

## Peace Talks: The Algerian Connection

PARIS—Americans discouraged by the slow motion Vietnam peace talks can take heart from the knowledge that Algeria and France went through not entirely dissimilar ups and downs in seeking a negotiated settlement of their eight year conflict.

In the process the Algerian war dragged on longer under the late General de Gaulle than it had under the Fourth Republic which succumbed in part because of its inability to either win the conflict militarily or find a negotiated settlement.

And even when formal peace negotiations replaced earlier inconclusive secret contacts in Italy and Yugoslavia, the discussions were marked by long interruptions, political crisis and despair.

An initial contact in Melun, outside Paris, broke up inconclusively in June, 1960 and it was not until the following May that the Algerians and French were able to meet at Evian on Lake Geneva. Those negotiations lasted 24 days, then broke down. And when they resumed in nearby Lugrin that July the massive French riposte to a Tunisian attack against their Mediterranean naval base at Bizerte forced a long postponement after only one week.

A major shakeup in the Algerian provisional government in August meant that the French negotiators patiently had to get to know their new Algerian interlocutors and teach them the complicated elements of the negotiating brief.

And even when de Gaulle dropped French claims to sovereignty over the Sahara and its oil in September the major sticking point which had condemned the earlier talks, such was the disarray in Algerian ranks that it took months of secret contacts to arrange for the final conference.

The heart of the peace agreement was hammered out secretly in the winter of 1962, especially during a week-long February meeting at the ski resort at Les Rousses and only then did Algerians and the French formally meet again in Evian from March 5 to 18 when the treaty was finally signed.

The background to the Algerian peace negotiations was every bit as violent as that of the Vietnam talks. The last two years of

negotiations were marked by attempts on de Gaulle's life, a major, if abortive, military revolt in Algeria and terrorism by diehard partisans of keeping Algeria French which swept across the Mediterranean to France itself.

Moreover, no matter how difficult reconciling the interests of Hanoi, Saigon, the Vietcong and Washington may seem, the task for the French and Algerians was formidable. Both sides spoke French, but the real problem was to invent a new country—Algeria—and to that end the French prepared not only their own detailed briefs, but also the Algerians:

Militarily, the French army had almost complete control of the countryside, a claim that the South Vietnamese military has never been able to make and certainly not sincerely since the Easter North Vietnamese offensive. But, the Algerians were firmly implanted politically within Algerian cities—often thanks to de Gaulle's not entirely oblique encouragement—unlike the Vietcong who have never been able to organize and open urban following.

In fact, the only principle of the present Vietnam talks which has no seemingly obvious parallel in the Algerian negotiations is the recent apparent American decision to go back on points which had been agreed on earlier.

A leading French negotiator of the Algerian peace talks recalled that his Algerian interlocutors had tried to do so. Largely because they feared being accused of treason by more intransigent elements in their own ranks. "But with a little persuasion." The Frenchman said. "We talked them out of it."

Ironically, many of the detailed guarantees that France negotiated so hard to incorporate into the treaty were never applied. They concerned the million-strong French community and the maintenance of French military bases after the peace.

All but a relative handful of the French left Algeria within months of the peace and the bases were abandoned long before the treaty had stipulated.