Accords of '54 and '73: Strong Similarities

U.S. Finally Seems to Be Accepting Geneva Terms

FOR THE GOVERNMENT OF THE UNITED STATES OF AMERICA:

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The signatures on one of the 62 cease-fire documents

Associated Press

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Special to The New York Times

SAIGON, South Vietnam—Jan. 28—The agreement that Secretary of State William P. Rogers signed yesterdayy in Paris bears a remarkable resemblance in its basic provisions to the Geneva accords of 1954.

News Analysis

It might be said, in fact, that almost 19 years after an earlier Secretary of State, John Foster Dulles, refused to endorse the Geneva settlement, the United States had finally agreed to its major terms. The consequences that flowed from that refusal in 1954 have been enormous. The Eisenhower Administration's National Security Council, meeting in August, 1954, shortly after the Geneva conference ended, declared that the accords were a "disaster" that "may lead to the loss of Southeast Asia" unless checked by American action. A few weeks later the first teams of American advisers were sent to Vietnam.

Now, in a great historical than 455,000 American lives shift, after the loss of more and several hundred billion dollars, the man who was Vice President at the time of the Geneva conference, Richard M. Nixon, has accepted much the same settlement.

As for the similarities, in essence the Geneva and the Paris agreements call for the temporary partition of Vietnam into a Communist North and a shaky non-Communist South. In each agreement the future of South Vietnam is to be decided by an election, but without any guarantee that it will be held. Laos and Cambodia are to be neutralized, and all foreign troops—French in the original instance, American in the present—must pull out of all of Indochina. Both settlements are to be overseen by a small and largely powerless international commission.

The United States' distaste for the 1954 accords and its acceptance of the 1973 agreement are reflected in the contrast in postwar planning for American activities in Hanoi.

In June, 1954, while the Geneva conference was still under way, the Eisenhower Administration secretly ordered a small team of Americans headed by Col. Edward G. Landsdale to begin covert operations against North Vietnam. Although the mission was largely a failure, it did try to sabotage Hanoi's printing presses and contaminate the engines of city buses.

The Paris agreement, in Article 21, states that Washington will provide postwar economic aid to Hanoi and that "the United States anticipates that this agreement will usher in an era of reconciliation with the Democratic Republic of Vietnam."

If the provisions of the two settlements are strikingly similar, they were framed against a similar background of international forces.

In 1954 France was exhausted and bitterly divided by the Indochina war, which had been going on for eight years. In June of that year, in the middle of the Geneva conference, Pierre Mendès-France took over as Premier with a pledge that he would resign unless a settlement was reached by July 20. It was—on July 20.

President Nixon faced a nation exhausted and torn by a war that had been going on, in its intensive form, for seven years. Although Mr. Nixon was not sworn to achieve the end of the fighting or to resign, it was clear that his electoral mandate was at least partly based on the belief that it was he who could best reach a settlement.

At least equally important, in both 1954 and this past year, the Soviet Union and China were seriously committed to seeking a peaceful solution.

French Rejected Plan

At the time of Geneva the Russians were worried that under American pressure the West European nations, especially West Germany, would establish an organization known as the European Defense Community as a stronger successor to the Atlantic alliance.

The Russians hoped that by appearing conciliatory and by getting the Vietnamese Communist delegates at Geneva to offer concessions, France would stay out of the new defense group. After the Russians apparently did persuade Ho Chi Minh to back down in his demand for control of all Vietnam, not just part, the French National Assembly voted against the defense proposal.

In much the same way the Russians are thought to have put pressure on Hanoi recently to moderate its insistence that President Nguyen Van Thieu resign before it would consider a cease-fire and the release of American prisoners. The reasons for Moscow's help appear to be its desire for a general European disarmament conference and for American trade and technical assistance.

In 1954 the Chinese were just emerging from the Korean war and, under the guidance of Premier Chou En-lai, were embarking on a moderate foreign policy that stressed the so-called five principles of peaceful coexistence. Like the Russians the Chinese sought to convince their non-Communist neighbors of their friendly intentions, and Mr. Chou is thought to have played a decisive role when, just before the end of the Geneva conference, he met with Ho Chi Minh on the Chinese-Vietnamese border and urged him to make concessions.

