

U.S. Stands Firm On POW Release

Move Stuns Conference In Paris

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PARIS, Feb. 27—The International Conference on Vietnam was jarred tonight by President Nixon's order to Secretary of State William P. Rogers to demand satisfaction on North Vietnam's suspension of the release of American war prisoners before taking up other issues.

North Vietnam's action and President Nixon's countermove immediately clouded the future of the conference to "guarantee" the Jan. 27 cease-fire accord.

Until tonight, this conference was optimistically racing to a conclusion by Friday that would have put a stamp of approval on the Vietnam agreement, glossing over its ambiguities and the charges from both sides that it was being seriously violated. The United States, the Soviet Union and China were all prepared to join in this formalistic endorsement in the hope of putting the Vietnam problem behind them.

Most delegations were stunned by the sudden turnabout which caused the American delegation to reverse course to face the demands raised by North Vietnam.

Although the prisoner-release clash involved the United States and North Vietnam, diplomats here immediately saw it as an open attempt by North Vietnam to try to compel the United States to put pressure on South Vietnamese President

Nguyen Van Thieu.

North Vietnam and the Vietcong insist that the Saigon government now must accept the full consequences of a division of power in South Vietnam, which Thieu refuses to acknowledge.

All the submerged, unresolved questions of "peace" in Vietnam may now be thrown into this international conference unless the prisoner dispute is quickly patched over.

President Nixon's instructions to Rogers "to demand clarification" on the prisoner releases from Hanoi's Foreign Minister Nguyen Duy Trinh specified that this must be done "before other business is conducted at the conference."

That puts a firm brake on the conference. By earlier arrangement, for normal diplo-

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matic purposes, no conference session was planned for Wednesday in order to give diplomats an opportunity to resolve their procedural disagreements. Those diplomatic disputes now pale into relative insignificance compared to the obstacles symbolized by the prisoner dispute, which North Vietnam apparently has chosen to force to the forefront of world attention in a demonstration that the Vietnam problem is still there.

American officials said there would be no meeting tonight between Rogers and Trinh. But preliminary discussions about the problem were reported under way at the Hotel Majestic conference center, where for two days there has been a glow of expectant accord.

The senior diplomats participating in the talks tonight were identified as North Vietnamese Deputy Foreign Minister Nguyen Co Thach, U.S. Assistant Secretary of State William H. Sullivan and Heyward Isham, who was acting head of the American delegation to the formal Paris peace talks.

Since this conference of 12 foreign ministers plus United

Nations Secretary General Kurt Waldheim opened Monday, the North Vietnamese delegation had forecast the initialing of an international accord on Thursday, and a signing ceremony on Friday. American officials had fully concurred in that forecast as late as this afternoon.

Tonight U.S. delegation spokesman Robert J. McCloskey said: "We clearly have a new and important matter of some urgency before us."

Newsmen asked if the conference now faces the risk of collapse.

"We didn't come to Paris to see the conference fail," replied McCloskey. "We would hope we would be able to solve the matter of the prisoners by clarification with the North Vietnamese."

In a sudden shift of mood and diplomatic style following the stern White House statement on prisoner releases, the American delegation tonight began airing countercharges against the Vietnamese Communists, which it markedly had avoided doing during the two days of the conference.

"We have continuing evidence," said McCloskey, "that there are gross violations by the Communist side that include the infiltration of several thousand forces in the period since Jan. 28" when the cease-fire went into force.

McCloskey said that since the cease-fire the North Vietnamese also have infiltrated into North Vietnam 85-mm artillery, trucks and other heavy military equipment, and there have been numerous "enemy-initiated incidents on the ground."

The American spokesman was asked why the United States tonight was raising these protests for the first time in this conference. McCloskey replied that it was because the Provisional Revolutionary Government "Monday made a direct accusation against the United States." He said: "We reject categorically and emphatically any charge that we, the United States, are guilty in any way of any violation."

"We had felt that the con-

ference was not convened to debate violations of the cease-fire," said McCloskey. "We had hoped to proceed in the conference at a foreign ministers' level in a more thoughtful and constructive way."

There was no outward sign during the day from the Soviet Union, or China, North

Vietnam's major allies, that they anticipated any new flare-up over Vietnam.

On the contrary, Rogers held an hour-long meeting with Soviet Foreign Minister Andrei A. Gromyko at the Soviet embassy just before the White House announcement. They talked about what were described as issues before this conference plus the Middle East and other standard American-Soviet matters.

This morning at the conference, Gromyko delivered a moderate speech, hailing last month's Vietnam accord as evidence that "the world has changed and that the most disputed and most difficult problems can be settled at the negotiating table."

Gromyko said: "There has been some real progress in carrying out the Paris agreement" on Vietnam. He cautioned, however, that "violations" of the accord by the Saigon authorities "... must be terminated; the agreement cannot be allowed to be undermined."

During the day the North Vietnamese and Vietcong positions toughened to prevent the Saigon administration from gaining any leverage out of this conference.

On behalf of Hanoi and the Vietcong, representatives of Poland and Hungary stalled proceedings in a 39-member committee that is negotiating a final accord here by objecting to any further participation by the United Nations in the drafting work. They contended that Secretary General Waldheim is present at the conference only as an observer. South Vietnam had sup-

ported a role for the United Nations in Vietnam peace-keeping.

The conference delegates have been grappling with two problems: the conditions for

reconvening the conference, with the drafters headed toward an arrangement that would give either the Communist or non-Communist powers a veto over the conference's recall and a continuing dispute

over how to channel and air reports on cease-fire violations made by the International Commission for Control and Supervision of the cease-fire in Vietnam.