

What happens now? How much room is there for diplomatic movement? On the face of it, there is practically no ground, since Hanoi continues to lay down four conditions for negotiations. These include the prompt withdrawal of U.S. forces from South Viet Nam, and the provision to let Vietnamese settle their own internal affairs themselves. There is some ambiguity in the four points, but the main stumbling block--even if it is not spelled out in the United States' own fourteen points--is the chronic American and South Vietnamese fear that an election in South Viet Nam would be loaded in favor of Communists if the U.S. pulls out too quickly. Essentially, then, the central question revolves around the role Hanoi demands for the National Liberation Front, the political branch of the Viet Cong, in the future life of South Viet Nam, and how large the United States agrees this role might be.

Should the present American efforts continue as they are, with obvious good intention, and should they fail in time, then the onus for the consequences clearly will rest on Hanoi. One dreads to imagine these consequences, but surely they will make the previous military build-up look puny by horrible comparison. Just as surely, any further military escalation will spill out on Communist China, with incalculable results for the whole world. The operative word at the moment is "time". We can take encouragement from the halt in bombing, and pray it will continue at least long enough for the sight of a conference table.

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The Massive Viet Nam Peace Offensive

The long-awaited peace offensive by the United States has begun--or, to those who all along have insisted that the United States has been trying to wage peace as well as war in Viet Nam--the move toward a negotiated settlement has been seen to have begun.