the Republican Party. I was concerned about our failure to do better in Congress, but I was at least certain that no Republican candidate had lost for lack of money. On examination I found that in many cases our candidates had been defeated by younger liberals who had labor support and labor money. I thought that this would be our challenge as a party before the 1974 off-year elections—to revamp and renew ourselves so as to get candidates who could successfully appeal to voters and wage-winning campaigns.

At about 11:40 P.M. George McGovern conceded and sent me a telegram:

CONGRATULATIONS ON YOUR VICTORY. I HOPE THAT IN THE NEXT FOUR YEARS YOU WILL LEAD US TO A TIME OF PEACE ABROAD AND JUSTICE AT HOME. YOU HAVE MY FULL SUPPORT IN SUCH EFFORTS. WITH BEST WISHES TO YOU AND YOUR GRACIOUS WIFE PAT. SINCERELY, GEORGE MCGOVERN.

Ed thought the message was gracious, but Tricia and Julie thought it cold and arch. I thought it was merely carefully worded. I expressed my reaction in my diary: "It was a tough experience for him and I am not as hard-nosed about it as some might be because with all the mistakes he made, he feels that he has done the best he can and he is being put upon."

Thousands of calls and cables began pouring in to celebrate the great victory. One was from Johnson City:

THE WAY IN WHICH YOUR FELLOW MEN EXPRESSED THEIR APPROVAL OF YOUR RECORD THESE LAST FOUR YEARS MUST BE A GREAT COMFORT TO YOU AND I KNOW IT WILL GIVE YOU THE STRENGTH SO NECESSARY IN THE TIMES AHEAD. YOU AND YOUR FAMILY HAVE ENDURED MUCH BUT I KNOW TODAY THAT IT IS WORTH IT ALL LADY BIRD AND I WILL DO ANYTHING WE CAN TO EASE YOUR BURDEN AND HELP YOU MAKE A GOOD PRESIDENT IN THE DAYS AHEAD. LYNDON B. JOHNSON.

The dimensions of the victory were gratifying. I received 47,169,844 votes, and McGovern received 29,172,767: 60.7 percent to 37.5 percent. This was the second largest percentage of the popular vote in our history of two-party politics, and the greatest ever given a Republican candidate. Only Lyndon Johnson, running against Goldwater in the unique circumstances of 1964, had received fractionally more: 61.1 percent. I received the largest number of popular votes ever cast for a presidential candidate and the second largest number of electoral votes. No presidential candidate had ever won so many states.

The support was both wide and deep—it was truly a New Majority landslide of the kind I had called for in my acceptance speech in August. I won a majority of every key population group identified by Gallup except the blacks and the Democrats. Four of these groups—manual workers, Catholics, members of labor-union families, and people with only grade school educations—had never before been in the Republican camp in all the years since Gallup had begun keeping these records.

A few days later I described in my diary a curious feeling, perhaps a foreboding, that muted my enjoyment of this triumphal moment.

Diary

It makes one feel very humble at a time like this.

I had determined before this election evening to make it as memorable a one as possible for everybody concerned. The tooth episode probably interfered to a considerable extent. Certainly by the time that I had to prepare for the office telecast I was not as upbeat as I should have been.

The rest of the family seemed to think that they got enough of a thrill out of it. I think the very fact that the victory was so overwhelming made up for any failure on my part to react more enthusiastically than I did.

I am at a loss to explain the melancholy that settled over me on that victorious night. Perhaps it was caused by the painful tooth. To some extent the marring effects of Watergate may have played a part, to some extent our failure to win Congress, and to a greater extent the fact that we had not yet been able to end the war in Vietnam. Or perhaps it was because this would be my last campaign. Whatever the reasons, I allowed myself only a few minutes to reflect on the past. I was confident that a new era was about to begin, and I was eager to begin it.

THE END OF THE WAR

My first priority after the election was to end the war. Now that the pressure was removed, I hoped that both parties would enter the negotiations with the idea that after some hard bargaining each would accept an agreement embodying less than their most extreme position. I knew that it was not going to be easy. None of the objective factors had changed, but now that there was no election deadline, it remained to be seen what the Communists' negotiating tactics would be. Both Saigon and Hanoi were already playing a frustrating game with us. Thieu, while urging that we put forward his demands—some of which were bound to be unacceptable to the North Vietnamese—was still pretend-
ing that he was prepared to go it alone. And Le Duc Tho was pretending
that the Communists were completely sincere in their desire to conclude
an agreement on its merits and then to observe its terms. From our intel-
ligence sources we knew that Thieu was secretly telling his military lead-
ers to be ready for a cease-fire before Christmas; and we knew that the
North Vietnamese were still planning to capture as much territory as
possible just before the cease-fire in order to be able to turn it to their
advantage.

The next meeting with the North Vietnamese was scheduled for mid-
November. If anything was to come from it, Thieu’s cooperation was
now essential. I decided that Haig, whom Thieu trusted and liked, would
once again be the best emissary. He left for Saigon on November 9, car-
rying another letter I had written to Thieu. In it I dealt point by point
with the objections Thieu had raised to the terms of the October agree-
ment and clarified the positions that we would present to the North Viet-
names at the next Paris meeting. “We will use our maximum efforts to effect
these changes in the agreement,” I wrote. “I wish to leave you under no illu-
sion, however, that we can or will go beyond these changes in seeking to improve
an agreement that we already consider to be excellent.”

I also urged Haig to remind Thieu that although I had won the White
House by a landslide, he must remember that the Senate was now even
more dovish than it had been before the election. There was no question
that if we did not have a settlement completed before Congress reconvened
in January, and if it appeared that Thieu was the obstacle to achieving
one, the Senate would cut off the funds that South Vietnam needed to
survive. The situation was as simple, and as certain, as that.

Thieu handed Haig a reply that repeated his objections, particu-
larly regarding the presence of North Vietnamese troops in South Vietnam.
I responded by reiterating that we would not be able to obtain all the ad-
justments he had requested. I pointed out that far more important than
what was said in any agreement was what we would do in the event the
enemy renewed its aggression. “You have my absolute assurance that if
Hanoi fails to abide by the terms of this agreement it is my intention
to take swift and severe retaliatory action,” I wrote.

Haig left Saigon convinced that Thieu would come along in the end.
There was no doubt in his mind that Thieu knew that total intransigence
would be fatal. In the meantime, however, he had been careful not to
push Thieu too far. He reported on November 12:

We are now dealing with a razor’s edge situation. Thieu has firmly laid
prestige on the line with his entire government and I believe if we take a
totally unreasonable stance with him, we may force him to commit politi-
cal suicide. I am not sure that this would serve our best interests and there-

whether we could meet the December 8 deadline would depend upon
the outcome of the November 20 meeting in Paris.

