strictly civilian. Worse still, Lắm summoned Malaysia and Japan as witnesses, jeopardizing longstanding plans to have them serve as "impartial observers" in a future ceasefire and compromising what was meant to have been a private gathering. Fortunately, poor communication in the Foreign Ministry insured Kuala Lumpur' invitation had not actually been delivered as scheduled, while a relieved Tokyo was happy to accept Lắm's retraction. "Although he was not a young man," Lắm was recorded admitting, "there were still things he was learning as he went about his new job, and perhaps he had been at fault by trying to 'strike the iron while it was hot.'"[32]

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[28] "Preliminaries to a Net Assessment of the Vietnam Conflict," William J Baroody Subject Files: Vietnam, Preliminaries to a Net Assessment of the Vietnam Conflict, September 14, 1972, box A101, Melvin Laird Papers (hereafter MLP), Gerald Ford Library (hereafter GFL).
[29] Tae Yang Kwak, "The Anvil of War: The Legacies of Korean Participation in the Vietnam War" (Ph.D. diss., Harvard University, 2006), 84.
[30] Telegram 80084 State Department to Manila, Bangkok and Seoul, December 6, 1967, POL 23-3 Viet-S, 1967-1969, CFPF, box 2772, RG59, NARA.
[31] Telegram 5810 Manila to State Department, December 29, 1967, POL 23-3 Viet-S, 1967-1969, CFPF, box 2772, RG59, NARA.
[32] Telegram 028302 State Department to Saigon, February 26, 1970, POL 7 Viet-S, 1970-1973, CFPF, box 2809, RG59, NARA.

All of this meant that with South Vietnam largely preoccupied by domestic upheaval until the advent of the Second Republic in 1967, the terms and conditions of its most important regional relationships were negotiated in Washington rather than Saigon. This rendered the government an incidental player in its own foreign affairs, enabling it to ignore potential regional partners like Indonesia from behind the diplomatic and economic safety of the American umbrella. And though neighbours were happy to accept inducements to fight on South Vietnam's behalf, Saigon's subordinate status did little to bolster its legitimacy, strategic value, or future prospects absent American support. Behind closed doors, the other troop contributors were dismissive if not contemptuous of their putative ally, with South Korean officials, for instance, lamenting to Melvin Laird that South Vietnam's leaders "simply didn't have the will and the desire to meet their problems."[33]

SOUTH VIETNAM ON THE WORLD STAGE

Though elections and a new constitution brought an end to the post-Ngô Đình Diệm anarchy, the outcome of another no less critical contest - the 1968 U.S. Presidential Election – loomed large, as did impending negotiations between Washington and Hanoi. So important was the result of the U.S. showdown that, according to Director of Central Intelligence Linh Quang Viên's analysis, even a Democratic Party primary win for peace candidate Robert Kennedy could lead to collapsing morale and mass desertions in the South Vietnamese army.[34] And though Saigon's preferred candidate Richard Nixon ultimately prevailed, his narrow victory underscored South Vietnam's susceptibility to external developments over which it had little control. A 1970 report by Presidential Special Advisor on Foreign Affairs Nguyễn Phú Đức identified chronic

[33] "Memorandum for the Record: Vietnamization Meeting with Secretary Laird," William J Baroody Subject Files: Historical Project Vietnamization Meetings, August 10, 1971, file 1971 (4), box A73, MLP, GFL.
[34] Linh Quang Viên, "Thượng nghị Sĩ Robert Kennedy Quyết định Tranh chức Ứng cư viên," (Undated), HS1600, PTTDIICH/VNAC2.

dependence on the United States for military, financial and political support as Saigon's most pressing foreign policy concern. Noting that more than half a million American troops in Vietnam had yet to bring the war to a close, Đức warned that the situation was "disadvantageous for our side in terms of the political and psychological aspects, because U.S. and world opinion has a tendency to compare the strength of a great power like the United States with a small country like North Vietnam, and in the face of this gap, they pressure the U.S. to withdraw early one way or another without paying enough attention to the fact that North Vietnam is the invading enemy." "The pressure of U.S. public opinion has forced us to show goodwill towards peace," he continued, "while the communists invade unrepentantly."[35]

But regardless of the unsavory perceptions that American patronage engendered, South Vietnam had little choice but to clutch the double-edged sword of U.S. aid due to a structural inability to live within its means – a fact Đức neglected to include in his report. Consider, for instance, the 1970 National Budget: plagued by corruption, woeful tax collection rates, and a massive but often ineffective military, South Vietnam faced projected 20% spending increases despite having collected less than 30% of anticipated expenses in tax revenue the previous year.[36] Exacerbating matters, the United States suffered financial challenges of its own when, in 1968, years of increased American exports and expenditures to promote the war prompted a run on the dollar against the price of gold.[37] Though Richard Nixon relieved the pressure to some extent by withdrawing from the Gold Standard in 1971, the gold crisis meant that for the first time, the United States approached the limit of its capacity to sustain South Vietnam. Nixon increasingly found himself subject to the spending restrictions proposed by Defense Secretary

[35] Nguyễn Phú Đức, "Vấn đề Chiến tranh và Hòa bình," July 29, 1970, HS1691, PTTDIICH/VNAC2.
[36] Tổng Nhà Ngân sách và Ngoại viên, "Ngân sách Quốc gia Tài khóa 1970," undated, HS80, PTTDIICH/VNAC2.
[37] Robert M. Collins, "The Economic Crisis and the Waning of the American Century," The American Historical Review, vol. 101, 2, (April, 1996): 414-415.

Melvin Laird, who regarded the war as something of a distraction from the Soviet challenge. Vietnam, Laird wrote, was "purely and simply …one of the major reasons the Soviet Union has been able to make such marked military strides relative to the United States during the past few years," framing the issue in a manner that no Cold War-era President could dare to neglect.[38] In any case, responding to both economic and political imperatives, which South Vietnam's dire reputation only intensified, the United States began redeploying troops out of Vietnam in 1969. Dubbed "Vietnamization" to suggest a constructive South Vietnamese role in the process, U.S. withdrawal instead proved disastrous for the South Vietnamese economy, both increasing Saigon's share of the defense burden while depriving citizens of a crucial source of economic activity – providing services for American troops. Perhaps a necessary compromise to prolong congressional support for the war, Vietnamization generated simultaneous inflation and unemployment in South Vietnam, with military expenses skyrocketing even as economic opportunities withered.

