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SIT TO 47FROM: SITUATION ROOM
TO: WINSTON LORDSUBJECT: EXCERPTS FROM LE DUC THO INTERVIEW - NEW YORK TIMES
JULY 7, 1971

PARIS, JULY 6 -- FOLLOWING ARE EXCERPTS FROM THE TRANSCRIPT OF AN INTERVIEW TODAY WITH LE DUC THO, A MEMBER OF THE POLITBURO OF THE RULING COMMUNIST PARTY OF NORTH VIETNAM, CONDUCTED BY ANTHONY LEWIS OF THE NEW YORK TIMES. MR. THO SPOKE IN VIETNAMESE, WHICH WAS TRANSLATED INTO ENGLISH BY AN AIDE, PHUONG NGUYEN DINH. TWO OTHER AIDES, TRAN THIEN CAN AND NGUYEN THANH LE, WERE WITH HIM.

Q. MR. THO, IN THE NEW SEVEN POINT PROPOSAL PUT FORWARD AT THE PEACE TALKS LAST WEEK BY THE PROVISIONAL REVOLUTIONARY GOVERNMENT, POINT ONE SUGGESTS WITHDRAWAL OF ALL AMERICAN FORCES FROM VIETNAM AND SIMULTANEOUS RELEASE OF ALL PRISONERS. POINT TWO DEALS WITH THE TERMS OF A POLITICAL SETTLEMENT IN SOUTH VIETNAM, AND THE OTHER POINTS WITH POSTWAR ISSUES. MY FIRST QUESTION IS THIS: COULD POINT ONE BE AGREED AND CARRIED OUT WITHOUT AN AGREEMENT ON THE OTHER POINTS? COULD THERE BE A U.S. WITHDRAWAL AND EXCHANGE OF PRISONERS WITHOUT FIRST, A POLITICAL SETTLEMENT?

A. TO SHOW OUR GOODWILL WE CAN SETTLE THE PROBLEM OF POINT ONE SEPARATELY, SO THAT ALL AMERICAN SERVICEMEN MAY PROMPTLY RETURN TO THEIR FAMILIES, SO THAT NO MORE AMERICAN SOLDIERS MUST DIE ON THE INDOCHINESE BATTLEFIELD, SO THAT ALL AMERICAN PRISONERS MAY PROMPTLY RETURN TO THEIR HOMES.

THIS LINE OF ACTION OF OURS IS IN RESPONSE TO THE DEEP ASPIRATIONS OF THE VIETNAMESE PEOPLE AS WELL AS OF THE AMERICAN PEOPLE. BUT I WONDER WHETHER MR. NIXON WILL RESPOND TO OUR PROPOSAL.

NEGOTIABLE TIMETABLE?

Q. THE PROPOSAL BY MRS. BINH (NGUYEN THI BINH, VIETCONG REPRESENTATIVE AT THE PEACE TALKS) SPEAKS OF A TERMINAL DATE FOR WITHDRAWAL "IN 1971." THIS YEAR IS MORE THAN HALF OVER NOW. IS THE TIMETABLE NEGOTIABLE? MIGHT A DATE IN 1972 BE ACCEPTABLE?

A. ONCE MR. NIXON SETS A DATE, AGREEMENT ON THE MODALITIES OF TROOP WITHDRAWAL AND PRISONER RELEASE WILL NOT BE DIFFICULT. IT WILL NOT TAKE A LONG TIME IF MR. NIXON SO DESIRES AND SHOWS GOODWILL. THEREFORE IN OUR VIEW THE PROPOSAL DATE IN 1971 IS A REASONABLE ONE.

BUT IF MR. NIXON PROLONGS THE PERIOD OF THE TROOP WITHDRAWAL, THEN THE U.S. TROOPS WILL BE DELAYED IN THEIR RETURN TO THEIR COUNTRY. THE AMERICAN PRISONERS WILL BE DELAYED IN THEIR RELEASE AND DELAYED IN THEIR RETURN HOME, AND MORE AMERICANS WOULD DIE ON THE BATTLEFIELD. OR IF MR. NIXON REFUSES TO SET THE DATE, THEN THE PROBLEM WILL NOT BE SETTLED AT ALL. OR IF MR. NIXON CONTINUES LINKING THE SETTING OF A DATE FOR WITHDRAWAL WITH OTHER CONDITIONS, WITH MORE CONDITIONS, THEN THE SETTLEMENT OF THE PROBLEM WILL BECOME MORE DIFFICULT.

I READ DEFENSE SECRETARY MELVIN LAIRD'S STATEMENT. HE SAID THAT THE WITHDRAWAL OF MILITARY PERSONNEL MIGHT BE RAPID, BUT THE RETURN OF WAR MATERIALS WILL COST BILLIONS OF DOLLARS AND HE WILL HAVE TO ASK FOR MONEY FROM THE AMERICAN CONGRESS. THEREFORE, I THINK THAT MR. LAIRD ADMITS THAT THE WITHDRAWAL OF U.S. TROOPS MAY BE RAPIDLY CARRIED OUT.