Diary

Assuming that we get any kind of movement from the North
Vietnamese on the agreement this week, and assuming we get
what we consider to be a good agreement—well, as a matter of
fact, we consider the present one to be good, but this will make it
better—then we have to put it to Thieu hard: he either accepts
the agreement and goes along with it, or we will have to go our
separate ways.

As I told Henry when he began to rumble around to the effect
that we have a very good record in this instance, I said, Henry,
we’re not concerned about being right on the record. What we
are concerned about is to save South Vietnam and that’s why we
had to temporize with Thieu as much as we did, because our in-
terest is in getting South Vietnam to survive and Thieu at
present seems to be the only leader who could lead them in that
direction.

It would, of course, be a disappointment in the event that
Thieu does not go along, but under those circumstances we shall
simply have to make our own deal, get our prisoners, have our
withdrawal, try to save Cambodia and Laos, and then say that
Vietnamization has been completed and Thieu then can do what
he likes.
On November 20 Kissinger met with Le Duc Tho for more than five hours. Tho opened by reading a lengthy speech complaining that we had reneged on the October agreement. While its tone was no different from the standard rhetoric we had come to expect, the charges that we had unilaterally prevented an agreement were unacceptable. Kissinger immediately cited chapter and verse from earlier sessions in which he had informed the Communists that the South Vietnamese would have to be consulted before any agreement could be signed. Kissinger finished his opening remarks by reiterating our desire to negotiate seriously to end the war and our intention to maintain the essence of the agreement that had been achieved in October.

He then presented the proposed changes. By the time the ones requested by the South Vietnamese had been applied to the text of the agreement and added to the changes and clarifications we wanted, there were more than sixty of them. Le Duc Tho seemed somewhat taken aback by their number. Most of the changes were relatively minor and uncontroversial. But a few were substantive, the most significant of them involving Thieu’s insistence on a pull-back of some of the North Vietnamese forces out of South Vietnam. There was also a proposal that the DMZ be respected by each party; the presence of North Vietnamese troops in the South would be a violation of this provision. Le Duc Tho simply took note of the list and indicated that he might have some of his own to propose. Kissinger had made no distinction between the changes we wanted and those we were presenting on behalf of the South Vietnamese. His approach, however, made it clear that we were prepared to negotiate on all of them. At the close of the meeting he asked whether this was actually our final proposal. Kissinger replied, “I would put it this way. It is our final proposal, but it is not an ultimatum.” Kissinger suggested that the technical experts meet that night to study the proposed changes. As the session adjourned on a friendly note, it seemed possible that the Communists would treat the proposals as a basis for negotiation and that an agreement might be reached during this round. That morning I dictated in my diary, “The next two days will tell the tale as to whether we get an agreement.”

At the meeting the next day, however, the North Vietnamese countered our proposed changes and hardened their position on the remaining unresolved issues; in some areas they even pulled back to their position before October 8. It seemed that Kissinger’s fears had been realized and that the North Vietnamese, relieved of the pressure of our election deadline, were prepared to stall the negotiations in an attempt to exploit our differences with Thieu. When Kissinger reported that there had been another tense and totally unproductive meeting on November 22, I sent him a message, which I said he could use if and when he saw fit—

not at all—in an effort to get the negotiations moving. The message was in the form of a directive stating that unless the other side showed the same willingness to be reasonable that we were showing, he should discontinue the talks and we would have to resume military activity until they were ready to negotiate. It continued:

They must be disabused of the idea they seem to have that we have no other choice but to settle on their terms. You should inform them directly without equivocation that we do have another choice and if they were surprised that the President would take the strong action he did prior to the Moscow Summit and prior to the election, they will find now, with the election behind us, he will take whatever action he considers necessary to protect the United States’ interest.

After the next session in Paris on November 23 Kissinger reported that although he had made limited progress in specific areas, we were still far apart on some of the provisions that Thieu considered most important. Therefore we had to face the fact that barring a sudden change by the North Vietnamese, we were not going to have an acceptable deal. He felt that as long as Saigon held out for so many substantial alterations, not only would no agreement be reached but the North Vietnamese would continue to retract concessions they had already granted.

Kissinger considered that we now had two options open to us. Option One would be to break off the talks at the next meeting and dramatically step up our bombing while we reviewed our negotiating strategy in order to decide what kind of agreement we would be prepared to accept with and without the South Vietnamese. This was the option Kissinger favored. Option Two would be to decide upon fall-back positions on each of Thieu’s major objections and present them as our final offer. If the North Vietnamese agreed to them, we could still claim to have improved on the October terms. This proposal, as Kissinger put it, “would be substantially better optically, and marginally better substantively, than the agreement we concluded in October. It gives Thieu the minimum that he has asked for if he wanted to be reasonable, which he shows absolutely no inclination of being at this time.”

The corollary of Option Two would be a complete break with Thieu if he refused to accept the agreement it produced. I knew that this would be a serious step to take, but I strongly opposed breaking off the talks and resuming the bombing unless it was absolutely necessary to compel the enemy to negotiate. I was also becoming irritated by some of Thieu’s tactics, and I felt that we could no longer be in the position of forestalling an agreement solely to buy him time. Therefore, if Kissinger could reach a satisfactory agreement, I wanted him to do so. Then Thieu
could make his own decision about joining us or going it alone.

In my message replying to Kissinger’s cable I made it clear that I did not consider that Option One was open to us any longer:

In my view the October 8 agreement was one which certainly would have been in our interest. You should try to improve it to take account of Saigon’s conditions as much as possible. But most important we must recognize the fundamental reality that we have no choice but to reach agreement along the lines of the October 8 principles.

Almost immediately I became concerned that, in my attempt to encourage Kissinger to pursue Option Two, I might have overstated my reluctance to resume the bombing if there was no other choice left to us to make the enemy negotiate seriously. I felt it was essential that he not be denied this bargaining chip, and consequently I sent him a cable the next morning, November 24, saying that if the Communists remained intransigent, he could suspend the talks for a week so that both sides could consult with their principals. I said that I would be prepared to authorize a massive bombing strike on North Vietnam in that interval:

I recognize that this is a high-risk option, but it is one I am prepared to take if the only alternative is an agreement which is worse than that of the October 8, and which does not clear up any of the ambiguities which we and Saigon are concerned about in the October 8 draft.

Our aim will continue to be to end the war with honor. And if because of the pursuit of our strategy and the accident of the timing of the election we are now in a public relations corner, we must take our lumps and see it through.

In giving this direction, we all must realize that there is no way whatever that we can mobilize public opinion behind us as in the case of November 3, Cambodia, and May 8. But at least with the election behind us, we owe it to the sacrifice that has been made to date by so many to do what is right even though the cost in our public support will be massive.

