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(Background material)

ONE YEAR OF FRUITLESS NEGOTIATIONS

Today marks the first anniversary of the consultative talks held in Paris between the two South Vietnamese parties, otherwise known as the La Celle-St. Cloud Conference. Yet this Conference which at first met in an atmosphere of great hope engendered by the Paris Agreement has turned out to be a great disappointment, especially to the South Vietnamese people who has suffered so much in the continuing conflict in Viet-Nam. The responsibility for this state of affairs lies squarely on the shoulders of the Communist side as will become apparent in the following analysis.

The La Celle-St. Cloud Conference has its genesis in the Paris Agreement on Ending the War and Restoring Peace in Viet-Nam signed on January 27, 1973. Article 12(A) of this document stipulates that "immediately after the ceasefire (which went into effect at eight o'clock in the morning, local time in Viet-Nam, on January 28, 1973), the two South Vietnamese parties shall hold consultations in a spirit of national reconciliation and concord, mutual respect, and mutual non-elimination to set up a National Council of National Reconciliation and Concord of three equal segments....the two South Vietnamese parties shall sign an agreement on the internal matters of South Viet-Nam

as soon as possible and do their utmost to accomplish this within ninety days after the ceasefire comes into effect, in keeping with the South Vietnamese people's aspirations for peace, independence and democracy".

In other words, the Paris Agreement envisions the settlement of the Viet-Nam war in two distinct stages, a military phase which theoretically should have come to an end on the morning of January 28, 1973, and a short lapse of time afterwards which ideally would have produced a political solution to the internal situation in South Viet-Nam. Thus conceptually speaking, a political solution for South Viet-Nam should have been negotiated by April 27, 1973, had the two sides shown the "utmost" goodwill to reach it.

The first contacts between the two parties, the Government of Viet-Nam and the NLF, regarding procedural matters went smoothly enough. As a consequence, the two parties first met officially at the La Celle-St. Cloud castle on March 19, 1973, after the French Government was kind enough to reserve the use of the location for the purpose of the talks.

At this meeting, the Government of the Republic of Viet-Nam delegation, mindful of the fact that both the letter and the spirit of the Paris Agreement required a speedy solution to the political problems of South Viet-Nam which would respect the 'sacred' and 'inalienable' right of the South Vietnamese people to self-determination (Article 9A), proposed a very concrete agenda discussing the general election provided for in Article 9(A) of the Agreement, the composition of the National Council of National Reconciliation and Concord charged with organizing the election (Article 12B) and the question of armed forces in South Viet-Nam (Article 13). But the NLF preferred to dwell on generalities and suggested that

the first item for discussion be the question of democratic freedom. It is thus clear that the NLF expected the talks to either bog down in these generalities or to last forever.

With one side proceeding with such bad faith or dilatory tactics the talks soon degenerated into a propaganda forum where the NLF spend time talking violations of the ceasefire rather than the more substantive issues of an eventual political settlement. In April 1973, the GVN delegation had to remind the other side that they were at La Celle-St. Cloud for political discussions and not for wrangling over alleged ceasefire violations, especially when these were for the most part their doing as evidenced by the last report of the ICCS Canadian delegation. At the sixth and seventh meeting in April, the GVN delegation thus came up with an even more detailed and concrete proposed agenda which would go into such questions as: the power organs to be elected, the conditions conducive to a 'genuinely free and democratic general election', the organization and composition of the National Council of National Reconciliation and Concord. Finally, as the 90-day deadline written in the Agreement came close, on April 25, 1973 -- two days before the deadline -- the GVN delegation deposited at the eighth meeting the most concrete and substantial proposal that was ever proposed in the course of the entire La Celle-St. Cloud Conference: a preliminary accord on principles leading to an eventual "final and comprehensive agreement on the internal matters of South Viet-Nam" was put forward, complete with text and a proposed schedule leading from a suggested date of signing of the preliminary accord on April 27, 1973 to a general election 120 days later, on Sunday, August 26, 1973.

Faced with such a demonstration of good faith, the NLF could only

come up with a hastily put together proposal of six points which at first they described as seven points. Unfortunately the NLF's "six points", besides the obscure language of some of the passages, had nothing to say. One would be hard put to find any concrete date or suggestion as to a clearcut course of action in the maze of vituperative language that accompanied these "six points".

The 90-day deadline therefore came and went with the NLF not even disposed to talk substantive issues, let alone concrete dates and positive actions.

The universal letdown caused by this first failure of the negotiations between the two South Vietnamese parties found a slight uplift in the proclamation of the joint communique of June 13, 1973, whose Article 10(B) reiterated the commitment of both sides to see to it that the National Council of National Reconciliation and Concord would be formed "as soon as possible" and that "an agreement on the internal matters of South Viet-Nam" also be signed "as soon as possible" with both parties "doing their utmost to accomplish this within forty-five days from the date of signature of this joint communique", i.e. by July 28, 1973.

The GVN delegation went back to the conference room with renewed vigor. It took note of the NLF's six points, suggesting only that Point 1 of the other side (regarding the implementation of the ceasefire) and Point 2 (the return of prisoners) be left to the Two-Party Joint Military Commissions in Saigon, who were directly responsible for the implementation of the ceasefire agreement. In addition, the GVN delegation proposed a new schedule leading up to a general election, which would take place on Christmas Day 1973.

The categorical rejection of the GVN proposal by the NLF once again dampened all hopes, especially as the NLF was unable to counter with any alternative proposal which would keep the faith alive as to a possible solution to the internal, political conflict in South Viet-Nam. In this way, the 45-day deadline envisioned in the joint communique also came and went without an inch of ground being covered in the talks leading eventually to peace in Viet-Nam. Not very long after, the Vietnamese New Year, always a time of hope in the Vietnamese psyche, and the first anniversary of the Paris Agreement (January 27, 1974) came along, but no progress was registered on the negotiation front.

Since then, the GVN delegation has once more come up with a new proposal suggesting the twentieth anniversary of the Geneva Accord (July 20, 1974) as a possible date for general election. But the NLF side maintained a consistently negative approach, which augurs extremely ominously for the prospect of real peace in South Viet-Nam.

On the occasion of the first anniversary of the La Celle-St. Cloud Conference, the two South Vietnamese parties owe it to the South Vietnamese people and to the world an honest report as to the progress on the negotiating front regarding an eventual solution to the internal conflict in South Viet-Nam. Made fully aware of the negotiation situation in Paris, the people of South Viet-Nam appeals to the people of the world and to the international community to bring their influence to bear on the Communist side so that a fair and honest peace be accorded to the South Vietnamese people.