THE RETURN OF MATERIAL WILL BE COSTLY, BUT I THINK THE PRIMARY THING IS AMERICAN TROOPS' LIVES AND NOT FINANCES. MONEY. MOREOVER, THE U.S. IS A RICH COUNTRY; IT HAS ENOUGH MONEY TO DO THAT. AND THE EXPENDITURES FOR THE RETURN OF WAR MATERIAL TO THE UNITED STATES CANNOT BE A PRETEXT TO DELAY THE DEPARTURE OF AMERICAN TROOPS. I THINK THAT HUMAN LIVES ARE THE MOST PRECIOUS THINGS.

ABOUT FURTHER CONDITIONS

Q. LET ME TAKE UP THE POINT ABOUT PRESIDENT NIXON PUTTING FURTHER CONDITIONS. WHAT SORT OF CONDITIONS ARE YOU CONCERNED ABOUT?

A. I MEAN THAT MR. NIXON, BEFORE SETTING A DATE FOR THE TROOP WITHDRAWAL, WILL RAISE OTHER QUESTIONS, AND THE FIXING OF A DATE WILL BE DONE ONLY AFTER A SETTLEMENT OF THESE PROBLEMS.

FOR INSTANCE, SUPPOSING HE SAID THAT AFTER HE SETS A DATE FOR THE TROOP WITHDRAWAL THERE MUST BE A CEASE-FIRE THROUGHOUT INDOCHINA. THEN IT CANNOT BE SETTLED IN THAT WAY, BECAUSE THE CEASE-FIRE THROUGHOUT INDOCHINA WILL RAISE MANY OTHER PROBLEMS. IF SO, THE PROBLEM, DATE FOR THE TROOP WITHDRAWAL AND THE RELEASE OF PRISONERS CANNOT BE SETTLED.

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 SOUTH VIETNAM?

A. I MEAN BY TOTAL WITHDRAWAL THE WITHDRAWAL OF ALL AMERICAN GROUND FORCES, NAVAL FORCES, AIR FORCES, AMERICAN MILITARY PERSONNEL, AMERICAN MILITARY ADVISERS, 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, WITHDRAWAL AND PRISONERS, THEN DISCUSSIONS SHOULD BE IMMEDIATELY STARTED TO SETTLE OTHER PROBLEMS RELATING TO AN OVER-ALL SETTLEMENT OF THE WAR.

3. AND WOULD THAT INCLUDE QUESTIONS OF ECONOMIC ASSISTANCE?

A. THEN THE DISCUSSIONS WOULD BE CARRIED OUT ON ALL THE REMAINING PROBLEMS, ECONOMIC AND MILITARY, AND A NEW BASIS WOULD BE LAID DOWN FOR THE RELATIONSHIP BETWEEN SOUTH VIETNAM AND THE UNITED STATES. AND POINT FIVE OF THE SEVEN-POINT PROPOSAL -- DEALING WITH

THINGS WITH FUTURE ECONOMIC AID -- IS VERY EXPLICIT IN THIS CONNECTION. AND AFTER THE END OF THE WAR NORTH VIETNAM MAY ESTABLISH RELATIONS WITH THE UNITED STATES, TOO, ON THE PRINCIPLE OF INDEPENDENCE, EQUALITY, AND MUTUAL INTEREST.

I THINK THAT ONLY WHEN THE WAR IS ENDED IN THIS WAY IS IT IN THE INTEREST OF THE UNITED STATES. NOW YOU CAN SEE THAT AFTER DOZENS OF YEARS OF WAR THE WAR HAS NOT BROUGHT ANY INTEREST AT ALL TO THE AMERICAN PEOPLE. ONLY LOSSES, NO INTEREST AT ALL.

Q. PART OF THE DEFINITION OF TOTAL WITHDRAWAL WAS THE DISMANTLEMENT OF AMERICAN MILITARY BASES. DOES THAT NOT CONFLICT WITH THE TIME PROBLEM THAT MR. LAIRD MENTIONED? THAT IS THE PROBLEM OF REMOVING MATERIAL.

A. I THINK THAT TROOPS ARE ALWAYS ACCOMPANIED BY EQUIPMENT, BECAUSE TROOPS WITHOUT EQUIPMENT WOULD NOT MAKE TROOPS. THEREFORE, WHEN WE SPEAK OF TROOP WITHDRAWAL IT SHOULD BE UNDERSTOOD THAT THE WITHDRAWAL OF EQUIPMENT SHOULD BE CARRIED OUT AT THE SAME TIME. MR. LAIRD SAYS THAT THE WITHDRAWAL OF EQUIPMENT OF MATERIAL WILL NECESSITATE BILLIONS OF DOLLARS. BUT I FIRMLY BELIEVE THAT THE U.S. HAS ENOUGH MONEY TO DO THAT. I THINK THAT MR. LAIRD RAISED THIS QUESTION TO DELAY THE WITHDRAWAL.

