

Excerpts From Le Duc Tho Interview

Special to The New York Times

PARIS, July 6—Following are excerpts from the transcript of an interview today with Le Duc Tho, a member of the Politburo of the ruling Communist party of North Vietnam, conducted by Anthony Lewis of The New York Times. Mr. Tho spoke in Vietnamese, which was translated into English by an aide, Phuong Nguyen Dinh. Two other aides, Tran Thien Can and Nguyen Thanh Le, were with him.

Q. Mr. Tho, in the new seven-point proposal put forward at the peace talks last week by the Provisional Revolutionary Government, Point 1 suggests withdrawal of all American forces from Vietnam and simultaneous release of all prisoners. Point 2 deals with the terms of a political settlement in South Vietnam, and the other points with postwar issues. My first question is this: Could Point 1 be agreed and carried out without an agreement on the other points? Could there be a U.S. withdrawal and exchange of prisoners without, first, a political settlement?

A. To show our goodwill we can settle the problem of Point 1 separately, so that all American servicemen may promptly return to their families, so that no more American soldiers must die on the Indochinese battlefield, so that all American prisoners may promptly return to their homes.

This line of action of ours is in response to the deep aspirations of the Vietnamese people as well as of the American people. But I wonder whether Mr. Nixon will respond to our proposal.

Negotiable Timetable?

Q. The proposal by Mrs. Binh [Nguyen Thi Binh, Vietcong representative at the peace talks] speaks of a terminal date for withdrawal "in 1971." This year is more than half over now. Is the timetable negotiable? Might a date in 1972 be acceptable?

A. Once Mr. Nixon sets a date, agreement on the modalities of troop withdrawal and prisoner release will not be difficult. It will not take a long time if Mr. Nixon so desires and shows goodwill. Therefore in our view the proposal date in 1971 is a reasonable one.

But if Mr. Nixon prolongs the period of the troop withdrawal, then the U.S. troops will be delayed in their return to their country. The American prisoners will be delayed in their release and delayed in their return home, and more Americans would die on the battlefield. Or if Mr. Nixon refuses to set the date, then the problem will not be settled at all. Or if Mr. Nixon continues linking the setting of a date for with-

drawal with other conditions, with more conditions, then the settlement of the problem will become more difficult.

I read Defense Secretary Melvin Laird's statement. He said that the withdrawal of military personnel might be rapid, but the return of war material will cost billions of dollars and he will have to ask for money from the American Congress. Therefore, I think that Mr. Laird admits that the withdrawal of U.S. troops may be rapidly carried out.

The return of matériel will be costly, but I think the primary thing is American troops' lives and not finances, money. Moreover, the U.S. is a rich country; it has enough money to do that. And the expenditures for the return of war material to the United States cannot be a pretext to delay the departure of American troops. I think that human lives are the most precious things.

About Further Conditions

Q. Let me take up the point about President Nixon putting further conditions. What sort of conditions are you concerned about?

A. I mean that Mr. Nixon, before setting a date for the troop withdrawal, will raise other questions, and the fixing of a date will be done only after a settlement of these problems.

For instance, supposing he said that after he sets a date for the troop withdrawal there must be a cease-fire throughout Indochina. Then it cannot be settled in that way, because the cease-fire throughout Indochina will raise many other problems. If so, the problem, date for the troop withdrawal and the release of prisoners, cannot be settled.

Q. There may be a problem in definition of the term "withdrawal." Would you define it so that after American forces are removed from Vietnam the U.S. could continue to provide military and economic assistance to South Vietnam?

A. I mean by total withdrawal the withdrawal of all American ground forces, naval forces, air forces, American military personnel, American military advisers, dismantlement of American military bases from South Vietnam.

This is our conception, our view, on total withdrawal of U.S. forces. So I think that after the settlement of this problem, withdrawal and prisoners, then discussions should be immediately started to set-

tle other problems relating to an over-all settlement of the war.

