

Hanoi and Vietcong Give Assurances on P.O.W. Issue

By JOHN L. HESS

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PARIS, June 10—The North Vietnamese and the Vietcong said today that if the United States would set a date for its withdrawal from Vietnam, they would discuss a full exchange of prisoners without relation to any other questions.

The statement, at a news conference following the 116th session of the Paris peace conference, was a reply to frequent warnings by the United States that the Communists would use prisoner discussions to raise new demands.

Today, they declined either to confirm or deny statements attributed to them implying that the American prisoners would be released soon after a withdrawal pledge had been obtained. But Duong Dinh Thau, spokesman for the Viet-

cong's provisional revolutionary government of South Vietnam, said that if recent visitors here from the United States had left affirming "our goodwill and flexibility" on the issue, "they are right."

The response, echoed in slightly different terms by the spokesman for Hanoi, was the most specific one reporters could elicit to questions about statements by former Defense Secretary Clark M. Clifford and Representative Robert L. Leggett, Democrat of California.

Clifford Gave Views

Mr. Clifford said Tuesday that he had reason to believe that American prisoners would be released within 30 days of a Washington commitment to withdraw all forces by Dec. 31. Representative Leggett, following a visit here, said a Vietcong official had promised to release all Americans before the completion of an agreed withdrawal.

At the talks today, David E. Bruce, the chief of the United States delegation, warned in a preliminary statement that "indiscriminate shellings" of Da-nang last week "violate the understandings reached in 1968" to end the bombing of North Vietnam. One understanding then was said to be that the Communists would refrain from shelling cities in South Vietnam.

"The consequences of these attacks are your responsibility," he said. "You may think that

such an increase in violence will be to your advantage. Such an assumption would be mistaken."

Fifty-four civilians were said to have been killed or wounded in the shellings.

'Punished the Americans'

Mrs. Nguyen Thi Binh, the Vietcong delegate, retorted that this was a "shameless calumny" and that "the forces of liberation punished the Americans in their base itself."

Mr. Bruce devoted most of his prepared statement to what he described as the other side's inhumane and intransigent position on the prisoner question. Referring to "unclear and even inconsistent" statements attributed to their representative outside the talks, he invited them to confirm and clarify them.

At the end, he said he had received no answer and the other side had said nothing new. A United States spokesman said later that there had been no response to American suggestions for restricted sessions to explore the questions.

At news briefings, the other side again avoided an explicit promise to release the prisoners at a given time. Mr. Thau, the Vietcong spokesman, said:

"We will give proof of our goodwill to settle this question. We reject the calumny that there is a difference between discussion and liberation."

"Of course there will be dis-

ussion, but it will be toward liberation."

Asked about other issues regarding a peace settlement, he replied, "that is another question . . . we want to settle this question rapidly."

Nguyen Thanh Le, the North Vietnamese spokesman, commented on the prisoner issue: "normally in all wars, that question is not settled until the settlement of all questions, political, military, economic." But his side offered to settle it first "to prove our goodwill and our flexibility," he said.

"We'll continue to show goodwill and flexibility," he said, "but the key is that Nixon fix a deadline." 14V