Q. YOUR DISCUSSION HAS BEEN VERY SPECIFICALLY ON WITHDRAWAL OF FORCES FROM VIETNAM. IS THERE ANY QUESTION HERE OF THE U.S. WITHDRAWING FORCES FROM THAILAND, CAMBODIA, LAOS? DOES THE WORD "WITHDRAWAL" COVER ONLY VIETNAM OR OTHER PLACES?

A. THE PROBLEM AS WE HAVE RAISED IT INVOLVES VIETNAM. WE HAVE PROPOSED THE WITHDRAWAL OF U. S. FORCES AND THOSE OF OTHER POWERS, AND THE RELEASE OF MILITARY PERSONNEL AND CIVILIANS CAPTURED IN VIETNAM. AS TO LAOS AND CAMBODIA, THESE ARE DIFFERENT QUESTIONS.

U. S. FORCES IN THAILAND

Q. THE SEVEN-POINT PROPOSAL SPEAKS OF A CEASE-FIRE BETWEEN AMERICAN AND VIETNAMESE LIBERATION ARMED FORCES. IN ORDER TO REACH AGREEMENT WOULD IT BE NECESSARY TO UNDERTAKE AN IMMEDIATE CEASE-FIRE COVERING NOT ONLY AMERICAN FORCES IN VIETNAM BUT THE AIR FORCE OPERATING FROM THAILAND?

A. WHEN WE POSE THIS POINT 1 FOR THE WITHDRAWAL OF THE TOTALITY OF AMERICAN AND ALLIED FORCES AND THE RELEASE OF PRISONERS, WE INCLUDE ALSO A CEASE-FIRE BETWEEN THE VIETNAMESE AND THE AMERICANS. IF SO, THERE COULD BE NO AMERICAN MILITARY ACTIVITIES BASED IN OTHER COUNTRIES BUT AFFECTING VIETNAM.

IF NOW, FOR INSTANCE, THE U. S. WITHDRAWS ITS FORCES FROM VIETNAM AND THEN THE U.S. USES ITS MILITARY FORCES IN OTHER COUNTRIES AND ON BOARD THE SEVENTH FLEET TO SHELL VIETNAMESE TERRITORY AND BOYS AND SUPPORT SAIGON TROOPS, THEN THE FIGHTING

BETWEEN THE VIETNAMESE AND AMERICAN TROOPS WILL CONTINUE. AND AMERICAN SOLDIERS WILL CONTINUE TO DIE ON THE BATTLEFIELD. AND IT WILL BE A VICIOUS CIRCLE THEN. IT WILL BE TANTAMOUNT TO THE U. S. WITHDRAWING FROM VIETNAM AND CONTINUING THE WAR IN ANOTHER FORM.

I THINK THE SETTING OF A FINAL DATE OF TROOP WITHDRAWAL AND THE RELEASE OF PRISONERS OF ALL PARTIES IS THE FIRST STEP IN THE SETTLEMENT OF THE WAR. IT IS OUR DESIRE TO ACHIEVE THAT. IT DOES NOT MEAN THAT ONLY POINT 1 IS SETTLED AND WE STOP THERE. BUT WE WONDER WHETHER MR. NIXON DESIRES IT TO BEGIN. BECAUSE OUR EXPERIENCE IS THAT DURING THE TWO AND A HALF YEARS OF MR. NIXON'S PRESIDENCY HE HAS BEEN TALKING A GREAT DEAL ABOUT PEACE BUT HAS BEEN EXPANDING THE WAR.

IF WE COUNT THE WORD "PEACE" IN HIS STATEMENTS, WE WILL FIND A GREATER NUMBER THAN THE WORD "WAR". BUT ACTUALLY MOST OF HIS EFFORT IS FOR WAR. THE QUANTITY OF BOMBS DROPPED DURING MR. NIXON'S PRESIDENCY IS GREATER THAN THE QUANTITY OF BOMBS DROPPED IN VIETNAM, CAMBODIA AND LAOS DURING THE FOUR YEARS OF MR. JOHNSON'S PRESIDENCY. AND UNDER MR. NIXON'S ADMINISTRATION THE WAR HAS BEEN EXTENDED FROM SOUTH VIETNAM TO LAOS AND CAMBODIA.

"LESSONS FROM EXPERIENCES"

I WONDER WHETHER MR. NIXON DRAWS LESSONS FROM THESE EXPERIENCES TO END THIS WAR IN VIETNAM AND TO RESTORE PEACE IN VIETNAM. WE HAVE UNDERSTOOD MR. NIXON THROUGH TWO INDOCHINESE WARS NOW DURING THE LAST 25 YEARS. MOREOVER, THE RECENT PENTAGON PAPERS HAVE SHED A GREAT DEAL OF FURTHER LIGHT ON THIS PAST.

