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A Basis for Negotiation Exists

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Speaking on July 28, President Johnson told his news conference that "Hanoi has set forth its own proposal. We are ready to discuss their proposals and our proposals and any proposals of any government whose people may be affected. . . ." This was in fact the first official recognition by the President or any of his spokesmen that the North Vietnamese Four Point Proposal for negotiations was even worth discussing—although it had been put forward by Premier Pham Van Dong as early as April 8. It had previously been given scant attention. Speaking at a teach-in at Oxford University on June 16, the British Foreign Secretary, Michael Stewart, had followed the American line in dismissing Hanoi's proposal as totally unacceptable, since it required that Americans should leave at once and that Communists and Communists alone should determine the future of Vietnam.

This is an inaccurate interpretation of the Four Point Proposal (which I shall detail later), as President Johnson presumably now recognizes. Failure to examine these proposals in detail has led to the belief that Hanoi is opposed to any kind of negotiations, except on the unrealistic precondition of prior American withdrawal from Vietnam. But what is really at issue is not the *willingness* to negotiate—both sides have said that they will—but the *basis* on which Hanoi is prepared to negotiate. A corollary to this lack of analysis of the Hanoi position is the widespread belief that the "Communist side," as Michael Stewart used the term at Oxford—North Vietnam, the National Liberation Front (NLF), China, and even the Soviet Union—is united in its attitude toward negotiations. The truth is that major differences exist between the Soviet Union and China on this question; even between the NLF and Hanoi there are noticeable variations in nuance.

Considerable efforts have been made to present the Soviet Union as being unwilling to shoulder its responsibilities as co-chairman of the 1954 Geneva Conference on Vietnam. These efforts have been particularly noticeable at the Foreign Office in London, where the British Government itself has been under pressure to assume those responsibilities as the second co-chairman, and to dissociate itself from American policy. But the record gives a very different picture.

It was in August, 1964, at the time of the Tonkin Gulf incident, that the Soviet Government under Mr. Khrushchev virtually washed its hands of Vietnam, and indicated as much to the then British Foreign Secretary Mr. Butler. But the new Soviet administration, headed by Mr. Kosygin, saw the dangers of this stand-off policy, both because it gave China a free hand in Southeast Asia and because it encouraged the United States to think that it could safely escalate the war in Vietnam. In November, 1964, Kosygin pledged Soviet support for Hanoi if the war was extended from the South, and on February 6, 1965—the day before such extension took place—he arrived in person in Hanoi at the invitation of the North Vietnamese Government.

The following day, speaking before a mass rally in Hanoi, Kosygin publicly proposed that the Geneva Conference should be reconvened. He said that the Soviet Union "supports the resolution of the conference of nonaligned countries in Cairo on the convocation of a new international conference on Indo-China with a view to the peaceful settlement of the questions which have arisen there."

According to private information, the same proposal had already been made on February 6 by the Soviet Ambassador in Peking to Foreign Minister Ch'en Yi, and on February 7 by the Ambassador to France in

Paris.

This new initiative was overshadowed by the Vietcong attack on Pleiku and the instant American "retaliation" of the same day. British and American officials took no notice of Kosygin's remarks. In the official view of the British Foreign Office, "suggestions that a new Geneva conference should be convened are regarded as premature," there was "no purpose" in reconvening such a conference, nor was there "any enthusiasm" for cooperation with the Soviet Union (*The Times* and *The Guardian*, February 9, 1965).

Meanwhile, the French Foreign Minister, M. Peyrefitte, called on the Soviet Union and Great Britain to take the necessary steps to restart talks, and twice in the following week the Soviet Union was reported to have informed Britain that it wished to promote negotiations and to resume the co-chairmanship. But Britain supported, without reservation, the American view that negotiations could not take place unless—as Mr. Stewart put it—"the Vietcong should cease their activities," thus demanding what amounted to a unilateral cease-fire by the Vietcong. The French proposal met with an unenthusiastic reception in London. On February 20, Britain proposed to the Soviet Union a form of words to be circulated to the Geneva powers asking their views on the situation, but reportedly emphasized that "it would do nothing without the closest consultation with the United States."

