

BRUCE SAYS ENEMY SETS HARSH TERMS IN PEACE PROPOSAL

16 1971
Envoy, Replying to 7-Point Communist Plan, Does Not Reject It Outright

REDS CHARGE STALLING

American Indicates Pullout Date Hinges on Definition of What Is Involved

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Text of Bruce's statement is printed on Page 2.

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PARIS, July 15 — David E. Bruce, the United States representative at the Vietnam peace talks, told the Communists today that their terms proposal for a settlement left their objectives unclarified and set "far-reaching" and "harsh" conditions.

He was responding to the seven-point plan put forward two weeks ago by Mrs. Nguyen Thi Binh for the Vietnam. Its initial point provided for the first time that if the United States fixed a date for a total troop withdrawal in 1971, all prisoners of war would be released.

Ambassador Bruce did not reject the plan outright, but he strongly indicated that the United States would not fix a final withdrawal date without first defining through negotiations, exactly what was involved.

Hanoi Aide Sees Stalling

The North Vietnamese delegate, Xuan Thuy, accused the Nixon Administration of "trying to stall the negotiations by refusing to answer the seven points." He said again that the way to progress in the talks on ending the Vietnam war was to set a withdrawal date.

The day's session, the 121st

The day's session, the 121st in the talks here, dampened hopes raised by the Communist proposal. To the extent that the exchanges clarified the situation, they showed the depth of the differences between the two sides.

American officials think the apparent simplicity of Mrs. Binh's first point is deceptive. While seeming to ignore the question of South Vietnam's political future, they say, it really does implicitly include politics.

'A Position of Strength'

The American spokesman, Stephen Ledogar, said at a briefing that the Communist plan was faulty because it did not define the word "withdrawal." That might require the end of United States aid to Saigon, he noted, which would have immediate political effects.

The Communists, for their part, said the United States was merely trying to obscure the meaning of their plan.

Mr. Thuy accused the Americans of still trying essentially, to win a military victory "so as to negotiate from a position of strength." He said repeated-

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ly that the United States objective was to keep President Nguyen Van Thieu of South Vietnam in office after the election in October. An element of the seven-point plan is his removal.

The extent of the deadlock was indicated by the fact that the Americans did not even acknowledge the Communists' expressed willingness to talk about troop withdrawal and prisoners separately from the political points. The leading North Vietnamese figure here, Le Duc Tho, said in an interview with The New York Times last week that the first point was separable and the North Vietnamese spokesman, Nguyen Thanh Le, reiterated it today.

Mr. Ledogar made the point that in the actual exchanges in the conference the Communists "haven't even talked about separability."

In fact, Ambassador Bruce hinted that the United States might regard the question of troop withdrawal as inextricably bound up with the larger political issues.

Over-All Settlement Stressed

Responding to a question by the Communists whether the United States was ready to set a withdrawal date in 1971, he said, "We have long been ready to negotiate a timetable for

complete withdrawal as part of an over-all settlement."

His answer reflected the American suspicion that the first point in the Communist plan was really an ultimatum calling on President Nixon to set the final withdrawal date. That could come, Mr. Bruce said, only as "the result of a genuine negotiating process," not as the price "just for negotiations to begin."

Mr. Ledogar, asked whether the United States was in effect setting the condition that the Communists define the word "withdrawal" before negotiating, said no.

The problem, he asserted, is that all seven points in the plan include "obscure" elements but that the Communists say, "This is our proposal, take it or leave it, we will not define the terms, we will not clarify the ambiguity."

Mr. Bruce, believing that semipublic talks will never get past such differences, proposed last week that the parties go into "restricted" sessions, without reports to the press. The other side declined.

As an alternative Mr. Bruce answered four questions put to him last week and then posed five of his own. He reiterated the hope that through this process "we could begin a useful dialogue."

But Mr. Ledogar, asked afterward whether he could say that today marked the beginning of such a dialogue, replied:

"I wish I could. But you have both sides asking questions and only one answering. The response of the other side was to refuse to answer the questions we asked and to refuse clarifying anything."

It was in his replies that Mr. Bruce so strongly criticized Mrs. Binh's plan.

He said it dealt with the withdrawal-prisoner issue "in a highly superficial and misleading manner." It appeared, he added, that the plan attached "far-reaching and self-serving conditions to prisoner release which are as harsh and comprehensive as anything you have previously insisted upon."