TO SHOW NOW HIS DESIRE FOR A PEACEFUL SETTLEMENT OF THE VIETNAM PROBLEM, MR. NIXON SHOULD RESPOND TO POINT 1 OF MRS. BINH'S PROPOSAL HE SHOULD TAKE THE FIRST STEP NOW. AND HE SHOULD CONTINUE AFTER THAT TO TAKE THE FOLLOWING STEPS AND DISCUSS OTHER PROBLEMS.

AND AMONG THE OTHER PROBLEMS THERE IS ONE VERY IMPORTANT ONE. THAT IS THE QUESTION OF CHANGING THE THIEU ADMINISTRATION. BECAUSE THE THIEU ADMINISTRATION IS DICTATORIAL, WARLIKE AND IT IS AGAINST THE RAPID WITHDRAWAL OF U.S. FORCES. IT WANTS AMERICAN FORCES TO REMAIN THERE TO HELP IT REPRESS THE SOUTH VIETNAM PEOPLE. IF THE THIEU ADMINISTRATION WILL CHANGE, THEN A NEW PERIOD WILL BE OPENED FOR THE RADICAL SETTLEMENT, THE COMPREHENSIVE SETTLEMENT OF THE WAR.

WE WANT TO SEE THE VIETNAMESE PEOPLE LIVE IN PEACE. WE WANT ALSO TO SEE THE DEVELOPEMENT OF RELATIONSHIPS BETWEEN VIETNAM AND THE UNITED STATES AFTER THE RESTORATION OF PEACE.

THERE IS A PRECEDENT. WE HAVE EXPERIENCE WITH THE FRENCH. WE WORKED NEARLY A CENTURY UNDER FRENCH DOMINATION, AND OUR RESISTANCE WAR AGAINST THE FRENCH LASTED NEARLY NINE YEARS. BUT AFTER THIS SETTLEMENT OF THE WAR AND THE RESTORATION OF PEACE THERE WAS NO OBSTACLE TO THE BUILDING OF FRIENDLY RELATIONS BETWEEN THE FRENCH PEOPLE. I BELIEVE IT IS THE SAME WAY WITH THE AMERICAN PEOPLE.

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TIMING OF THE RELEASES

WE SHOULD SAY THAT THE SUFFERINGS CAUSED BY THE SUCCESSIVE AMERICAN ADMINISTRATIONS TO OUR PEOPLE DURING THE PAST YEARS HAVE LEFT A VERY PROFOUND WOUND. BUT AT THE SAME TIME IT LEFT BEHIND ALSO GREAT SUFFERINGS FOR THE AMERICAN PEOPLE. AND THE AMERICAN PEOPLE HAVE NO INTEREST IN IT.

THEREFORE, I THINK IT IS TIME NOW TO END THIS WAR, TO RESTORE PEACE, TO RESTORE GOOD RELATIONSHIP BETWEEN OUR TWO COUNTRIES. WE VIETNAMESE ARE BRAVE AND VALIANT IN FIGHTING, BUT WE VALUE HUMAN BEINGS.

Q. MRS. BUNH'S PROPOSAL OF THE RELEASE OF THE PRISONERS BEGINNING ON THE SAME DATE AND ENDING ON THE SAME DATE AS THE WITHDRAWAL. PRECISELY WHAT DOES THAT MEAN? IF, FOR EXAMPLE, THERE WAS AN AGREEMENT DURING THIS SUMMER TO FIX A DATE, THEN WHEN THE NEXT PLANNED WITHDRAWAL OF AN AMERICAN MILITARY UNIT OCCURRED AFTER THAT AGREEMENT WOULD NORTH VIETNAM BE PREPARED TO RELEASE SOME OF THE CAPTURED PILOTS?

A. AFTER AGREEMENT IS REACHED UPON THE DATE OF THE TROOP WITHDRAWAL AND THE MODALITIES OF THE RELEASE OF PRISONERS, THEN WHEN THE FIRST BATCH OF SOLDIERS LEAVES VIETNAM, THE FIRST BATCH OF PRISONERS WILL BE RELEASED.

WHAT IS IMPORTANT NOW IS THAT A DATE IS AGREED UPON FOR THE TROOP WITHDRAWAL. AS TO MODALITY, HOW THE TROOP WILL BE WITHDRAWN, I THINK THAT THESE QUESTIONS CAN BE RAPIDLY SETTLED.

Q. POINT 4 IN THE PLAN SPEAKS OF A CEASE-FIRE BETWEEN AMERICAN FORCES AND VIETNAMESE FORCES. HOW WOULD SUCH A CEASE-FIRE WORK WHERE AMERICAN SOLDIERS ARE TIED IN WITH OR SERVING IN UNITS OF THE ARMY OF THE REPUBLIC OF VIETNAM?