In view of Britain's unquestioning alignment with the United States, the Soviet Union appears to have regarded Paris rather than London as the most fertile ground for discussions. On February 23, following talks between President de Gaulle and Mr. Vinogradov, it was made known that Russia and France had agreed to seek an international conference on Vietnam. It

has been argued that their motives were disingenuous — that Russia simply wanted to embarrass the West, and that France was motivated by plain anti-Americanism. Yet it cannot be denied that France has consistently advocated negotiations since September, 1963, and that the Soviet Union was sticking its neck out—and inviting Chinese criticism — by its advocacy of a peaceful solution even after the bombing of the North had commenced. "It has become clear," wrote the diplomatic correspondent of the *London Guardian* on February 25, "that the Soviet Union has been taking the initiative over the calling of an international conference on Indo-China."

But it soon became apparent that the Soviet initiative had shot its bolt for a variety of reasons. Chief among these were the lack of British cooperation and the intensification of American bombing, which stiffened the resolve of both Hanoi and the NLF not to negotiate under duress. Their reluctance was made clear at the Indo-Chinese People's Conference, held in Cambodia, March 1-9, and attended by all the neutralist or Communist governments and parties of Indo-China. There a Cambodian proposal for a new conference on Vietnam, backed by the Soviet Union and supported by the nonaligned nations, was firmly rejected by Hanoi and the NLF.

Since then the Soviet Union has apparently refrained from further initiatives, although as late as June a Chinese statement accused Moscow of "trying to bring about peace negotiations, in a painstaking effort to find a way out for the U.S. aggressors," which suggests continued activity behind the scenes. Kosygin seemingly realizes that the decisions can only be taken in Vietnam and Washington, not in Moscow. Visiting London in late March, Gromyko again expressed willingness to act jointly with Britain as co-chairman, but expressed the pessimistic belief that the calling of a conference was a matter for the countries principally involved — North Vietnam and the United States. Three months later the same sense of impotence was reflected in Moscow's reply to the suggested "Commonwealth Mission." The Soviet Union, it said, was not "authorized" to enter into any discussions with regard to Vietnam.

One related initiative—for a conference on Cambodia, proposed by the Soviet Union on April 3—had also come unstuck. This was due partly to British delay in acting

upon the proposal, and the clumsy admission by Gordon Walker on his mission to Southeast Asia that the conference would provide a back-door approach to negotiations in Vietnam. This in turn aroused North Vietnamese suspicions and led to Cambodia's own rejection of the proposal.

At various times since 1962, North Vietnam and the NLF have expressed willingness to negotiate on the "neutralization" of South Vietnam. In effect, they were prepared to offer the U.S. a "way out," by which South Vietnam would be neutralized but would remain independent of the North for a period of time, although in the long run reunification would take place. In November, 1964, for instance, senior officials of the NLF told British reporter Dennis Bloodworth that they now accepted "a broad, largely non-Communist coalition government [which would] mean that South Vietnam would remain a separate state for several years to come." Premier Pham Van Dong of North Vietnam told a British M.P., William Warbey, at the beginning of this year, as reported by *The Guardian*, February 9:

We have no desire to rush political re-unification. We want the opening up of trade and communications between the North and South and the reunion of the divided families, but political re-unification will result from a slow process of rapprochement between our Government and the new democratic Government in Saigon. This is a matter we shall settle between ourselves, in our time, and without outside interference.

This relatively cautious and long-term approach is written into the manifesto of the NLF, which calls for the institution of a "largely liberal and democratic regime" and the election of a "new National Assembly through universal suffrage" (Article 2); for the "peaceful reunification by stages on the basis of negotiations," and the restoration of "commercial and cultural exchanges between the two zones" (Article 9). It reveals a sense of sober realism at the difficulties which any process of reunification is bound to encounter. Even following the bombing of North Vietnam, this long-term view of reunification has been reaffirmed by leaders of the NLF in, for example, the well-known interview of its Secretary-General, Huynh Tan Phat, with the French journalist Georges Chaffard (*L'Express*, April 25). There seems little doubt that if reunification

ever did take place, it would do so along these lines, and that it would not assume the form of a simple North Vietnamese "take-over" of the South. It is believed that sections of the NLF itself would resist any attempt at annexation of the South by Hanoi.