When Kissinger informed Le Duc Tho that I was prepared to take actions as strong as the ones of May 8, the North Vietnamese immediately became more conciliatory. This seemed to confirm our suspicions that their intransigence was in fact a negotiating tactic. They did not want the talks to end any more than we did and were therefore prepared once again to engage in serious negotiations.

The problem, as Kissinger presented it in his reporting cable that afternoon, was that while we had now considerably improved the agreement over the October 8 terms, there was no possibility that we could come near anything that would satisfy all of Thieu’s requirements. We knew from cable intercepts that Thieu was in a deliberate stalling pattern; this meant that no improvements in the agreement would have any effect on him until he decided that he had sufficiently prepared his people to accept it. So despite our intensive efforts and the improvements we had been able to make in the agreement, a major break with Thieu seemed inevitable if we were going to complete the agreement right away. Kissinger therefore once again recommended a week’s recess during which we could force a reckoning with Thieu and then, on the basis of his decision, formulate our own final position.

I still believed, however, that it was important to keep the negotiating channels open and working. I considered Thieu’s position to be ill-advised, and I felt more strongly than ever that if we could get a good agreement, we should do so and let Thieu make his choice accordingly. I immediately replied to Kissinger that I thought it preferable for him to stay in Paris and continue talking as long as there was even a remote chance of reaching an agreement. I said that I would even “take risks in that direction.”

The North Vietnamese were still stonewalling the negotiations, however, so after another inconclusive session on November 25, Kissinger and Le Duc Tho agreed on the desirability of recessing the talks for several days.

I met with Kissinger as soon as he returned from Paris.

Diary

He arrived back around 10:30 and we spent an hour on it at that time. I had to back him off the position that we really had a viable option to break off the talks with the North and resume the bombing for a period of time. It simply isn’t going to work. While we must play the card out with the North Vietnamese as if it would work that way, we must have no illusions that we now have no option except to settle.

We sent a message to the North Vietnamese that we would return to the talks with the idea of making one last effort. In order to demonstrate our good faith and desire to reach a settlement, I ordered a reduction of the bombing of North Vietnam.

On November 29 Kissinger ushered Nguyen Phu Duc, President Thieu’s personal representative at the Paris talks, into the Oval Office. We thought that if I made a brutally tough presentation to Duc, that
would succeed in bringing home to Thieu the precariousness of his position and the danger of being left on his own. I said that it was not a question of lacking sympathy for Saigon's predicament; but we had to face the reality of the situation. If we did not end the war by concluding a settlement at the next Paris session, then when Congress returned in January it would end the war by cutting off the appropriations. I had already informed Thieu that I had canvassed the staunchest congressional supporters of my Vietnam policy regarding the October terms, and they had unanimously avowed that if Thieu alone were standing in the way of accepting such terms, they would personally lead the fight against him when Congress reconvened.

On November 30 I met with Kissinger, Haig, Laird, and the Joint Chiefs of Staff to discuss our military plans in the event that the talks were broken off or that the agreement reached was subsequently violated by the Communists. In the former case there were contingency plans for three-day and six-day bombing strikes against North Vietnam. In the latter case I was adamant that our response be swift and strong. "If Hanoi violates an agreement, our response must be all out," I said. "We must maintain enough force in the area to do the job, and it can't be a weak response. Above all, B-52s are to be targeted on Hanoi. We must have our own unilateral capability to prevent violations."

Kissinger's next meeting with the North Vietnamese was scheduled for Monday, December 4. If no settlement emerged from this meeting, it would be very difficult to predict how or when the war would end. Kissinger would need all his formidable skills not only to convince the North Vietnamese that we would stay in and continue fighting unless they agreed to a settlement, but to convince the South Vietnamese that we would stop fighting and get out unless they agreed to one. Kissinger himself was optimistic that it would take only a few days to conclude an agreement; in fact, he said, there was a 70-30 chance that he could have the whole thing "wrapped up" by Tuesday night. He blamed his "peace is at hand" statement for having caused many of our present troubles, and he talked about resigning if he was unable to conclude an agreement. I told him that he should not even be thinking in such terms.

On Sunday night I noted: "We enter a very tough week and a very crucial one, but some way I think it's got to come out because the great forces of history—what is really right—are moving us in those directions. Only insanity and irrationality of some leaders may move us in other directions."

All our hopes were dashed on Monday. Le Duc Tho not only categorically rejected every change we had requested, but also withdrew some that had already been agreed upon during the last round and introduced several new and unacceptable demands of his own. Now, even if we decided to conclude an agreement without Thieu, the terms were no longer acceptable to us. Kissinger cabled: "We are at a point where a break-off of the talks looks almost certain." In a long report analyzing the meeting he stated:

- It is not impossible that Tho is playing chicken and is waiting for us to cave tomorrow. But I do not think so. There is almost no doubt that Hanoi is prepared now to break off the negotiations and go another military round. Their own needs for a settlement are now outweighed by the attractive vision they see of our having to choose between a complete split with Saigon or an unmanageable domestic situation.

- The central issue is that Hanoi has apparently decided to mount a frontal challenge to us such as we faced last May. If so, they are gambling on our unwillingness to do what is necessary; they are playing for a clear-cut victory through our split with Saigon or our domestic collapse rather than run the risk of a negotiated settlement.

- This is the basic question; the rest is tactics. If they were willing to settle now, I could come up with acceptable formulas and would not need to bother you. Assuming they are going the other route, we are faced with the same kind of hard decisions as last spring.

Kissinger felt that Le Duc Tho's conduct once again left us with only two options: either we must agree to go back and accept the terms of the October agreement without any changes, or we must run the risk that the talks would break off. He pointed out that the first option was unacceptable. It would be tantamount to overthrowing Thieu; as Kissinger put it, "He could not survive such a demonstration of his and our impotence." It would leave us with no way of explaining our actions since October, and it would provide Hanoi with an enormous propaganda victory. Their own needs for a settlement are now outweighed by the attractive vision they see of our having to choose between a complete split with Saigon or an unmanageable domestic situation.

- The central issue is that Hanoi has apparently decided to mount a frontal challenge to us such as we faced last May. If so, they are gambling on our unwillingness to do what is necessary; they are playing for a clear-cut victory through our split with Saigon or our domestic collapse rather than run the risk of a negotiated settlement.

- This is the basic question; the rest is tactics. If they were willing to settle now, I could come up with acceptable formulas and would not need to bother you. Assuming they are going the other route, we are faced with the same kind of hard decisions as last spring.

Kissinger continued: "Therefore I believe we must be prepared to break off the negotiations. The question is how we do it." He felt that we now had two tactical choices in this regard. The first was to propose setting on the basis of where we had stood in the previous week's round;
that would at least enable us to keep the changes and improvements Le Duc Tho had agreed to. The problem with this option was that neither Hanoi nor Saigon was likely to accept it.