Q. And would that include questions of economic assistance?

A. Then the discussions would be carried out on all the remaining problems, economic and military, and a new basis would be laid down for the relationship between South Vietnam and the United States. And Point 5 of the seven-point proposal—dealing among other things with future economic aid—is very explicit in this connection. And after the end of the war North Vietnam may establish relations with the United States, too, on the principle of independence, equality and mutual interest.

I think that only when the war is ended in this way is it in the interest of the United States. Now you can see that after dozens of years of war the war has not brought any interest at all to the American people. Only losses, no interest at all.

Q. Part of the definition of total withdrawal was the dismantlement of American military bases. Does that not conflict with the time problem that Mr. Laird mentioned? That is the problem of removing matériel.

A. I think that troops are always accompanied by equipment, because, troops without equipment would not make troops. Therefore, when we speak of troop withdrawal it should be understood that the withdrawal of equipment should be carried out at the same time. Mr. Laird says that the withdrawal of equipment of material will necessitate billions of dollars, but I firmly believe that the U. S. has enough money to do that: I think that Mr. Laird raised this question to have reason to delay the withdrawal.

Q. Your discussion has been very specifically on withdrawal of forces from Vietnam. Is there any question here of the U. S. withdrawing forces from Thailand, Cambodia, Laos? Does the word "withdrawal" cover only Vietnam or other places?

A. The problem as we have raised it involves Vietnam. We have proposed the withdrawal of U. S. forces and those of other powers, and the release of military personnel and civilians captured in Vietnam. As to Laos and Cambodia, these are different questions.

U.S. Forces in Thailand

Q. The seven-point proposal speaks of a cease-fire between American and Vietnamese liberation armed forces. In order to reach agreement, would it be necessary to undertake an immediate cease-fire covering not only American forces in Vietnam but the Air Force operating from Thailand?

A. When we pose this point 1 for the withdrawal of the totality of American and Allied Forces and the release of prisoners, we include also a cease-fire between the Vietnamese and the Americans. If so, there could be no American military activities based in other countries but affecting Vietnam.

If now, for instance, the U.S. withdraws its forces from Vietnam and then the U.S. uses its military forces in other countries and on board the Seventh Fleet to shell Vietnamese territory and bomb and support Saigon troops, then the fighting between the Vietnamese and American troops will continue. And American soldiers will continue to die on the battlefield. And it will be a vicious circle then. It will be tantamount to the U.S. withdrawing from Vietnam and continuing the war in another form.

I think the setting of a final date of troop withdrawal and the release of prisoners of all parties is the first step in the settlement of the war. It is our desire to achieve that. It does not mean that only Point 1 is settled and we stop there. But we wonder whether Mr. Nixon desires it to begin. Because our experience is that during the two and a half years of Mr. Nixon's Presidency he has been talking a great deal about peace but has been expanding the war.

If we count the word "peace" in his statements, we will find a greater number than the word "war." But actually most of his effort is for war. The quantity of bombs dropped during Mr. Nixon's Presidency is greater than the quantity of bombs dropped in Vietnam, Cambodia and Laos during the four years of Mr. Johnson's Presidency. And under Mr. Nixon's Administration the war has been extended from South Vietnam to Laos and Cambodia.

'Lessons From Experiences'

I wonder whether Mr. Nixon draws lessons from these experiences to end this war in Vietnam and to restore peace in Vietnam. We have understood Mr. Nixon through two Indochinese wars now during the last 25 years. Moreover, the recent Pentagon Papers have shed a great deal of further light on this past.

To show now his desire for a peaceful settlement of the Vietnam problem, Mr. Nixon should respond to Point 1 of Mrs. Binh's proposal. He should take the first step now. And he should continue

after that to take the following steps and discuss other problems.

And among the other problems there is one very important one. That is the question of changing the Thieu administration. Because the Thieu administration is dictatorial, warlike and it is against the rapid withdrawal of U.S. forces. It wants American forces to remain there to help it repress the South Vietnam people. If the Thieu administration will change, then a new period will be opened for the radical settlement, the comprehensive settlement of the war.

We want to see the Vietnamese people and the American people live in peace. We want also to see the development of relationships between Vietnam and the United States after the restoration of peace.