But the question now is whether Hanoi and/or the NLF believe any longer that negotiation is a viable method of attaining their objective. The immediate effect of the bombing of the North was to stiffen the resolve of both, and to make them unwilling even to talk of negotiations. It was not until April 10 that the North Vietnamese National Assembly put forward what could be regarded as a realistic offer of negotiations—the Four Point Proposal which has been reiterated at regular intervals since then. This proposal enumerates the following four points, which it regards as the only proper basis for a political settlement: (1) . . . the U.S. Government must withdraw from South Vietnam all U.S. troops, military personnel. . . . (2) Pending the peaceful reunification of Vietnam, the military provisions of the 1954 Geneva Agreements must be strictly respected; the two zones must refrain from joining in any military alliances with foreign countries. . . . (3) The internal affairs must be settled by the South Vietnamese people themselves, in accordance with the program of the South Vietnam NLF, without any foreign interference. (4) The peaceful reunification is to be settled by the Vietnamese people in both zones, without any foreign interference.

"If this basis is recognized," the proposal concludes, "favorable conditions will be created for the peaceful settlement of the Vietnam problem, and it will be possible to consider the reconvening of an international conference along the pattern of the 1954 Geneva Conference on Vietnam." In plain language, what does this mean? The essential points in the North Vietnamese position, as outlined in this proposal and in subsequent statements, are as follows:

• The eventual withdrawal of U.S. forces from Vietnam has to be recognized as the basis of a settlement; it does not have to be carried out before negotiations can begin. It has been made quite clear that the method of withdrawal is negotiable, but that the principle must be accepted in advance. For example, in an article by General Nguyen Van Vinh, broadcast by Hanoi radio

on July 26, it was stated that:

For a political solution, and to achieve true peace in South Vietnam, the U.S. imperialists must first of all agree to the withdrawal of their forces. Concerning the way of conducting this withdrawal, the imperialist side has many experiences: the French have withdrawn from Indo-China and Algeria, and the Americans have withdrawn from Laos and other areas in the world.

« Hanoi will not accept any negotiated settlement which perpetuates the division of Vietnam, or otherwise seeks to dilute the full force of the Geneva Agreements. The purpose of negotiations is simply to insure that those agreements are fully carried out. North Vietnam has repeatedly pledged its support for the agreements, and the NLF wishes to see them implemented "in accordance with the spirit and letter of an international agreement of full legality" (statement of March 22). They presumably continue to accept the authority of the International Control Commission in any settlement, although this remains to be clarified.

« Hanoi's precondition for negotiations is that the United States should publicly "recognize" that the object of such negotiations should be the implementation of the Ge-

neva Agreements, restoring the territorial integrity and unity of Vietnam. The United States is also required to "recognize" that the NLF program is the right way to set about political reform in South Vietnam. What is then negotiable, it is implied, is the way and the pace and the guarantees by and with which reunification will be carried out.

It can be argued that this is a totally unacceptable proposal. Nevertheless, from Hanoi's point of view, the United States has already moved a long way toward it and could move even further. In February, Johnson would only negotiate after prior withdrawal by the Vietcong; in April, only with Hanoi and for the sole purpose of securing an "independent South Vietnam"; by June-July, at least some lip service was paid in Washington to the principle of reunification, and to the NLF's right to participate in negotiations. The longer we hang on, the argument in Hanoi might run, the further Johnson will move toward the realization that the only face-saving way out for America is to beat a decent retreat through negotiations which will lead to reunification and total American withdrawal. As the article quoted above suggested by way of sweet-

ening the pill:

The Americans also want to know what they will obtain in return for this withdrawal. Certainly, they will get something. They will, in return, obtain peace, friendship, honor for the U.S.A., and benefit for the American people's interests and lives.

But does the NLF see eye to eye with Hanoi on the question of negotiations? Its five-point stand as set out in the March 22 statement differs from Hanoi's Four Point Proposal in three respects: (1) It lays greater stress on the role of the NLF as the "only genuine representative of the 14 million South Vietnamese people." (2) It employs more hostile and belligerent language. (3) It appears to make the actual physical withdrawal of the U.S. from South Vietnam a precondition for negotiations—a demand so unrealistic as to amount, in effect, to a rejection of negotiations.