Faced with eroding U.S. economic, military, and political support, South Vietnam cast its gaze abroad, seeking alternative partners to fill the yawning fiscal void. In August 1968, newly-appointed Foreign Minister Trần Chánh Thành delivered a speech at the new Vietnam Council of Foreign Relations, established to spearhead Saigon's global public relations campaign by promoting South Vietnamese perspectives and interests abroad. Shattering the "Hallstein" doctrine, Thành proposed a "policy of presence" in neglected neutral countries like France, Cambodia, Indonesia and India, prioritizing restored full consulates in all four countries while pursuing normalized relations. Bolder still, Thành called for a settlement in Southeast Asia based on the 1954 and 1962 Geneva Conferences - a daring proposal indeed given that

[38] "Memorandum for the President – Redeployment of U.S. Forces from Southeast Asia," Melvin Laird to Richard Nixon, April 3, 1971, Vietnam Subject Files (hereafter VSF), folder 4, box 84, National Security Files (hereafter NSF), Richard Nixon Library (hereafter RNL).

predecessor Trần Văn Đỗ had been dismissed after similar remarks saw him excoriated in the National Assembly. From now on, Thành concluded, South Vietnam would strive for peaceful coexistence with its neighbours, including North Vietnam provided Hanoi renounce interference and aggression.[39] His remarks, U.S. Ambassador Ellsworth Bunker noted with satisfaction, represented the beginning of a new era in South Vietnamese foreign relations, where positive diplomacy was no longer the sole preserve of the communists.[40]

Despite these encouraging first steps, the government faced considerable challenges reforming its long-neglected foreign service. Basic tasks like recruiting personnel with adequate language skills were a persistent problem, to say nothing of finding statesmen familiar with overseas local affairs. Two high profile delegations to Malaysia in 1968 and 1969 were both largely ignored, for instance, after it emerged that the Vietnamese visitors barely spoke English.[41] Likewise, a lengthy and expensive 1967 Latin American tour by former Ambassador to Washington Vũ Văn Thái saw his team arrive in Rio de Janeiro speaking neither Spanish nor Portuguese, only to discover that the government had shut down for the duration of his stay to celebrate Carnival.[42] Six years later, the Brazil mission was singled out by Budget and Finance Committee Chair Hồ Văn Xuân, who demanded the Foreign Ministry cut costs by recalling unqualified staff, alleging that the Rio consulate was conversant exclusively in Vietnamese.[43] Even the capable Washington Embassy was stretched to its limits managing a procession of National Assembly tours to far-flung destinations like Salem, Oregon or Fairbanks, Alaska,

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[39] Trần Chánh Thành. Viet-*Nam's Foreign Policy and Consolidation of Legitimacy: Briefing Summar*y of Speech: August 20, 1968, (Saigon, 1969).
[40] Telegram 35948 Saigon to State Department, August 21, 1968, POL 15-1 Viet-S, 1967-1969, CFPF, box 2765, RG59, NARA. For Communist international public relations efforts see Brigham, Guerrilla Diplomacy.
[41] Airgram A-701, "Vietnamese Assembly Delegation Visits Malaysia," July 24, 1968, POL 7 Viet-S, 1967-1969, CFPF, box 2754, RG59, NARA; Airgram A-114, "Republic of Vietnam Parliamentary Delegation Visits Malaysia," Kuala Lumpur to State Department, February 4, 1969, POL 7 Viet-S, 1967-1969, CFPF, box 2755, RG59, NARA.
[42] Telegram 7301 Rio de Janeiro to State Department, January 17, 1967, POL 17 Viet-S, 1967-1969, CFPF, box 2769, RG59, NARA.
[43] "Ngoại giao Việt Nam: Nguyễn Phú Đức," Sóng th*ần*, October 24, 1973.

featuring representatives who, as usual, struggled to communicate in English.[44] Designed to raise awareness of Saigon's purported democratic reforms, these parliamentary delegations proved a particular burden for the foreign service. By 1970, diplomats were demanding that Prime Minister Trần Thiện Khiêm curtail the practice, arguing that the tours drained Foreign Ministry coffers, sparked media accusations of "junketeering," and impeded Assembly proceedings by leaving insufficient legislators on hand to approve new bills. One assemblyman, a Ministry memo noted, had made six one-month international trips in the past year alone.[45]

Closer to home, the Foreign Ministry found it difficult to coordinate with the departments tasked with economic development, prompting an exasperated President Thiệu to complain to his cabinet that "this creates a difficult situation to watch: on the one hand, the government and the people of Vietnam demand international funds, and on the other, the delegates who call themselves representatives of the people do not have a single project or program to vie for the world's assistance."[46] Perhaps unsurprisingly then, the Foreign Ministry's reputation was less than prestigious, as a 1970 report on department performance suggests: "We need a system… which avoids the situation of having employees who work temporarily and perfunctorily in Vietnam, and who only look to find ways to leave for foreign countries quickly, so they can contribute little to the national cause, and just enjoy themselves."[47]

Inexperience coupled with Saigon's controversial reputation saw a tendency towards association with already-sympathetic and often questionable right-wing organizations. In Washington, veteran Ambassador Bùi Diễm took the lead, partnering with Young Americans for

[44] Telegram 023109 State Department to Saigon, February 13, 1968, POL 7 Viet-S, 1967-1969, CFPF, box 2754, RG59, NARA.
[45] Ibid; "Việc xuất ngoại có tính cách tụ vụ của các Dân biểu và Nghị sĩ," October 9, 1970, HS7687, PTTDIICH/VNAC2.
[46] "Hội đồng Tổng Trưởng 11-4-1969," April 11, 1969, HS79, PTTDIICH/VNAC2.
[47] "Cải thiện Ngành Ngoại giáo," August 1970, HS1690, PTTDIICH/VNAC2.

Freedom to curate member tours of South Vietnam, and making plans to deploy pro-war Vietnamese students and veterans to the United States to shout down American protestors.[48] Asserting that "the war to determine the survival of our people is in America," the Defense Ministry's Psychological and Political Warfare Bureau also sprang into action, proposing a new speakers' series, the Vietnamese American Council. The selection of familiar partisans like Wesley Fishel and the Free Pacific Association's Raymond de Jaegher as headliners, however, was neither novel nor especially inspired.[49]

As word of Saigon's initiative spread, the Ministry was repeatedly solicited by a procession of conservative fringe groups. Right-wing talk-show Twin Circle Headline approached Nguyễn Phú Đức in 1970, noting that "about 40% of [our] programs are in defense of your government and a free South Vietnam," including "a formal debate with Prof. Jonathan Mirsky… [who] is no friend of freedom." "Unless help is forthcoming," host Daniel Lyons pleaded, "we are going to drop the program in 400 cities next month …If something around $10,000 could be promised …we could survive through the winter."[50] The World Anti-Communist League sought $2 million for "Vietnam Report," a monthly English-language bulletin to "popularize Vietnamese political perspectives on the world stage." Arguing that South Vietnam should instead target "the bloc standing in the middle," Nguyễn Phú Đức dismissed the League as "a far-right organization with very limited range," overruling Prime Minister Trần Thiện Khiêm.[51] Elsewhere, more noble-minded but naïve benefactors drained Ministry time and resources, perhaps none more than Freedoms Foundation President Dr. Kenneth Wells. The founder of "Loyalty City" and "Gadsden," model Vietnamese "Freedom

[48] "Hội Young Americans for Freedom," March 3, 1970, HS1743, PTTDIICH/VNAC2.
[49] "The Vietnamese American Council," Nha Chiến tranh Tâm lý Chánh trị, Bộ Quốc phòng, October 2, 1969, HS7660, PTTDIICH/VNAC2.
[50] Letter from Daniel Lyons to Nguyễn Phú Đức, October 13, 1970, HS1971, PTTDIICH/VNAC2.
[51] "Tài trợ cho Tập san "Vietnam Report," March 31, 1971, HS1843, PTTDIICH/VNAC2.