A. THE QUESTION IS APPROACHED AS A TOTAL WITHDRAWAL OF UNITED STATES FORCES, SO THERE IS NO REASON THAT SOME AMERICAN G.I.'S OR ADVISERS WILL REMAIN BEHIND. DURING THE PROCESS OF WITHDRAWAL ALL AMERICAN FORCES WILL MOVE TO DEPARTING POINTS. THOSE POINTS WILL NOT BE ATTACKED UNLESS ATTACKS ARE LAUNCHED BY UNITED STATES FORCES AGAINST US.

AS A MATTER OF FACT, IN THE PAST WE HAVE SIGNED AGREEMENTS A COUPLE OF TIMES, AND THE VIOLATION OF THE AGREEMENTS HAS ALWAYS BEEN ON THE OTHER SIDE AND NOT ON OURS. THE 1954 GENEVA AGREEMENTS DEPENDED UPON PAPERS. THEREFORE WE STILL WONDER, IF AGREEMENT IS REACHED NOW, WHETHER THE OTHER SIDE WILL VIOLATE THE AGREEMENT THAT HAS BEEN SIGNED.

Q. IF AGREEMENT IS REACHED ON POINT 1, YOU COME TO THE OTHERS AND PARTICULARLY POINT 2, THE POLITICAL QUESTION. IF THE U.S. HAS IN FACT ALREADY WITHDRAWN ITS FORCES, THEN WOULDN'T IT REALLY BE NECESSARY FOR THE PROVISIONAL REVOLUTIONARY GOVERNMENT OF DEAL WITH THE SAIGON GOVERNMENT RATHER THAN THE AMERICANS?

A. AFTER THE WITHDRAWAL OF U.S. FORCES AND OTHER FOREIGN COUNTRIES' FORCES, THE P.R.G. WILL CONTINUE THE DISCUSSION ON OTHER PROBLEMS WITH THE SAIGON ADMINISTRATION - BUT A NEW ONE, WITHOUT THIEU.

Q. SUPPOSE THAT IN THE ELECTION THIS OCTOBER GENERAL THIEU IS THE WINNER AND THE UNITED STATES IS WITHDRAWING. HOW WOULD THE DISCUSSION BE CONDUCTED?

A. ALTHOUGH IT IS NOT ADMITTED, NOT PUBLICLY STATED, THE WHOLE WORLD KNOWS THAT THIEU HAS BEEN PUT IN POWER BY THE U.S. ADMINISTRATION AND THE U.S. WILL HAVE THE DECISIVE VOICE IN THE FORTHCOMING ELECTIONS.

THEREFORE, IF MR. NIXON IS REALLY DISPOSED TO SETTLE THE WHOLE PROBLEM OF THE WAR, THEN BESIDES POINT 1 THE QUESTION OF CHANGE OF THE RULING GROUP NOW IN OFFICE IN SAIGON - HEADED BY THIEU - IS IN THE POWER OF THE U.S.

THE ELECTION IN SOUTH VIETNAM WILL BE DECIDED BY THE U.S. IT IS THE U.S. THAT WILL DECIDE WHO WILL WIN. THE FORTHCOMING ELECTION IN SOUTH VIETNAM IS AN OPPORTUNITY FOR MR. NIXON TO CHANGE THIEU. IT IS ALSO A YARDSTICK TO SHOW WHETHER MR. NIXON DESIRES A PEACEFUL SETTLEMENT ON THE WAR OR NOT.

I THINK THAT AFTER THE SETTLEMENT OF POINT 1, POINT 2 AND THE CHANGE FROM THIEU IS A VERY IMPORTANT POINT TO COME TO AN OVER-ALL SETTLEMENT. AND I AM FIRMLY CONVINCED THAT THE P.R.G. WILL HAVE ENOUGH GOODWILL AND SERIOUS DESIRE FOR A LOGICAL AND REASONABLE SETTLEMENT TO REALIZE NATIONAL CONCORD AMONG THE VIETNAMESE.

MR. NIXON OFTEN SAYS THAT HE IS AFRAID THAT SOUTH VIETNAM WILL TURN COMMUNIST. THAT IS NOT TRUE, BECAUSE THE P.R.G. HAS REPEATEDLY AND VERY CLEARLY STATED THAT ITS OBJECTIVE IS TO ACHIEVE A SOUTH VIETNAM THAT IS INDEPENDENT, PEACEFUL, NEUTRAL, DEMOCRATIC. IT IS NOT A SOCIALIST COUNTRY, BUT NATURALLY IT CANNOT BE A NEO-COLONY.

