
Marigolds, Sunflowers, and “Kosygin Week”

The story of the Vietnam War peace negotiations is among the most important but least understood elements of the conflict. Serious study here has been impeded by a range of factors: by, among others, the vagaries of document declassification; by the inherent complexity, secrecy, and indeed (especially before 1968) the tentativeness of contacts between Washington and Hanoi; by the difficulties of disentangling secret from public diplomacy and establishing their interrelationship; and by the complicating role played by intermediaries. The task of establishing what happened—much less why—is far from complete. The fact remains, however, that, beginning with the commencement of large-scale fighting in 1965, efforts were made by various parties to effectuate a serious Washington-Hanoi negotiating process. Yet no agreement was signed until January 1973. Various historians have pinned the blame for the long delay on some combination of North Vietnamese intransigence, bad faith in Washington, and a host of complicating factors, from misjudgments in the U.S. bombing strategy to the roles played by the allies of the main combatants. The intention of our article is to examine one episode in this story that we believe to be central: the London negotiations of February 1967.

The February 1967 Vietnam peace initiatives, involving British leaders and Soviet Premier Alexei Kosygin, were complex and open to a variety of interpretations. The London talks were part, as William Bundy noted in 1969, of an “utterly, utterly confusing” set of wider negotiations and diplomatic moves that took place between November 1966 and mid-February 1967. For Labour Prime Minister Harold Wilson, “[a] historic opportunity had been missed.” (Wilson blamed a combination of bungling in Washington and bad faith on the part of the National Security Adviser Walt Rostow.) Robert McNamara wrote in 1999 that the Wilson-Kosygin talks were “very, very close to a breakthrough”


until Washington changed its policy, “requiring Hanoi to cease infiltration before Washington instituted a bombing halt.” For Gareth Porter in 1975 (as for Robert Kennedy in 1968), there had been a deliberate sabotage of Wilson’s initiative. Joseph Sisco, Assistant Secretary of State in 1967, singled out “that occasion in London” as marking the best hope for peace in the late 1960s.

Most academic accounts of the negotiations acknowledge that there was a significant hardening of Washington’s position, and that this cut the ground from under Wilson’s feet. However, the majority of such accounts also emphasize the extent to which Wilson was inclined to wishful thinking. Insofar as there is a consensus on this still confusing and murky episode, it is that prospects for success (with or without Washington’s hardening of position) were poor. Hanoi’s intransigence was evidenced by massive troop movements southwards towards the demilitarized zone (DMZ)—“like a Sunday night on the New Jersey Turnpike”—during Kosygin’s visit to London.

Various documents relating to SUNFLOWER (the early 1967 peace initiatives of which the Wilson-Kosygin talks formed a part) were published in 1983. The authors of the Pentagon Papers negotiating volumes took seriously the charge that Washington had sabotaged the talks by means of a change of tense. They explained that on 10 February Kosygin was given an amended version of the proposed agreement on linking a halt to American bombing to an end to Northern Vietnamese infiltration into the South: “The difference between the two versions boiled down essentially to a change in tenses. The British version said, ‘The U.S. will stop bombing NVN as soon as they are assured that infiltration from NVN to SVN will cease.’ The revised version changed the last two words to ‘has stopped.’ The tense change, according to the Pentagon Papers, “could have been used as ammunition within the party presidium in Hanoi by those who believe the United States would not show ‘good faith’ toward any agreement reached.”

This article looks beyond published memoirs and the Pentagon Papers negotiating volumes. It makes use of key documentation that has been recently declassified, especially in the Johnson Library and London Public Records.

5. Transcript, Joseph Sisco oral history interview with Paige E. Mulhollan, November 1971, p. 23, LBJL.
Office (PRO). The PRO documents, in particular, allow us to set the February 1967 talks in the context of Anglo-American relations and to unravel the complex intermeshing of U.S.-U.K. diplomatic and decision-making processes. We conclude that the London talks involved the squandering of a potentially fruitful opportunity for applying Soviet pressure on Hanoi. However, we see U.S.-U.K. cooperation in seeking peace in Vietnam as almost doomed to failure, not least because of the negative and distrustful state of Anglo-American relations at this time. In order to explain this state of affairs some preliminary scene-setting is required.

By the early 1960s, Washington and London were well aware that the power differential between Britain and the United States continued to grow. Britain’s declining fortunes were obvious for the world to see: decolonization continued apace, Britain was overstretched militarily, and its economy was sluggish and uncompetitive. By 1964, Britain was faced with a severe balance-of-payments deficit (U.K.£800 million in debt) and had extensive overseas obligations and a currency subject to speculative attacks. This inherited economic position shaped the British Labour Government’s time in office and had consequences for the wider financial world. The parlous state of Britain’s economy only became fully clear to Harold Wilson the day after Labour’s October 1964 electoral victory, in a treasury brief that showed that, despite an apparently healthy economy, imports were rising rapidly and the growth rate lagged behind that of much of the rest of the Western world. The new government took the decision not to devalue, instead introducing a temporary 15% import surcharge and an increase in the bank rate by 2% and raising new taxes. Despite this action, the pound faced its first speculative attack in November 1964. Fearing an assault on the pound might lead to an attack on the dollar and that Britain might significantly reduce its overseas commitments, the Johnson administration was resigned to helping sterling by underwriting the pound, and it arranged U.S.$3 billion of credit for Britain that included an American contribution of $1 billion. The United States also bailed the pound out in July 1965 and July 1966. Britain’s economic dependence on the United States thus became even deeper. Nevertheless, the British considered this unequal relationship with the United States a price worth paying if it meant that they could maintain some influence on the world stage.

On becoming prime minister, Harold Wilson was adamant that the Anglo-American alliance should remain at the center of British foreign policy. He did, however, begin to speak of a close, rather than a special relationship, one based

10. Ibid, 131–35.
11. By November 1967, the United States was prepared to “think the unthinkable” and let the British devalue the pound from U.S.$2.80 to $2.40. This was followed in January 1968 with the announcement from London that Britain would withdraw all its forces from the Far East (except Hong Kong) and the Persian Gulf by 1971.
not on “nostalgia of our imperial age” but on “the only things that matter, unity of purpose, and unity of our objectives.” But exactly what did Wilson mean by a “close” relationship with the United States? Certainly he did not mean that he was any less committed to the fundamentals of the Anglo-American alliance. Despite Labour Party election-manifesto promises to the contrary, Wilson’s government was happy for the special nuclear relationship with the United States to continue and was prepared to co-operate with the United States on NATO, disarmament, and economic matters.

The new prime minister hoped, however, to establish a different approach from his predecessors. He envisaged a more informal relationship between himself and the American president and between leading officials. In his mind, regular face-to-face meetings and frequent telephone conversations, facilitated by speedy transatlantic flights and modern communications, would ensure that the two leaders were kept up to date on each other’s thinking. Clearly, this fitted into Wilson’s image of himself acting as a world statesman, capitalizing on his contacts in Washington and Moscow to be an “honest broker” between East and West.

Ultimately, due to Britain’s declining military and economic fortunes, Wilson’s vision of a “close” relationship depended to a large extent on a close personal relationship with Johnson. The wish for a greater degree of informality in transatlantic relations, fostered by an intimate relationship between himself and Johnson, was not to be fulfilled. As we now know, the personal relationship between Wilson and Johnson was not as friendly as the prime minister had hoped. As early as March 1965, David Bruce, U.S. Ambassador to Great Britain, described in his diary the president’s “antipathy” for the prime minister. Ultimately, the two had little in common save their obsession with politics. Publicly, this did not show, however, as Johnson remained outwardly friendly and officials on both sides of the Atlantic did their best to shield the prime minister from the president’s true feelings about him. Consequently, for much of his time in office Wilson labored under the misconception that his relationship with the president was friendlier than it actually was. In reality, Johnson did not trust Wilson, believing him to be preoccupied with his own domestic position, especially where Vietnam was concerned.

There can be little doubt that Britain’s position on Vietnam had, by February 1965, become troublesome to the Johnson administration. The major problem was, of course, the British refusal to provide even a token troop deployment in Vietnam. A British military involvement had been hoped for, and in some quarters expected. As Britain was America’s closest ally, British involvement would have been a great benefit in propaganda terms, just as their noninvolvement would be an embarrassment, especially as Britain was a charter member of the Southeast Asia Treaty Organization. William Bundy later argued that “[A] British commitment would have made a considerable psychological difference . . . particularly in liberal circles, which was where the main criticism of the war came from.” LBJ recalled telling Wilson in their July 1966 Washington meeting that “a platoon of bagpipers would be sufficient, it was the British flag that was needed.” Or, as Secretary of State Dean Rusk later put it to the journalist Louis Heren, “All we needed was a regiment. The Black Watch would have done.”

But since the Geneva conference in 1954, Britain had steadfastly refused to get involved militarily in Vietnam. By the early 1960s, many British authori-

ties, including most of the Foreign Office, were convinced that the Vietnamese were basically anti-Chinese and that another land war in Asia would be a mistake, and they felt the best hope for world peace would be an early negotiated settlement. However, as Fredrik Logevall has shown, London was unwilling to damage its relationship with Washington by challenging the United States directly over Vietnam despite its ambivalence over the wisdom and morality of U.S. military involvement. Instead, during the Wilson-Johnson years (1964–68), the British government provided limited aid to the struggle in Vietnam, combined with strong diplomatic support of the U.S. war effort. At the same time, they developed a policy of trying to promote a compromise settlement in Vietnam in order to prevent further escalation of the war and attempted to influence the United States by criticizing its military tactics, rather than questioning its wider objectives.

By February 1967, Britain had already revealed its eagerness on several occasions to act as a mediator in the Vietnam conflict. Wilson's mediation ambitions were partly connected to his determination to keep British troops out of Vietnam. He attempted to make his refusal to send troops more palatable to Washington by pleading that actual military involvement would compromise his putative status as mediator. Wilson's keenness was also linked to some extent to Britain's role as co-chair (with the USSR) of the Geneva conference. More pressingly, it was linked to domestic political considerations, to pressures from the Commonwealth, and to Wilson's desire to promote a strong (and inexpensive) international role for Britain. Bruce reported in mid-1968: “The Prime Minister would dearly love a British role in the Viet Nam peace negotiations to bolster Britain's sagging international prestige but, even more, to earn him


20. Fredrik Logevall, Choosing War: The Lost Chance for Peace and Escalation of War in Vietnam (Berkeley, 1999.)
21. During Kennedy's campaign for greater allied support in Vietnam in 1961, Great Britain agreed to send a five-man Police Mission to Vietnam, the British Advisory Mission (BRIAM), headed by Sir Robert Thompson, a counterinsurgency specialist who had been credited with the British success in Malaya. Britain also provided military training in Malaysia, some signals intelligence from its base in Hong Kong, and a limited amount of laboratory and technical equipment, and in August 1966 it sent five British doctors and six nurses to Saigon. See Stanley Robert Larsen and James Lawton Collins, Allied Participation in Vietnam (Washington, DC, 1975).
22. The British were already overstretched militarily in the Far East, with 54,000 troops in Malaysia.
23. Johnson described Wilson’s argument that he could not send troops to Vietnam without jeopardizing the British position as Geneva co-chair as a “fig leaf.” Briefing book 7/20/66, Box 215/6, Country File (hereafter CF) U.K., National Security File (hereafter NSF), LBJL.
badly needed political credit at home.”

