

## Indochina: Phase II

Phase I of the Paris peace accords has now been completed with the withdrawal of the last American ground combat troops from Vietnam and the return of the last war prisoners from North Vietnam. This is a notable achievement of the Administration, and it is one that has brought great relief to the country as a whole.

No one should have any illusions, however, about what the future may hold for Indochina. The war may be over for Americans—American ground forces at least—but it is over neither for the Vietnamese, nor for their neighbors the Cambodians who still experience the terror of American B-52 bombing attacks, nor even necessarily for those reluctant warriors the Laotians. The fundamental political issues that first precipitated conflict remain unresolved throughout the area.

Provisions for troop withdrawal and prisoner return comprised the sole unambiguous portions of the Paris agreements. Strong mutual interest in their fulfillment on both sides practically insured the speedy resolution of the minor hitches that did develop.

Phase II, the attempt to stabilize the peace and to move toward political accommodation in South Vietnam and the neighboring countries, is not nearly so easy.

The elaborate machinery that was devised at Paris to supervise the cease-fire has fulfilled the worst fears of the skeptics. To no one's real surprise, the Four-Party Joint Military Commission never manned more than a fraction of its assigned sites and exercised no significant check on hostilities even where it presumed to function. With the departure of its American and North Vietnamese members, the successor Two-Party Commission composed of South Vietnamese Government and Vietcong representatives can hardly be expected to do better.

The International Commission of Control and Supervision has been paralyzed from the start—as it was evident it would be—by a deadlock along ideological lines. Canada has reluctantly consented under heavy pressure to pursue this “charade” for another sixty days, but only on the condition that some progress is made toward a political settlement.

The prospects for political accommodation appear extremely remote. Although representatives of the Saigon Government and the Vietcong's Provisional Revolutionary Government are meeting in Paris, neither side has shown any disposition to compromise or to make room for the neglected Third Force which might help to contrive some *modus vivendi*. In the absence of a political settlement, fighting can be expected to continue and sooner or later to escalate into a major effort by one side or other to achieve a military decision.

To prevent such a calamity, it is certainly in the interest of the United States and all other concerned outside powers to press both sides to reach an accommodation. At the same time, it is essential to keep foremost in mind the central lesson of the American experience in Indochina—the extremely limited ability of outside powers to influence political developments in the Third World.

Phase II is the responsibility of the peoples of Indochina. For better or for worse, they must be left free to work out their own destiny.