The second tactical choice, and the one Kissinger recommended, was to insist on retaining those changes to which the North Vietnamese had already agreed while boiling down our remaining requirements to only the most basic ones involving the clear delineation of the non-governmental nature and functions of the National Council of Reconciliation and Concord and the necessity of having in the agreement some formulation of the principle that North Vietnamese troops did not have the right to remain indefinitely in the South. The Communists were unlikely to accept these requirements, but if for some reason they did, we could use the improvements they represented over the October terms as a lever to bring Thieu along. None of these points was sufficiently critical that the North Vietnamese, if they had genuinely wanted an agreement, could not have accepted them.

If the Communists refused and the talks broke off, we would have no choice but to step up our bombing as a means of making them agree to a redefined negotiating position. Kissinger recommended that I go on television to enlist the support of the American people for the stern measures that would be required. "I believe that you can make a stirring and convincing case to rally them as you have so often in the past with your direct appeals," he wrote.

I disagreed with Kissinger in this regard. Instead of a frantic and probably foredoomed attempt on my part to rally American public opinion behind a major escalation of the war, I preferred an unannounced stepping up of the bombing. This would be coupled with a press conference by Kissinger to explain where we stood in terms of the new attempts at reaching a settlement, and why the negotiations had broken down. In my opinion, however, this was still only the option of last resort.

Diary
What Henry does not understand is what I tried to get across to him yesterday before he left, and that is that rallying the people as we did November 3 on Cambodia, and then May 8 has now reached the point of no return.

Expectations were raised so high prior to the election and since the election that to go before the American people on television and say that we have been tricked again by the Communists, that we were misled by them, and that now we have to order resumption of the war with no end in sight and no hope, is simply going to be a loser.

In his cable Kissinger raised the idea of his resigning. "I have no illusions about what a break-off in the talks will do to us domestically," he wrote. "If this happens, I will talk to you upon my return about my own responsibility and role."

Diary
I told Col. [Richard] Kennedy [of the NSC staff] that Henry simply has to get out of his head this idea of resigning and all that sort of thing. This is not personal. This is just one of those things where we are in a box and we have to do the very best we can to do what is right and work our way out of it. It will be tough but in the end we are going to win.

On Tuesday morning, December 5, I received a cable from Kissinger. In the event the negotiations broke off, he saw no alternative to stepping up the bombing drastically, and seizing the public relations initiative by using a presidential speech to rally the American people. He suggested in another cable that he insist upon Thieu's demand for the withdrawal of all North Vietnamese troops from South Vietnam as a way of causing Tho to break off the talks. Then he would return to Washington, and I would deliver the television address, in which I would set forward clear and achievable objectives that would essentially add up to a complete American withdrawal in exchange for the return of our POWs. We would then continue bombing until the North Vietnamese agreed to return all our prisoners; he estimated that this would take between six and eight months. "These are issues that the American people can understand.... And I am confident that you can rally them once again," he concluded.

I remained unconvinced of the wisdom and the feasibility of this course of action. It was my firm conviction that we must not be responsible—or be portrayed as being responsible—for the breakdown of the talks.

Diary
We must cast this if we possibly can in the light that the North Vietnamese rather than we were responsible for the breakdown in negotiations; and then we should talk in as low-key a manner as possible, and act as strongly as possible without making a big to-do about the fact that we were stepping up the bombing, etc., and in effect resuming the war with no end in sight after raising the expectations of the people primarily as a result of Henry's now-famous "peace is at hand" statement.

As far as the people are concerned, they assume that we have
been bombing all along which, of course, is a fact, although the level of bombing has been lower than the high level immediately after May 8. Time will tell us tomorrow as to whether or not we have a way out, but I must say that four weeks after the election the situation is certainly not a very happy prospect.

There was clearly a difference of opinion between Kissinger and me regarding the best strategy to pursue. Once again he felt that we had reached a point where the only thing we could do was break off the talks and step up the bombing to make the North Vietnamese agree to a settlement. And once again I believed it was important to keep the talks going for as long as there was even a remote chance that they might yield a settlement.

Lest there be any misunderstanding about the way I wanted to proceed at what was likely to be the most critical and delicate stage of the entire negotiations, I gave Haldeman detailed instructions for a message to be sent to Kissinger outlining the course he should follow in his next meeting with Le Duc Tho:

We should avoid any appearance of a dramatic break-off by our side. Instead we should treat the situation as a case where the talks have reached an impasse at this time and each side is returning home for consultation. If there is any such dramatic break-off, it should come from their side, not ours. In any event, our side should not appear to be taking the initiative in ending the talks. We should ask for a recess for the purpose of further consultation.

Then when you return to U.S. you should conduct a low-key, non-dramatic briefing to explain the current situation very briefly and to indicate our continuing plan to maintain military operations until a satisfactory settlement is reached. You would indicate that we are ready to resume negotiations at any time when it will be productive to do so.

I have talked to a very few of the hard-liners here in total confidence, and it is their strongly unanimous view that it would be totally wrong for the President to go on TV and explain the details of why the talks have failed.

Kissinger sent his reply through Haldeman. "We had better face the facts of life," he said. "If there is no agreement in the next forty-eight hours, we may be able to pretend that the talks are in recess long enough to permit me to give a briefing after my return. But soon after there will be no way to keep either of the Vietnamese parties from making the stalemate evident. Furthermore, if we resume all-out bombing this will be even more true. Thus in the event of a stalemate we have only two choices: to yield, or to rally American support for one more effort which..."
are contained in your minimum position contained in your last message, adding to it the specific question about whether they will agree to any language covering the withdrawal of North Vietnamese forces from South Vietnam. I assume that their answers to virtually all of these questions will be negative, but the purpose is to make the record clear once and for all. I then want you to ask them what is their final offer. You will then tell them that you will report the answers they have given to the President directly and then you will contact them as to the time and the conditions for further meetings.

If the negotiations are to be broken off, it must be absolutely clear that they were responsible for breaking off the negotiations rather than me.

I also am firmly convinced that we should not paint ourselves into a corner by saying like “This is our last offer” or “This is our final meeting.” Leave a crack of the door open for further discussion.

I realize that you think that if I go on television that I can rally the American people to support an indefinite continuation of the war simply for the purpose of getting our prisoners back. I would agree that this is a possibility at this time. But, that can wear very thin within a matter of weeks, particularly as the propaganda organs—not only from North Vietnam but in this country—begin to hammer away at the fact that we had a much better deal in hand, and then because of Saigon’s intransigence, we were unable to complete it.

However your meeting comes out today, if it does not end in a settlement, and of course I know and agree with you that there is a very remote possibility that you will make a breakthrough on the settlement side, we will embark on a very heavy bombing in the North. But we are going to do it without a dramatic television announcement of it. The thing to do here is to take the heat from the Washington establishment, who know the difference, for stepping up the bombing which will occur for a few days, and simply act strongly without escalating publicity about our actions by what we say about them.