If anything, Bruce’s analysis applied even more forcefully to the pre-1968 period—to the years before London’s 1967 decisions to withdraw from east of Suez and to devalue the pound, when Wilson sought to exert maximum international leverage from the U.S.-U.K. special relationship.

Wilson’s domestic political difficulties in respect to Vietnam were, without doubt, considerable. Opposition to U.S. policy in South East Asia had grown steadily since the escalation of the war in July 1965, and by early 1966 the majority of the British public and parliament were against any military involvement on Britain’s part. Moderate MPs had joined a hardcore of left-wingers within the Parliamentary Labour Party who openly criticized the British government for its diplomatic support of American action in Vietnam. By the middle of 1966, protest against the war included demonstrations, personal letters to the prime minister, cables to Washington, and peace motions and emergency debates in the House. Wilson was also beginning to face questions from his own cabinet members, particularly Barbara Castle and Richard Crossman, who were beginning to question his judgment in supporting the Americans on this issue.

As a minimum requirement, Wilson’s critics pressured him to take initiatives for peace. This pressure was acute prior to the April 1966 general election because the Labour Government’s small working majority of between one and five seats meant that Vietnam could have threatened Wilson’s tenure in Downing Street. This did not mean, however, that the healthy majority Labour received in April 1966 eased the pressure on the prime minister. On the contrary, dissent on Vietnam only increased, mainly due to the continuing escalation in the U.S. war effort. Backbenchers now felt able to voice their dissent without threatening the life of their government and felt compelled to acknowledge the fact that by July and August 1966, British public opinion had turned against the U.S. effort in South Vietnam. The unpopularity of the war within much of his party meant the prime minister was constantly walking a political tightrope, trying to maintain a close relationship with the Americans while not offending them as he tried to keep his critics at bay by playing the international statesman.

Generally, prior to February 1967, Washington—encouraged by Bruce—showed sympathy for Wilson’s domestic predicament, especially for the attacks mounted upon him by Labour Party left-wingers. Washington was also prepared, albeit without much enthusiasm or hope of success, to indulge his medi-
Nevertheless, Wilson’s zeal did contribute to tensions in the Anglo-American relationship on Vietnam. In February 1965, Wilson, after hearing of a Viet Cong attack on the U.S. barracks at Qui Nhon, and fearing an overreaction on the part of the United States, infuriated the president by offering to fly over to Washington to give LBJ the benefit of his wisdom. Johnson thought a visit would be “a serious mistake” and reminded Wilson that Britain, without troops in the field, was “willing to share advice but not responsibility.” Wilson recalls in his memoirs that in relation to an earlier reference to Clement Attlee’s visit to President Truman over the danger of Korean escalation in December 1950, Johnson “pointed out that we had troops in Korea, not in Vietnam.” The personal relationship between the two leaders was damaged irreparably by this incident; Wilson’s hopes for a close relationship with Johnson were dealt an early blow.

Still, this did not prevent Wilson from continuing with behind-the-scenes attempts to engage the Russians in a mediatory role. During a visit by Soviet

28. Record of a telephone conversation between the prime minister and President Johnson, PREM (hereafter Prime Minister’s Office) 13/692, Public Record Office (hereafter PRO), Kew.
Foreign Minister Andrei Gromyko to London in March 1965, Wilson raised the possibility of reconvening the Geneva Conference but was rebuffed by the Russian foreign minister, who insisted that the United States was the aggressor and that the first step to peace was an American withdrawal from Vietnam. Wilson then attempted to involve the Russians in a conference on Cambodia. Next came two high-profile British peace gambits: the Commonwealth Peace Mission of June 1965 and the subsequent dispatch of a British Labour member of parliament, Harold Davies, to Hanoi the following month. Such efforts allowed Wilson to assure his own party, and the country at large, that he had made every effort to encourage negotiations on Vietnam.

While these efforts to find peace were tolerated, Washington became increasingly exasperated by British attempts to distance themselves from some of the military tactics the Americans were using in Vietnam. On 17 May 1966, under intense Parliamentary pressure over Britain’s Vietnam policy, Wilson had affirmed in the House of Commons that the British government “was not supplying arms directly or indirectly for the fighting in Vietnam.” Although this was not strictly true, the Americans were extremely unhappy with the statement, firmly believing Britain, as a major ally of the United States, should assert its willingness to sell arms to them “without restriction as to end use.” The Johnson administration felt this was yet another unnecessary gaffe to add to a long list of leaks about private peace feelers.

More seriously, on 29 June 1966, the British Government dissociated itself from the U.S. bombing of petrol, oil, and lubricant storage installations near Hanoi and Haiphong. The Americans were deeply unhappy with this public show of disagreement from their closest ally and indeed had spent many weeks prior to the bombing attempting to persuade Wilson not to take such a step, despite lengthy explanations of the reasons why Britain could not sanction military action so close to civilian population centers.

As far as the British were concerned, the Americans were making the propaganda effort difficult for themselves and their allies by their failure to explain fully in public either their aims in South Vietnam or the reasons why military escalation was the best way forward, and to discuss in private their future intentions in Vietnam, especially relating to peace negotiations. As they had been doing for many years, London regularly requested increased levels of consultation, particularly after Britain was not informed of U.S. plans to use gas in Vietnam in March 1965, a policy that London vehemently opposed. Without adequate consultation on such matters, Britain was unable to formulate its own
policy on Vietnam with any confidence, particularly in relation to its own attempts at mediation. Wilson was even unable to deal with the regular questions in the House of Commons. Although U.S. officials appeared at times to be confiding in the British over Vietnam, thus giving the illusion of a fair degree of consultation, in fact the White House was revealing very little about the future direction of its Vietnam policy and was certainly reluctant to apprise the British fully regarding its diplomatic efforts. For instance, on 6 November 1966, British Foreign Secretary George Brown met with Averell Harriman to discuss Brown’s forthcoming talks with Gromyko. Brown’s “most emphatic point” was “his desire for explicit, specific U.S. guidance for use in Moscow.”\(^{36}\) As we shall see, despite assurances to the contrary, this was not granted.

During the summer of 1966, Wilson maintained his campaign to promote a joint USSR-U.K. mediator role, especially in relation to a reconvening of the Geneva conference. In July 1966, he informed Washington that, in a recent meeting, Kosygin had shown a willingness to become involved. Wilson “had the impression that Kosygin greatly fears Chinese intervention in Viet-Nam.” The Soviet leader was concerned to avoid a “Cuba-like eyeball-to-eyeball confrontation between the United States and China.” Moscow would “have no control over such a situation and they are very worried about [it].”\(^{37}\) On 22 September, U.S. Representative to the UN Arthur Goldberg made the first public statement of the Phase A/Phase B formula. The United States would “order a cessation of all bombing of NVN—the moment we are assured, privately or otherwise, that this step will be answered promptly by a corresponding and appropriate de-escalation on the other side.”\(^{38}\) Almost immediately, Wilson and Brown ran to intercept and run with the Phase A/Phase B ball. At the annual Labour Party conference, Brown publicly embraced the Goldberg offer, with London as a guarantor.\(^{39}\) A background paper prepared for Brown’s October 1966 visit to Washington acknowledged that “Brown’s proposal is largely consistent with our positions, allowing for certain concessions to Hanoi to break the impasse.” The paper noted, however, that Brown favored separate “NLF/VC representation in negotiation,” which did not exactly accord with Washington’s stated position. It was “regrettable . . . that the Brown formula has been surfaced publicly, for it reduces Hanoi’s ability to respond favourably.” Hanoi dismissed Brown’s “previously discredited U.S. ‘peace tricks.’”\(^{40}\) Brown was

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36. Telegram from Bruce to Harriman, 7 November 1966, “Cables 8/66–1/67”, Box 210, CF, U.K., NSF, LBJL.
40. Background paper, “Visit of U.K. Foreign Secretary George Brown,” 14 October 1966, Box 216, CF, U.K., NSF, LBJL.
still consciously seeking to link his espousal of the Goldberg formula to some joint U.K.-USSR initiative. On 9 October 1966, U.S. Ambassador Llewellyn Thompson reported from Moscow on talks Brown had held there with Gromyko. According to Gromyko, “the way to stop the war was for the United States unconditionally to stop the bombing. When pressed as to what North Viet-Nam would do in such a case the most that Mr Gromyko would say was that the response might be different.”

In early November, Brown was allowed by Washington to present the Phase A/Phase B formula to Moscow at a meeting with Kremlin leaders later that month. In mid-November, Thompson reported that the prospects for the Brown-Kosygin meeting were good. There was “some evidence that the Russians are concerned that the United States was getting together with Communist China.” Chester Cooper informed Harriman (at this time a State Department ambassador-at-large, charged with facilitating peace contacts) that if Brown made progress in Moscow, “we should be prepared to engage in immediate talks with Hanoi” on the “bombing-cessation-plus-no-reinforcement-for-stopping-infiltration formula.”

On 25 November, Brown informed Rusk that he was having trouble getting “Gromyko to lay off his gramophone record and get down to the question of issues.” Brown presented the A/B formula in the following terms: “The order of events would therefore be: phase A, stop the bombing, while phase B, which would follow, would be the execution of the other agreed measures of de-escalation by both sides.”

The November initiative stalled, Brown reported that he could not “really tell what this music means.” In fact, as Brown and Wilson discovered in January 1967, their Phase A/B track was only part of the wider MARIGOLD negotiation. The main part involved contact with Hanoi via Janusz Lewandowski, Polish representative to the Vietnam International Control Commission. The Lewandowski channel foundered amid mutual recriminations and mutual (U.S.-Polish) distrust and was brought to an end by the U.S. bombing raids of 13–14 December 1966.

