

## MEMORANDUM

## NATIONAL SECURITY COUNCIL

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July 14, 1971

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MEMORANDUM FOR: DR. KISSINGER  
THROUGH: RICHARD T. KENNEDY  
FROM: JOHN NEGROPONTE  
SUBJECT: The 7-Points and Le Duc Tho's Interview

Introduction

I interpret the new NLF 7-point statement, when viewed in conjunction with Le Duc Tho's interview, as sufficiently ambiguous with respect to the meaning of "withdrawal" to warrant serious consideration of exploration with the other side.

Point 1: The Crucial Point

Point 1 is entitled "Regarding the deadline for the total withdrawal of U. S. force."

Its first sentence is a preamble which states the U. S. must unconditionally do the following things:

- End its war of aggression;
- Stop its policy of Vietnamization;
- Withdraw all troops, military personnel (e.g. advisors) weapons, and war materials of the U. S. and TCC's;
- Dismantle all U. S. bases in South Vietnam.

The second sentence introduces an element of timing with respect to withdrawal of U. S. and TCC forces, stating that a fixed date must be set for completion.

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The third sentence introduces a conditional element which states that if the date set for the completion of U.S. and TCC withdrawal is before the end of 1971, then the parties will agree on modalities for:

- The safe withdrawal of those forces;
- The release of all military and civilian prisoners captured in the war, including U.S. pilots captured in the DRV.

#### The Ambiguity: The Meaning of Withdrawal

There are obviously two possible interpretations of what the Communists mean by withdrawal. As yet we have no textual evidence which would conclusively support either interpretation.

#### The First Interpretation

The first interpretation is that withdrawal, as used in the second and third sentences of Point 1 of the NLF proposal, includes ending the war of aggression, stopping Vietnamization, and dismantling our bases.

Arguing in favor of this interpretation is the fact that Point 1 is entitled "Regarding the deadline for the total withdrawal of U.S. forces" and therefore everything demanded within that point is subsumed under the rubric of total withdrawal.

Also in favor of this interpretation is the fact that it is consistent with the Communist ideological and strategic approach to the war: military and political issues are inseparable.

#### The Second Interpretation

The second interpretation is that the withdrawal of U.S. and TCC forces are matters which the Communists are willing to resolve separately and before "other problems relating to an overall settlement of the war."

Arguing in favor of this interpretation is the fact that the text of Point 1 uses four distinct and separate verbs in its preambulatory sentence (end, stop, withdraw, dismantle) and then, in the conditional third sentence, merely refers to withdrawal.

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The second feature which may support this interpretation is Le Duc Tho's July 6 interview with Tony Lewis. In the operative part of that interview Lewis asks:

Q. "There may be a problem in definition of the term 'withdrawal.' Would you define it so that after American forces are removed from Vietnam the U. S. could continue to provide military and economic assistance to Vietnam? "

Tho answered:

A. "I mean by total withdrawal, the withdrawal of all American ground forces, air forces, American military personnel, American military advisors, and dismantlement of American military bases from South Vietnam.

This is our conception, our view, on total withdrawal of U.S. forces. So I think that after the settlement of this problem, withdrawals and prisoners, then discussions should be immediately started to settle other problems relating to an overall settlement of the war. "

It can be inferred that Tho's definition of withdrawal, on the basis of the foregoing reply, does not include ending the war of aggression and stopping Vietnamization, since they are not mentioned in the items he explicitly defines as withdrawal. Moreover, by this purposeful ambiguity, Tho leaves open the possibility of treating military and economic support for the GVN as part of an overall settlement to be discussed after withdrawal and prisoner exchanges have been settled.

#### My Own Interpretation

I would agree with the second interpretation of the two I have outlined above. I think the DRV has posed its position in a purposefully ambiguous

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way. It is now waiting for us to construct it in the way most advantageous to us and counter, either with a proposal of our own or, more likely, with private probes designed to clarify the meaning of withdrawal in the third sentence of Point 1.

Having said this, I find nothing consoling about the DRV attitudes such an interpretation must reflect. If Tho is really saying that the U.S. and TCC's can get out, have their prisoners back and keep supporting the GVN short of direct military intervention (although without U.S. military men on the ground, the task of supplying the GVN militarily would be severely complicated), this would appear to reflect a supremely confident view of the situation on the ground. In effect, Hanoi is saying that without U.S. ground, air, or naval gunfire support, no amount of aid to the GVN will deter the final outcome the Communists desire. General Giap, in effect, said this in an interview reported out of London shortly after Tho's talk with Lewis.

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