On December 6 we gave Dobrynin an urgent message that we would be presenting our rock-bottom position at the next meeting and that failure to make progress would result in termination of the talks. He seemed to be very disturbed, and reiterated that the Soviets had been working continuously on North Vietnam to get them to accept an agreement. A few days later I stepped up the pressure by calling him and telling him that it was definitely in Moscow’s interest that the negotiations wind up now because both Moscow and Washington had bigger fish to fry and it was in our mutual interest to eliminate this irritant in order to enable our mutual relations to continue to improve. We also informed the Chinese ambassador in Paris that the situation had become critical, and that before taking “grave steps” we wanted to bring the issues before Chou En-lai, because such action would obviously affect our ability to develop Sino-American relations in the ways that both our governments wanted.

When Kissinger and Le Duc Tho met on December 7, very little was accomplished. There was some progress the next day, however, and by the morning of December 9 there remained only one major unresolved issue, the DMZ. In fact, the North Vietnamese had already agreed to it during the November negotiations. But now Le Duc Tho was insisting on a new and vague clause about both sides “assessing regulations” for movement across the DMZ, which had the effect of calling its integrity into question. I sent a cable to the North Vietnamese, saying that I felt the inclusion of their new clause would make rapid conclusion of the agreement difficult and suggesting that the language they had agreed to at the November 23 session be restored.

On December 9, with only this one remaining item to negotiate, I allowed myself to begin feeling optimistic about the possibility of having an agreement before Christmas. It would be painful if Thieu refused to go along, but there was no question that we had done everything possible to help him and that now we had to look to our own interests and conclude an agreement if the terms were acceptable. I thought back over the roller-coaster events of the past week, which had begun with Kissinger’s recommending breaking off the talks and bombing, and which seemed to be ending with a settlement in sight.

Diary

In essence, as Haldeman and I add things up we think what happened here is that Henry went back to Paris firmly convinced that he would quickly, within a matter of two days, reach agreement with the North Vietnamese. As a matter of fact, he told me that the meetings would only last two days—Monday and Tuesday.

The North Vietnamese surprised him by slapping him in the face with a wet fish.

The North wants to humiliate the South and us as well if possible. The South wants to drive the North out of South Vietnam and get us to stick with them until this goal is accomplished. As far as we are concerned, we must bring the war to an end on an honorable basis as quickly as possible.

Expectations have been built so high now that our failing to bring the war to an end would have a terribly depressing effect on this country, and no television speech is ever going to rally the people, despite Henry’s feelings based on past performances that this could be the case. As I have pointed out in previous memos, and as I see it now very clearly, the country can be rallied when it’s on its back and when you ask it to get up and fight. On the
other hand, when the country is already very optimistic, to go in and tell them that things are in a hell of a shape doesn't rally them—it simply rallies our opponents and depresses our friends.

For better or for worse, we are on a course now where we have no choice but to make the very best settlement that we can and then to do the best that we can to see that it is enforced.

On December 10 the North Vietnamese replied to my cable, saying that they considered their position on the DMZ to be very reasonable. It seemed clear that they had made a decision to stall the negotiations.

That afternoon I decided to stir things up and remove any doubts about our resolution. I telephoned Dobrynin and told him that I personally did not favor any of the compromise language that Kissinger was suggesting regarding the DMZ. I said that Hanoi should abide by the language it had already agreed to, and I told him bluntly that it was definitely in Moscow's interest to aid the negotiations and get them over with since we both had bigger fish to fry. As it stood, I said, Hanoi's preoccupation with changing the DMZ arrangement could risk concluding an agreement that had now been largely achieved. Dobrynin asked for some time to communicate with Moscow.

At the meeting on Monday, December 11, the North Vietnamese were totally inflexible on the DMZ issue. Kissinger's report characterized their conduct as composed of equal parts of insolence, guile, and stalling.

They were somewhat more forthcoming the next day, but there was still no real progress. That night Kissinger reported that he had come to the conclusion that Hanoi had decided to play for time: Le Duc Tho was purposely trying to prevent either a settlement of the war or a break-off of the talks. It was possible that they simply planned to exploit the increasingly obvious split between us and Saigon, and I could not help thinking it was ironic that the North Vietnamese intransigence at the negotiating table may have been at least in part a result of our unsuccesful attempts to pressure Thieu into accepting an agreement. There was no doubt that the Communists had infiltrated the Saigon government, and that Hanoi was therefore aware of our warnings of congressional fund cutoffs in January. I noted in a diary entry a week later on December 18: "We are right on a tightrope here and I fear that as a result of the infiltration of the South Vietnamese that the North Vietnamese figure that they have us where the hair is short and are going to continue to squeeze us. That is why we had to take our strong action."

Of course it was also possible that the leaders in Hanoi were divided and were still making up their minds about whether to conclude the agreement. In any case, the result was the same: stalemate. Kissinger described the situation in his cable:

Their consistent pattern is to give us just enough each day to keep us going but nothing decisive which could conclude an agreement.

On the other hand, they wish to ensure that we have no solid pretext for taking tough actions. They keep matters low key to prevent a resumption of bombing.

They could have settled in three hours anytime these past few days if they wanted to, but they have deliberately avoided this. For every one of their semi-concessions they introduce a counterdemand.

The North Vietnamese strategy seems to me to be as follows: they have reduced the issues to a point where settlement can be reached with one exchange of telegrams. I do not think they will send this telegram, however, in the absence of strong pressures.

At the next meeting, on December 13, Le Duc Tho made it clear that he had no intention of reaching an agreement. He was scheduled to return to Hanoi for consultations the next day, so Kissinger suggested that the talks be recessed and no more meetings be held until after Christmas. That night I noted, "As I had somewhat anticipated, this day, December 13, is really one of the toughest days we have had during the Administration."

Kissinger and I completely agreed on the cynicism and perfidy of the North Vietnamese. He even thought that Le Duc Tho's occasional fainting spells during the talks had been contrivances aimed at gaining a negotiating advantage by eliciting sympathy for him. Gritting his teeth and clenching his fists, Kissinger said, "They're just a bunch of shits. Tawdry, filthy shits. They make the Russians look good, compared to the way the Russians make the Chinese look good when it comes to negotiating in a responsible and decent way!"

I had reluctantly decided that we had now reached the point where only the strongest action would have any effect in convincing Hanoi that negotiating a fair settlement with us was a better option for them than continuing the war. Kissinger and I agreed that this meant stepping up the bombing. The only question was how much bombing would be needed to force Hanoi to settle. Kissinger recommended reseeding the mines of Haiphong Harbor, resuming full-scale bombing south of the 20th parallel, and intensifying bombing in southern Laos. My intuition was that something far more extensive was required. When I checked and found that the area south of the 20th parallel was largely rice paddies and jungle, I told Kissinger, "We'll take the same heat for big blows as for little blows. If we renew the bombing, it will have to be something
new, and that means we will have to make the big decision to hit Hanoi and Haiphong with B-52s. Anything less will only make the enemy contemptuous."