HE ALLEGES THAT U.S. INVOLVEMENT IN SOUTH VIETNAM IS A FIGHT AGAINST COMMUNISM, BUT THE PENTAGON PAPERS HAVE SHOWN THAT 70 PERCENT IS FOR THE GLOBAL STRATEGY OF THE UNITED STATES. I THINK THAT IF MR. NIXON IS WISE, IS CLEAR-SIGHTED HE SHOULD SETTLE THE VIETNAM WAR NOW.

HANOI AIDE SAYS PACT ON P.O.W.'S CAN BE SEPARATE

POLITICAL QUESTIONS CAN WAIT, THO, A POLITBURO MEMBER, ASSERTS
IN INTERVIEW

HE SEES A QUICK ACCORD

NORTH VIETNAMESE DEMANDS REMOVAL OF THIEU BEFORE ANY SUBSEQUENT
TALKS

BY ANTHONY LEWIS
SPECIAL TO THE NEW YORK TIMES

PARIS, JULY 6-A HIGH-RANKING NORTH VIETNAMESE LEADER SAID TODAY
THAT THE NEW COMMUNIST OFFER TO RETURN WAR PRISONERS IF AMERICAN
FORCES ARE WITHDRAWN BY THE END OF 1971 WAS NOT DEPENDENT ON A
POLITICAL SETTLEMENT IN SOUTH VIETNAM.

LE DUC THO, A MEMBER OF THE POLITBURO IN HANOI, SAID THAT THE
QUESTIONS OF PRISONERS AND WITHDRAWAL COULD BE NEGOTIATED SEPARATELY
NOW IN THE PARIS PEACE TALKS, WITH FUTURE POLITICAL ARRANGEMENTS
TO BE DISCUSSED AFTERWARD.

IN AN INTERVIEW, MR. THO SAID THAT IF PRESIDENT NIXON AGREED TO
SET A FINAL DATE FOR TOTAL AMERICAN WITHDRAWAL, THE "MODALITIES"
OF WITHDRAWAL AND OF THE RELEASE OF PRISONERS COULD BE "RAPIDLY
SETTLED."

WITH 'THE FIRST BATCH'

HE SAID NORTH VIETNAM AND THE VIETCONG WOULD RELEASE SOME
PRISONERS QUICKLY AFTER AGREEMENT ON THE WITHDRAWAL AND ON
PRISONERS. WHEN "THE FIRST BATCH OF SOLDIERS" LEAVES VIETNAM
AFTER THAT, HE ADDED, "THE FIRST BATCH OF PRISONERS WILL BE
RELEASED."

(ECHOING MR. THO'S VIEWS, MRS. NGUYEN THI BINH, THE VIETCONG
REPRESENTATIVE IN PARIS, SAID IN AN INTERVIEW WITH UNITED PRESS
INTERNATIONAL THAT HER LATEST PEACE PROPOSALS WERE NOT MADE ON
A TAKE-IT-OR-LEAVE-IT BASIS.)

MR. THO'S COMMENTS APPEARED TO CLARIFY AN IMPORTANT QUESTION
THAT AMERICAN OFFICIALS HAD RAISED PRIVATELY ABOUT THE SEVEN-
POINT PEACE PLAN PROPOSED LAST THURSDAY BY MRS. BINH: WHETHER THE
VARIOUS POINTS WERE INTERDEPENDENT.

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DIFFICULT POLITICAL ISSUES

POINT 1 SET FORTH THE NEW PROPOSAL ON THE PRISONERS AND WITHDRAWAL. THEN CAME SUGGESTIONS FOR A COALITION GOVERNMENT IN SOUTH VIETNAM AND OTHER DIFFICULT POLITICAL ISSUES ON WHICH THE NEGOTIATORS HAVE MADE NO PROGRESS HERE IN THREE YEARS.

AMERICAN OFFICIALS HERE, INFORMED OF MR. THO'S STATEMENT THAT POINT 1 WAS SEPARATELY NEGOTIABLE, SAID, IT COULD BE SIGNIFICANT. THEY ADDED, HOWEVER, THAT THERE WERE STILL MANY POTENTIAL DIFFICULTIES IN THE LANGUAGE OF THE PROPOSAL ITSELF.

THE CHIEF UNITED STATES NEGOTIATOR, DAVID K.E. BRUCE WILL REPLY TO THE NEW PLAN AT THE NEXT SESSION OF THE TALKS ON THURSDAY. HE IS EXPECTED TO ASK FOR CLARIFICATION ON A NUMBER OF ISSUES.

MR. THO, IN THE INTERVIEW, ALSO MADE THESE OTHER EXPLANATORY COMMENTS ON THE NEW PLAN:

AS PART OF ITS TOTAL WITHDRAWAL, THE UNITED STATES WOULD HAVE TO END THE SHELLING OF VIETNAM BY SHIPS OF THE SEVENTH FLEET AND ALL BOMBING AND CLOSE-SUPPORT ACTION BY PLANES BASED IN THAILAND.

