

Paris: Where It Stands

By W. W. Rostow

AUSTIN, Tex.—As negotiations resume in Paris, it may be worth looking back at what has apparently transpired in the last several months.

The draft agreement released to the press by Hanoi on Oct. 26, 1972, was both the design of a cease-fire and an outline of principles to govern a subsequent peace settlement. It contained all the familiar elements in the American position, substantially shared in Saigon.

These were the obvious weaknesses in the procedure which separated a cease-fire from a future settlement:

- United States troops were to be out in sixty days. The other key dates (except the calling of the international conference within thirty days) were fuzzy or not mentioned; a political settlement within three months, depending on "everyone doing his utmost"; no date for withdrawing "foreign" forces from Laos and Cambodia.

- No date or procedure for withdrawal of North Vietnamese forces from South Vietnam, except an elliptical reference.

- The major United States leverage on North Vietnam (mining and bombing) would end immediately; the major North Vietnamese leverage on South Vietnam, Laos and Cambodia (its troops beyond its borders) would remain throughout the domestic political and international negotiations.

Given these evident weaknesses in the draft agreement, why should President Nixon have felt initial confidence that it was viable? If the International Control Commission could effectively supervise the replacement of arms during the cease-fire, there was no danger of a big build-up and a renewed major Communist offensive. In the long run, if an international control commission could assure compliance with the reaffirmed Geneva Accords on Laos of 1962, North Vietnamese forces left behind in South Vietnam (as well as in Laos and Cambodia) could not sustain themselves. They would have to withdraw.

In addition, a number of considerations may have convinced President Nixon that Hanoi wanted the best settlement it could get rather than a renewed war; the heavy losses suffered by North Vietnam in the spring offensive; the apparent interest of the Hanoi negotiators in economic aid and the palpable need of North Vietnam to get on with the tasks of economic and social development; indications from both Moscow and Peking that they wished to see a settlement.

Under these circumstances, it seemed fair to urge Saigon to proceed to implement the cease-fire and to face the peace settlement confidently.

Then diplomacy in December altered Washington's perception of Hanoi's intent. Hanoi appeared to seek not a South Vietnamese political settlement and an election but rather a version of what happened in Laos since 1954.

What happened in Laos?

The 1954 agreement isolated two provinces as regroupment areas for Communist forces (Sam Neua and Phong Saly) pending, in the case of the North Vietnamese, return to their own country, and in the case of the Pathet Lao, their integration into the Laos army or demobilization. The International Control Commission created in 1954 was never permitted to enter these two provinces; the withdrawal of the North Vietnamese troops was never verified; the frontiers of Laos were steadily violated by North Vietnam; and the Communists proceeded to build there the political and military base from which they later pressed outward to expand their area of control in Laos. A unified independent Laos was never created—a fact fundamental to the tragic war in South Vietnam which was resumed in the course of 1958 and which continues fourteen years later.

In 1954 (as now) the leaders in Hanoi were pressed by Moscow and Peking to settle. In December they may well have envisaged in Paris a repetition on a large scale of what they earlier did in Laos; that is, they *de facto* establishment of political and military bases in South Vietnam, under the protection of cease-fire arrangements; and undermining of their commitments to settlements in Laos and Cambodia; insistence on a weak international control commission incapable of preventing continued infiltration of arms and men; the resumption of war on a large scale in Indochina at a later, more propitious time, with America gone from the field.

President Nixon had cut the bombing south of the 20th parallel in the period of optimism. He resumed it in December.

As negotiations resume, the question is: Will Hanoi accept an agreement which is fully and effectively monitored?

The answer lies outside Hanoi: in Peking and Moscow; in London, which bears special responsibilities under the Geneva Accords of 1954 and 1962; in New Delhi, Ottawa and Warsaw, where the governments know all too well how weak inspection provisions, in which they participated, have permitted the tragedy of Indochina to persist for almost twenty years; and in the United States, where the Congress and the American people must decide whether to support President Nixon in consolidating a stable and honorable peace.

W. W. Rostow was adviser to President Johnson.