Some features of London’s involvement in MARIGOLD impinge directly on our understanding of the February 1967 negotiations. Firstly, there was the

41. Memorandum of conversation (Thomson-Dean), 9 October 1966, “Memos 8/66–1/67,” Box 210, CF, U.K., NSF, LBJL.
42. Memorandum of conversation (Dean-Stewart-Thompson), 16 November 1966, “Memos 8/66–1/67,” Box 210, CF, U.K., NSF, LBJL.
43. Cooper to Harriman, “George Brown goes to Moscow,” 10 November 1966, “Memos 8/66–1/67,” Box 210, CF, U.K., NSF, LBJL. Cooper, the former CIA London station chief, was now special assistant to Harriman, who from mid-1966 was responsible, as ambassador at large, for peace contacts.
45. Outgoing telegram, Department of State, 27 November 1966, “Memos 8/66–1/67,” Box 210, CF, U.K., NSF, LBJL.
46. Ibid.
Meeting between President Johnson and Prime Minister Wilson, 16 December 1965 in the Oval Office, White House.
complex and evolving Anglo-American relationship. Brown and Wilson felt that Britain had been put in an impossible position at the November Moscow meeting. Gromyko and Kosygin knew about the Polish contact and knew that Hanoi was in the process of rejecting the A/B offer now being advanced by Brown. Brown was furious at Rusk’s cable telling of the Polish peace efforts. In a flash cable, Brown replied, “[T]hough I realize your difficulties, I must say I wish you had told me of this before I went to Moscow. To put it mildly a very valuable opportunity may have been lost. It is not surprising that the Russians were so puzzled. . . . If a further opportunity arises I am sure you will keep me fully in the picture.”

Michael Palliser of the British Foreign Office wrote to the prime minister describing Rusk’s telegram as “disheartening,” as it revealed “a disconcerting lack of frankness with us by the Americans.” Washington attempted to mollify Brown by informing him that “there was nothing on which we could have informed you prior to your visit to Moscow.” This antagonized the British even further, Brown described this explanation as “disappointingly disingenuous.” The prime minister asked to see Bruce about the matter and, according to the British record of conversation, spoke firmly, saying it “raised a major issue of confidence in relations between the Foreign Secretary and himself and the President and Mr. Rusk.” The prime minister said he had been “disturbed” at what had happened, that Brown had been “placed in an impossible situation for his talks in Moscow” and that those talks might have proved “counter-productive” with the Russians. Wilson was keen to ensure that this did not happen again, especially during Kosygin’s visit to London in February, arguing that “it was essential, before he came, the United States Government should have put the British Government completely in the picture without holding anything back.” The British would not be “put into bat” a second time without knowing the score.

Cooper was dispatched to London to try to smooth the waters by briefing the prime minister on the latest developments in Vietnam and conveyed his view that the silence on the Polish contact could be explained by the fact that LBJ was “psychotic” over leaks. The prime minister thanked Johnson for the

47. Flash telegram from Brown to Rusk, 4 January 1967, PREM 13/1917, PRO.
48. Top-secret report from Michael Palliser to the Prime Minister, 4 January 1967, PREM 13/1917, PRO.
50. C. M. Maclehose to Sir Patrick Dean, top secret, 11 January 1967, PREM 13/1917, PRO.
51. Record of conversation between the Prime Minister and the U.S. Ambassador at 10 Downing Street, 12.10 p.m., Tuesday, 10 January 1967, PREM 13/1917, PRO.
52. Maclehose to Dean, 11 January 1967, PREM 13/1917.
53. Top secret record of conversation between the Prime Minister and Mr. Chester Cooper in the Prime Minister’s Room in the House of Commons, 6:00 p.m., 18 January 1967, PREM 13/1917, PRO.
“admirably full briefing” he and Brown received from Cooper and said he felt they were “now fully in possession of the facts.” Cooper reported that London was prepared to accept Rusk’s (manifestly untrue) explanation: “NO ABUSE FROM BROWN, NO WHINING FROM PM.” Although behind the scenes the British had communicated their unhappiness over the Polish affair, in official correspondence the matter was played down.

Rusk’s remarks, delivered in various communications to Ambassador Bruce, put Washington’s view of Wilson and Brown into perspective. If possible, Britain should not be put in a “false position”: “At same time, we were playing a multiple chess game and could not be expected to cut the British in on all boards at all times.” According to Rusk, Patrick Dean (British ambassador to Washington) seemed to accept this. Rusk realized that Brown was “still very hurt,” but “we have to play the chess game and judge the security and role of each channel.” Addressing Bruce, Rusk continued: “You might join me in having doubts how Brown would have handled himself had he known of the Lewandowski matter.” In September 1966, Bruce had given Washington a character sketch of Brown—“a curious mixture of humility and vanity. . . . His brain, in contrast to his appetites, has little tolerance for alcohol.” Bruce saw Wilson as intrinsically over-optimistic.

London, of course, did not press its annoyance over MARIGOLD. Wilson and Brown turned naturally to the repairing of fences, especially in view of negative assessments from their own diplomats about the prospects for Anglo-American relations. Dean informed Brown on 23 January 1967 of Washington’s emerging view that the United States was being taken too much for granted. There was “an increasing tendency to judge the value of United States-European relations in terms of the benefits which they bring to United States national interests.” The days of Kennedy’s “Grand Design” for Europe were over. The February 1967 talks with Kosygin were, at one level, London’s attempt to reinvigorate U.S.-U.K. relations.

MARIGOLD exposed deep rifts in Washington over the value of Soviet involvement in Vietnam negotiations, over the value of any third-party role—indeed, over the value of peace initiatives per se. These divisions profoundly affected the February negotiations. Bruce certainly favored a Soviet role, informing Washington in September 1966 that the “older communist brother”

54. Top secret telegram from the Prime Minister to the President, 21 January 1967, PREM 13/1917, PRO.
58. Transcript, David K. E. Bruce oral history interview with Thomas H. Baker, December 1971, tape 1, p. 28, LBJL.
59. Foreign & Commonwealth Office (FCO) 7/767, PRO.
might “try to educate their Asian comrades.”

On 3 October, Harriman informed LBJ and Rusk of his belief that “the only real chance now to induce Hanoi to negotiate a settlement depends on the influence Moscow is willing and able to exert.” Harriman reportedly counseled that Moscow was unhappy with the war, which—as Kosygin reportedly told him in July 1965—"only helps the Chinese."

The search for peace in this period was quickened by Defense Secretary McNamara's publicly expressed doubts about the efficacy of bombing. Implicit in Harriman's advice was the view that Soviet mediation constituted the way forward, and that anything that aided the cause of Soviet mediation should be encouraged. For Walt Rostow, however, the priority was to keep the number of intermediaries between Washington and Hanoi to a minimum. He told George Ball in July 1966 that contacts with Moscow “should be direct with no intermediary.” In November 1966, Rostow outlined the obstacles he saw generally in the way of peace negotiations. According to Rostow, Hanoi's problem with negotiation “was that an end to terror in the South would cause the Viet Cong rapidly to collapse and North Vietnam thus to lose its international bargaining position.”

From Washington's viewpoint, the weeks of January and early February 1967 were ones of intense and multifaceted contacts with Moscow and Hanoi. MARIGOLD now gave way to SUNFLOWER, which involved direct contacts with Hanoi and contacts via Moscow (including Ambassador Thompson and U.S. Chargé d’Affaires John Guthrie), as well as the London talks beginning on 6 February. During January, Washington became convinced that the atmosphere and indications emerging from Hanoi had changed. On 3 January, a Soviet Washington Embassy contact, Alexander Zinchuk, reported that “[T]here are forces for moderation in Hanoi—forces who think they cannot win the war and that a compromise must be made at some point.” On 18 January, LBJ told Senate Majority Leader Mike Mansfield and Senate Minority Leader Everett Dirksen that he had received from Hanoi “perhaps the most

60. Bruce to Washington, 30 September 1966, “Memos 8/66 to 1/67,” Box 210, CF, U.K., NSF, LBJL.
61. Harriman to Johnson and Rusk, 3 October 1966, Box 212, CF, Vietnam, NSF, LBJL.
62. Transcript, Averell Harriman oral history interview with Paige E. Mulhollan, June 1969, p. 12, LBJL.
63. See Gardner, Pay Any Price, 340.
64. Teleconference, Rostow-Ball, 1 July 1966, box 7, Papers of George Ball, LBJL.
important communication he had received since becoming President.” Rostow was excited by the contacts made via the U.S. Embassy in Moscow, telling LBJ that he detected an “impulse in Hanoi to get out of the war” and to begin serious (and secret) negotiations. He emphasized, however, that Hanoi clearly wanted “direct negotiations with the United States to avoid intermediaries and keep secrecy.”

As ever, Johnson was assailed by conflicting advice. Thompson felt the North Vietnamese messages were simply “the first round in oriental rug trading.” The view that previous bombing halts had been used cynically by Hanoi to regroup and recover was widely accepted. Ambassador Henry Cabot Lodge, in Saigon, also consistently counseled against being duped by Hanoi into making concessions. However, in early February 1967, Washington was evincing optimism. At a news conference on 2 February, LBJ responded to a questioner who asked about the kinds of reciprocal steps needed from Hanoi. Johnson replied: “Just almost any step.”

By the time of this press conference, LBJ was in receipt not only of North Vietnamese overtures made via Moscow (what was known as the Le Chang channel), but also of the “Trinh formula.” (Nguyen Duy Trinh, Hanoi’s Foreign Minister, on 28 January indicated that peace talks “could” begin if U.S. bombing of the North ceased unconditionally. Other demands—for example, the United States’s prior acceptance of a role for the National Liberation Front in any future Saigon government—seemed to have been dropped.) In all this frenetic activity, the precise nature of the Phase A/Phase B formula on offer was somewhat obscured. The first draft of a letter from LBJ to Ho Chi Minh, written by Rostow on 5 January, did not give details on any de-escalation formula, but looked simply to “direct talks.” The United States was publicly committed to beginning talks (in the “Fourteen Points,” originally elucidated on 29 December, 1965) and to stop bombing in exchange for a “meaningful act of military de-escalation by Hanoi.” Most versions of Phase A/Phase B by early February 1967 had mentioned the need for a “reciprocal act,” without being very clear

69. Thompson to State Department, 28 January 1967, “SUNFLOWER 3,” Box 255, CF, Vietnam, NSF, LBJL.
70. See, e.g., CIA intelligence memorandum: “Hanoi’s Reaction to the Bombing Halt,” 18 January 1966, Box 51, CF, Vietnam, NSF, LBJL.
71. See, e.g., Lodge to Rusk, 4 January 1966, Box 94, CF, Vietnam, NSF, LBJL.
74. Ibid, 228, 384–86.
75. Johnson to Ho Chi Minh, 5 January 1967, “Walt Rostow Memos to the President,” Box 12, NSF, LBJL.
as to sequence or timing. Cooper later described the proposals, as of early February, as envisaging a prior agreement for the United States to stop bombing, with “reciprocation” (communist de-escalation, apparently spontaneous but actually prearranged) taking place some two or three weeks later. On 2 February, the following formulation was delivered to North Vietnam via its Moscow Embassy:

The USG is aware that the DRV [Democratic Republic of Vietnam—North Vietnamese government] is sensitive to any public link between a stopping of the bombing and reciprocal actions on Hanoi’s part. . . . For this reason, we remind the DRV of the USG [United States government] suggestion that the stopping of the bombing might take place as a prior and ostensibly unilateral action. Before doing this we would want a private understanding with the DRV that additional subsequent steps would be taken that would amount in the aggregate to an equitable and reciprocal reduction of hostile action.