Kissinger pointed out that Hanoi and Haiphong were heavily defended with Soviet surface-to-air (SAM) missiles. If we attacked them, we would have to be prepared for new losses and casualties and POWs. "I know," I said, "but if we're convinced that this is the right thing to do, then we will have to do it right."

On December 14 I issued an order, to become effective three days hence, for the reseeding of the mines in Haiphong Harbor, for resumed aerial reconnaissance, and for B-52 strikes against military targets in the Hanoi-Haiphong complex. The bombing plan included sixteen major transportation, power, and Radio Hanoi transmitter targets in Hanoi, as well as six communications command and control targets in the outlying area. There were thirteen targets in the Haiphong area, including shipyards and docks. When the first plans came in for the bombing, I was appalled to find that the planes had to be borrowed from different commands, involving complicated logistics and large amounts of red tape. The day after the bombing began, I think I shook Admiral Moorer when I called him and said, "I don't want any more of this crap about the fact that we couldn't hit this target or that one. This is your chance to use military power effectively to win this war, and if you don't, I'll consider you responsible." I stressed that we must hit and hit hard or there was no point in doing it at all. If the enemy detected any reticence in our actions, they would discount the whole exercise.

The order to renew bombing the week before Christmas was the most difficult decision I made during the entire war; at the same time, however, it was also one of the most clear-cut and necessary ones.

Diary

Henry talked rather emotionally about the fact that this was a very courageous decision, but I pointed out to him that there was no other choice—that we were going to be here for four years and that even though we made a good, cheap peace now, to have it break within a matter of a year or two would leave us with nothing to be proud of and beyond that would leave us with terrible choices—much worse choices—later than we would have at the present time. We are going to face up to the music at this time with the hope that this will gain their attention and keep them from reacting to us later.
may in carrying out orders have been too cautious at times in the past, and that our political objectives have not been achieved because of too much caution on the military side. We simply have to take losses if we are going to accomplish our objectives.

I remember Churchill's admonition in his book on World War I, that one can have a policy of audacity or one can follow a policy of caution, but it is disastrous to try to follow a policy of audacity and caution at the same time. It must be one or the other. We have now gone down the audacious line and we must continue until we get some sort of a break.

Many people could not understand why I did not "go public" with the reasons for the December bombing. As I have already indicated, I did not feel that the American people were ready to be rallied at this time as they had been on November 3 and on May 8. But more important, I was convinced that any public statements on my part would have been directly counterproductive to the possibility of resumed negotiations. If I had announced that we were resuming bombing for the purpose of forcing the North Vietnamese to negotiate, their national pride and their ideological fanaticism would never have allowed them to accept the international loss of face involved in caving to such an ultimatum. So I did it with the minimum amount of rhetoric and publicity, and it succeeded exactly as I had intended. Our brief but massive use of force got the message through to Hanoi while still allowing them to back off their intransigent position without having to acknowledge that they were doing so because of military pressure from us.

On the morning of December 18, in a message to the North Vietnamese in Paris, we said that after having carefully reviewed the record of the recent negotiations, we had decided that they were deliberately and frivolously delaying the talks. We proposed returning to the text of the agreement as it had stood after the November 23 session, with the addition of one or two subsequently negotiated changes. On this basis we would be prepared to meet again at any time after December 26 to conclude an agreement.

I decided that we would also make every possible effort to convince Thieu that in the event the North Vietnamese agreed to resume negotiations, it was imperative that he join us in offering reasonable terms Hanoi would be willing to accept. We considered Agnew, Laird, and Connally for this unenviable job, but finally I said, "Haig is still the man to carry the message to Garcia."

Haig arrived in Saigon on December 19, carrying the strongest letter I had yet written to Thieu. In it I stated: "General Haig's mission now represents my final effort to point out to you the necessity for joint action and to convey my irrevocable intention to proceed, preferably with your cooperation but, if necessary, alone... I have asked General Haig to obtain your answer to this absolutely final offer on my part for us to work together in seeking a settlement along the lines I have approved or to go our separate ways." Haig told Thieu that I had dictated the letter personally and that no one else in our government had seen it. After Thieu had read the letter through twice, he looked up and said that it was obvious that he was not being asked to sign an agreement for peace but rather an agreement for continued American support. Haig replied that as a soldier and as someone completely familiar with Communist treachery, he agreed with Thieu's assessment.

Thieu seemed almost desperate. He argued that the cease-fire would not last more than three months: then, when the last American had gone, the Communists would resume their guerrilla warfare. But this time they would fight with knives and bayonets, being careful not to do anything sufficient to justify American retaliation. In this way my guarantees to enforce the agreement would never be put to the test, and the Communists would have a free hand against him and his government.

After this meeting Thieu leaked word to reporters that we had tried to force him to accept an ultimatum and that he had refused. I was shocked when I learned this, and I felt we would now be justified in breaking with him and making a separate peace with Hanoi. But I was still reluctant to allow our annoyance with him to lead us to do anything that might bring about Communist domination of South Vietnam.

December 20 was the third day of heavy air strikes over North Vietnam. Ninety B-52s flew three waves of attacks against eleven targets. Six planes were lost. On December 21 there were thirty B-52 sorties flown against three new targets. Two planes were lost.

My major concern during the first week of bombing was not the sharp wave of domestic and international criticism, which I had expected, but the high losses of B-52s. I noted on December 23, "I raised holy hell about the fact that they kept going over the same targets at the same time. I was, therefore, not surprised, although deeply disappointed, when we lost five planes on the second or third day. Finally, we got the military to change their minds." The Pentagon began scheduling the strikes at different times and on different routes, thus denying the enemy the knowledge of when and where the strikes would take place and thereby reducing their ability to shoot down our planes.
On December 22 we sent a message to the North Vietnamese requesting a meeting for January 3. If they accepted, we offered to stop the bombing north of the 20th parallel on December 31 and suspend it for the duration of the meeting.

The media reaction to the December bombing was predictable. The Washington Post editorialized that it caused millions of Americans "to cringe in shame and to wonder at their President's very sanity." Joseph Kraft called it an action "of senseless terror which stains the good name of America." James Reston called it "war by tantrum," and Anthony Lewis charged that I was acting "like a maddened tyrant." In Congress there were similarly critical outbursts from members of both parties. Republican Senator William Saxbe of Ohio said that "President Nixon ... appears to have left his senses on this issue." And Mike Mansfield said that it was a "stone-age tactic."

Diary

On the negative side, the columnists and the media broke down about the way they had during the election and on all the Vietnam decisions previously.

