

Paris Talks

Reds Firm on POW Issue

Paris

Communist delegations at the Vietnam peace talks made it clear yesterday that American prisoners of war will be released only if the United States accepts the month-old Communist peace plan.

The plan calls for simultaneous withdrawal of American forces and release of prisoners this year. The United States so far has refused to accept the plan and continues to press for further clarification of the seven-point proposal.

North Vietnam's delegation chief, Xuan Thuy, and his Viet Cong counterpart, Mrs. Nguyen Thi Binh, laid new stress on the July 1 peace plan in the wake of Swedish reports that 187 American prisoners would be released by Hanoi next week.

In two conversations with newsmen at the 124th session of the Vietnam peace conference, Thuy knocked down the reports. First he said they were the product of someone's "excessive imagination." Later he said they resulted from someone's "strong imagination."

Asked if there had been diplomatic contacts outside the Paris conference on the prisoner issue, Thuy replied obliquely by saying "the only way that will lead to result is for Mr. Nixon to respond to our peace plan here in Paris on Kleber street," site of the conference.

Mrs. Binh did not comment to newsmen about the POW report, but her speech to the conference stressed the first point of her peace plan, which calls for release of the prisoners coupled with withdrawal of American forces by the end of this year.

She asked: "Why doesn't the American government respond to this proposal, which not only takes into account the just concern of the American people, but responds exactly to a request that it — the American government — itself has made?"

She referred to Mr. Nixon's desire to have the prisoners released before total troop withdrawal from South Vietnam.

U.S. Ambassador Philip C. Habib, interim head of the American delegation, dwelt on the old allied proposal for an all-Indochina cease-fire in place and was seconded by South Vietnamese Ambassador Pham Dang Lam.

But the Communists came back with references to a cease-fire in the seven-point plan. The plan calls for a cease-fire by Communist and U.S. forces after the United States agrees on a troop withdrawal, and by the Communist and South Vietnamese forces after a political solution to the conflict has been realized.

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