As far as the London aspect of SUNFLOWER was concerned, “Kosygin Week” was preceded by various attempts to smooth ruffled British feathers. Chester Cooper was appointed to act as Washington’s liaison man in London. A briefing was held in London between Cooper and Wilson on 18 January, at which the British leader was given some general information about the new tone coming from Hanoi and the U.S. response to it. Cooper returned to London shortly before Kosygin’s expected arrival.

The week of the visit, 6–13 February, was tense, confusing, and emotionally fraught for all concerned. A day-by-day account of events, describing developments in Washington as well as London, may help clear the fog.

The week of metaphorical mist began on Monday 6 February in actual fog, causing Kosygin’s plane to be diverted from Gatwick Airport to Heathrow. Private talks between Wilson and Kosygin, recorded both in Wilson’s memoirs and in the Foreign Office records, centered almost immediately on Vietnam. Wilson outlined his understanding of the Phase A/Phase B proposal—a U.S. bombing halt followed by North Vietnamese de-escalation—and also referred to the Trinh statement and the apparent climate of general optimism. He

77. Transcript, Chester Cooper oral history interview with Paige E. Mulhollan, July 1969, Interview II, p. 20, LBJL.
79. “SUNFLOWER and SUNFLOWER chronology” (undated), Box 256, CF, Vietnam, NSF, LBJL, p. 20. “Privately Cooper informed Wilson and Brown of our direct contact with the North Vietnamese, pointing out that it was low-level and fragile.”
assured Kosygin that the “American Government wanted to take any opportu-
nity of a move forward but they could not do it without some favourable gesture
from the other side.” If Kosygin should take up the initiative, “then the Prime
Minister would undertake to impress upon the United States the need to
respond promptly and visibly to any North Vietnamese approach.” Wilson went
further, suggesting that the United Kingdom could influence the United States
just as the USSR could influence North Vietnam: “Perhaps each [country]
would have to go bowl for their friends. Her Majesty’s Government could
deliver their friends if the Soviet Government could deliver theirs.” Kosygin
did little more than play the ball straight back to the bowler. He responded that
the “pertinent question was a simple one: to support the North Vietnamese pro-
posal that the bombing should be ended and that negotiations should start.”

Cooper informed Dean Rusk that Wilson had not made progress. Wilson
himself was encouraged. Kosygin, according to the British leader, “was prepared
to talk business.” At dinner, he gave Wilson “an old-fashioned look” on being
asked if he had been in touch with Hanoi. “How did I think he had been spend-
ing his time since our meeting?”

At 8:00 p.m. Washington time, Walt Rostow informed LBJ and Dean Rusk
that Cooper had spoken on the secure phone to John Walsh of the State Depart-
ment. Kosygin had indeed apparently called Hanoi and secured a commitment
“that they would negotiate if we stopped bombing.” The Soviet leader “then
pressed Wilson to join him in a statement to Washington asking for us to stop
bombing in the North in return for Hanoi entering into negotiations.” The
British considered this to be “Kosygin’s opening gambit” and maintained that
as such it should not be taken too seriously. Wilson refused the request,
needing to consult Washington further. Cooper’s report to Washington on
the evening of 6 February emphasized the possibility of progress. He also
emphasized that Moscow might achieve the immediate goal of pressuring Hanoi
not to use the Tet truce for its own military advantage. On reading Wilson’s
cable, Rostow commented that “If we want him [Wilson] to be tough, he will
be tough.” Wilson wanted a clear draft of the proposals. Rostow was sensitive
to the need for linguistic clarity: “This is obviously a pressure play which we
should take seriously but not react to with excessive haste. Also, if we are going
to enter into counter-drafting, we ought to get the draft Wilson is talking
about.”

80. Record of the first formal meeting between Harold Wilson and Alexei Kosygin, 6
February 1967, FCO 15 633, PRO.
83. Secret memorandum from D. F. Murray to George Brown, “Kosygin,” 6 February
1967, PREM 13/1917, PRO.
84. “SUNFLOWER and SUNFLOWER chronology” (undated), pp. 19–20, Box 256, CF,
Vietnam, NSF, LBJL.
85. Rostow to Johnson and Rusk, 6 February 1967, Box 256, CF, Vietnam, NSF, LBJL.
Meanwhile, in Moscow, John Guthrie met North Vietnamese diplomat Le Chang. The conversation centered on the possibility of direct, secret talks. Significantly, Le Chang declared that the Soviets should not be involved. In Washington, also on 6 February, Johnson had a full-scale row with Robert Kennedy over precisely the issues which were engaging Wilson and Kosygin in London, as well as Guthrie and Le Chang in Moscow. The row with Kennedy may be reconstructed from a variety of sources. The confrontation was personal and abusive. LBJ threatened to “destroy you and every one of your dove friends.” There was not “a chance in hell” of extending the Têt bombing halt. The president ridiculed RFK’s recent “peace feeler” trip to Europe, as the row became increasingly personal and drew on resentment accruing from the serialization of William Manchester’s account of the JFK assassination. Kennedy left the Oval Office at around 6:00 p.m. Washington time. Johnson discussed the London situation with Rostow and in the early hours of 7 February composed a reply to Wilson’s cable. LBJ informed Wilson that Hanoi had a record of intransigence and urged that he “separate the political processes of discussion from military action.” Wilson should not “suggest a stoppage of the bombing in exchange merely for talks.” A version of Phase A/B was mentioned: “Specifically, we are prepared to and plan, through established channels, to inform Hanoi that if they will agree to an assured stoppage of infiltration into South Viet Nam, we will stop the bombing of North Viet Nam and stop further augmentation of US forces in South Viet Nam.”

Even on Day One of “Kosygin Week,” London’s optimism and excitement stood in contrast to skepticism and mistrust in Washington.

Day Two (Tuesday 7 February) saw further apparent progress by Wilson, but a significant raising of Anglo-American tensions. Received overnight, LBJ’s cable was interpreted by the British Foreign Office as—in Michael Palliser’s phrase—“pure Rostow.” The British view was that its tough message represented just one facet of Washington opinion. The State Department’s view, according to Palliser, was much more encouraging to Wilson’s ambitions. (Palliser would have been interested to learn that on only 6 February, LBJ had admonished RFK with the words: “It’s not my State Department, goddamit. It’s

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86. “SUNFLOWER and SUNFLOWER chronology” (undated), pp. 21, Box 256, CF, Vietnam, NSF, LBJL.
88. Gardner, Pay Any Price, 342; Shesol, Mutual Contempt, 366.
your State Department.” Wilson ignored LBJ's warnings and pursued his Soviet quarry on the second day of talks. The United States wanted to stop the bombing, so Wilson assured Kosygin, “but they needed an assurance that would be secret.” North Vietnamese reciprocation “would not be presented as having been taken in response to the stopping of the bombing which would be presented as unconditional.” Like Palliser, Wilson invoked the divisions in the Johnson administration: “[T]hese American leaders who deeply desire a settlement must be able to convince those who are urging that the military activities must be maintained, that by stopping the fighting the other side would not be placed in a position of military advantage.”

Wilson’s urgent tone was clearly linked to the fact that the Tet bombing pause had commenced on this very day. The British leader also anticipated that the direct Washington channel to Hanoi, the “palm-tree” discussions, would address the same issue on the following day. Kosygin did not exactly share this sense of urgency, holding that the “only realistic approach was a cessation of the bombing to be followed by a move to the conference table.” However, if “the North Vietnamese decided on another approach, as a result of studying the United States proposals, this would of course be acceptable.” According to Wilson’s recollection, Kosygin held it to be unrealistic to expect “North Vietnam to stop the guerillas and the NLF from further hostilities.” Wilson assured Kosygin that this demand “was not in the package.” Stopping “the movement from north to south” would suffice.

Following a briefing from Wilson, Cooper was in a confident mood. Cooper later recalled that Kosygin had apparently “bit on” the Phase A/Phase B idea. The North Vietnamese were being “whip-sawed by the Chinese,” and were indeed looking to Moscow for guidance and support. Kosygin saw the Trinh statement as a “tremendous breakthrough,” signaling a clear change of tone. Cooper cabled Rusk and Harriman at least twice on 7 February. The first cable outlined Cooper’s morning talks with Brown, designed to “starch up” Wilson’s offers to Kosygin. A possible U.K.-USSR communiqué should state: “Both sides recognize that successful negotiations cannot take place unless bombing has stopped and mutual steps are taken towards further de-escalation (Phase A-Phase B)” The second cable recorded the offer made by Wilson. Phases A

91. Shesol, Mutual Contempt, 366.
92. “Visit of Mr. Kosygin to London: Record of 10 Downing Street meeting,” 7 February 1967, FCO 16/633, PRO.
94. “Visit of Mr. Kosygin to London: Record of 10 Downing Street meeting,” 7 February 1967, FCO 16/633, PRO.
96. Cooper oral history, 8–9.
97. Cooper to Rusk and Harriman, 7 February 1967, Box 256, CF, Vietnam, NSF, LBJL.
98. Cooper to Rusk and Harriman, 7 February 1967 (second cable), Box 256, CF, Vietnam, NSF, LBJL.
and B were to be “kept apart.” Because “the United States Government know
that the second stage will follow, they will therefore be able first to stop the
bombing, even if there is a short period between the first stage and the actions
to be taken by both sides in the second stage.” Kosygin showed “considerable
interest in this formulation” and had apparently “not understood it when Brown
presented it to him last November.” Cooper concluded the cable with reference
to the direct approach to Hanoi. He told the British that it was likely that such
a communication would be sent: “The British hope that if any questions arise
as to the differences in the formulation of Phase A and Phase B as worked out
today in London, and the formulation forwarded to Hanoi by Washington,
Hanoi be told that the British test was authoritative.”