This is another of those occasions where the NLF speaks with a voice different from that of Hanoi. Even if the difference is not particularly marked, it should give food for thought to those who believe that the NLF is merely a Hanoi puppet. It is partly explicable by the simple fact that those who ac-

National Liberation Front for Private Ownership of Land

Famous British Peace Worker's Account of His Controversial Viet Peace Talks In Moscow

By Fenner Brockway*

My visit to Russia was private and had no official or even semi-official authority. But as Chairman of the British Council for Peace in Vietnam I took the opportunity to have discussions with the Ambassador of North Vietnam, and with representatives of the National Liberation Front, who are officially recognized in Moscow. My first surprise was that the Ambassador stated that his government would be prepared to take part in a reconvened Geneva conference. I had misunderstood that the Soviet Union, as co-chairman with Britain of the Geneva conference, declined to invite the nine powers to reassemble because of the opposition not only of China but of Vietnam. It is true that [the Ambassador] Mr. Nguyen van Kinh laid down that four basic principles must be accepted, but these do not seem to be inconsistent with the Geneva agreement, at least the essentials of which even President Johnson has endorsed as the basis for a peaceful settlement.

The four principles which North Vietnam asks are:

[(1) The independence and unity of Vietnam; (2) While separate administrations continue in North and South, neither to be in any military alliance and all foreign military troops and bases to be removed; (3) the people of South Vietnam to be free to decide their "political social and economic future without foreign interference" and (4) an eventual opportunity to reunite without foreign interference.]

I put a number of questions to clarify implementation of these principles. I was told it was visualized that South Vietnam would have a democratic representative government, and the Ambassador emphasized that it would have a democratic freedom to choose whether it would join the North in one state and, if so, when.

The Ambassador said one consideration in timing would be the different economic character of North and South Vietnam. As a Communist state North Vietnam has collectivized its agriculture. The National Liberation Front, despite the assertion that it is Communist, stands for peasant proprietorship.

My second surprise arose from the statement of the Ambassador that his government had never insisted that all the American troops should be withdrawn before talks for a cease-fire took place or before negotiations. My third surprise was to hear from the Ambassador that his Government would accept the International Commission set up by the Geneva conference, composed of Canada, India and Poland to ensure that the cease-fire was observed. He acknowledged that North Vietnam was disappointed by recent findings by Canada and India, but nevertheless his Government had accepted the Geneva agreement and would abide by it in letter and in spirit. The NLF representatives took a more stringent view. They did not believe that any international body could prevent America from consolidating its military strength during a cease-fire.

The North Vietnam and NLF representatives issued statements after I had reported my discussions. The North Vietnam Ambassador complained of misrepresentations not by me but by the Western press. I am not surprised in view of what the Voice of America distributed!

I must admit that one major obstruction to negotiations persists. The North Vietnam Ambassador insisted, and certainly the NLF would insist even more strongly, that in any negotiations the National Liberation Front must be accepted as the spokesman for South Vietnam. The North Vietnam Government will not concede that the series of governments which have been maintained in nominal office in Saigon have any representative authority whatever. It claims, on the other hand, that the NLF which controls two-thirds of the territory, represents the overwhelming majority.

* Veteran British Laborite, abridged from his account of these August talks in the Sept. 10, London Tribune.

tually engaged in the field — i.e., the Vietcong—have even less reason to take American offers of negotiations seriously, and are reluctant to weaken morale among their own supporters by making the slightest conciliatory gesture. In addition, there have been occasional hints of a certain amount of disillusion within the NLF toward Hanoi. Some NLF leaders may well feel that negotiations would give North Vietnam a greater say in the future of the South than they themselves could win on the battlefield. Most important of all, until the NLF is recognized in its own right as a major participant in any negotiations, it obviously will not reveal its hand publicly.

In private, as usual, the NLF attitude is slightly more conciliatory. On the major point of American withdrawal, its president, Nguyen Huu Tho, told one journalist that "withdrawal of all American troops with all their arms and equipment" need only be the "basis of any eventual agreement" (*Sunday Times*, June 27). Both he and the Secretary-General, Huynh Tan Phat (in his interview with Georges Chafard), have defined the kind of negotiations which they would accept. Such negotiations should be primarily an internal affair among all the Vietnamese parties. The role of the foreign powers should be limited to making proposals, ratifying the agreements reached, and providing guarantees for their execution. What the NLF rejects absolutely is the idea that any foreign power should have a decisive say in the internal affairs of Vietnam.

