

lieved when he took office that the war was "draining our national strength and had to be liquidated."

It is less clear how squarely Nixon or Kissinger faced the corollary of their logic: if the U.S. couldn't win, then Hanoi, presumably, couldn't lose. Kissinger left many acquaintances with the impression that he saw a Communist victory as tolerable, as long as it was suitably delayed to keep from openly humiliating the United States. Whether or not that was his real view, he certainly thought it useful for Hanoi—and Moscow—to be encouraged to believe so; the Vietnamese Communists, he evidently felt, would surely agree to a negotiated settlement once they understood that the U.S. would not actually seek to achieve its proclaimed goal of preserving a non-Communist regime in Saigon indefinitely. It would only be necessary for Hanoi to conclude, in other words, that Washington did not really mean what it said. To the administration's early offers of "serious talks," however, the North Vietnamese simply repeated their customary demands for total withdrawal of U.S. forces and removal of the Saigon "puppet administration."

Kissinger was shocked and angry at Hanoi's apparent lack of concern for American face. And he appears to have found completely unaccountable the fact that instead of saying one thing in public and something else in private, like the straightforward Americans, Ho Chi Minh and his colleagues kept saying the same unacceptable things no matter in which channel they were conveyed. Others might have considered that perhaps the Vietnamese Communists meant what they were saying. But to Kissinger, their refusal to be duplicitous was inexplicable, even suspect. It reflected a Vietnamese style of communication which he complained in his memoirs, "was indirect and, by American standards, devious or baffling."

Whoever was being devious, Nixon and Kissinger evidently continued to believe for some months that Hanoi would agree to what they saw as a reasonable, even generous, compromise. Journalists accompanying Nixon to his Midway Island summit with Nguyen Van Thieu in June 1969 were given the impression that he had "made up his mind to do whatever he has to do in order to extricate the United States" from the war; the president's and Kissinger's appraisal, newsmen were told, was that Hanoi and the Liberation Front were "just about ready for serious negotiations." Two months after Midway, when he began his secret meetings with North Vietnamese representatives, Kissinger "still half believed that rapid progress would be made" if the Communists could be convinced of American sincerity. As late as the end of September, Nixon expressed his hope publicly. "Once the enemy recognizes that it is not going to win its objectives by waiting us out," he told a press conference, "then the enemy will negotiate and we will end this war before the end of 1970. That is the objective we have."

In part, these expectations seem to have reflected a real belief in the generosity of their own proposals. Apparently, too, Nixon and Kissinger thought the Russians and Chinese could and would deliver a Vietnam settlement in return for American consideration on other matters. Both beliefs