Villages" for internally-displaced refugees, Wells exasperated Washington Embassy staff by promising dozens of charities that Saigon would finance an upcoming Vietnam tour – without first seeking Ministry confirmation.[52] Conceding that it might be "bad politics to discourage a friend," Bùi Diệm nonetheless advised that Wells "was a bit too concerned with seeking publicity …[while] his project was too expensive and required too much preparation."[53] Months later, the Embassy received a frantic telegram after Saigon was belatedly informed of Wells' plan to "send twenty-four million repeat twenty-four million 'coffee cans'" to Vietnam. "The coffee cans," Private Secretary Hoàng Đức Nhã explained, "are empty cans in which Welles [sic] intends to stuff with home everyday utensils like hammer, nails, screwdrivers etc." "PresiRep [Nguyễn Văn Thiệu] asks you to immediately tell Dr. Welles [sic] to drop his plan," the cable continued. "PresiRep has never asked him nor did PresiRep consent to the whole plan of sending coffee cans… the airlift or shipping of these cans to Vietnam will exceed the capacity of US [United States] and would not be very proper."[54]

Further afield, South Vietnam was similarly beguiled by right-wing fringe groups with limited broader appeal. Noting "dramatic circumstances" resulting in a spate of anti-leftist juntas, a firm representing South American military dictatorships suggested that "the moment for a trip to Latin America, for better diplomatic contacts and understanding of your country's problems, is favorable." "I have mostly friends in the newspaper field," the invitation continued, "[and] I am sure they can be very helpful even on the local political field."[55] South Vietnam also featured prominently in Rhodesian propaganda warning that "communist designs in Vietnam are

[52] George Butler, "Another 'Freedom Village' in Making," Gadsden Times, May 4, 1970.
[53] Telegram 0101 AMBAVINAM to Hoàng Đức Nhã, October 1, 1969, HS7686, PTTDIICH/VNAC2.
[54] Telegram 584 Hoàng Đức Nhã to AMBAVINAM, April 2, 1970, HS1751, PTTDIICH/VNAC2.
[55] Letter from Interco Press Agency to the Republic of Vietnam Permanent Observer of the United Nations, December 17, 1973, HS2094, PTTDIICH/VNAC2.

no different from their designs in Southern Africa."[56] Some ill-chosen affiliations risked making things considerably worse. In 1970, desperate to boost his domestic stature through the impression of American grassroots support, Nguyễn Cao Kỳ agreed to speak at a rally for Carl McIntire, a Christian-fundamentalist broadcaster described by detractors as "viciously anti-Catholic and anti-Semitic …and support[ed] by Fascist fringe groups." "I should like to urge you as strongly as I know how," implored a distressed Wesley Fishel, "to cancel this ill-destined trip to the United States."[57] Under intense Ministry pressure, Kỳ reluctantly relented, only to horrify a "totally downcast" Bùi Diễm days later by dispatching his wife instead. When mysterious last-minute engine troubles grounded her flight, State Department officials could scarcely contain their delight: "McIntire had already gleefully announced the lady's imminent arrival," one cable gloated; "The Lord giveth and the Lord taketh away."[58] And in Denmark, the appointment of Võ Đình Khoái as Ambassador backfired after Khoái appointed the editor of Reflex, a bankrupt far-right magazine, to run South Vietnam's information office. An ad recruiting mercenaries to fight on Saigon's behalf resulted in a flood of angry newspaper responses, prompting a government statement reiterating that the scheme was prohibited by Danish law.[59]

Beyond administrative limitations and scant awareness of overseas sensitivities, the Foreign Ministry also struggled to adapt to a changing regional strategic environment thrown into chaos by the onset of Sino-American rapprochement. As news of Henry Kissinger's landmark 1971 trip to China reached the capitals of Southeast Asia, it created what the National

[56] Rhodesia Ministry of Information, Immigration and Tourism, Red for Danger in Africa (Salisbury, 1967).
[57] Letter from Wesley Fishel to Trần Văn Lắm, September 10, 1970, HS1692, PTTDIICH/VNAC2.
[58] Telegram 162661 State Department to Saigon, October 2, 1970, POL 7 Viet-S, 1970-1973, CFPF, box 2809, RG59, NARA.
[59] Airgram A-136, "Slowdown in Plans to Open GVN Information Office in Copenhagen; Scandinavian Mercenaries to Aid GVN?" Copenhagen to State Department, May 8, 1970 POL 7 Viet-S, 1970-1973, CFPF, box 2809, RG59, NARA.

Security Advisor described as a "shockwave."[60] Already attentive to the so-called Nixon Doctrine, America's regional allies scrambled to reassess their relationships with Washington, and above all, with Beijing. In Malaysia, reactions were relatively calm given that Kuala Lumpur had positioned itself as "non-aligned" since 1968. Beijing's 1973 pledge to curtail support for the Malaysian communist movement paved the way for rapid normalized relations by 1974.[61] Singapore's Lee Kwan Yew also reacted positively to the news, though he complained about "the surprise element." Although fears of PRC influence within Singapore's Chinese population delayed recognition until 1990, the Singaporean Prime Minister acknowledged the wisdom of Nixon's decision: "the situation had to be faced," he wrote, "and this is the time."[62] And in Indonesia, which Nixon described as "the big prize" of Southeast Asia, news of Sino-American rapprochement was also unexpectedly measured. President Suharto surprised U.S. Secretary of State William Rogers during a 1969 visit by informing him that, given Indonesia's geography, he did not regard China as a major threat to its security.[63] Foreign Minister Adam Malik meanwhile affirmed that Jakarta recognized the necessity of U.S. troop withdrawals from the region, though he cautioned against proceeding too quickly and called for increased American aid to make up the slack.[64]

With the strategic logic that had prompted it suddenly undercut by revived Sino-American relations, the Vietnam War now seemed considerably less important to South Vietnam's putative regional partners, assuming the United States continued to provide political

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[60] Memorandum from Henry Kissinger to Richard Nixon, 14 July 1971, FRUS, 1969-1976, Vol. XVI, China, 1969-1972, ed. Steven E. Phillips (Washington: Government Printing Office, 2006), doc. 144.
[61] Ang Cheng Guan, Southeast Asia and the Vietnam War (New York, 2010), 92-95.
[62] Ibid.
[63] Telegram from Secretary of State Rogers to State Department, 5 August 1969, FRUS, 1969-1976, Vol. XX, Southeast Asia, 1969-1972, ed. Daniel J. Lawler (Washington: Government Printing Office, 2006), doc. 273.
[64] Telegram from the Embassy in Jakarta to the State Department, 29 July 1969, FRUS, 1969-1976, Vol. XX, Southeast Asia, 1969-1972, ed. Daniel J. Lawler (Washington: Government Printing Office, 2006), doc. 272. See also Lien-Hang T. Nguyen, *Hanoi's War: An International History of the War for Peace in Vietnam* (Chapel Hill, 2012), 137-142, 159-161.

support and largesse. Only in Thailand, where economic growth was most contingent on the U.S. military and fears of Chinese subversion were ripe, were Vietnamization and rapprochement with Beijing seen as cause for alarm.[65] And as Henry Kissinger pithily suggested, in a remark that would have shocked the previous generation of Cold War strategists, "if we withdraw from Thailand, the Thai won't fight [China]…maybe we shouldn't want the Thai to fight. History will not stop if Thailand goes back to being a neutralist country."[66]

As Saigon reached out to its neighbors then, it confronted a region in transition whose core strategic assumptions were increasingly questioned. Reporting from the latest Asia and Pacific Council (ASPAC) summit in 1972, Saigon's Ambassador to Seoul warned that "the conference… could mark a decisive turn in the history of the organization. ASPAC could emerge changed not only in its goals and objectives but in its very nature. An ASPAC acceptable to Red China and also communist countries and so-called 'neutrals' could affiliate." "Unlike the last reunion," he continued, "Korean and Japanese representatives abstained from mentioning [communist] aggression."[67] Against the backdrop of an expansive communist offensive against South Vietnam, the ASPAC proceedings reveal once-likeminded if aloof regional powers now prioritizing restored relations with China, an objective which overt association with South Vietnam threatened to disrupt.