Cooper’s enthusiasm was clearly growing. Ambassador David Bruce was also
party to these discussions and admitted to his diary that he had “begun at last
to feel a moderate optimism about the possibilities of at least initiating talks
with Hanoi.” However, he later emphasized that Kosygin had not been
entirely confident about his ability to deliver any promises or undertakings made
in London. Kosygin could not speak authoritatively even for Moscow, much
less for Hanoi. Bruce’s (and Washington’s) doubts about the London channel
were no doubt confirmed by Wilson’s reply, on the afternoon of 7 February, to
a question in the House of Commons. In an unguarded moment, and in an
attempt to prevent further questioning about the Polish discussions, he referred
to the secret peace negotiations of December 1966 and to a “very considerable
two-way misunderstanding.” Washington’s annoyance did not become appar-
ent until the following day. However, it is at least possible that news of Wilson’s
indiscretion reached Washington just as decisions were being made concerning
the Hanoi letter. Lloyd Gardner argues that the decision to send the letter,
effectively reversing the Phase A/Phase B formula, was made at the Tuesday 7
February luncheon at the White House.

Day Three of “Kosygin Week” (Wednesday 8 February) witnessed contin-
ued excitement in London, but also an irrevocable commitment by Washing-
ton to the hardened version of the A/B formula. Rostow cabled the Foreign
Office on Wednesday 8 February, advising Palliser “that public discussions,
leaks, etc., are incompatible with the enterprise in which we are engaged, which
includes a half million of our fighting men [sic].” Kosygin made what

99. Telegram from Cooper to Rusk and Harriman, 7 February 1967, Files of Walt W.
Rostow, MARIGOLD-SUNFLOWER, Box 9, NSF, LBJL.
100. Bruce diaries, 7 February 1967. See also Nelson Lankford, The Last American Aristo-
crat: The Biography of Ambassador David K. E. Bruce (Boston, 1996).
104. Telegram from Rostow to Palliser, 8 February 1967, “2/8/67 Wilson-Kosygin,” Box
9, Files of Walt Rostow, NSF, LBJL.
Wilson interpreted as “a very hard-line speech on Vietnam and Germany” at the Guildhall.105

Despite the tough public tone, Kosygin was keeping British hopes alive. During the Guildhall speech, the Soviet leader referred to the possibility of a reconvening of the Geneva conference under joint U.K.-USSR chairmanship. Cooper received an “excited call” from Brown at the Foreign Office and was recruited to the cause of preparing a public statement, supporting reconvening following mutual de-escalation. At this stage, as Cooper later reported to Washington, London favored a twin-track public-private approach. On 8 February, Wilson also put a “Phase A-Phase B formula” to Kosygin and expressed it “in the simplest possible terms”: “The United States are willing to stop the build-up of their forces in the South [following a bombing halt] if they are assured that the movement of North Vietnamese forces from the North to the South will stop at the same time.” The two stages would be kept apart.106 At a press conference on the same day, Kosygin declared that the Trinh formula “boils down” to saying that an unconditional bombing halt “would” open the possibility of talks. His use of the word “would”—rather than “could,” as reported in most versions of Trinh’s interview with journalist Wilfred Burchett—was deemed significant.107

In Washington, the day’s agenda on Vietnam was again influenced by Robert Kennedy, who attacked, during a speech at the University of Chicago, the Johnson administration’s “attempts to portray Viet Nam as a Chinese inspired conflict.”108 On 8 February, the letter to Ho Chi Minh was finally dispatched. In it, Johnson wrote, “I am prepared to order a cessation of bombing against your country and the stopping of further augmentation of U.S. forces in South Viet-Nam as soon as I am assured that infiltration into South Viet-Nam by land and by sea has stopped.”109 The wording was ambiguous about who was to do the assuring. Would an undertaking from Hanoi suffice, or would the bombing halt have to await confirmation by U.S./South Vietnamese intelligence?

A meeting of the National Security Council held at 11:05 a.m. on 8 February saw expression of a tough attitude by LBJ and Rusk. At the meeting, Robert McNamara ventured that bombing “of North Vietnam could be stopped if we got in return a symmetrical de-escalation.” Rusk replied: “We have undertaken dozens of probes. We have been in touch with the Pope, with Secretary General U Thant, and the United Nations. Our position is entirely clear and it is summarized in the fourteen-point paper which we have now made public. The other side is not interested.” Johnson took up the same theme: “We have our people

108. Shesol, Mutual Contempt, 369.
all over the world who are ready to listen. We have pursued every hint that the North Vietnamese were willing to give up something if we give up something. Hanoi is trying to force us to give up the bombing of North Vietnam. We will keep on until we get something from them. LBJ here indicated his commitment to the Phase A/Phase B formula as contained in the letter on its way to Ho Chi Minh.

Day Four (Thursday 9 February) was one of bureaucratic confusion, as Cooper sought reassurance from Washington. In the early hours of Thursday morning, Cooper cabled Washington with news of the evolving twin-track (public-private) approach. He kept Washington informed throughout the day of private talks at Claridge’s Hotel between Brown and Wilson and the Kosygin entourage. Cooper was given notes of the meeting taken by D. F. Murray of the Foreign Office. Kosygin appeared to back away somewhat from the Geneva reconvening idea and emphasized that he was not able to speak authoritatively for Hanoi.

Cooper’s position at this stage was pivotal. He seems not to have taken the Geneva reconvening as a very serious option. He would certainly have been aware of Washington’s skepticism about it. (Washington’s worries about Geneva reconvening had been expressed incisively, if brutally, by Henry Cabot Lodge, U.S. Ambassador in Saigon, in early 1966. Lodge described British efforts—London “simply coping with pressures”—to reconvene. This event would lead to “a meeting . . . filled with representatives of governments who either are like the British in that they are motivated by wishful thinking, or like the French and the Chinese Communists who actively want us to fail.” Cooper was closely involved, from Tuesday 7 February to Thursday 9 February, in the drafting of proposals “in great detail” for Kosygin to take back to Moscow. These proposals embodied the Wilson understanding of the A/B formula and were presented (as we have seen) to the State Department in Cooper’s second cable of 7 February.

On 9 February, Cooper received two cables from Washington, responding to his 7 February communications and giving new information about North Vietnamese troop movements. The first, sent at 6:45 p.m. Washington time, raised familiar doubts about the Geneva Conference reconvening and indicated a degree of impatience with London: “British should be left in no doubt that, while we are most grateful for their serious considered efforts, they may well have to accept results rather than . . . British participation in them.” The State Department worried that any halt in North Vietnamese “augmentation of forces” would leave the door open to Hanoi to continue sending equipment

110. Notes of 568th National Security Council meeting, 8 February 1967, NSC Meetings File, Box 2, LBJL.
112. Lodge to Rusk, 4 January 1966, Box 96, CF, Vietnam, NSF, LBJL.
south and even being able “to send forces in the guise of rotation.” Nowhere, however, was there any indication that the A/B sequence, as understood in London, was unacceptable. The second cable, timed at 12:27, summarized Pentagon information, including the moving over the previous two weeks of “an additional division from central North Vietnam southward.”\(^{113}\) A cable from Bruce to State indicated that the Phase A/B formula would be presented to Kosygin at a Buckingham Palace dinner that evening, 9 February. Meanwhile, the fallout from Wilson’s House of Commons gaffe continued to cloud relations between Washington and London. Palliser informed Rostow that Wilson had actually been *protecting* confidential information.\(^{114}\) Palliser also told Rostow, and Rostow accepted, that Wilson had had to respond to the question in the House as a result of Rostow’s own briefing to the British and American newspapers. Rostow accepted “full opprobrium, although still arguing that Wilson’s use of two-way misunderstanding” was wrong.\(^{115}\)

Cooper and Wilson were becoming anxious about Washington’s failure to approve the text to be presented to Kosygin at Buckingham Palace. (They seem to have had it in mind that Kosygin would consider the offer before his departure from Scotland on the Friday evening.) Washington sent no message of approval. Instead, Ambassador Lodge in Saigon “was informed that we had conveyed a message to Hanoi,” indicating that a North Vietnamese “assured stoppage of infiltration into” the South would be met by a bombing halt and the stopping of “further augmentation of US force.”\(^{116}\) Both the message to Lodge and a statement issued by Rusk at a 9 February press conference\(^{117}\) seemed compatible with Wilson’s understanding of the public-private A/B formula. As Cooper informed Rusk, both Wilson and Brown “think there is a fish on the hook,” though “Wilson thinks it might be a somewhat bigger and tastier fish than Brown.”\(^{118}\)

Day Five (Friday 10 February) promised much from London’s viewpoint, but climaxed in one of the biggest rows in recent Anglo-American diplomacy. At a meeting on Friday morning, Kosygin expressed interest in the Phase A-Phase B plan, though not in any reconvening of the Geneva Conference. Wilson was assured by Bruce and Cooper that the United States would accept the Phase A-

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\(^{114}\) Palliser to Rostow, 9 February 1967, PREM 13/1917, PRO.

\(^{115}\) Telegram from Palliser to Rostow, 9 February 1967, and telegram from Rostow to Palliser, 10 February 1967, both PREM 13/1917, PRO.

\(^{116}\) “SUNFLOWER and SUNFLOWER chronology” (undated), Box 256, CF, Vietnam, NSF, LBJL, p. 28.

\(^{117}\) “Various USG-Approved Formulations of Phase A-Phase B Proposals and Related Matters,” undated, “SUNFLOWER vol. 1,” Box 255, CF, Vietnam, NSF, LBJL.

\(^{118}\) Cooper to Rusk and Harriman, 9 February 1967, “SUNFLOWER,” Box 255, CF, Vietnam, NSF, LBJL.
Phase B plan and, like Kosygin, was less keen on Geneva reconvention. Brown and Wilson were also briefed about the North Vietnamese troop movements. Wilson prepared a final version of the plan to present to Kosygin. (Nothing appears to have been delivered to him at Buckingham Palace the previous night.) This version read:

(a) the United States will stop bombing NVN as soon as they are assured that the infiltration from NVN to SVN will stop . . .
(b) within a few days (with the period to be agreed between the two sides before the bombing stops) the US will stop further augmenting their forces in SVN and NVN will stop infiltrating their movement of forces into the South.

These words were cabled to Washington by Cooper, who requested “guidance as soon as possible.” No response from Washington was forthcoming. Cooper waited until 7:00 p.m., by which time he was “convinced there would be no reply” and that “silence means consent.” In The Lost Crusade, Cooper recalled his uneasiness about this, but also his reluctance to press Washington on an issue that seemed already to have been settled. Wilson delivered the offer to Kosygin before the latter left for Scotland. Wilson, in Cooper’s words, operated “on the assumption that he was in the clear as far as Washington was concerned.”

