

U.S. Reply to the Vietcong's 7-Point Peace Proposal

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PARIS, June 8—Following is the text of the opening remarks made by David K. E. Bruce, head of the United States delegation, at the 120th session of the Vietnam peace talks here today:

We have examined carefully your remarks of last week and will continue to do so in an attempt to find common areas of agreement. If they mean that you wish at last to enter into serious negotiations, we would welcome such an attitude on your part.

Examination of the various points of your latest proposals makes it evident that questions arising from their contents necessitate serious negotiation between all parties concerned. We will wish

to explore them further with you, and in subsequent meetings we will be seeking clarification on specific points.

Our analysis thus far, however, indicates that despite some new elements, your proposals do not seem to change your long-asserted basic demands or indicate your intention to end the fighting.

Demands Termed Sweeping

In respect to your deadline for the total withdrawal of United States forces, you enumerate certain measures which you demand the United States Government accept "without posing any conditions whatsoever." These demands are so sweeping and categorical in nature that we cannot possibly accept your arbitrary determination that they must be agreed to by us without any discussion or

negotiation upon them. This represents an approach which is the very antithesis of what is generally recognized as the process of negotiation.

Your offer to "agree on the modalities" of safe withdrawal and release of prisoners after a date for withdrawal has been made is unclear and may be merely a variation of your previous statement that the parties "will engage at once in discussions on" these questions, not necessarily committing you to the course of action implied. This point, as well as others you have presented, requires clarification.

On the prisoner-of-war issue itself, we note that you do not deal with the release of those prisoners captured by your forces or forces under your control in Laos and Cambodia. We continue to hold you responsible for the release of these men and for the provision of whatever information you have on all of our men captured and missing in action throughout Indochina.

Saigon Regime at Issue

On the question of political settlement in South Vietnam, you continue to insist that the present Government of the Republic of Vietnam must be replaced by one which fulfills your own criteria. Our policy on this point has always been perfectly clear and remains so. We will not impose any government on the people of South Vietnam, who must be allowed to determine for themselves their own future.

This question must be discussed among the South Vietnamese themselves, in particular between your side and the Government of the Republic of Vietnam. You have always obstructed that process of negotiation despite the fact that this conference was originally convoked with such a procedure as one of its principal objectives.

We are especially disappointed that in your proposals you still insist on linking the question of cease-fire to your political demands rather than to the urgent need to stop the killing. If an early end to the fighting throughout all of Indochina could be achieved, this would immediately create a much better atmosphere for fruitful deliberations.

Other Basis Sought

You have asserted that your proposals are intended as a major initiative, and we recognize that they deal with matters requiring serious discussion. You cannot, however, insist that they form the only basis for such discussions.

We are ready, as we always have been, to take up with you any points which you have or might bring to

our attention, and we expect you in turn to adopt the same attitude toward any suggestions made by us. It would be almost unprecedented for a negotiation to take any other course.

If real negotiations are to take place, these meetings must stop being used by you simply for propaganda purposes and must be devoted instead to constructive interchanges.

Let us make a fresh start here. I propose that the next meeting be a restricted session at which we could explore further your proposals as well as discuss our own. Such a forum, free from the glare of publicity and without the need to make public statements, except to the degree we mutually agree upon, could provide a better atmosphere for productive discussions.