

Hanoi Agrees to Free Americans Within Time Specified in Accord;
U.S. Had Suspended Minesweeping

Intricate Maneuvers Ease Crisis at Parley in Paris

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PARIS, Feb. 28—The United States and North Vietnam, through some intricate diplomatic maneuvering today, seemed to ease the crisis over the delay in American prisoner releases and to pave the way for concluding the international conference on Vietnam Friday.

This apparent diplomatic arrangement—as disclosed by American delegation officials, and in part by the White House—seemed to go a long way toward meeting the demands of both Washington and Hanoi that were expressed in angry terms yesterday.

North Vietnam had linked the release of another group of American prisoners to the resolution of its charges of cease-fire violations in the South.

The White House, angry at the effort to use the prisoners as bargaining chips, demanded their release unconditionally and instructed Secretary of State William P. Rogers to give the matter his "highest prior-

The prisoner issue cast a shadow over the 13-party conference, which until yesterday had been making progress toward a final document that would oblige the major powers to endorse and guarantee last month's Vietnam cease-fire agreement.

The latest arrangement was reached this afternoon after some hectic behind-the-scenes diplomacy.

As announced here and in Washington, Mr. Rogers met in secrecy with North Vietnam's Foreign Minister, Nguyen Duy Trinh, and received assurances that discussions would begin "at once" in Saigon for the freeing of additional American prisoners—estimated at about 140—whose release had been delayed.

Robert J. McCloskey, the spokesman for the American delegation to the Paris conference, stressed that Mr. Rogers

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made no promises, nor linked the release to anything else.

But in a parallel move evidently aimed at meeting at least some of the Communist demand, Foreign Minister Tran Van Lam of South Vietnam was reported to have arranged a private session with the Vietcong Foreign Minister, Mrs. Nguyen Thi Binh, to discuss the alleged cease-fire violations.

After the meeting, Mr. Lam said that "constructive results" were achieved. But he was not specific. A well-placed conference source said that Mrs. Binh was given some assurances that Communist representatives on the Four-Party Joint Military Commission in Saigon would receive better protection in the future.

Meeting on Draft Due

But a South Vietnamese spokesman insisted that the session was primarily concerned with choosing a site outside of Paris for talks starting next week between Saigon and Vietcong officials on the political future of South Vietnam. He said these talks would last "some months."

Assuming that there are no last-minute hitches on the prisoner question, conference diplomats expressed confidence tonight that a final document would be hammered out by a working group in time for approval by the foreign ministers at a full session tomorrow.

The document is then to be formally signed at elaborate ceremonies on Friday.

Mr. Rogers has been instructed by Mr. Nixon not to take part in any conference proceedings until a firm date is supplied by the Communist side in Saigon for the release of American prisoners, but American delegates did not expect this to prove a problem.

The diplomatic maneuvering to settle the prisoner crisis began last night when Mr. Rogers, on White House orders, proposed a private meeting with Mr. Trinh to seek an explanation for the prisoner delay.

Mrs. Binh Asks Meeting

Mr. Trinh responded, according to both Saigon and Washington officials, by proposing a four-sided meeting at the for-

mer Hotel Majestic, the site of the conference, by the foreign ministers of North Vietnam, South Vietnam, and the Vietcong, and the American Secretary of State. Mr. Rogers agreed to the proposal.

That four-sided meeting was largely devoted to polemics, diplomats said. The Communists repeated their demands for an end to alleged cease-

fire violations, and the Saigon Foreign Minister, Mr. Lam, in turn accused them of violations.

Mr. Rogers, according to Mr. McCloskey, limited his remarks to an insistence on the immediate release of the prisoners without any conditions—as he said was called for by the cease-fire agreement and protocols, which provide for the release of prisoners parallel to American troop withdrawals.

The meeting—held up for an hour by a debate over whether the Vietcong side is a government, as Hanoi insists, or a "party," as asserted by Saigon—lasted about two hours.

Separate Rooms

Then, Mr. Rogers and Mr. Trinh moved to one adjoining room, and Mr. Lam and Mrs. Binh to another for their private meetings. These meetings were kept secret from the press, which was segregated in another part of the building.

After receiving assurances from Mr. Trinh on the release of prisoners, Mr. Rogers drove back to the American Embassy to telephone Washington with the results of the negotiations.

While waiting for a call from the White House, Mr. Rogers took a quick sightseeing trip to Montmartre to have a look at Paris from the Basilica of the Sacré-Coeur.

Many newsmen, not knowing about the secret meetings, assumed that nothing had been accomplished and a variety of gloomy rumors spread around the Hotel Majestic. But late in the afternoon, shortly before the White House announcement, conference sources began to disclose some of the developments.

News Conference Called

No full session was held today at the conference to allow the drafting committee to complete its work. But the Vietnamese delegations held news conferences to publicize their points of view.

The North Vietnamese spokesman, commenting on the private talks between the American and North Vietnamese drafting teams, said that only a few differences remained to be settled. This was confirmed by other sources who said that the final declaration would al-

low the conference to be reconvened if either of two procedures was followed: the United States and North Vietnam both agree to do so, or if six or more parties at the conferences call for it.

One casualty of the drafting procedures has been Secretary General Waldhelm of the United Nations, who has been the

"13th party" at the conference. Hanoi, which originally had proposed that he be invited to the conference, has insisted that the United Nations have nothing to do with Vietnam and that he should not sign the final document.

There has also been a dispute over Saigon's refusal to accept any document that acknowledges the Vietcong as a government. In addition, the drafters have had difficulty surmounting Hanoi's opposition to the mention of Laos and Cambodia in the final declaration.

Dispute on Aid Issue

Hanoi has also opposed mention in the declaration of post-war foreign aid except in the most general terms. North Vietnamese spokesmen have strongly attacked the concept of aid to Hanoi by groups of nations, insisting that it be done on the basis of individual countries.

Another potential problem has revolved around Canada's request that the final document set up somebody to receive reports from the international observation team of which she is a part. It seems that no such body will be established.

A Canadian spokesman tonight said that his Government would not sign any final document acceptable. "But he did not say that Canada would oppose what seemed to be emerging as the reporting vehicle: a system by which the four members of the International Commission of Control and Supervision—Canada, Hungary, Indonesia and Poland—send their reports to the United States and North Vietnam, which then would circulate them to the conference's other participants.

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