

# The Active Participation of OUR FRIENDS

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As the tragic war in Vietnam appears to draw to a close, the time has come for the American people to recognize one of the best kept secrets in President Nixon's struggle for peace with honor in Indochina. We refer to the large and significant role that President Georges Pompidou and his Foreign Minister, Maurice Schumann, have played for two years in the long and tortuous negotiations.

*It is little short of a miracle of diplomatic discretion that France was able to veil the extent of its part in the delicate process centered in its capital. Only in the last few months have French statesmen begun to acknowledge their cautious, active participation—and this without undue boastfulness and without disclosing the full magnitude of their contributions.*

"More than any other government," President Pompidou informed a press conference early this month, "we have been involved in these negotiations, because we wholeheartedly wanted them to be successful." He alluded to his correspondence with Nixon, which "for reasons of propriety and discretion" he did not make public.

About three months earlier, on September 21, he talked to the press about Henry Kissinger's visits to Paris "in utmost secrecy," adding: "I can tell you now that we helped in these meetings, that I too personally helped and that—a rare thing for France—the secret was perfectly kept...France helps as best she can, especially on the material level."

A spokesman for the Foreign Office, at about the same time, emphasized that "the French government's attitude of caution and discretion does not keep it from an extremely active presence in all areas" of the negotiations. Schumann himself, on television, declared that "We have acted effectively" and that the French role could be qualified as "essential."

## THE NEW YORK TIMES REPORT

Basing himself on Pompidou's circumpect statements, C. L. Sulzberger of the *New York Times* reported from Paris on December 20, that "France has done what she could to facilitate peace negotiations here by granting facilities and keeping contacts with all parties." The President, he wrote, had seen Kissinger several times and "feels the belligerents are ultimately condemned by history to sign an agreement, although France is obviously not in a position to impose peace."

In a previous dispatch, December 15, Sulzberger declared that since Schumann met with Nixon on September 29, "he has personally remained in contact with the main parties," adding that the French

"claim responsibility for several provisions of the ultimate agreements and also for arranging compromises on others."

While he could not give details, Schumann told the National Assembly on November 16: "It is certain that we will in any case not be absent from the last phase of the negotiations." He characterized the Pompidou government's role as "discreet but effective," and remarked that in due time "everyone will recognize that some of the formulas for agreement reflect our suggestions." During the decisive weeks, Schumann said, he was able to confer with Nixon, Secretary of State Rogers and Kissinger, "and on the other hand to meet without needless publicity with the spokesmen for the Vietnamese people."

Both the Americans and the Vietnamese, the Paris *France-Soir* could report on December 9, "hope that France will make use of her experience in Asian affairs to help them start definitively on the path to peace." Alluding to the fears of an impasse at that time, the newspaper stated that "The visit Mr. Kissinger paid yesterday to President Pompidou and the one he made the previous day to Maurice Schumann, who had made a special trip from Brussels, perhaps have as their goal to avoid this."

## SIMILAR FRENCH & U.S. VIEWS

That the views of the Pompidou government were close to those of the White House, in one vital respect, came through in a statement by Foreign Minister Schumann as far back as May 7, 1972: "The absorption of one part of Vietnam by another or the establishment in South Vietnam of a government which mirrors that of North Vietnam will not facilitate the search for a political solution. The chances for a negotiated solution are proportional to the chances for establishing an independent and neutral government in South Vietnam."

In a wider focus on affairs, Pompidou spoke favorably of the Nixon visit to Peking and Moscow last year. "It is quite evident," he said, "that this visit was not irrelevant to the issues of peace. But it was also, as the French government predicted, a way to renew indispensable ties between all civilizations which have made the modern world what it is."

When the whole story can be told, it will be clear that in the attainment of an honorable peace in Indochina the role of France was even larger than these recent quotations indicate. **Once more the deep friendship between the peoples of France and the United States have been confirmed. It is a unique bond, for it has endured nearly two hundred years—the longest continuous such relationship between two great nations in the modern world.**

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