

National Committee for a Political Settlement in Vietnam/Negotiation Now!

February, 1970

Q. Haven't we already offered a cease-fire?

A. No. During the long months of the Paris talks no party has ever put a cease-fire proposal on the table for negotiation.

Q. But the other side has rejected the idea of a cease-fire, so why offer it?

A. Their rejection has been only in reply to speeches and statements, not to a serious negotiating offer. Even if they reject it immediately, there is enough in the "standstill" and election commission proposals to stimulate them to probe their meaning at least privately. This could lead to re-opening negotiations. The continuing presence on the table of a bone-fide, comprehensive proposal to stop the killing and give the N.L.F. access to the political process could build enough public support in Vietnam and around the world to persuade them to negotiate in good faith.

Q. Why not wait a while and give the President's Vietnamization plan a chance to work?

A. Placing this kind of proposal on the table at Paris would not conflict with present policy, nor cut any future options for de-escalation or faster troop withdrawals. Rather, it would enhance the chances for success of any moves toward peace. The President has said that he will continue efforts to negotiate a just peace. This proposal could put negotiations back on the track. At present there is grave risk that they will be abandoned altogether.

Q. Haven't we made enough concessions? Shouldn't the next move be up to them?

A. This is not a concession. It is a political strategy, offering a political solution to a political problem, rather than depending on military "Vietnamization" alone. Adding the new element of the standstill cease-fire to the proposals already made simply spells out in detail what we could consider an acceptable framework for ending the fighting.

Q. Some people have said the war might "just fade away" without a negotiated settlement. Isn't this possible?

A. It is illusory to base our policy on this remote possibility. The President and the House of Representatives and 46 Senators are on record in favor of efforts to negotiate a just peace.

Q. Would Saigon agree to such a proposal, even if we wanted to present it?

A. President Thieu has said in two major speeches that he is willing to "negotiate the modalities of a cease-fire with the other side." In any case, we shouldn't let Saigon veto a constructive peace proposal.

Q. What do you mean by "standstill" cease-fire?

A. It means stopping the fighting in place, with each side in de facto control of the territory it occupies until new elections held promptly, (within 3 to 6 months) decide who shall govern the country. The international peace-keeping force would oversee the cease-fire, guaranteeing free movement of trade, individuals (including political candidates) and unarmed military personnel throughout all territories. The electoral commission composed of representatives of Saigon, the N.L.F. and the various political and religious groups, would have full jurisdiction over the electoral process, including procedures for registration, voting, etc.

Q. How would the cease-fire be enforced?

A. An international force, preferably Asians, of perhaps 3000 men could be stationed at listening posts throughout the country. They would receive and handle reports of violations on the spot, or referring them to the higher body. Spot violations would not constitute a break-down of the agreement. Decisions should be made by majority rule, rather than the unanimity which has paralyzed the present International Control Commission.

Q. By calling for elections aren't we imposing Western values and traditions that are foreign to an Asian society?

A. All the Vietnamese parties on both sides at Paris have proposed elections as the way to settle the question of who rules the country. The chief point of contention is who runs the country during the interim period leading up to elections. The N.L.F. rejects Saigon. Saigon rejects a coalition government.

The election commission offers a feasible compromise, in effect a "coalition commission" with its authority limited to the electoral process. Other government processes would remain in the hands of those in de facto control of each territory until the elections take place.

Q. What would be the likely outcome of such elections?

A. Chances are the N.L.F. would win some seats in the Assembly and a minority role in the central government. Some who have been involved in the negotiations from the beginning think they would settle for this.

More important, this political process would benefit the people of South Vietnam because the contending parties would be competing politically for their support with progressive social programs instead of using violence, repression and terror to impose their will by military force.

Q. Why not just get out now, and never mind the details?

A. Since President Nixon has rejected this course, and has the support of the American people, that argument is over. This proposal offers a new approach for the peace movement, to stop all the killing by both sides, and move the struggle for power and leadership from the military to the political level.

If adopted, it offers the best chance to bring all of our boys home -- not just combat troops -- at the earliest possible time.

If it doesn't work, we may just have to leave, without a solution. But it is morally unconscionable for us to do so without first trying every possible avenue to end the war completely, and not just Vietnamize it.