

New Red

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Terms for U.S. POWs

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The Vietnamese Communists told the United States yesterday that American prisoners of war would not be released until the United States agrees both to withdraw its forces and to abandon the Saigon government of President Nguyen Van Thieu.

The double condition for a settlement that would bring about a release of the prisoners was made explicit during yesterday's session of the peace talks, the first to be held in a month, and during comments afterward to newsmen. The two points are the fundamental ones of the standing Communist seven-point peace plan and Nguyen Van Tien, the Viet Cong delegate, said they are "closely linked together."

Tien was backed by Xuan Thui, the chief Hanoi delegate, who said "if the Nixon administration really wants to disengage from the Vietnam war and to rapidly repatriate all American servicemen, in combat or in captivity," then it should "give up aggression, stop the Vietnamization of the war, pull out from South Vietnam all the troops . . . stop backing the Nguyen Van Thieu bellicose puppet group."

The effect of the Communist statements was to support President Nixon in the controversy under way in

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Washington with several opposition senators, notably George McGovern of South Dakota, who have asserted that American prisoners could be recovered simply by an American military withdrawal.

American press spokesman, Stephan Ledogar, agreed that the question had never been put to the Communist side by his delegation. On his part he made it clear that it is still American policy to obtain the withdrawal of North Vietnamese troops from South Vietnam, Laos and Cambodia and not simply the recovery of American prisoners in any negotiated settlement that called for American withdrawal.

Ledogar said the American delegation has consistently sought clarification of the Communist proposals and is still doing so. Six months after it was presented, Ledogar said "We don't know what their position is."

A reporter then asked Ly Van Sau, the Viet Cong spokesman, what conditions were necessary to effect the release of American prisoners. Sau answered, in substance, as follows:

The American aggression in Vietnam has taken two forms: The expedition of hundreds of thousands of troops and the setting up of a puppet regime in Saigon. A settlement must include a cessation of both forms. The prisoner of war question cannot be settled until the aggression is ended.

"In its two forms?" Sau was asked.

"Yes," he answered. "In its two forms."

The month's break, which resulted from three refusals

by Porter and one by the Communists to meet, did nothing to change their respective positions. The Communists demanded a "positive response" to their two demands and Porter answered:

"The trouble with positive response, as you use the words, is that they mean complete acceptance without question. Such procedure turns your proposals into ultimatums and you are in no position to issue ultimatums."

WARNING

Porter also warned the other side against new military initiatives. "The military efforts you seem to be planning on the western border of South Vietnam and elsewhere in Indochina are not likely to achieve anything to your permanent advantage and will probably entail the loss of many more lives," he said.

The Communists denied they were issuing any ultimatums, saying their proposals were "logical and reasonable." The original plan presented last July had called for evacuation by December 31, 1971, of all troops and military equipment, the dismantling of bases and the halt of Vietnamization. Asked whether he was prepared to advance a new date, Sau called on the United States to propose a "reasonable" one, in which case it would be examined, he said.