THE UNITED STATES WOULD ALSO HAVE TO WITHDRAW ALL MILITARY ADVISERS ATTACHED TO THE ARMY OF THE REPUBLIC OF VIETNAM. MR. THO DID NOT GIVE A DIRECT ANSWER TO A QUESTION ABOUT CONTINUED AMERICAN MATERIAL AID TO SAIGON'S FORCES.

THE AGREEMENT ON WITHDRAWAL AND RELEASE OF PRISONERS WOULD APPLY ONLY TO THE TERRITORY OF VIETNAM-NOT TO LAOS OR CAMBODIA.

IF AN AGREEMENT IS REACHED, POLITICAL TALKS SHOULD FOLLOW. THEY WOULD BE BETWEEN THE SO-CALLED PROVISIONAL REVOLUTIONARY GOVERNMENT OF SOUTH VIETNAM AND THE SAIGON ADMINISTRATION-BUT THE LATTER WITHOUT PRESIDENT NGUYEN VAN THIEU.

KNOWN TO BE SENIOR FIGURE

OFFICIALLY, MR. THO IS DESIGNATED AS A SPECIAL ADVISER TO THE HEAD OF THE HANOI DELEGATION AT THE PEACE TALKS, XUAN THUY, BUT IN FACT HE IS KNOWN BY ALL PARTICIPANTS TO BE THE SENIOR FIGURE.

HE RARELY GOES TO THE FORMAL MEETINGS, BUT WHEN HE COMES HERE FROM HANOI HE IS THOUGHT TO BRING AUTHORITATIVE WORD ON NEW DIRECTIONS-AS HE EVIDENTLY DID WHEN HE GOT HERE SHORTLY BEFORE MRS. BINH'S PROPOSALS LAST WEEK.

THE INTERVIEW TODAY, IN THE DELEGATION HEADQUARTERS IN SUBURBAN CHOISY-LE-ROI, LASTED AN HOUR AND 40 MINUTES. MR. THO SPOKE IN VIETNAMESE, WHICH WAS TRANSLATED INTO ENGLISH BY AN AIDE, PHUONG NGUYEN DINH.

MR. THO- A MAN OF ABOUT 5 FEET 5 INCHES WITH GRAY HAIR-SPOKE FORCEFULLY BUT SEEMED RELAXED, LAUGHING OCCASIONALLY. THERE WERE TWO OTHER AIDES WITH HIM, TRAM THIEN CAN AND NGUYEN THANH LE, THE LATTER THE DELEGATION PRESS SPOKESMAN, AND THEY INTERRUPTED FROM TIME TO TIME WITH WHAT WERE EVIDENTLY SUGGESTIONS FOR REPHRASINGS.

ONE NOTABLE COMMENT BY MR. THO DEALT WITH THE QUESTION OF A
CEASE

MRS. BINH'S FIRST POINT SAID THAT IMMEDIATELY AFTER AGREEMENT ON WITHDRAWAL AND RETURN OF PRISONERS THERE SHOULD BE A CEASE-FIRE-BUT ONLY BETWEEN AMERICAN TROOPS AND THE "LIBERATION FORCES." THAT WOULD HAVE THE EFFECT OF ALLOWING CONTINUED FIGHTING BETWEEN THE COMMUNIST FORCES AND THE SOUTH VIETNAMESE ARMY.

MR. THO SAID THAT IF PRESIDENT NIXON TRIED TO LINK HIS AGREEMENT ON THE FIXING OF A WITHDRAWAL DATE WITH A CEASE-FIRE THROUGHOUT INDOCHINA, THERE COULD BE NO ACCORD. THE WIDER CEASE-FIRE HE SAID, WOULD RAISE "MANY OTHER PROBLEMS."

THE AMERICAN DELEGATION HAS IN FACT BEEN PRESSING THE IDEA OF A GENERAL CEASE-FIRE IN THE TALKS. IT IS ALSO CONCERNED ABOUT PRISONERS BELIEVED TO BE HELD IN LAOS AND CAMBODIA.

MR. THO'S EXCLUSION OF LAOS AND CAMBODIA FROM THE REACH OF THE PROPOSED AGREEMENT ON WITHDRAWAL AND PRISONERS SURPRISED SOME OBSERVERS. HE DID NOT EXPLAIN, SAYING ONLY THAT THE TWO OTHER INDOCHINESE STATES RAISED "DIFFERENT QUESTIONS."

ON THE POLITICAL FUTURE OF SOUTH VIETNAM, MR. THO HELD TO THE COMMUNISTS' FAMILIAR OBJECTION TO NEGOTIATING WITH A SAIGON GOVERNMENT HEADED BY PRESIDENT THIEU. HE SUGGESTED THAT THE UNITED STATES COULD ARRANGE FOR MR. THIEU'S QUIET REPLACEMENT IN THE FORTHCOMING ELECTION.