The newly-established Association of Southeast Asian Nations' (ASEAN) position on Vietnam is also particularly instructive. An anti-communist alliance whose membership loosely overlapped with more security-oriented Southeast Asia Treaty Organization (SEATO), ASEAN in theory represented an excellent opportunity for the equally vehement anti-communist Saigon

[65] McMahon, The Limits of Empire 172.
[66] Minutes of a Defense Program Review Committee Meeting, 29 July 29 1971, FRUS, 1969-1976, Vol. XXXIV, National Security Policy, 1969-1972, ed. M. Todd Bennett (Washington: Government Printing Office, 2011), doc. 189.
[67] Mật diện đến số 4509, June 8 1972, HS1919, PTTDIICH/VNAC2.

regime to find common cause with its neighbors. Accordingly, after taking office in 1969, Foreign Minister Trần Văn Lắm identified the ASEAN region as a priority for his department: "We cannot stand all by ourselves, alone… we also cannot rely forever on the assistance of a far-away friend like America, whose social structures, economy, and people's lifestyles are completely different than ours. Therefore we need to find friends next to us immediately. We need to connect with the countries which are also in challenging situations like us to create a strong bloc."[68] But despite the Ministry's eagerness to partner in pursuit of ostensibly shared interests, ASEAN members proved surprisingly cool to Saigon's membership appeals. Singapore Foreign Minister Sinnathamby Rajaratnam was found "lacking in sympathy" by a jilted South Vietnamese delegation after he warned during a 1969 ASEAN conference that expanding too quickly to include South Vietnam would see the association's "potentiality" exceed its "capacity."[69] In response, irritated Presidential Special Advisor on Foreign Affairs Nguyễn Phú Đức spurned a 1971 Singaporean proposal to open a South Vietnamese trade office, dismissing Singapore as "just a tiny country with a smaller population than Saigon." Proceeding to list a litany of grievances, Đức recalled that in addition to rejecting South Vietnam's ASEAN membership, Singapore opposed U.S. intervention in Laos and Cambodia, and refused to open an Embassy despite South Vietnamese representation in Singapore since 1954.[70]

Indonesia, on the other hand, sought to boost its regional prestige by issuing proactive if vague public appeals for peace in Vietnam.[71] As such, Jakarta was happy to consider accepting South Vietnam into ASEAN – provided not only North Vietnam but also the Provisional

[68] Trần Văn Lắm, "Hiệp hội các Quốc gia Đông Nam Á-Châu (ASEAN)," March 7, 1970, HS1681, PTTDIICH/VNAC2.
[69] Ibid.
[70] Nguyễn Phú Đức, "Tân Gia Ba muốn mở một Tòa Đại diện Thương mại tại Sài Gòn," October 8, 1971, HS1975, PTTDIICH/VNAC2.
[71] Guan, Southeast Asia and the Vietnam War, 80.

Revolutionary Government be admitted too. [72] This proposal was anathema to the very premise of Saigon's diplomacy, which rejected out of hand communist claims that the P.R.G. represented South Vietnam's sole legitimate government. And unlike Singapore, Indonesia could hardly be disregarded as "just a tiny country." Fortunately for Saigon, Trần Văn Lắm reported, Indonesia had "turned towards the free world" with the 1965 extermination of at least half a million suspected Communist Party sympathizers, and was now privately sympathetic to South Vietnamese concerns. Still, Lắm cautioned, because "[Indonesian] public opinion was still poisoned by communist propaganda," restoring relations with Jakarta required careful clandestine diplomacy.[73] This delicate understanding was jeopardized when Lắm's predecessor Trần Văn Đỗ accidently disclosed the ongoing secret talks with Suharto, dooming parallel American efforts to enlist the General's help in moderating Hanoi's position.[74] Relations with Jakarta gradually recovered, though there was little South Vietnam could do to maneuver Singapore or Indonesia's strict public stances on ASEAN membership.

Perhaps unexpectedly for an association of anti-communist recipients of ample American military aid, ASEAN also took initiative, suggesting the warring Vietnamese parties resolve their differences peacefully through the vaguely-specified "neutralization" of the region.[75] To that end, sounding rather similar to Charles de Gaulle, Thai Foreign Minister Thanat Khoman proclaimed Southeast Asia "a region of peace" in a 1971 address, requesting that "foreign powers stop intervening in the region and respect its neutrality."[76] Initiated largely at Malaysian and Indonesian behest and with the enthusiastic support of the Philippines, the peace plan was

[72] Trần Văn Lắm, "Hiệp hội các Quốc gia Đông Nam Á-Châu (ASEAN)," March 7, 1970, HS1681, PTTDIICH/VNAC2.
[73] Trần Văn Lắm, "Phái đoàn Indonesia," October 17, 1969, HS2053, PTTDIICH/VNAC2.
[74] Telegram 4285 Jakarta to State Department, January 26, 1968, POL 15-1 Viet-S, CFPF, RG59, NARA.
[75] Special ASEAN Foreign Minister's Meeting, "1971 Zone of Peace, Freedom and Neutrality Declaration," November 27, 1971. http://cil.nus.edu.sg/rp/pdf/1971ZoneofPeaceFreedomandNeutralityDeclaration-pdf.pdf (accessed August 15, 2015).
[76] Trần Văn Lắm, "Tuyên ngôn Trung lập hóa Đông Nam Á," November 12, 1971, HS1921, PTTDIICH/VNAC2.

thin on details and never likely to win favor in Hanoi, led alone Saigon. Nonetheless, ASEAN's progressive public stance elucidated both the shifting strategic priorities prompted by thawing U.S.-China relations, and the growing diplomatic and domestic dividends of association with the pursuit of peace.