The record of the liberal left media on Vietnam is perhaps one of the most disgraceful in the whole history of communications in this country. I am not referring to the honest pacifists who have been against the war from the beginning, but to those in the media who simply cannot bear the thought of this administration under my leadership bringing off the peace on an honorable basis which they have so long predicted would be impossible.

The election was a terrible blow to them and this is their first opportunity to recover from the election and to strike back.

It was especially gratifying to receive calls of support from Nelson Rockefeller and Ronald Reagan. Senator James Buckley also stood behind me, as did Howard Baker, Bob Taft, and Chuck Percy. One of my strongest supporters was John Connally, who called daily to report some new and positive sampling of public opinion.

As the criticism outside mounted, the pressure inside the White House became intense. I could feel the tension in the people I passed and greeted as I walked back and forth to the EOB. I knew how sincerely troubled many of them were because of the bombing; I understood how difficult the bombing made it for many of them to face their friends and even their families during what should have been a happy holiday season.

Pat and I spent Christmas at Key Biscayne. It was the first Christmas we had been alone without the girls. Tricia and Ed were in Europe traveling, and Julie was also there to be with David. Pat and I naturally urged them to go, but I think we were both depressed to find how empty the house seemed without them. Casting a dark shadow over everything was the knowledge that if the bombing did not succeed in forcing the North Vietnamese back to the negotiating table, there was no way of knowing how—or whether—the Vietnam war would end. I made several diary entries during this holiday period.

Diary

This is December 24, 1972—Key Biscayne—4 A.M.

The main thought that occurred to me at this early hour of the morning the day before Christmas, in addition to the overriding concern with regard to bringing the war to an end, is that I must get away from the thought of considering the office at any time a burden. I actually do not consider it a burden, an agony, etc., as did Eisenhower and also to a certain extent Johnson. As a matter of fact, I think the term glorious burden is the best description.

On this day before Christmas it is God's great gift to me to have the opportunity to exert leadership, not only for America but on the world scene, because of the size of the mandate and also the strength of the country.

In a sense, of course, this is not true because immediately after World War II our power was greater because of the monopoly of the bomb and the weakness of Europe and Japan as well as the weakness of China and Russia. But then, there were other world leaders on the scene. Today, except for Chiang Kai-shek most of the World War II greats are gone. This, on the one hand, imposes an enormous responsibility but, of course, at the same time the greatest opportunity an individual could have.

From this day forward I am going to look upon it that way and rise to the challenge with as much excitement, energy, enthusiasm, and, wherever possible, real joy that I can muster.

God's help will be required as will the help of loyal people on the staff and the family.

A new group of Nixon loyalists, of course, is an urgent necessity, but this really begins a new period and this tape concludes with that thought—a period of always reminding myself of the glorious burden of the presidency.

At 6 P.M. Saigon time on December 24 a twenty-four-hour Christmas
truce I had approved began in Vietnam. No planes flew. No bombs were dropped. For a day we were at peace.

On Christmas Day I made phone calls to many of our long-time friends and supporters across the country.

Diary

All in all, the Christmas calls didn't produce anything important or different, except not too much talk about the bombing. My guess is that they were all concerned about the media handling of it. Reagan mentioned that and said CBS under World War II circumstances would have been perhaps charged with treason.

Martha Mitchell sounded very up when I called her, which is encouraging because John Mitchell has gone through hell with her and I am glad that she is finally recovering. Perhaps the two weeks or so down here will make a great difference in getting all of them back on the track in a way that John can continue to be effective politically because he is one of the wisest men, one of the strongest men, we have on our whole team.

Henry called to wish us a Merry Christmas but obviously needed a little cheering up, which I was totally able to do because I am confident we are doing the right thing.

It is inevitable that not only the President but the First Lady become more and more lonely individuals in a sense who have to depend on fewer and fewer people who can give them a lift when they need it, even though ironically there are millions more who know them and who would help if they could just be given the chance to do so. It is a question not of too many friends but really too few—one of the inevitable consequences of this position.

As this Christmas Day ends I am thankful for Manolo and Fina, for the wonderful Filipinos and the staff, for Bebe, for Julie and Tricia, Pat, for all of those who basically are our family at a time that the girls are so far away.

Harry Truman died on the day after Christmas. According to his wishes, he lay in state at the Truman Library in Independence, Missouri. On December 27 Pat and I flew there to pay our respects to him and to call on Mrs. Truman.

There was considerable pressure from some of the staff to continue the Christmas truce for a few more days. But I disagreed completely. In fact, I personally ordered one of the biggest bombing raids for December 26: 116 B-52 sorties were flown against targets in the Hanoi-Haiphong area.

That afternoon the North Vietnamese sent the first signal that they had had enough. We received a message from them condemning what they called "extermination bombing," but they did not require that the bombing be stopped as a precondition to their agreeing to another meeting, which they proposed for January 8 in Paris. We replied that we would like the technical talks to begin on January 2 if the Kissinger meeting was to be delayed until January 8. We offered to stop the bombing above the 20th parallel once the arrangements for the meeting had been completed and had been publicly announced. On December 28 the North Vietnamese gave in and confirmed the January 2 and January 8 dates.

At 7 P.M. Washington time on December 29 bombing above the 20th parallel was suspended. The next morning we announced that the Paris negotiations would be resumed and that Kissinger would meet with Le Duc Tho on January 8.

Diary

The real question is whether the announcement today will be interpreted in the public mind as having been the result of a policy that worked. Of course, it will not be so interpreted by our opponents in the media and the Congress.

I have gone over this with Chuck Colson and he in turn with John Scali [Special Consultant to the President]. They both recognize that much of the media will try to say, "Why was the bombing necessary?" or might even try to say we were forced back to the table because of the world outcry and all that sort of thing.

Henry always looks at it in terms of the merits, and on the merits we know that what this is is a very stunning capitulation by the enemy to our terms.

Most of the TV reporters and the next morning's newspapers put the emphasis on the bombing halt rather than the resumption of talks, and most of them indicated that it was not clear whether the return to negotiations was the result of the bombing, or whether the bombing halt was the result of the enemy's agreement to return to negotiations. It was frustrating not to be able to set them straight. As I said to Colson, "We'll just have to trust to the good judgment of the people to see it. Certainly the press isn't going to make the point for us."

Pat and I spent New Year's Eve at Camp David. I watched the Red-
skins beat the Cowboys on television, 26 to 3. Just before midnight I looked back over the day and then ahead to the coming year.

Diary

I let all the staff off today and had Manolo cook some eggs and bacon [for dinner]. I had about half a martini and then some white wine, bacon and eggs.

As the year 1972 ends I have much to be grateful for—China, Russia, May 8, the election victory, and, of course, while the end of the year was somewhat marred by the need to bomb Hanoi-Haiphong, that decision, I think, can make the next four years much more successful than they otherwise might have been.