'U.S.' TO 'HAVE DECISIVE VOICE'

"ALTHOUGH IT IS NOT ADMITTED," HE SAID, "NOT PUBLICLY STATED, THE WHOLE WORLD KNOWS THAT THIEU HAS BEEN PUT IN POWER BY THE U.S. ADMINISTRATION. AND THE U.S. WILL HAVE THE DECISIVE VOICE IN THE FORTHCOMING ELECTIONS. IT IS THE U.S. THAT WILL DECIDE WHO WILL WIN."

MR. THO INDICATED THAT HE WOULD LIKE TO TALK WITH HENRY S. KISSINGER, PRESIDENT NIXON'S NATIONAL SECURITY ADVISER, WHO IS TO MAKE A BRIEF VISIT TO PARIS THIS WEEKEND DURING A TRIP THAT HAS INCLUDED A STOP IN SAIGON.

"IF A MEETING IS PROPOSED" WITH MR. KISSINGER, MR. THO SAID, "THEN WE WILL CONSIDER IT VERY SERIOUSLY. BECAUSE WE HAVE BEEN STAYING HERE RATHER A LONG TIME WITH A DESIRE TO COME TO A PEACEFUL SETTLEMENT."

NO SUCH MEETING HAS BEEN REQUESTED BY THE AMERICAN SIDE, BUT IT PRESUMABLY COULD BE SET UP ON SHORT NOTICE IF MR. KISSINGER DESIRED IT. THROUGHOUT THE INTERVIEW MR. THO SOUGHT TO DIFFERENTIATE BETWEEN THE AMERICAN GOVERNMENTS. HE SAID THE PEOPLE WANTED TO END THE WAR.

REPEATEDLY CRITICAL OF PRESIDENT NIXON, HE SAID AT ONE POINT: "WE HAVE UNDERSTOOD MR. NIXON THROUGH TWO INDOCHINESE WARS." THAT MAY HAVE BEEN AN ALLUSION TO THE FACT THAT WHEN FRENCH STRENGTH WAS EBBING IN 1954, MR. NIXON, AS VICE PRESIDENT, FAVORED AMERICAN INTERVENTION.

MRS. BINH CALLS FOR TALKS

PARIS, JULY 6 (UPI)—MRS. BINH INDICATED TODAY THAT THE LATEST VIETCONG PEACE PROPOSALS WERE NOT AN INFLEXIBLE TAKE-IT-OR-LEAVE-IT PACKAGE.

IN AN INTERVIEW, THE FOREIGN MINISTER OF THE SOUTH VIETNAMESE NATIONAL LIBERATION FRONT CALLED ON PRESIDENT NIXON TO GIVE HIS NEGOTIATORS THE GO AHEAD TO DISCUSS THE PLAN WITH THE COMMUNIST DELEGATES.

SHE ADDED THAT, IF NEED BE, SHE WAS READY TO ENTER PRIVATE TALKS WITH AMBASSADOR BRUCE. THE AMERICANS HAVE DECLINED PRIVATE MEETINGS WITH HER GROUP ON THE GROUND THAT IT LACKED OFFICIAL STANDING.

MRS. BINH SAID THAT IF MR. NIXON TURNED THE PLAN DOWN AND DECIDED TO KEEP RESIDUAL FIGHTING FORCES IN VIETNAM, THE AMERICANS WOULD BE DRAWN INTO INTENSIFIED FIGHTING.

THE 46-YEAR-OLD OFFICIAL, WHO HAS HAD 25 YEARS OF UNDERGROUND ACTIVITY AS A POLITICAL MILITANT, WAS INTERVIEWED IN HER WELL-GUARDED HEADQUARTERS.

COMMENT BY ZIEGLER

SPECIAL TO THE NEW YORK TIMES

KANSAS CITY, JULY 6-- RONALD L. ZIEGLER, THE WHITE HOUSE PRESS SECRETARY, WAS ASKED TODAY TO COMMENT ON THE INTERVIEW IN WHICH MRS. BINH SAID THAT THERE WAS NOTHING RIGID ABOUT THE PEACE PROPOSAL AND THAT SHE WOULD GLADLY MEET PRIVATELY WITH AN AMERICAN TO DISCUSS IT.

"WE HAVE INDICATED BEFORE THAT WE ARE INTERESTED IN SERIOUS NEGOTIATIONS WITH THE OTHER SIDE," HE REPLIED. "THE OTHER SIDE KNOWS WHAT THE APPROPRIATE FORUM IS."

HE MADE THE STATEMENT ABOARD THE PRESIDENTIAL PLANE CARRYING MR. AND MRS. NIXON, SECRETARY OF STATE WILLIAM P. ROGERS AND OTHER OFFICIALS TO THE SUMMER WHITE HOUSE IN SAN CLEMENTE, CALIF.

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