

filed Indochina

Excerpt from story by Henry Giniger, datelined Paris, April 16:

Recently the [North Vietnamese] delegation has been getting queries from individuals and groups in the United States who believe that American forces should be withdrawn quickly but are concerned about the fate of American prisoners of war and about the safety of the withdrawing troops.

Up to now, the North Vietnamese and the Vietcong, their allies in the south, have gone only so far as to promise immediate discussions on these two questions. When it was pointed out to Mr. [Nguyen Than] Le that such a commitment seemed vague, he answered:

"There is no problem. The goal of the discussion would be the freedom of all military prisoners. We have no interest or purpose in keeping the prisoners. It is not true that we consider them to be hostages."

Mr. Le cited the precedent of the Geneva Conference of 1954 on Indochina which concluded with accords ending hostilities between the French and the Communist Vietminh and providing for the partition of Vietnam. Discussions on the release of prisoners by the two sides began soon after the signing of the accords on July 21, 1954, he recalled, and all prisoners were freed in October.

Mr. Le said that the same provisions were applicable to the question of security for the withdrawing forces. The French expeditionary force withdrew without hindrance, he commented. He insisted on his country's continued goodwill and sense of humanity in the present conflict as well.

Mr. Le accused President Nixon of "sophistry" in contending that announcing a date for withdrawal would deprive the United States of a bargaining counter to win the release of prisoners and would subject American forces to the danger of attack.

The spokesman accused Mr. Nixon of "inventing pretexts" not to withdraw from Vietnam. ....