An insight into Washington’s understanding of the developing situation emerges from a memorandum written by Rostow for LBJ considering “some of the questions we ought to answer in our own mind before we flash London.” The memo was timed at 2:30 p.m. Washington time, with London requesting a response by 3:30. Rostow kept the Ho letter firmly at the top of the agenda. His first point touched directly on the issue of tenses:

1. How do we assure ourselves that infiltration has stopped? (the exact language of your letter to Ho is: “I am assured.”) Possible answer: We stand down our bombing in the short run when we have Ho’s word backed by the UK/USSR. We do not move to the next step, however—“stop augmenting our forces”—until unilateral US military surveillance and Westy’s judgement tell us infiltration has, in fact, stopped.

Here, Rostow was slightly softening the position in the Ho letter. Bombing could be halted on the basis of an assurance from Hanoi, pending verification

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119. “SUNFLOWER and SUNFLOWER chronology” (undated), Box 256, CF, Vietnam, NSF, LBJL, p. 28.
120. “Various USG-Approved Formulations of Phase A-Phase B Proposals and Related Matters,” undated, “SUNFLOWER vol. 1,” Box 255, CF, Vietnam, NSF, LBJL.
121. Attachment, Cooper, “The Record as Available from Relevant Telegrams,” 10 April 1967, “SUNFLOWER PLUS,” Box 256, CF, Vietnam, NSF, LBJL.
123. Attachment, Cooper, “The Record as Available from Relevant Telegrams,” 10 April 1967, “SUNFLOWER PLUS,” Box 256, CF, Vietnam, NSF, LBJL.
by U.S. intelligence and General Westmoreland. Later in the memo, Rostow raised the query: “What do we say when bombing stops or we do not resume bombing at the end of Tet?” He answered his own question:

We shall have to make clear that we can only hold a “cat’s got our tongue” position for a relatively few days. The first explanation that bombing has stopped should be a straight military announcement by our military authorities in Saigon that their evidence indicates infiltration has stopped. This would remove from Hanoi the necessity publicly to announce that infiltration has stopped.

Rostow indicated his view that bombing should be resumed after Tet but also that the negotiation route be fully explored. There must be no “misunderstanding and no claim that we ‘blew a chance for peace.’”

Rostow later summarized the day’s ensuing events. He realized that London wanted a quick reply, but “Secretary Rusk was tied up in a lunch with the King of Morocco.” A meeting was arranged for 3:15. “The President,” according to Rostow, “had every reason to think nothing would be transmitted to Kosygin until we had replied.” The 3:15 meeting involved—again following Rostow’s account—Rusk, McNamara, William Bundy, Undersecretary Nicholas Katzenbach, and LBJ. (Cooper later alleged that “no Vietnam people” attended this meeting in the Cabinet Room, and that William Bundy was not present. According to Cooper, those present were ignorant of the development of “A/B” and thought he had dreamed it up “de novo.”) In Rostow’s words, “Wilson’s proposed formula” was judged unsatisfactory and the following message was “transmitted to Bruce and Cooper over the President’s private line to 10 Downing Street”: “(A) The United States will order a cessation of bombing of North Vietnam as soon as they are assured that infiltration from North Vietnam to South Vietnam has stopped. This assurance can be communicated in secret if North Vietnam so wishes.”

The message reflected the position of Rostow’s pre-meeting memo and represented a partial step back from the Ho letter, which remained ambivalent about the nature of the “assurance.” An assurance from Hanoi would suffice in the short term. The message still caused consternation in London. Cooper had been warned—around 9:00 p.m., London time, while he was attending a performance of Fiddler on the Roof—that a message was imminent. Wilson recalls being told by Bruce that he was near “the biggest diplomatic coup of the

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124. Rostow to LBJ, 10 February 1967, “SUNFLOWER vol. 1,” Box 256, CF, Vietnam, NSF, LBJL.
125. Rostow, “For the President’s Diary,” undated, “SUNFLOWER, DOUBLE PLUS,” Box 256, CF, Vietnam, NSF, LBJL.
126. Cooper oral history, 20.
127. Rostow, “For the President’s Diary,” undated, “SUNFLOWER, DOUBLE PLUS,” Box 256, CF, Vietnam, NSF, LBJL.
Days Six (Saturday 11 February) and Seven (Sunday 12 February) witnessed efforts by Wilson, Brown, and Cooper, despite the Friday bombshells, to keep the initiatives going. Two telegrams were dispatched by Wilson to LBJ in the early hours of Saturday morning. Given Wilson’s anger, their tone was extraordinarily muted. The first (drafted on Friday evening, but sent at 1:30 a.m. on Saturday) outlined the week’s events and requested inclusion in the information flows involving Hanoi: “I shall be in a very difficult position if he [Kosygin] knows more than I do.” Wilson referred to his “domestic politics” problems, but added: “I am standing by the line in your last message to me, above all because I believe it is right.” The second telegram, dispatched at 2:50 am London time, offered an upbeat interpretation of Kosygin’s reactions, which Wilson regarded as a product of his worries about China. “The basic fact about the whole week,” according to Wilson, “is that Kosygin is obsessional about the Chinese problem.”

Wilson was clearly trying to keep the initiative going, despite his anger and disappointment of the previous night. Nevertheless, Bruce recalls that Wilson instructed Paul Gore-Booth at the Foreign Office to “chew us up” on the shift in American policy. It was by now common practice for the prime minister to vent his anger and disappointment behind the scenes via Bruce and Dean. The official written exchanges between Washington and London tended to be much more politic. (The relative docility of the telegrams contrasts sharply with Wilson’s account of them as recorded in his memoirs.)

On the morning of 11 February, Cooper received a communication from William Bundy, explaining that the White House position was in line with the
Ho letter and took account of the North Vietnamese troop movements.\(^{135}\) At 8:40 a.m., London time, Bruce and Cooper cabled Secretary Rusk. They floated a plan, raised during the Kosygin-Wilson talks, for a British trip to Hanoi. Wilson “felt . . . that much would be gained if he made an offer to go to Hanoi with or without Kosygin.” Bruce predicted this offer would “cause a violently unfavorable reaction in Washington”\(^{136}\) and along with Cooper suggested the following reply: “[T]hank you, we are grateful for your steadfastness, persistence, skills, etc., etc., in talks thus far. Believe, in light of our various private ongoing efforts such a trip would be counter-productive at this time. Will keep in close touch. Thanks again, etc., blah blah blah.”\(^{137}\)

Wilson, Brown, and Cooper occupied the day in worries about Kosygin’s return from Scotland and in discussions with Bruce about how best to ensure that Washington did not resume bombing. An evening meeting provoked the feeling in Cooper that he was witnessing “Anglo-American Relations dissolving before my eyes.”\(^{138}\) Bruce described it as “two and a half hours of rather rough handling.”\(^{139}\)

Bruce cabled the State Department at 10:08 p.m., London time, informing Rusk that Wilson and Brown “now feel that the ground has shifted from under them.”\(^{140}\) The record of the evening meeting, available at the PRO, reveals numerous heated exchanges between the British and Americans. Wilson expressed his concern that the Soviets might leak the news and argued that “the Soviet Government would thereby make the British look fools and not knaves and make the Americans look knaves but not fools.” Wilson even threatened “an act of dissociation” from U.S. policy in Vietnam. Wilson indicated that, though “neither side wanted another Suez,” the tense change had pushed Anglo-American cooperation to the limits. He stated that he was still inclined to present Kosygin with the original “A/B” formula. Bruce and Cooper rather unhappily attempted to defend Washington’s position, arguing that the revised formula was not a radical change.\(^{141}\)

In Washington, Rostow informed LBJ that there was now an “A-B-C-D” formula: Washington is informed by Hanoi that infiltration has ceased, bombing stops, Saigon confirms the infiltration cessation, Washington announces that there will be no further augmentation of U.S. forces.\(^{142}\)

\(^{135}\) Cooper oral history, 22.
\(^{136}\) Bruce diaries, 10 February 1967.
\(^{137}\) Bruce and Cooper to Rusk, 11 February 1967, “SUNFLOWER 2,” Box 256, CF, Vietnam, NSF, LBJL.
\(^{138}\) Cooper, \textit{The Lost Crusade}, 363.
\(^{139}\) Bruce diaries, 11 February 1967.
\(^{140}\) London Embassy to State, 11 February 1967, “SUNFLOWER 1,” Box 255, CF, Vietnam, NSF, LBJL.
\(^{141}\) Record of a meeting at 10 Downing Street, 10:40 p.m., Saturday, 11 February 1967, PREM 13/1918, PRO.
\(^{142}\) Rostow to Johnson, 11 February 1967, “SUNFLOWER 1,” Box 255, CF, Vietnam, NSF, LBJL.
February cable from Ambassador Lodge warned that Hanoi was unlikely to accept the terms in the Hanoi letter. Acceptance “would be a complete reversal” of earlier insistence on an unconditional bombing halt. (Lodge did, however, note that Russian influence in Hanoi was clearly increasing.) Washington also received a cable from Bruce, requesting that bombing not be resumed at least until the London talks with Kosygin were completed. Rusk advised LBJ that, despite the “overwhelming evidence” of huge North Vietnamese troop movements, there “remains an outside chance that Kosygin will get some reply from Hanoi.” Bombing resumption would simply lead to the United States being “charged with having broken up a major possibility for peace.” At the very least, the United States should avoid harming either Anglo-American or U.S.-Soviet relations unnecessarily: “Unlike the December case with the Poles, we are dealing with two key and generally responsible nations.”

By Sunday, after the late meeting at Chequers (the prime minister’s country residence) with Cooper and Bruce on the Saturday night, Wilson felt sufficiently confident to cable LBJ about the “hell of a situation” in which he found himself. He told Johnson that he could “only now get out of this position” if he told Kosygin “either that I am not in your confidence or that there was a sudden and completely unforeseeable change in Washington which as a loyal satellite I must follow.” He could do neither, but would stand by the document handed to Kosygin as he left for Scotland. Wilson’s bitterness was now manifest. Kosygin had “climbed out on a limb. Now his enemies in Hanoi and perhaps in Moscow will be saying he was wrong to be misled by me.”