Privately dismissive of ASEAN's speculative solution on the not unreasonable assumption that Hanoi would never cede footholds in South Vietnam, Saigon's foreign policy corps still acknowledged the wisdom of paying lip-service to such proposals in keeping with its campaign to project a constructive image.[77] But the President and his Council of Advisors, motivated in part, as we shall see, by domestic political calculations, instead overruled the diplomatic consensus, countering with assertive foreign policy principles of their own. Dubbed the "four noes," a phrase that could scarcely have run more counter to the premise of positive diplomacy, Thiệu's pledge to forbid territorial concessions, negotiations, coalition government, and communist or "neutralist" activity precluded even the appearance of considering ASEAN and others' peace plans. Though his gesture may have reassured an anxious domestic base, it only reinforced South Vietnam's perceived recalcitrance, prompting colleagues like Lower House Defense Committee Chair Trần Văn Đôn to insist that the four noes "be recast in a more positive context to appeal to international opinion."[78]

But while Saigon's apparent obstreperousness was out of touch with the new regional zeitgeist, the failure to inspire neighborly solidarity owed more to an incongruous strategic transition. Its symbolic value eroding as the Domino Theory's currency waned, South Vietnam offered little to an area recalibrating geopolitical assumptions in anticipation of China's restored standing. Likewise, though Saigon's repressed opposition shared ASEAN's zeal for negotiations

[77] Nguyễn Phú Đức, "Đề nghị để vãn hôi hòa bình tại Việt Nam," July 31, 1972, HS1922, PTTDIICH/VNAC2.
[78] Telegram 17397 Saigon to State Department, November 2, 1971, POL 15-1 Viet-S, 1970-1973, CFPF, box 2813, RG59, NARA.

with the North, the notion of a settlement based on regional neutrality held little appeal for the hardline supporters of a President grasping for military and political survival.[79] With shifting regional calculations elevating both the international rewards and domestic costs of appearing to embrace peace, the Foreign Ministry struggled to balance these competing imperatives, its efforts undercut at home while forsaken abroad.

DOMESTIC PARADOXES

In the spring of 1966, the second Buddhist uprising in three years saw the cities of Đà Nẵng and Huế effectively lost to central government control after anti-military protests by monks, students, teachers, civil servants and even the Mayor of Đà Nẵng. Order was restored only by force following weeks of intense street-to-street fighting. Dangling a carrot after brandishing the stick, Prime Minister Nguyễn Cao Kỳ sought to placate a skeptical public by promising elections and a new constitution. His pledges were also intended to reassure voters in the United States, where doubts about the war were fuelled by the revived Buddhist-led insurgency. During a 1966 encounter in Honolulu, President Johnson was explicit that continued support for South Vietnam hinged on the appearance of domestic reform.[80] Well aware of a growing global audience, liberal politicians like Lý Quí Chung leveraged American scrutiny into military concessions on the constitution, calculating that pressure to present Johnson with a finished draft at the upcoming Guam Conference would force Kỳ's hand.[81]

To be sure, the elections scheduled for September 1967 were a considerable gamble for the United States and the South Vietnamese military, risking the possibility that political competition could spiral out of control, in turn provoking another counterproductive military

[79] Tran Thi Lien, "The Challenge for Peace Within South Vietnam's Catholic Community: A History of Peace Activism," Peace & Change 38, no. 4 (October 2013).
[80] "The Declaration of Honolulu," February 8, 1966, Public Papers of the Presidents: Lyndon B. Johnson, 1966 vol. I (Washington, DC, 1967), 153-157.
[81] Lý Quí Chung, Hồi Ký Không Tên (Ho Chi Minh City, 2004): 109-110.

coup. We "ought to take out coup insurance against this risk," one White House memo suggested.[82] But given the growing pressure for reform from constituents on both sides of the Pacific, Washington and Saigon had few alternatives. "The next two or three years will be crucial for the Vietnamese and American people," observed Phan Quang Đán, a respected politician known for his arrest and torture under Ngô Đình Diệm. "The new government must have wide popular support," Đán reiterated, "so it can undertake necessary reforms and introduce new programs."[83] Still, while the elections were an acknowledgment that Saigon's credibility abroad was contingent on popular support at home, they were intended strictly to legitimize rather than replace the incumbent authority. As Ambassador Henry Cabot Lodge argued, "the military is the only group which has experience or competence in managing the country… [they] will need to run the country for some time, and if we give any real power to civilians, the military will overthrow the government."[84]

Given these conservative objectives, it was perhaps unsurprising how quickly the public relations component of the September contests was tarnished. Reports from the provinces of threats, harassment, and the transfer or demotion of civilian candidate supporters soon reached the capital, prompting appeals for American intervention to guarantee a fair result.[85] Press censorship, meanwhile, proceeded without interruption despite having been proscribed since April by the new constitution. The repression of their peers drew the predictable ire of American correspondents, with the Washington Evening Star, for instance, reporting that "erratic, illogical and arbitrary" military censorship was imposed even on the remarks of both the Foreign Minister

[82] "Memorandum on Action Program to Promote a Favorable Political Evolution in Saigon," White House to State Department, January 13, 1967, POL U.S.-Viet-S 1967-1969, CFPF, box 2670, RG59, NARA.
[83] Telegram 15816 Saigon to State Department, January 17, 1967, POL 15 Viet-S, 1967-1969, CFPF, box 2768, RG59, NARA.
[84] Telegram 17704 Saigon to State Department, February 9, 1967, POL 14 Viet-S, 1967-1969, CFPF, box 2757, RG59, NARA.
[85] Võ Long Triều, Hồi ký T*ập hai: Đệ* nhị Việt Nam Cộng Hòa (Lexington, KY, 2010), 70.

and Prime Minister Kỳ himself.[86] Unable to air grievances at home, Saigon's increasingly savvy opposition turned instead to American outlets, with candidates like Âu Trường Thanh providing copy for anti-war ads in the New York Times. "Is this what 12,000 Americans have died for"? inquired one example complete with reproductions of censored Saigon Post columns.[87] And when the Embassy finally prevailed upon the generals to relax press censorship in June, an outpouring of anti-military articles immediately followed.[88] Before it had even formally begun then, the election had already been discredited by the very audience whose loyalty it was staged to recover. As Lower House candidate Lý Quí Chung recalled, "nobody believed the election would be carried out honestly."[89]

Sure enough, amid reports of rampant electoral fraud, the military capitalized on its vast financial and organizational advantages, administering victory against a divided civilian field, albeit with just 34% of the vote. The big surprise was a second place showing for lawyer Trương Đình Dzu, who cleverly campaigned for peace negotiations only after his candidacy was approved. Days later, he was detained on "politically-motivated" five-year-old currency trading charges, according to the Embassy, and then placed under indefinite "protective custody" following the 1968 Tet Offensive. By now a well-known symbolic figure, Dzu's questionable arrest further undermined the compromised rehabilitation of South Vietnam's dismal international image.[90]

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[86] Richard Critchfield, "Saigon's Censors Busy in Spite of Constitution," Washington Evening Star, May 2, 1967.
[87] National Committee for a SANE Nuclear Policy, "Is This What 12,000 Americans Have Died For"? New York Times, July 18, 1967.
[88] Telegram 03738 Saigon to State Department, August 16, 1967, POL 14 Viet-S, 1967-1969, CFPF, box 2758, RG59, NARA.
[89] Lý Quý Chung, *Hồi ký Không Tên*, 114.
[90] Telegram 20174 Saigon to State Department, February 22, 1968, POL U.S.-Viet-S, 1967-1969, CFPF, box 2670, RG59, NARA; Charles Joiner, The Politics of Massacre: Political Processes in South Vietnam. (Philadelphia, 1974), 268. For Embassy view of charges against Trương Đình Dzu see Airgram A-568, "Arrest of Prominent Vietnamese Lawyer," Saigon to State Department, March 29, 1963, POL 6-1 S VIET, 1963, CFPF, box 4046, RG59, NARA.