There is a precedent. We have experience with the French. We worked nearly a century under French domination, and our resistance war against the French lasted nearly nine years. But after the settlement of the war and the restoration of peace there was no obstacle to the building of friendly relations between the Vietnamese people and the French people. I believe it is the same way with the American people.

Timing of the Releases

We should say that the sufferings caused by the successive American Administrations to our people during the past years have left a very profound wound. But at the same time it left behind also great sufferings for the American people. And the American people have no interest in it.

Therefore, I think it is time now to end this war, to restore peace, to restore good relationship between our two people and two countries. We Vietnamese are brave and valiant in fighting, but we value human beings.

Q. Mrs. Binh's proposal of the release of the prisoners beginning on the same date and ending on the same date as the withdrawal. Precisely what does that mean? If, for example, there was an agree-

ment during this summer to fix a date, then when the next planned withdrawal of an American military unit occurred after that agreement would North Vietnam be prepared to release some of the captured pilots?

A. After agreement is reached upon the date of the troop withdrawal and the modalities of the release of prisoners, then when the first batch of soldiers leaves Vietnam, the first batch of prisoners will be released.

What is important now is that a date is agreed upon for the troop withdrawal. As to modality, how the troops will be withdrawn, I think that these questions can be rapidly settled.

Q. Point 1 in the plan speaks of a cease-fire between American forces and Vietnam forces. How would such a cease-fire work where American soldiers are mixed in with or serving in units of the Army of the Republic of Vietnam?

A. The question is approached as a total withdrawal of United States forces, so there is no reason that some American G.I.'s or advisers will remain behind. During the process of withdrawal all American forces will move to departing points. Those points will not be attacked unless attacks are launched by United States forces against us.

As a matter of fact, in the past we have signed agreements a couple of times, and the violation of the agreements has always been on the other side and not on ours. The 1954 Geneva agreements depended upon papers. Therefore we still wonder, if agreement is reached now, whether the other side will violate the agreement that has been signed.

Q. If agreement is reached on Point 1, you come to the others and particularly Point 2, the political question. If the U.S. has in fact already withdrawn its forces, then wouldn't it really be necessary for the Provisional Revolutionary Government to deal with the Saigon Government rather than the Americans?

A. After the withdrawal of U.S. forces and other for-

eign countries' forces, then the P.R.G. will continue the discussion on other problems with the Saigon administration—but a new one, without Thieu.

Q. Suppose that in the election this October General Thieu is the winner and the United States is withdrawing. How would the discussion be conducted?

A. Although it is not admitted, 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.

Therefore, if Mr. Nixon is really disposed to settle the whole problem of the war, then besides Point 1 the question of change of the ruling group now in office in Saigon—headed by Thieu—is in the power of the U.S.

The election in South Vietnam will be decided by the U.S. It is the U.S. that will decide who will win. The forthcoming election in South Vietnam is an opportunity for Mr. Nixon to change Thieu. It is also a yardstick to show whether Mr.

Nixon desires a peaceful settlement on the war or not.

I think that after the settlement of Point 1, Point 2 and the change from Thieu is a very important point to come to an over-all settlement. And I am firmly convinced that the P.R.G. will have enough goodwill and serious desire for a logical and reasonable settlement to realize national concord among the Vietnamese.

Mr. Nixon often says that he is afraid that South Vietnam will turn Communist. That is not true, because the P.R.G. has repeatedly and very clearly stated that its objective is to achieve a South Vietnam that is independent, peaceful, neutral, democratic. It is not a socialist country, but naturally it cannot be a neo-colony.

He alleges that U.S. involvement in South Vietnam is a fight against Communism, but the Pentagon papers have shown that 70 per cent is for the global strategy of the United States. I think that if Mr. Nixon is wise, is clear-sighted he should settle the Vietnam war now.

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United Press International

PEACE NEGOTIATORS: Mrs. Nguyen Thi Binh, Vietcong delegate, presented a seven-point program last week in Paris to David K. E. Bruce, chief of the U.S. delegation.