1973 will be a better year.

On January 2 I called Lyndon Johnson at his ranch in Texas. We shared a few reminiscences of Harry Truman, and he said that he did not know whether he would be able to attend the memorial service in Washington because he had experienced severe heart pains after attending the recent Texas-Alabama football game and his doctor had told him not to travel.

The conversation turned to Vietnam, and Johnson said, “I know what torture you’re going through over the war, and I want you to know that I’m praying for you every day.”

I told him, “I know that you tried to do the right thing when you were here, and that is what I am trying to do as well.”

We continued to play the Soviet and Chinese strategies for whatever they might turn out to be worth. Kissinger went to see Dobrynin and told him that the things the Soviets wanted—a Mideast settlement, a European security conference, nuclear weapons agreements—would have to stay on the back burner until Vietnam was settled. And I wrote a letter to Chou En-lai, saying that the Vietnam war impeded the kind of further progress that would benefit both our countries.

On January 2, 1973, the day before Congress officially reconvened, the House Democratic Caucus voted 154 to 75 to cut off all funds for Indochina military operations as soon as arrangements were made for the safe withdrawal of U.S. troops and the return of our POWs. Two days later Teddy Kennedy proposed a similar resolution to the Senate Democratic Caucus, where it passed 36 to 12. The atmosphere of the congressional leadership breakfast at the White House the next morning was tense. At the end I made a short speech about my reasons for the bombing and why I was sure it was the only way to get a settlement. I concluded, “Gentlemen, I will take the responsibility if these negotiations fail. If they succeed, then we will all succeed.”

I was not surprised at the conduct of the Democratic liberals. Ever since the election I had virtually written off any hope of receiving support or cooperation from them. I could see that they were going to try to use the Vietnam issue to pull themselves together after the McGovern debacle. Their strategy seemed obvious: if we got an agreement, they would say that it was because they had pressured me to stop the bombing and return to the negotiating table; if we failed to get an agreement, they would insist on the military withdrawal that most of them had favored all along.

On January 6, before he left for Paris, Kissinger and I met at Camp David to discuss the negotiating strategy he should follow. During the last round of negotiations in December he had described the two options from which we had to choose. Under Option One we would agree to an immediate settlement on the best terms we could negotiate. Under Option Two we would break with Thieu and continue the bombing until the North Vietnamese agreed to return our POWs in exchange for our complete withdrawal.

I was determined that this round of negotiations would produce an agreement, and I strongly conveyed my sentiments to Kissinger.

Diary

Adding it all up I put it to Henry quite directly that even if we could go back to the October 8 agreement that we should take it, having in mind the fact that there will be a lot of details that will have been ironed out so that we can claim some improvement over that agreement. I told him that a poor settlement on Option One was better for us than Option Two at its best would be.

He has finally come around to that point of view, although he believes that both from the standpoint of South Vietnam and perhaps our own standpoint in the long term, we might be better off with Option Two. I think he overlooks the fact that as far as our situation here is concerned, the war-weariness has reached the point that Option Two is just too much for us to carry on.

The war continues to take too much of our attention from other international issues, such as the Mideast, and it also has a detrimental effect on our international relations, not only with the Soviet and the Chinese but even with our allies.

As I told him goodbye at the door of Birch Lodge, I said, “Well, one way or another, this is it!” That night I tried to list all the pluses and
minuses to see if I could find some clue to the way things would turn out.

Diary
The first day may tell us a great deal. Certainly as of the end of last week there was a good chance that the enemy was coming back to negotiate a settlement. The international support they have had and the support from the Democrats in Congress may cool them off and convince them that they can hang on longer.

Henry, of course, is going to continue to play the hard line, indicating that I might resort to resumption of the bombing in the Hanoi area, even though I have told him that as far as our internal planning is concerned we cannot consider this to be a viable option.

He feels that another card we have is the threat to withdraw the agreement altogether. He believes that Hanoi wants an agreement now for the reason that this gives them some standing in the South, whereas an American bug-out ironically would still leave them with the necessity of winning militarily in the South.

Some minor straws in the wind are that the technical talks have made some progress this week on the four easier issues, with the four tougher ones left for next week. Also, the fact that the North Vietnamese have launched offensives in the South may indicate that they are trying to grab territory and villages, etc., prior to the time that a cease-fire takes place.

Another plus item is that the South Vietnamese seem to be coming more into line. Our intelligence indicates that Thieu is telling visitors that it is not a peace agreement that he is going to get, but a commitment from the United States to continue to protect South Vietnam in the event such an agreement is broken. This, of course, is exactly the line I gave him in my letter which Haig delivered to him.

In the midst of the tense days of the December bombing and the furore it provoked, new Watergate problems began to surface. On December 8 Howard Hunt’s wife was killed in a plane crash; since then Hunt had apparently been disconsolate and on the verge of a breakdown. Now that Hunt was about to face a jail term, Colson began to worry about him.

On the White House staff there were the first signs of finger-pointing, tentative and without evidence. I could sense that people were getting unsettled and worried. I dictated in my diary on January 3.

Diary
One disturbing note was Haldeman’s comment to the effect that Colson may have been aware of the Watergate business. I am not sure actually that he was. Haldeman’s point was that Colson was insisting on getting information with regard to attempts of the Democrats to disrupt our convention, etc. Of course, Colson may have been insisting on such information but he may not have been aware of what means were being used to obtain this information. I simply can’t believe, based on my conversations with Colson, that he would have been so stupid as to think we could get such information through attempting to bug the other side.

I made another note about this problem three days later, on Saturday, January 6.

Diary
Colson told me on Friday that he had tried to do everything he could to keep Hunt in line from turning state’s evidence. After what happened to Hunt’s wife, etc., I think we have a very good case for showing some clemency.

It was Colson’s view apparently that either Haldeman or Ehrlichman or both might have been more deeply involved than has been indicated. Of course, it is all hearsay. Colson’s point is that Magruder is a name-dropper and that Magruder may have mentioned the names of Haldeman and Ehrlichman in telling the Watergate people to get information. Apparently, according to Colson, too, some of the meetings took place in Mitchell’s office at the Justice Department. This would seem hard for me to believe but then again during the campaign people are not as rational or responsible as they normally would be. This, I know, must be a great burden for Haldeman and Ehrlichman during this past tough week and I could see that something was eating them without knowing what.

I was concerned about these speculations, but I saw them at least in part as manifestations of the routine staff animosities that had long existed between Colson and Mitchell and Colson and Ehrlichman.

It now seems clear that I knew Colson was sending messages of reassurance to Hunt through his lawyer—messages that Hunt took to be signals of eventual clemency. I did not believe that any commitments had been made. I cannot even rule out the possibility that I knew similar reassurance was being given the other defendants. I certainly do not