

Paris II

The second Vietnam peace agreement that was signed yesterday in Paris by representatives of the United States, North and South Vietnam and the Vietcong is essentially a reread of the Jan. 27 Paris pact, with all the weaknesses of that much-abused document.

If the new agreement has any better chance for success, it is because there is evidence that the still bitterly hostile Vietnamese factions are under strong pressure from their big-power supporters to observe strictly the cease-fire that has been rescheduled to begin at midnight tonight. In moving to complete the accord, Washington apparently overrode objections from the Thieu regime, displaying refreshing firmness with Saigon. Meanwhile, a communiqué in Peking, where Chinese and North Vietnamese leaders have been meeting, similarly suggests that China has been pressing Hanoi to end the fighting.

Achievement of a genuine cease-fire after so many years of conflict would be a substantial and promising accomplishment. But there is still no assurance that peace can be preserved between opposing forces that remain heavily armed as a result both of large shipments of American military equipment to Saigon just prior to the January agreement and of the subsequent large-scale infiltration of men and supplies from the North.

Like its predecessor, the new Paris pact is ambiguous in its arrangements for settling the underlying political conflict. Key provisions for the release of political prisoners and establishment of a Council of National Reconciliation and Concord call only on the parties to "do their utmost" to achieve these goals within a new 45-day time frame. Unless there is a will to compromise that is not yet evident on either side, either of these contentious issues could become the cause of renewed conflict.

The vulnerability of the new agreement underscores the continuing need for Congressional action to insure that the withdrawal of American combat troops and prisoners from Indochina, which were the most notable achievements of the initial accords, will become complete and final. This is especially true in light of Henry Kissinger's assertion that nothing in the new agreement prevents a continuation of American bombing raids in Cambodia.

Administration supporters have been obstructing vital legislation to restore Congressional control over United States military activities in Indochina on the grounds that nothing should be done to tie the hands of American negotiators in Paris. Now that Mr. Kissinger has successfully completed his mission, there is nothing to justify further delay on actions which are essential to the restoration of this country's constitutional system and, incidentally, are altogether in accord with the spirit of the Paris agreements.