



Paris Peace Talks May Be a Charade

Joseph Kraft

A PART from being a demon diplomat, Ambassador David Bruce has a connoisseur's love of good living and the finer arts. And a taste that ranges from the ponies at Longchamps to the statues at the Musee Rodin is apt to stand him in especially good stead as President Nixon's new chief negotiator at the Paris peace talks.

For most of the signs indicate that the Bruce mission is a mere charade — an operation aimed more at silencing domestic critics of the war than at getting the talks moving.

First off, there is the matter of Ambassador Bruce's initiation into the job. Unlike his predecessors, Averell Harriman and Henry Cabot Lodge, Ambassador Bruce goes to the Paris job without detailed knowledge of the Vietnam problem. And he has been given only three days of Washington briefings — most of it eaten up by large meetings with the National Security Council and other high-level officials.

And after that he made a maiden voyage to the Vietnam war under the auspices of the same people that brought George Romney to make his famous crack about "brainwashing."

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THEN THERE is the question of staff. Unfamiliarity with Vietnam makes Ambassador Bruce dependent upon his associates. In particular he will need a deputy ambassador and a military adviser wily in the ways of the Vietnam war lovers and determined to achieve a negotiated settlement.

Philip Habib, the veteran of the peace talks who has recently been serving as top man in the Paris delegation, would make

an admirable deputy. But Habib is leaving.

As replacements the State Department has been pushing two men well-known as exponents of the hard-line policies favored by Ambassador Ellsworth Bunker. One is Samuel Berger, the present deputy to Ambassador Bunker in Saigon. Another is Martin Hertz, the former chief of the political section under Bunker.

As to the military adviser, the Pentagon has just named Lieutenant General Julian Ewell, the former commander of the III Area Corps in Vietnam. Previously, as commander of the 9th Division, Ewell was known as the Butcher of the Delta. He earned that name because of his emphasis on killing large numbers of the enemy — or those supposed to be the enemy. And that is not exactly the outlook which goes with a sympathetic approach to a political settlement.

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AS A FINAL, telltale sign there was the interview given by President Nguyen Van Thieu of South Vietnam on the CBS program, "Face the Nation." In that program, President Thieu not only refused to budge on proposals for withdrawal of American troops and political change in Saigon that would move towards the positions of the other side. He publicly scorned Secretary of State William Rogers by asserting that the Secretary's talk of more flexible approaches to the other side worked to "create misunderstanding."

Of course, President Thieu has always worked in the past to sabotage peace negotiations. But the latest effort is the most blatant. And the bold act indicates the belief that he can sabotage the Bruce mission with total impunity.