Promoted as ex post facto validation of the war, the elections instead served only to complicate South Vietnam's rebranding campaign, confirming rather than debunking unflattering global perceptions. The New York Times dismissed the proceedings as a "farce," while the Baltimore Sun labelled them "a grim comedy." The British Guardian offered a slightly more charitable interpretation, describing the contest as "less of a charade than expected."[91] International election monitors came away equally unimpressed. Sa Kwang Uk, a judge chairing the South Korean Central Election Management Committee tasked with overseeing the Assembly vote, shared his observations in Chosun Ilbo newspaper: "There were neither watchers, nor voters' slips. Anyone producing a citizenship card was issued 59 ballot papers representing candidates. Each voter chose seven and deposited them in ballot boxes. The remaining 52 he threw away. The remaining ballot papers, if just put into the boxes, could have been counted as valid… the tallies results were simply radioed or telephoned from counties to provincial seats, and onto Saigon for final summing up… if an election were held in Korea that way, popular protests would rock the whole nation."[92] Australian External Affairs Minister Paul Hasluck, meanwhile, regretted that South Vietnam had "so quickly undermined the positive image that came as a result of announcing the election."[93] Within South Vietnam, however, expectations had always been tempered. Trần Văn Tuyến, a prominent lawyer associated with the Vietnamese Nationalist Party perhaps best captured the prevailing mood: "I am anxious to note that the Second Republic is deficient at its very beginning and that its existence is seriously threatened at its very birth… but in the midst of the current political chaos, having something in

[91] "Editorial: Heads we Win, Tails you Lose," New York Times, August 3, 1967; "Editorial: Grim Comedy," Baltimore Sun, August 4, 1967; "Editorial: Less of a Charade than Expected," The Guardian, September 6, 1967.
[92] Airgram A-145, "Vietnam Elections: Comments by Chairman of Korean Central Election Management Committee," Seoul to State Department, September 19, 1967, POL 18 Viet-S, 1967-1969, CFPF, box 2760, RG59, NARA.
[93] "Memorandum of Conversation: Foreign Secretary Paul Hasluck's call on Under Secretary Katzenbach," October 12, 1967, POL 14 Viet-S, 1967-1969, CFPF, box 2761, RG59, NARA.

hand is better than void and nothingness."[94] And indeed, despite blatant military interference, the elections nonetheless brought an end to the tumult subsuming South Vietnamese politics after Diệm's assassination, restoring a legal basis, however haltingly observed, for military rule. Still, as a platform for public promotion and for distancing South Vietnam from its communist competitors, the exercise was a substantial disappointment.

Having surprised observers by supplanting rival Nguyễn Cao Kỳ, Nguyễn Văn Thiệu's position was still by no means secure even as he assumed the Presidency. Aloof, uncharismatic, and with no regional or religious base, he enjoyed less military support than the gregarious Kỳ. Instead, presenting himself as a sober and responsible statesman, Thiệu calculated that by professing to uphold the constitution, he could neutralize Kỳ's esteem in the armed forces by securing American backing, at a time when the United States sought above all to forestall further coups. Meanwhile, partly to undermine Nguyễn Văn Lộc, Kỳ's consolation choice for Prime Minster, Thiệu fostered ties with the Assembly's northern Catholic refugee bloc, which resented the appointment of a southern P.M. Helmed by the Greater Solidarity Force and the Nhân Xã Party, the northern Catholic deputies boasted a potent regional identity, zealous anti-communism, and a disciplined village-level network enabling their sweep to legislative power despite being outnumbered. Their intensive lobbying forced Nguyễn Văn Lộc's resignation during the chaos of the Tet Offensive, which Thiệu likewise exploited to replace Kỳ's military partisans with loyalists of his own.[95] By the end of 1968, the President enjoyed substantial authority over the armed forces.

[94] Trần Văn Tuyên. "Vài Ý nghĩa về Cuộc bầu cừ 3 Tháng 9," Chính luận, September 16, 1967.
[95] Telegram 27239 Saigon to State Department, May 15, 1968, POL 15-1 Viet-S, 1967-1969, CFPF, box 2765, RG59, NARA; Telegram 27359 Saigon to State Department, May 15, 1968, POL 15-1 Viet-S, 1967-1969, CFPF, box 2763, RG59, NARA.

But the National Assembly was an altogether different matter. Emboldened by Nguyễn Văn Lộc's demise, northern Catholic legislators were disgruntled when successor Trần Văn Hương, another more-eminent southerner, was selected to counterbalance Thiêu's reliance on Assembly northerners.[96] Foreign Minister Trần Chánh Thành also found himself under mounting parliamentary pressure despite impeccable anti-communist credentials as architect of Ngô Đình Diệm's notoriously excessive "Denounce the Communists" campaign.[97] At a time of heightened alarm over impending U.S.-North Vietnamese negotiations, Thành's call for South Vietnam to assume a constructive peace stance rather than cede proceedings to third parties set off alarm bells among Assembly hardliners. After a series of heated Senate interpolation sessions, Thiêu relented in August 1969, replacing Hương and Thành with retired general Trần Thiện Khiêm and former Diệm partisan Trần Văn Lắm respectively.[98] Trần Chánh Thành's fate provides an instructive example of the Second Republic's foreign policy contradictions. As we have seen, Thành and his colleagues reasoned that repairing Saigon's public image in response to global war-weariness required re-engaging neglected neighbors and conditioning clamors for peace to its advantage, citing events like the Tet Offensive to cast the communists as inveterate belligerents. But though their approach paid modest dividends abroad, it was intolerable to the Assembly's influential hawks.[99] Caught between constituents at home and abroad with dramatically divergent expectations, Thiệu struggled to satisfy both parties, his rhetoric oscillating from moderate or militant according to its audience.

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[96] Telegram 25386 Saigon to State Department, May 4, 1968, POL 15 Viet-S, 1967-1969, CFPF, box 2763, RG59, NARA.
[97] Miller, Misalliance, 133.
[98] "Đại Tướng Khiêm Tân Thủ tướng," Chính Luận, August 24-25, 1969.
[99] Telegram 212148 State Department to Saigon, July 31, 1968, POL 15-4 Viet-S, 1967-1969 box 2768, CFPF, RG59, NARA.

Irritated by Assembly interference with his political agenda, Thiệu lashed out against liberal parliamentarians, in part to signal straying supporters without targeting them directly. Instead, the trumped-up arrests of prominent figures like Trương Định Dzu, Ngô Công Đức and Trần Ngọc Châu achieved an unlikely consensus against the abuse of executive power. Capitalizing on disproportionate overseas influence over Vietnamese domestic affairs, once-irreconcilable deputies reached out abroad, tapping global networks established during worldwide Assembly promotional tours to publicize the plight of their imprisoned colleagues.[100] Once the avatars of the state's public relations, South Vietnam's elected representatives now challenged the basis of the very campaign they had been dispatched to endorse. By late 1969, the clash between legislature and executive was causing serious harm to the President's domestic agenda, with Austerity Tax and Land Reform bills – both seen in Washington as tests of Thiệu's ability to rule – delayed for months by Assembly grandstanding over political prisoners.[101] Ascendant over the military but exasperated by insubordinate opposition, Thiệu seized upon the 1971 Presidential Election to "smash the treasonous, demagogic rhetoric of a minority of defeatists," as an internal planning document put it, conspiring to preclude Nguyễn Cao Kỳ from contending and ordering the military bureaucracy to implement a victory in the provinces.[102] The scheme backfired when challengers Kỳ and Dương Văn Minh obtained Thiệu's written vote-rigging instructions and withdrew their candidacies in protest.[103] Ignoring a horrified White House, Thiệu proceeded apace, reframing the now-uncontested election as a referendum on his rule. Months later, using the pretext of Emergency Powers legislation after the communist

[100] "Hai Nghị sĩ Viếng thăm Hoa Kỳ," April 21, 1971, HS1792, PTTDIICH/VNAC2.
[101] Telegram 25248 Saigon to State Department, December 29, 1969, E 12 Viet-S, 1967-1969 CFPF, box 684, RG59, NARA.
[102] "Tài Liệu Hướng Dẫn về Việc Lập Kiến Nghị Đệ Trình Tổng Thống." HS5652, PTTDIICH/VNAC2.
[103] Telegram 15088 Saigon to State Department, September 20, 1971, Vietnam Country Files (hereafter VCF), folder 3, box 157, NSF, RNL.

