

HANOI AIDE SAYS PACT ON P.O.W.'S CAN BE SEPARATE

Political Questions Can Wait,
Tho, a Politburo Member,
Asserts in Interview

HE SEES A QUICK ACCORD

North Vietnamese Demands
Removal of Thieu Before
Any Subsequent Talks

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Excerpts from the interview
will be found on Page 14.

By ANTHONY LEWIS
Special to The New York Times

PARIS, July 6—A high-ranking North Vietnamese leader said today that the new Communist offer to return war prisoners if American forces are withdrawn by the end of 1971 was not dependent on a political settlement in South Vietnam.

Le Duc Tho, a member of the Politburo in Hanoi, said that the questions of prisoners and withdrawal could be negotiated separately now in the Paris peace talks, with future political arrangements to be discussed afterward.

In an interview, Mr. Tho said that if President Nixon agreed to set a final date for total American withdrawal, the "modalities" of withdrawal and of the release of prisoners could be "rapidly settled."

With 'The First Batch'

He said North Vietnam and the Vietcong would release some prisoners quickly after agreement on the withdrawal and on prisoners. When "the first batch of soldiers" leaves Vietnam after that, he added, "the first batch of prisoners will be released."

[Echoing Mr. Tho's views, Mrs. Nguyen Thi Binh, the Vietcong representative in Paris, said in an interview with United Press International that her latest peace proposals were not made on



Associated Press

DISCUSSES PEACE PLAN:
Le Duc Tho, member of
Communist party's Polit-
buro in North Vietnam.

a take-it-or-leave-it basis.]

Mr. Tho's comments appeared to clarify an important question that American officials had raised privately about the seven-point peace plan proposed last Thursday by Mrs. Binh: Whether the various points were interdependent.

Difficult Political Issues

Point 1 set forth the new proposal on the prisoners and withdrawal. Then came suggestions for a coalition government in South Vietnam and other difficult political issues on which the negotiators have made no progress here in three years.

American officials here, informed of Mr. Tho's statement that Point 1 was separately negotiable, said it could be significant. They added, however, that there were still many potential difficulties in the language of the proposal itself.

The chief United States negotiator, David K. E. Bruce,

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will reply to the new plan at the next session of the talks, on Thursday. He is expected to ask for clarification on a number of issues.

Mr. Tho, in the interview, also made these other explanatory comments on the new plan:

As part of its total withdrawal, the United States

POW's

would have to end the shelling of Vietnam by ships of the Seventh Fleet and all bombing and close-support action by planes based in Thailand.

The United States would also have to withdraw all military advisers attached to the Army of the Republic of Vietnam. Mr. Tho did not give a direct answer to a question about continued American material aid to Saigon's forces.

The agreement on withdrawal and release of prisoners would apply only to the territory of Vietnam — not to Laos or Cambodia.

If an agreement is reached, political talks should follow. They would be between the so-called Provisional Revolutionary Government of South Vietnam and the Saigon administration — but the latter without President Nguyen Van Thieu.

Known to Be Senior Figure

Officially, Mr. Tho is designated as a special adviser to the head of the Hanoi delegation at the peace talks, Xuan Thuy, but in fact he is known by all participants to be the senior figure.

He rarely goes to the formal meetings, but when he comes here from Hanoi he is thought to bring authoritative word on new directions — as he evidently did when he got here shortly before Mrs. Binh's proposals last week.

The interview today, in the delegation headquarters in suburban Choisy-le-Roi, lasted an hour and 40 minutes. Mr. Tho spoke in Vietnamese, which was translated into English by an aide, Phuong Nguyen Dinh.

Mr. Tho — a man of about 5 feet 5 inches with gray hair — spoke forcefully but seemed relaxed, laughing occasionally. There were two other aides with him, Tran Thien Can and Nguyen Thanh Le, the latter the delegation press spokes-

man, and they interrupted from time to time with what were evidently suggestions for rephrasings.

One notable comment by Mr. Tho dealt with the question of a cease-fire.

Mrs. Binh's first point said that immediately after agreement on withdrawal and return of prisoners there should be a cease-fire — but only between American troops and the "liberation forces." That would have the effect of allowing continued fighting between the Communist forces and the South Vietnamese Army.

Mr. Tho said that if President Nixon tried to link his agreement on the fixing of a withdrawal date with a cease-fire throughout Indochina, there could be no accord. The wider cease-fire, he said, would raise "many other problems."

The American delegation has in fact been pressing the idea

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of a general cease-fire in the talks. It is also concerned about prisoners believed to be held in Laos and Cambodia.

Mr. Tho's exclusion of Laos and Cambodia from the reach of the proposed agreement on withdrawal and prisoners surprised some observers. He did not explain, saying only that the two other Indochinese states raised "different questions."

On the political future of South Vietnam, Mr. Tho held to the Communists' familiar objection to negotiating with a Saigon Government headed by President Thieu. He suggested that the United States could arrange for Mr. Thieu's quiet replacement in the forthcoming election.

'U.S.' to 'Have Decisive Voice'

"Although it is not admitted," he said, "not publicly stated, the whole world knows that Thieu has been put in power by the U. S. Administration. And the U. S. will have the decisive voice in the forthcoming elections. It is the U. S. that will decide who will win."

Mr. Tho indicated that he would like to talk with Henry S. Kissinger, President Nixon's national security adviser, who is to make a brief visit to Paris this weekend during a trip that has included a stop in Saigon.

"If a meeting is proposed" with Mr. Kissinger, Mr. Tho said, "then we will consider it very seriously. Because we have been staying here for

rather a long time with a desire to come to a peaceful settlement."

No such meeting has been requested by the American side, but it presumably could be set up on short notice if Mr. Kissinger desired it.

Throughout the interview Mr. Tho sought to differentiate between the American people and American Governments. He said the people wanted to end the war.

Repeatedly critical of President Nixon, he said at one point: "We have understood Mr. Nixon through two Indochinese wars." That may have been an allusion to the fact that when French strength was ebbing in 1954, Mr. Nixon, as Vice President, favored American intervention.

Mrs. Binh Calls for Talks

PARIS, July 6 (UPI)—Mrs. Binh indicated today that the latest Vietcong peace proposals were not an inflexible take-it-or-leave-it package.

In an interview, the foreign minister of the South Vietnamese National Liberation Front called on President Nixon to give his negotiators the go-ahead to discuss the plan with the Communist delegates.

She added that, if need be, she was ready to enter private

talks with Ambassador Bruce. The Americans have declined private meetings with her group on the ground that it lacked official standing.

Mrs. Binh said that if Mr. Nixon turned the plan down and decided to keep residual

fighting forces in Vietnam, the Americans would be drawn into intensified fighting.

The 46-year-old official, who has had 25 years of underground activity as a political militant, was interviewed in her well-guarded headquarters.

Comment by Ziegler

Special to The New York Times

KANSAS CITY, July 6 — Ronald L. Ziegler, the White House press secretary, was asked today to comment on the interview in which Mrs. Binh said that there was nothing

rigid about the peace proposal and that she would gladly meet privately with an American to discuss it.

"We have indicated before that we are interested in serious negotiations with the other side," he replied. "The other side knows what the appropriate forum is."

He made the statement aboard the Presidential plane carrying Mr. and Mrs. Nixon, Secretary of State William P. Rogers and other officials to the summer White House in San Clemente, Calif.