The attitude of the Chinese toward negotiations accords more closely with that of the NLF than of North Vietnam. Prior U.S. withdrawal is an absolute precondition, all offers of mediation are imperialist or revisionist hoaxes, etc. This strong propaganda line is reinforced by three considerations: First, there is the genuine belief, based on the Chinese Communist party's own revolutionary experience, that a people's war can be won against superior odds, and that offers of negotiation are meaningless. Second, the fact that the Soviet Union is in favor of negotiations in itself

compels the Chinese, in their present implacable mood toward "modern revisionism," to be against. Third, China regards Vietnam as a test case in the struggle against American imperialism (just as America believes the reverse). Opposition to American aggression in Vietnam is the "spearhead" of a world-wide frontal attack on the enemy, and no weakness must be shown.

But as in the case of the NLF, the real Chinese position is undoubtedly more complex, and is explained unofficially in terms which could be paraphrased in the following way: In the present tense situation, decisions must be left entirely to the people on the spot — the Vietcong. Even if they are making mistakes, we must be scrupulously careful not to diverge publicly from them—unlike the Soviet Union, which has blatantly weakened solidarity with the Vietcong by its so-called "peace initiatives."

But we Chinese reserve our position on negotiations; we don't reject them out of hand if circumstances change. For instance, we have not yet given a reply—affirmative or negative—to the Soviet proposal of last February. On the question of American withdrawal, we would refer you to Chairman Mao's interview with Edgar Snow early this year, in which the Chairman said that U.S. withdrawal after a conference was one of several possibilities. [Interview published by the *Sunday Times*, February 14.] If a conference does eventually take place with the full participation and concurrence of the NLF, of course we shall be there. But it is up to them to decide.

To conclude, "the Communist side" does not present a totally united front on the desirability of negotiations. This is the first myth which needs to be exploded among a major part of Western political and press opinion. Further, Hanoi is on open record as accepting the principle of a negotiated solution—China and the NLF accept it but with more ambiguity. What is at issue is not whether negotiations should take place but what the basis of such negotiations should

be. Here lies the crux of the difference between America on the one hand and North Vietnam and the NLF on the other. The latter will negotiate only on ways and means of implementing the 1954 Geneva Agreements, and would prefer to fight on rather than accept any dilution of those agreements. America, however, has refused to endorse them from 1954 until very recently. The Vietnamese suspect that despite recent statements, America's policy has not undergone any genuine change, and that talk of "reunification" and "respecting the Geneva Agreements" by Mr. Rusk is outweighed by talk of "maintaining an independent South Vietnam" by Mr. McNamara. It will take a lot to convince them otherwise. From their point of view, they accepted one compromise solution in negotiations at Geneva in 1954, and were subsequently let down; they will not accept another compromise. As the North Vietnamese delegation to the Helsinki Peace Congress argued at a meeting with the British contingent (*Peace News*, August 13):

On the question of negotiations, we think we already have negotiated and have the basis for the solution of the problem. The Geneva Agreements recognize the independence, sovereignty, unity and territorial integrity of Vietnam. It was not easy to get these agreements—they took a lot of negotiating. Now it is said we should negotiate again. For what? Shall we negotiate for a solution where Vietnam is not independent and not unified? No. Nor shall we negotiate for the perpetuation of division of our country.

Like almost every other facet of the Vietnam situation since 1954, the problem of negotiations can be reduced to the following question: Do we accept the reunification of Vietnam on the terms of the Geneva Agreements? If the answer is no, then it is futile even to offer negotiations to Hanoi and the NLF, and there is little alternative but to fight on. If the answer is yes, then in effect we have accepted their "basis" for negotiation. However much Western liberal opinion may dislike it, there is no middle way between these two choices.

... Israelis, watching the India-Pakistan war, are worried about State Department assurances that U.S. arms given the Arab States would be used only against Communist aggression or "internal security" since similar assurances were given the Indians and the Pakistanis. . . . Secretary McNamara boasted at his Sept. 16 press conference that in four years the U.S. had sold \$9 billion worth of arms abroad.

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