Easter Offensive, he imposed severe restrictions on political parties and the press, effectively ending South Vietnam's brief experiment with limited democracy.[104]

Opposition parties were predictably outraged, with Vũ Văn Mẫu's Buddhist slate teaming with Senate Chairman Nguyễn Văn Huyền's mostly-Catholic Lily group to condemn the proceedings. [105] And even once-stalwart loyalists saw the election as a point of no return. Ambassador-to-Washington Bùi Diễm, perhaps Saigon's most well-connected and effective representative, recalled the debacle as the moment when "the search for a vivifying national purpose was finally discarded in favor of the chimerical strength of an autocrat." Confiding in Secretary of State William Rogers that he was "very much at loose ends… over his inability to gain sympathetic support from traditional friends of Vietnam in the U.S.," the despondent diplomat considered requesting a transfer to Tokyo.[106]

The President could also hardly claim ignorance of the diplomatic fallout from arrogating power. For some time, confidants like his cousin, Private Secretary Hoàng Đức Nhã, had stressed that action against "corruption and social justice" was paramount in "improving the attitudes of the American people towards Vietnam."[107] By mid-1971, citing public disgust with both the elections and official complicity in drug trafficking, South Vietnamese intelligence reported that "America is no longer concerned with South Vietnam's survival."[108] Likewise, Senators Mike Mansfield and George Aiken alerted Trần Văn Đỗ that Saigon should anticipate "difficulties in maintaining funding levels," insisting that "South Vietnam needs to prove to the

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[104] Airgram A-143, "Text of New Decree-Law on the Press," Saigon to State Department, August 14, 1972, POL 5 Viet-S, 1970-1973, CFPF, box 2808, RG59, NARA; Telegram 13675 Saigon to State Department, September 18, 1972, POL 12-5 Viet-S, 1970-1973, CFPF, box 2810, RG59, NARA.
[105] "Thuyết trình của Nghị sĩ Vũ Văn Mẫu tại Thượng Nghị viện," September 22, 1971, HS5686, PTTDIICH/VNAC2.
[106] Bui Diem, In the Jaws of History, (Boston, 1987): 293; Telegram 178333 State Department to Saigon, September 28, 1971. VCF, box 157, folder 3, NSF, RNL.
[107] Hoàng Đức Nhã. "Nhận xét về dư luận dân Mỹ," June 1968, HS1581, PTTDIICH/VNAC2.
[108] "Tình hình Hoa Kỳ - Báo cáo tháng 8/1971," undated, HS1830, PTTDIICH/VNAC2.

American public that it has a 'viable future.'"[109] Senator Henry Jackson, once described by Ellsworth Bunker as "one of the strongest and most stalwart supporters of [Nixon's] Vietnam policy," went further, declaring he would "reserve my position regarding future U.S. military and economic aid" should the uncontested election proceed."[110] And Jackson was just one of many Vietnam defectors from both parties who cited conditions in South Vietnam as the basis for their withdrawn support. Days after Thiệu's re-election, the Senate defeated a proposed $565 million aid bill for Saigon, the absence of which, a South Vietnamese spokesman warned, "would probably mean a communist victory in short order." "Our economy is totally dependent on American aid," a government economist added.[111] Even Anna Chennault, broker of Thiệu's secret 1968 pledge with Nixon to sabotage any U.S.-North Vietnamese agreement, advised Thiệu "as a friend" that the Republican Party was "losing patience" with his "failure to achieve the participation or support of nationalist elements." "I think they are looking for an excuse to get out," she warned, "and time is running short."[112] With American congressional and public support dwindling in no small part due to Saigon's dismal domestic performance, Nixon and Kissinger hastened to deliver a settlement in time for the 1972 U.S. Presidential Election, complete with the concessions that would jeopardize South Vietnam's survival.

The election also dealt a blow to what remained of the Many Flags campaign. In New Zealand, one of just two allies covering their own military costs, the unopposed contest imposed severe constraints on Wellington's ability to sustain its support. Already facing a domestic backlash, Prime Minister Keith Hollyoake informed Thiệu that "in defence of New Zealand's role in South Vietnam …he [had gone] to some lengths to state [his] confidence in the reality and

[109] "Phúc trình về những Tiếp xúc của Trần Văn Đỗ," December 12, 1971, HS1828, PTTDIICH/VNAC2.
[110] Telegram 14645 Saigon to State Department, September 11, 1971, VSF, box 119, folder 2, NSF, RNL; "Speech by Senator Henry Jackson," September 10, 1971, HS1792, PTTDIICH/VNAC2.
[111] "South Vietnam Imperiled by Senate's Aid Refusal," Baltimore Sun, October 31, 1971.
[112] Letter from Washington Embassy to President Thieu, June 26, 1972, HS1907, PTTDIICH/VNAC2.

the validity of the elections." A one-man ballot would jeopardize his government's position, Hollyoake implored, which "had not gone uncontested," and would "create embarrassment and difficulty for South Vietnam's closest allies …blur[ring] the sharp differences of approach and intention which, for New Zealand and other supporters of South Vietnam, have always been apparent between the authorities in Saigon and Hanoi."[113] Though New Zealand's token presence hardly tipped the military balance, the beleaguered Thiệu regime could ill-afford to squander Wellington's status as one of Saigon's few democratically-elected advocates.

Although the fateful 1973 settlement with Hanoi enabled a new round of international recognition for both North and South Vietnam, the additional diplomatic support did little to address Saigon's existential fiscal shortfall. Even the Foreign Ministry was ordered to "shed skin," as Foreign Affairs Committee member Cao Văn Tường put it, proposing austerity's familiar refrain of "doing more with less" to compensate for dwindling American aid, which despite reductions remained substantial at $700 million for fiscal year 1975.[114] Desperate to plug gaping holes in the budget, South Vietnam scrambled for alternative aid sources, spearheaded by a lavish 1973 world tour featuring the President and a ninety-member entourage. But the delegation was spurned at virtually every stop, rendered politically toxic by Thiệu's disappointing domestic record. In West Germany, identified with Japan as one of two states with the means to offset U.S. cutbacks, government spokesmen sought to appease protestors by categorizing Thiệu's arrival as a mere "gesture of courtesy," insisting his visit would last no more than a few hours. Unmoved, demonstrators hurled cobblestones at police, wounding 35 officers and causing extensive property damage. Behind the scenes, it took considerable American Embassy pressure before a reluctant Bonn relented. "For reasons of security," Thiệu