A morning cable from Rusk to Bruce indicated that the secretary of state did “not believe that the matter hangs on the tenses of verbs.” Johnson’s reply to the Wilson cables echoed Rusk’s words. The tenses were unimportant. The “A/B” offer had been on the table since November, with Hanoi demonstrating “no flicker of interest.” Wilson’s 7 February position on the formula was the incorrect version. Referring, presumably, to Wilson’s hopes for a trip to Hanoi, LBJ pointed out his “difficulty” in “giving anyone a power of attorney.” Wilson responded that no such power had been requested—“[C]learly that would be out of the question.”

143. Saigon embassy to State, 11 February 1967, “SUNFLOWER 1,” Box 255, CF, Vietnam, NSF, LBJL.
146. Wilson to Johnson (second cable), 12 February 1967, “SUNFLOWER 2,” Box 255, CF, Vietnam, NSF, LBJL.
The events of Sunday 12 February were complex, occasionally comic, and hectic—a kind of “Kosygin Week” in miniature. Since the events themselves are not a matter of dispute, they may be summarized quite briefly, generally following Cooper’s account.

Wilson’s desire to keep the process alive was evidenced in the cable to Johnson in which he also denied wanting any power of attorney. He suggested establishing a “timetable” so as to avoid a dangerous interval between the bombing halt and the stoppage of infiltration. This “would of course be aired as a possible idea without committing you in any way.” Wilson was, in effect, taking a modified version of his “A/B” formula, presenting it clearly—in the words of the Foreign Office record—as “a British initiative.” Wilson looked to a timetable “which would provide for the cessation of troop movements after a short interval—meaning hours rather than days.” Kosygin was, according to the Foreign and Commonwealth Office record, “glad to receive the proposal.”

During this time, London was very anxious that the Tet bombing halt, which had already been extended by one day, should continue. The resumption of talks with Kosygin went smoothly, with no explicit mention of the tense change. A bland communiqué was agreed upon. Cooper had by now taken up residence in a secret attic-bedroom at Chequers, awaiting word from Washington.

As Wilson and Kosygin talked, Cooper decided to take the initiative. He suggested to Burke Trend, the Cabinet Secretary, that a way might be found to achieve new “diplomatic elbowroom.” Hanoi should be asked to agree to halt southwards troop movements in exchange for a continuation of the Tet bombing pause. Cooper’s suggestion was welcomed by Wilson, though it was clear that it could not be presented to Kosygin without White House approval. After various delays, Rostow replied to Wilson (now back at Downing Street) that a bombing halt would be approved if assurance came from Hanoi that “all movement of troops and supplies into South Viet Nam will stop” at 10:00 a.m. London time on Monday morning. Cooper and Wilson protested at the “impossible deadline.” An extension to 4:00 p.m., London time, was agreed. Kosygin duly passed news of the offer to Hanoi, who made no response. Bombing resumed shortly after 4:00 p.m. on Monday 13 February.

Washington’s view on 12 February was expressed by Rusk in a cable to Lodge in Saigon: “We continue to believe it is most unlikely Kosygin or Hanoi will produce any response.” As Rusk had indicated in his memo of the previous evening, a bombing-halt extension would be a useful exercise in public rela-
tions, but little else. The official Washington line was that Hanoi’s response to the Ho letter (and the “A-B-C-D,” which Rostow believed to be the essence of the message delivered to Kosygin on 10 February) was still being awaited. Deputy Press Secretary Tom Johnson’s notes on a 13 February meeting on the bombing pause revealed enthusiasm for extensions coming only from Vice President Hubert Humphrey. Even McNamara opposed what he saw as unnecessary extensions.\(^{155}\) LBJ’s personal cable to Wilson, confirming the 10:00 a.m. Monday deadline already indicated by Rostow, had a tone of valediction: “[Y]ou have worked nobly this week to bring about what all humanity wants: a decisive move towards peace.”\(^{156}\) In a cable to the U.S. Embassy in Moscow, drafted on 12 February for delivery the following morning, Rusk indicated that any bombing-halt extension should not be interpreted as a change of policy. He acknowledged confusion over the tense change. The British draft had to be “corrected” to conform to the Ho letter. According to Rusk, little damage had been done. “At most,” the Russians “may have been very briefly misled on the afternoon of the 10\(^{th}\) and may have transmitted to Hanoi a ‘will stop’ version on that afternoon based on that misunderstanding, and on the fact that [the] British had handed over the version they sent to Washington before they had our final clearance.”\(^{157}\) On 15 February, Hanoi’s rejection of the offer contained in LBJ’s letter to Ho Chi Minh was received.

In the period immediately following “Kosygin Week,” Wilson put the blame for failure squarely on Rostow’s shoulders. A “personal minute” from Wilson to Brown in March effectively accused the national security adviser of lying to his boss: “I suspect that Rostow himself was largely responsible for the misunderstandings during the Kosygin visit and may well have reported to the President in the light of that responsibility.”\(^{158}\) Other British reactions were more temperate. Brown advised Wilson against raising the issue of Rostow’s behavior with Johnson: “[B]etter not to run the risk of unnecessarily irritating L.B.J.”\(^{159}\) In his memoirs, Brown acknowledged the possibility that “we were too anxious to be intermediaries and didn’t check enough with the Americans beforehand.” He identified the root of the problem as the bureaucratic conflict between the White House and the State Department.\(^{160}\)

The British Foreign Office also counseled against hasty responses and premature conclusions. D. F. Murray felt that it was impossible to apportion blame:

\(^{155}\) “Meeting on Vietnam, 13 February 1967,” Tom Johnson’s notes of meetings, Box 1 (set 1), LBJL.

\(^{156}\) Johnson to Wilson, 12 February 1967, “SUNFLOWER 1,” Box 255, CF, Vietnam, NSF, LBJL.

\(^{157}\) Rusk to Moscow Embassy, 12 February 1967, “SUNFLOWER 1,” Box 255, CF, Vietnam, NSF, LBJL.

\(^{158}\) Wilson to Brown, “Personal minute,” March 1967, FCO 15/633, PRO.

\(^{159}\) Ibid., Brown addition, 14 March 1967.

“[W]e shall probably never know exactly what considerations were being applied in Washington.” Paul Gore-Booth argued that the events of 13 February were probably “not so important” as they seemed “at the time.” A year later, Patrick Dean, British Ambassador in Washington, reported Robert Kennedy’s accusation that LBJ had deliberately sabotaged the 1967 London talks. Dean disagreed with RFK and accepted that Washington’s line had been “dictated by the threat of the North Vietnamese division.”

On the American side, Rostow’s position was that Wilson was affected by “a rankling that we did not cut him in fully on the direct channel.” Rostow was dispatched to London in late February to attempt to restore relations. (By that time, a new row had erupted over what Washington regarded as yet more injudicious remarks made by Wilson to the House of Commons.) In his discussions in London, Rostow talked down the possibilities of successful mediation. LBJ felt that the “best prospect for the future might well be more in direct contacts.” Rostow defended Washington’s conduct in “Kosygin Week.” The revised message of February evening was not a major switch. The offer in the Ho letter (interpreted by Rostow, as we have seen, as an “A-B-C-D” formula) remained on the table until its rejection by Hanoi on 15 February. When newspaper reports of the events of 10 February threatened to surface, Rostow put forward to LBJ several options, including “Let Wilson sweat it out alone.” The automatic White House response was to blame Cooper as well as Wilson for acting ultra vires. For presidential aide William J. Jorden, “Cooper just exceeded his instructions, that’s all.”

Cooper’s own interpretation of “Kosygin Week” was a little schizophrenic, and naturally was affected by his professional duties and loyalties. His sympathy with Brown (in particular) and Wilson and his anger with Rostow are evident from the oral history and The Lost Crusade. Cooper certainly saw Wilson as excessively “bullish,” as he advised Rostow in April, and primarily responsive to domestic pressure. David Bruce, the other American principal in London during the week, had (at least according to Wilson) been extremely bullish as well. Bruce later vouched for the correctness of Cooper’s Lost Crusade account. The 10 February evening message was “a reversal in some respects.” However, there was no “deep-seated design” in Washington. The White House was

162. Rostow to Johnson, 25 February 1967, “Memos to the President: Walt Rostow,” Box 14 (2 of 2), NSF, LBJL.
163. Record of a conversation between the prime minister and Mr. Walt W. Rostow, No. 10 Downing Street, 5:30 p.m., Friday, 24 February 1967, PREM 13/1918, PRO.
165. Transcript, William J. Jorden oral history interview, 1970, p. 98, LBJL.
166. Cooper to Rostow, “The President’s Meeting with British Ambassador, Sir Patrick Dean, 11:00 a.m., Monday, April 10” (1967), “SUNFLOWER 1,” Box 256, CF, Vietnam, NSF, LBJL.
simply more pessimistic than London. Bruce also later declared that he did not “believe Kosygin was in a position to make a deal.”

Turning to the State Department, Dean Rusk later denied that the Ho letter (and, by implication, the 10 February evening wire message) represented a hardening of position. Wilson had presented an offer to Kosygin “without clearing it with us first.” Benjamin Read, Executive Secretary at the State Department, recalled that the British and Cooper had the “A/B” formula “hopelessly garbled.” However, Read indicated that there was “a hardening of position” in the Ho letter and the 10 February message to London: “There was a substantive difference of meaning; whether it was intended and purposeful, I just honestly couldn’t say.” “One or both of those letters [the letter to Ho and the Wilson cable] were written with midnight oil and without the presence of a lawyer and the tense slipped.” Assistant Secretary William Bundy remembered that the letter to Ho had been drafted principally by Rusk. The reason for the hardening of position was that “sensitive intelligence” pointed to the pressure of three North Vietnamese divisions poised to move South across the DMZ: “[I]f we allowed a time gap [between the bombing halt and the end of infiltration] they could put the three divisions across and then say ‘Fine,’ insist upon no more moving and them with three divisions.” According to Bundy, “[W]e had, in effect, to have Wilson give the same message to Kosygin that the President had sent in the letter to Ho, but without telling Wilson or Kosygin, but Wilson particularly, about the letter because the President just didn’t trust Wilson.” Johnson “became very excited because obviously it couldn’t be inconsistent, and they didn’t in London know the difference.” In the event, “Wilson jumped the gun.” For Averell Harriman, the North Vietnamese military movements were also central to the failure. There was also “tremendous pressure from our military” on LBJ to resume bombing.

