

HANOI IN DISPUTE OVER ITS P.O.W.'S, BOYCOTTS TALKS

Says It Will Return to Truce
Meetings Only If Saigon
Frees More Prisoners
MAR 6 1973

'TOTAL IMPASSE' CITED

U.S. Again Says Release of
American Captives Is Tied
to Troop Pullout Only

NYTimes

By SYLVAN FOX

Special to The New York Times

SAIGON, South Vietnam, Tuesday, March 6—A North Vietnamese official said yesterday that the Communists would boycott further meetings of the four-party Joint Military Commission because of a dispute over the exchange of Vietnamese war prisoners.

The official, Col. Bui Tin, said the Communist side would return to the military commission meetings only when the Saigon Government agreed to release a number of Communist war prisoners "that is in accordance with the terms of the Paris agreement."

Saigon remained silent on the matter. A Government spokesman said simply that there was "no result" from yesterday's meeting of the Joint Military Commission.

[In Washington, the White House again insisted that release of all American prisoners of war was tied to no provision other than withdrawal of American forces from Vietnam, according to a dispatch of United Press International.]

Date Is Not Set

The North Vietnamese colonel said that the American and South Vietnamese delegations to the Joint Military Commission had been informed of the Communist boycott of further meetings, but an American source denied that any such information had been provided.

The American source said that the Communists had "declined to agree to any time"

for another meeting when the Americans on the commission suggested that the body meet again tomorrow.

In a telephone interview, Colonel Tin warned that as a result of the dispute, "the work of the Joint Military Commission has reached a total impasse."

The colonel did not specify the number of prisoners the Communists wanted released in the second round of Vietnamese prisoner exchanges.

However, an American source said that at a meeting of the commission's chief delegates earlier yesterday, the Communists demanded the release of 5,000 of their men held by Saigon.

Figure Called Unacceptable

The Saigon Government has offered to release 3,000 such prisoners, according to the American source, but Colonel Tin said that yesterday Saigon scaled down that offer to 2,000, which he called "absolutely unacceptable."

In the first round of Vietnamese prisoner releases last month, almost 7,000 Communist prisoners were exchanged by the Saigon Government for just

Continued on Page 13, Column 1

Continued From Page 1, Col. 8

over 1,000 of their soldiers held by the Communists.

These figures were based on the original estimates provided by both sides in Paris of the number of war prisoners each held. The Saigon Government said it held 28,000 Communist soldiers while the Communists said they held 4,000 Government soldiers.

Late last week the Communists raised that number to 4,500.

Under the Paris agreement, the prisoner exchanges were supposed to take place in four equal parts and to be completed within 60 days after the accord was signed on Jan. 27.

The dispute arose partly because neither side accepts as accurate the other's figures for the number of prisoners it holds. The Saigon authorities, for example, contend that the Communists actually hold some 30,000 Government prisoners.

However, within the framework of the numbers used in the first round of exchanges, observers suggested that the Communist complaint appeared justified.

Implicit Criticism of Saigon

According to an American source, Maj. Gen. Gilbert H. Woodward, the chief United States delegate to the military

commission, apparently took this position at yesterday's meeting, calling upon both sides to observe the full releases required under the Paris accord.

The general's remarks, according to an American source, were "implicitly critical" of Saigon for scaling down the number of prisoners it offered to release.

In his interview, Colonel Tin corroborated this, declaring:

"Even Major General Woodward had to reassert the U.S. position that during the first and second phases of prisoner exchanges each side should release a number of prisoners no less than 50 per cent of the total prisoners they held."

"The Republic of Vietnam side may be unable to explain its absurd attitude," Colonel Tin said.

Although noting that General Woodward more or less supported their contention, the Communists used the dispute as an opportunity to attack the United States.

"We especially want to emphasize U.S. responsibility for the present impasse," said Colonel Tin, "because at the Paris talks the representatives of the United States Government several times stressed that anything they negotiated concerning the Government of Vietnam had the complete agreement of the Government of Vietnam."

Thus, Colonel Tin said, the Communists "hold the Government of Vietnam and the United States responsible for the present deadlock," which he described as "an extremely critical situation."

Colonel Tin added, "It must be noted that the U.S. pristook place quickly and smoothly," and he indicated that he clearly expected the U.S. now to bring pressure to bear on Saigon to get the Vietnamese prisoner exchange back on the track.

In another development, Saigon drastically revised its casualty count for the fighting since the cease-fire went into effect on Jan. 28.

A Government spokesman said that "updated reports

from the field" showed that 12,192 Communist soldiers had been killed since the cease-fire started rather than the 8,884 reported Sunday.

Saigon said the revised figure for Government troops killed was 2,156 rather than the 1,616 reported Sunday.

U.S. Insists on Releases

WASHINGTON, March 5 (UPI)—The White House insisted anew today that release of all American prisoners of war was tied to no other provision than withdrawal of United States forces from Vietnam.

The press secretary, Ronald

L. Ziegler, made the statement in response to a warning by a North Vietnamese spokesman in Saigon that the next release of prisoners might be delayed by a deadlock in the Joint Military Commission.

"The United States expects the prisoners of war to be released in accordance with the agreement," Mr. Ziegler said.

He said President Nixon was pleased over return of the latest group of prisoners and that the United States expected those remaining in prison would be freed "on schedule and consistent with the agreement by all parties."