[113] "Letter from Prime Minister Hollyoake to President Thieu," August 30, 1971, HS1964, PTTDIICH/VNAC2.
[114] "Phái đoàn Bộ Ngoại giao Điều trần về Ngân sách 1975," November 28, 1974, HS2013, PTTDIICH/VNAC2.

was granted a fifty-minute meeting at a secluded military airport, where his hosts explained that "we need you to help us help you."[115] Arriving in Tokyo, the party was likewise informed that "while Japan was very concerned with assisting South Vietnam, [Thiệu] still needed to deal with a number of related problems, including left-wing protests… and a number of internal difficulties caused by the economic situation."[116] Canberra, a longstanding troop contributor, was even more curt, with Prime Minister Lance Barnard refusing to permit entry after declaring that Thiệu was "not welcome and [would] not be given any aid."[117] And Mexico, with little at stake, allowed a South Vietnamese delegation to study Mexican land reform only after American lobbying, and on condition that its presence remain secret.[118] So noxious was the Thiệu regime that even oil companies balked at offshore exploration in Vietnam, with a spokesman for Standard Oil of New Jersey explaining that he was "most anxious to avoid a situation in which oil company interests were alleged to be a reason for continued U.S. involvement in Vietnam."[119]

Effectively dooming the search for overseas solidarity and alternative partners, the unopposed election fiasco exposed the conceptual failings of South Vietnam's global outreach campaign. In courting external assistance and legitimacy to compensate for internal military, economic and political shortcomings, the Thiệu regime essentially confused the causal links between its foreign and domestic affairs. Given its stratospheric aid requirements and dwindling strategic value, only unimpeachable local support could attract the staggering foreign contributions that Saigon demanded from diplomacy. Conceived in part to assure patrons for

[115]Telegram 05322 Bonn to State Department, April 11, 1973, POL 7 Viet-S, 1971-1973 CFPF, box 2810, RG59, NARA.
[116] "Viện trợ Nhật Tài khóa 1973 và 1974," November 29, 1973, HS7681, PTTDN, TTLTQD2.
[117] Telegram 6838 Canberra to State Department, April 20, 1973, POL 7 Viet-S, 1971-1973, CFPF, box 2810, RG59, NARA.
[118] Telegram 3899 Mexico to State Department, May 31, 1973, POL 7 Viet-S, 1971-1973 CFPF, box 2810, RG59, NARA.
[119] Memorandum from State Department to Henry Kissinger, "Status Report on Petroleum Exploration in South Vietnam," July 23, 1971, VCF, box 156, folder 2, NSF, RNL.

whom promoting democracy was more than mere euphemism for advancing American interests abroad, the 1971 election instead confirmed for many that South Vietnam was beyond salvation.

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Despite the imminent withdrawal of the last American troops from Vietnam, Foreign Minister Trần Văn Lắm professed an astonishingly optimistic view of Saigon's position in January 1973. Looking ahead, Lắm predicted that "the program of Vietnamization will be completed, and we will realize the success of our policies of self-strengthening and resilience." He boasted of his Ministry's achievements the previous year, which included "preparing world opinion to support us… by denouncing communist terrorism," "consolidating efforts to tighten friendships in Southeast Asia and Africa," and "expanding the presence of South Vietnam around the world." A source of particular pride was the fact that all Southeast Asian states save Myanmar had opposed the PRG's inclusion at the latest Non-Aligned Foreign Ministers Conference, one of 168 international gatherings in 1972 featuring South Vietnamese representation. The Ministry had also organized delegations to Senegal, Ghana, Ethiopia, Liberia and Kenya, and established formal diplomatic relations with Israel, with Venezuela and Iran expected to follow suit. Though the forthcoming settlement with Hanoi posed an existential challenge, the Minister promised that his department could secure "massive international aid to rebuild South Vietnam… while guarding against threats to its sovereignty."[120]

With South Vietnam's Ministries increasingly supplanted by Thiệu's Council of Advisors, Lắm's report was as much a plea for his department as a dispassionate analysis, reflecting the global scale of Saigon's outreach along with vestiges of the high hopes once vested in foreign affairs. Behind closed doors however, the Ministry's prognosis was decidedly more sober. Undermined by domestic developments contradicting the basic premise of its diplomacy,

[120] "Bộ Ngoại giao năm 1972 và Công tác Chính yếu 1973," January 10, 1973, HS1853, PTTDIICH/VNAC2.

South Vietnam's quest to elicit overseas political support produced limited results. And despite prescient efforts to reduce dependence on the United States, the Thiệu regime remained perilously exposed to the whims of American voters. Four years after Richard Nixon's narrow 1968 victory had accelerated Saigon's worldwide public relations agenda, "the future of Vietnam" one analyst wrote, "still more or less hinges on the result of the November 1972 election."[121] Even foreign policy professionals questioned the benefits that the far-flung campaign might bring. Phan Công Tâm, an intelligence officer who accompanied Martine Bokassa to Bangui, recalls wondering "why my government cared so much for its image in a country that had no connection with the defense of South Vietnam at this critical time."[122] Phùng Nhật Minh, meanwhile, prioritized internal reform above chasing alternative patrons: "From now on, the task of overseas information should be ranked second. The first and most important task, which demands the most attention, brainpower and expense, has to be activities which will strengthen our national forces to satisfy the two requirements of preserving security and development."[123]

Although the last stages of American involvement in the Vietnam War are often seen as a fiscal clash between Congress and the White House, Nguyễn Văn Thiệu's authoritarianism – which compromised the entire stated purpose of the war – was a critical factor provoking the spending cuts that hastened Vietnamization and impelled the 1973 settlement with North Vietnam. Struggling to reconcile the divergent demands of foreign and domestic constituents, Thiệu pursued repressive stability at the expense of a cacophonous constitutional system, ultimately damaging his credibility both at home and abroad. When South Vietnam's journalists and legislators, the very emblems of the state's self-proclaimed redemption, seized the global

[121] Lưu Vĩnh Lữ, "Cuộc Bầu cử Mỹ," undated, HS1904, PTTDIICH/VNAC2.
[122] Phan Công Tâm, "Testimony of a Senior Officer," 29.
[123] Phùng Nhật Minh, "Công tác Ngoại giao," August 27, 1971, HS1772, PTTDIICH/VNAC2.

platform afforded them to instead decry the "dictatorial, corrupt, rotten policy of Nguyễn Văn Thiệu," as one opposition bloc put it, the effect was devastating, bringing to mind perhaps the adage that "a great ad campaign only makes a bad product fail faster."[124] In alienating domestic and therefore international onlookers, Saigon was condemned to continued isolation, vulnerable to a unilateral American settlement and left with no realistic diplomatic alternatives. To be sure, an effective foreign policy was just one of many prerequisites for South Vietnam's always unlikely survival, subordinate, as we have seen, to building a broad local support base. And indeed, despite an impeccably cosmopolitan scope, Saigon's failed bid for legitimacy from abroad amid spiralling discontent at home suggests that effective diplomacy requires sound domestic foundations.

[124] Airgram A-047, "Anti-Thieu Proclamation by Lower House People's Society Bloc," Saigon to State Department, March 13, 1973, POL 15-2 Viet-S, 1970-1973, CFPF, box 2814, RG59, NARA.