Our concluding remarks relate, firstly, to the events of and immediately preceding “Kosygin Week,” including the question of why Washington hardened its stance on the A/B formula. Our interpretation here is not radically distinct from those offered by George Herring and Lloyd Gardner. However, we feel that our above reconstruction of key events, based on British as well as American archives, does give new scholarly depth to our conclusions. Secondly, we wish to draw attention to a set of circumstances that emerges from both sets of archives, but especially from the British side: the extremely high level of mutual distrust, impatience, incomprehension, and even personal dislike which charac-

167. Bruce oral history interview, 28, 30.
168. Transcript, Dean Rusk oral history interview with Paige E. Mulhollan, July 1969, tape 1, p. 45 and tape 2, p. 3, LBJL.
169. Transcript, Benjamin Read oral history interview with Paige E. Mulhollan, March 1970, tape 2, pp. 10–20, LBJL.
terized Anglo-American relations in this period. Lastly, and most speculatively, we tackle the question of whether “Kosygin Week” was, in fact, an historic missed opportunity for peace in Vietnam.

Regarding the hardening of Washington’s position on the A/B formula, we do not find anything resembling a smoking gun, whether held by Rostow or by LBJ himself. Rostow’s skepticism about the value of intermediaries—and, indeed, about Hanoi’s willingness to negotiate at all—had become evident during the MARIGOLD process. Though even Rostow was prepared to soften his stance to some degree, his skepticism won the day during “Kosygin Week.” Here, Rostow’s bureaucratic proximity to the president was clearly important. By the end of the 1960s, it would be unusual for the presidential national security adviser to lose any bureaucratic battles at all! In a meeting between Wilson and LBJ in June 1967, the president “did not try to deny” that “there had been a change of policy under pressure from their hawks.”

The sharpness of the policy shift can be overstated. As even Cooper acknowledged, many of the bureaucratic principals had only a fuzzy understanding of the sequence of moves in the A/B process that had been publicly initiated by Arthur Goldberg in September 1966. There was never any question of a unilateral and unconditional U.S. bombing halt to satisfy Hanoi. Cooper worked heroically and in good faith, but was guilty of trying to lead rather than serve Washington. Wilson and Brown strayed beyond their remit, notably in virtually ignoring LBJ’s 6 February cable. Despite all this, there was a sharp contrast between LBJ’s apparent optimism in late January-early February and his mood during “Kosygin Week.” On 2 February, Johnson was telling a press conference that “[j]ust almost any step” from Hanoi would do. Why the sudden change? Here, Robert Kennedy’s accusation of bad faith and deliberate sabotage of the London talks must be considered. In this analysis, LBJ’s statements to the press and to congressional leaders simply disguised his real (“win-the-war”) position. Against the evidence of North Vietnamese regrouping during the Tet bombing pause, there is the fact of a new American military initiative being launched in late February. (A CIA report of 8 March noted that Operation JUNCTION CITY, a “massive allied sweep operation in the Communists War Zone ‘C,’” had been under way for approximately two weeks. It seemed to some journalists at the time that supply movements for JUNCTION CITY would have had to have occurred during the Tet truce.174)

172. Record of conversation between Prime Minister and the President of the United States of America at the White House, Friday 2 June 1967, Confidential Annex to the Visit of the Prime Minister to Canada and the United States, 1–3 June 1967, PREM 13/1919, PRO.
The archival record is not entirely incompatible with a “conspiracy” interpretation. In early 1967, a year before the Tet offensive, Washington seemed as concerned with the appearance as with the reality of reaching out for peace. The cable traffic, in particular, however, does not point in the direction of deep-seated White House duplicity. Reaction to rapidly changing events, especially to the North Vietnamese troop movements, is more apparent than any conspiracy. The cable traffic does not appear to bear out I. F. Stone’s charge that journalists were simply “brainwashed” into reporting massive movement of North Vietnamese troops and supplies.\footnote{See Page, \textit{U.S. Official Propaganda}, 170–71.} LBJ was under considerable pressure, not only from the military but also from Saigon,\footnote{See, e.g., telegram from Rostow to Bruce, 13 February 1967, “SUNFLOWER 1,” Box 255, CF, Vietnam, NSF, LBJL.} to close any opening allowed to North Vietnamese troop movements. LBJ’s real sense of responsibility for U.S. military personnel south of the DMZ seems to have ruled out any agreement to extend the Tet bombing halt. Regarding the wider A/B plan, it seems likely that the more LBJ and Rostow worked on the details of an offer, the more they became aware of loopholes and of the need to send strong messages to Hanoi and to Saigon. Against “conspiracy” explanations, it is worth remembering that Rostow seems genuinely to have believed both that the 10 February message was a “correction” of London’s position and that an offer (the “A-B-C-D” formula) was still alive.

In explaining Johnson’s apparent change of mind and his willingness to accede to Rostow, it is difficult, given the timing of events, to believe that LBJ was not influenced by the erupting row with Kennedy. By the same token, it is not easy to discern at the highest levels the existence of any powerful “peace party” eager to help Cooper and Wilson and whose influence Rostow had to overcome. Rusk’s public release of an offer, based on the original A/B sequence, on 9 February seemed to suggest that the State Department would perform this role. However, Rusk, who had a hand in drafting the final version of the Ho letter, was suspicious of Wilson and far from strongly committed to the London initiative. The same seems to have held for McNamara, another possible leader of a February 1967 “peace party.” McNamara had also lost ground with LBJ through his friendship with Robert Kennedy and his advocacy of previous failed bombing pauses.\footnote{See Shesol, \textit{Mutual Contempt}, 370, 389.} The President had also long since ceased to attend to Hubert Humphrey’s views on the war. Harriman, another possible “peace party” leader and a consistent advocate of using the Sino-Soviet split as a lever in Vietnam, was not held in high regard by Johnson.\footnote{See Stephen W. Twing, \textit{Myths, Models, and U.S. Foreign Policy} (Boulder, 1998), 133–34.}

Turning to the subject of Anglo-American relations, we are struck by the intensity of transatlantic antagonism. Wilson and Brown learned nothing from and forgot nothing of the MARIGOLD humiliation of January 1967. London’s
attitude towards Washington was shaped by a humiliating economic dependence and by Wilson’s desire to establish a close personal relationship with the American leader. The opening to Kosygin seemed to offer the chance of resolving domestic pressures, asserting Britain’s superior diplomatic competence and restoring credibility with LBJ. For their part, American personnel were irritated by Wilson’s opportunism and occasional crassness and certainly by his garrulous irresponsibility in the House of Commons. Washington always set more store by the “direct” channel (via the U.S. Embassy in Moscow) to Hanoi. From Washington’s perspective, direct channels reduced the risk of “entrapment” by allies into unwanted lines of conduct and commitment. Also, as viewed from the United States, Britain’s (deeply resented) noncombatant status, far from strengthening London’s mediatory credentials, actually called into question Wilson’s good faith in facing the consequences of his diplomacy. The difference in perspective was well captured in the London conversations with Rostow that followed “Kosygin Week.” Rostow reminded Foreign Secretary George Brown of the “losses in American forces which had taken place during the Korean peace talks.” Enemy exploitation of peace negotiations in Korea was “deeply burnt into the memory of the United States Administration.” Brown responded that “to get talks going was better than no talks at all.” Surrounding and undermining all U.S.-U.K. peace initiatives were major problems of mutual incomprehension, resentment, and mistrust.

These severe Anglo-American strains acutely compromised the prospects of success for the Cooper-Wilson-Brown initiatives. Washington was prepared to allow London to float ideas and to probe openings. Beyond that, Washington was certainly not inclined to place its faith in constitutive British diplomacy. Was it a missed opportunity? There is some indication from former North Vietnamese officials that they were interested in negotiation. However, given Hanoi’s conduct during the bombing pause, and the military maneuvers of early February 1967, LBJ and Rostow can be forgiven a strong degree of skepticism. The key opportunity of February 1967, however, was the possibility of seizing on Kosygin’s expressed willingness to intercede. Hanoi was moving towards Moscow and backing away from Beijing. As Harriman argued, this changed the diplomatic context and presented scope for new initiatives. The killing of the Phase A/Phase B plan was hardly an auspicious beginning. (Kosygin told Ambassador Llewellyn Thompson on 19 February that he knew the revised A/B formula “was hopeless the moment he had read it.”)

Our final verdict on the episode rests on the likelihood of successful Soviet intervention with Hanoi. Washington should have been more energetic in

179. Record of conversation between the foreign secretary and Mr. Walt Rostow at 2 Carlton Gardens, 8:45 a.m., Friday, 24 February 1967, FCO 15/584.
180. See McNamara, Blight, and Brigham, Argument without End, 284–91.
181. Memo of conversation between Michael Stewart and Foy Kohler, 21 February 1967, Box 210, CF, U.K., NSF, LBJL.
attempting to exploit the opportunities raised by apparent changes in Moscow’s attitude and by the rivalry with China. However, the way forward was far from easy. At issue was not only the degree of influence that Moscow enjoyed over Hanoi but the ambivalent nature of the USSR’s involvement in the Vietnam War as well. Moscow had significantly increased its support to Hanoi in 1964–65, largely as a means of trying to offset Chinese influence and to reassert its leadership of international communism. By the middle of 1966, the general American view was that Moscow had misjudged the resolve of Washington and was looking for an acceptable settlement. Thompson wrote in July 1966: “They stand to lose . . . in almost any outcome and they want neither the United States nor China to come out on top.”  

Far from wanting a settlement, however, it could be argued by 1967 that Moscow was beginning to enjoy the dissipation of American and Chinese energies, as well as the increasing international isolation and domestic embarrassment of the United States. Also militating against fruitful Soviet intercession was Moscow’s sensitivity to Chinese accusations of U.S.–Soviet collusion. Be this as it may, the possibility of exerting pressure on Hanoi via Moscow was at least worth Washington’s full attention. Kosygin himself certainly saw at least the possibility of a breakthrough. The confusions of February 1967 amounted to a squandering of this possibility.  

LBJ’s peace initiatives, such as they were, failed for a multiplicity of complex reasons. Moscow’s ambivalence, Wilson’s unrealism, Rostow’s skepticism, Johnson’s hatred of RFK, Hanoi’s ever-present tendency to “smash all the crockery,” and certainly, as we have argued, the poisoned state of Anglo-American relations—all these factors and several more played their part in the debacle of “Kosygin Week.” No one party, no one factor, was entirely responsible. What may confidently be concluded, however, is that one necessary condition for success was lacking. This necessary (though not, of course, sufficient) condition was a clear presidential sense of direction. Johnson had no clear strategy for ending the war beyond his presumption that it would be ended by some combination of diplomatic and military effort. Buffeted between competing pressures and threats, LBJ was unable to provide coherent leadership. In March 1965, he told his wife that, in regard to “the Vietnam situation”: “I can’t get out, and I can’t finish it with what I have got. And I don’t know what the hell to do!”  

Two years later, the president still did not know what the hell to do.  

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