Over the past year the Chinese, under the redoubtable Mr. Chou, have again been emerging from a period of isolation—this time imposed by the recent Cultural Revolution—and have been trying out a foreign policy of winning friends among the non-Communist powers. While little is known publicly this time about Peking's role in persuading the North Vietnamese to make the concessions that led to the breakthrough in Paris on Oct. 8, knowledgeable American officials here say it was vital.

Despite the similarities in the provisions of the Geneva and Paris agreements and in their international contexts, there are two significant differences.

Strong Government Now

First, in 1954 there was no real government in Saigon, no independent army and no strong police force. The negotiators on both sides assumed that the new regime, headed by Emperor Bao Dai, would soon succumb to poor leadership, banditry, political intrigue and the Communists. Ngo Dinh Diem's later emergence as a strong leader came as a complete surprise.

In contrast, President Thieu has already assembled the most powerful administration, army and police apparatus in Vietnam in at least a century.

Second, while the Geneva accords provided for a clear separation of the Communists, who were to regroup their armed forces to the North, and the non-Communists, who could move to the South if they chose, the Paris agreement makes no demarcation of territory.

Local commanders are supposed to stop armed patrols, but it is widely expected that endemic local skirmishing can hardly be avoided as both sides seek to guard their territory.

Aside from those differences, many of the similarities between the 1954 and 1973 settlements are explicitly spelled out in the Paris text. Article 1 of the Paris agreement, for example, begins: "The United States and all other countries respect the independence, sovereignty, unity and territorial integrity of Vietnam as recognized by the 1954 Geneva Agreements on Vietnam."

Article 15 of the Paris accord, which deals with the long-disputed issue of the demilitarized zone, also recalls the language of the earlier agreement: "The military demarcation line between the two zones at the 17th Parallel is only provisional and not a political or territorial boundary, as provided for in Paragraph 6 of the Final Declaration of the 1954 Geneva Conference."

Kissinger Sees Victory

Henry A. Kissinger, who negotiated for the United States, has insisted that the inclusion of recognition of the line in the Paris agreement is a victory for the idea of a sovereign state of South Vietnam. The North Vietnamese apparently resisted until the last minute against acceptance of the reaffirmation of the line, but it is not something that has meant much in practice.

The 1954 accords, like the present one, provided for both a joint military commission and an international commission to supervise enforcement. In both cases the agreements have stipulated that the supervisory agencies can make official reports only on the basic unanimity—an arrangement that undermined the enforcement of the Geneva accords from the outset.

The international commission, which was called the International Commission for Supervision and Control under the

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1-29-73 NYT

Geneva accords, was composed of representatives of Canada, Poland and India, with an Indian as the chairman. The new commission, which reverses the name—International Commission of Control and Supervision—is made up of four members, Canada, Poland and Indonesia and Hungary.

Few experienced observers in Saigon can see many other differences.

Superficially the political settlements decreed by the two agreements have different forms, the Geneva version calling for a national election in both North and South that would decide on the means of national reunification, the Paris version providing merely for an election in the South to set up a new government.

No Election Guarantees

In neither case are there guarantees that compel the Governments to hold the specified elections, and almost everyone in South Vietnam seems to believe that President Thieu is no more likely to hold his election than President Diem was. (Instead of holding the required election on national reunification Mr. Diem staged a referendum in which he won 98.2 per cent of the vote.)

In one of the many ironies that history relishes, Cambodia appears to be the nation that profited most from the Geneva accords but will gain least from the Paris settlement. From 1954 until his overthrow in the spring of 1970, the Cambodian ruler, Prince Norodom Sihanouk, was able to keep his country neutral, as the accords specified.

The North Vietnamese and Vietcong made gradually increasing use of eastern Cambodia for base areas and infiltration routes, but the vast majority of Cambodians lived in peace.

The advent of the Lon Nol Government and its policy of trying to evict the Vietnamese has changed all that. Now, according to Mr. Kissinger, the Cambodian problem will be the hardest to solve, for not only are there the Government in Phnom Penh and the North Vietnamese; there are also Prince Sihanouk's exile regime in Peking and the rapidly growing Cambodian Communist troops under Cambodian leaders in Hanoi.