

DEPARTMENT OF STATE

FOR THE PRESS

DECEMBER 11, 1969

NO. 373

MINISTER HABIB'S OPENING STATEMENT

Following is the text of the opening statement delivered by Minister Philip C. Habib at the Forty-Sixth Plenary Session of the New Paris Meetings on Viet-Nam, December 11, 1969.

Ladies and Gentlemen:

In recent weeks your side has sought, outside of these Plenary Meetings, to persuade the world that you are seriously seeking a negotiated settlement of the war in Viet-Nam. You have spoken of your goodwill and serious attitude and of the reasonableness and correctness of your proposals.

We continue to hear the same demands for unilateral action which you have been making for the past ten months. We see no signs that your side is prepared to take any steps of its own to match actions by our side. We hear only more strident language.

You cannot convince us here, or public opinion at large, of your desire for genuine negotiations by protestations of goodwill alone. This is a clear case where actions speak louder than mere words.

For example, you constantly claim that you came to these meetings with what you term "goodwill and a serious attitude." It is worth examining what goodwill and serious attitude consist of.

Normally, in international negotiations, goodwill means the following things: to present reasonable proposals; to listen to the proposals of others; to discuss one's own proposals and to explain them; to discuss the proposals of others and to ask for clarification; to be ready to deal with all parties; to be ready to give and take; and to reach an agreement to which all parties can honorably adhere.

By any normal standards, therefore, you have not yet shown here either goodwill or a serious attitude. You have made unreasonable demands and insisted that we accept them before negotiations can begin. You demand actions on our part with no indication of what you are prepared to do. You have rejected our positions out of hand and refused to discuss them. You have refused to deal with the Government of the Republic of Viet-Nam, even though you originally agreed to do so and even though that Government has agreed to meet with you without any conditions publicly or privately.

These, I submit, are not actions which demonstrate a serious attitude.

Your words and actions diverge also when you claim to accord "humane" treatment to our prisoners of war.

Here again there are standards by which one can define "humane" treatment. In addition to adequate diet and medical care, and the absence of

As President Nixon said in his press conference on Monday, we are waiting for a serious proposal from your side. In the meantime, we have a plan for the orderly reduction of American forces in Viet-Nam and for strengthening the capabilities of the South Vietnamese to defend themselves. President Nixon on Monday indicated that that plan is going forward and is working.

Ladies and gentlemen, our side poses no obstacle to full discussion of all issues and all proposals. We are ready for serious negotiations on the basis of actions to be taken on both sides. The next step is up to you.

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DEPARTMENT OF STATE FOR THE PRESS

DECEMBER 30, 1969

NO. 383

AMBASSADOR HABIB'S OPENING STATEMENT

Following is the text of the opening statement delivered by Ambassador Philip C. Habib at the Forty-Eighth Plenary Session of the New Paris Meetings on Viet-Nam, December 30, 1969.

Ladies and Gentlemen:

The issue which I wish to address today is the question of prisoners of war. In the midst of this traditional holiday season, a season for family reunions and celebrations, thousands of families are troubled over the fate of a relative missing or captured in Viet-Nam. This is a tragic situation, not just because family members are missing at this holiday period, but also because the families' uncertainty and anguish is so unnecessary and uncalled for.

I do not express only my government's view on this unfortunate matter, nor only the view of the American people. I express a view that is almost universally shared. It has been expressed in representative bodies throughout the world -- in the United States Congress, in the United Nations, at the International Red Cross Conference in Istanbul last September, by many National Red Cross societies and by many governments. In fact, on this issue, North Viet-Nam is virtually isolated in the eyes of world public opinion.

Ladies and gentlemen, there are two questions before us, first, the critical question of humanitarian treatment for the prisoners your side holds. Secondly, the repatriation of all prisoners.

On the first question, your side's position does not conform to normal standards. On the second question, your position is unreasonable.

Some Americans have been held by your side since early in 1964. Others have been missing since that time. And yet you still refuse to inform all families of the fate of these men.

On December 22, a spokesman for your side is reported to have said, "We refuse to give the list of names to the Nixon Administration, but the prisoners' families will know their names by and by." A gradual, piecemeal process of providing a few names at a time to anxious families is no substitute for making known without delay the names of all prisoners of war.

Because of your side's continuing refusal to identify all prisoners of war, my government is today releasing to the press the names of U.S. military personnel who are missing in Southeast Asia and may possibly be your prisoners. I will give your side a copy of the list here as well. My government is taking this action in the hope that your side, even at this late date, will indicate which men are prisoners and those whom you know to be dead, as a matter of humanitarian concern for their families.

Your side claims that you provide humane treatment to the prisoners you hold. But you permit no independent and objective authority to verify this claim. Indeed, much of the evidence available to the outside world regarding the treatment of prisoners held by your side contradicts your claims. The prisoners have not been permitted to correspond regularly with their families, and to receive mail and packages on a regular basis.

If your side hopes to apply political pressure upon the United States through its harsh attitude regarding prisoners of war, you reveal a thorough misunderstanding of American public opinion. No American can condone your side's handling of the prisoner question. Your denial of the most fundamental precepts governing such matters has only resulted in unanimous public condemnation.

Ladies and gentlemen, I call on your side to live up to the international standards for the treatment of those who are missing or held prisoner in Viet-Nam. This humanitarian issue should be dealt with separately from the political and military questions we face in the Paris meetings. We propose that our two sides enter promptly into discussions on all questions affecting prisoners of war held on both sides, including the question of their early release. The United States Delegation stands ready to enter into such negotiations without delay.

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DEPARTMENT OF STATE
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DECEMBER 30, 1969

NO. 383A

AMBASSADOR HABIB'S SUPPLEMENTARY REMARKS

Following is the text of supplementary remarks by Ambassador Habib at the Forty-Eighth Plenary Session of the New Paris Meetings on Viet-Nam, December 30, 1969.

First, as to your distortions of the US position with regard to a settlement of the war in Viet-Nam, and your misconceptions repeated here today. At this time I only want to refer to our statement made at the last session. I suggest you review it and hopefully thereby gain an accurate view of the US position and proposals.

Whether with regard to the question of withdrawal of all non-South Vietnamese forces from South Viet-Nam, or the question of a political settlement, our previous statements are quite clear and our proposals reasonable.

Having said that, today I wish to return to the question of prisoners of war.

We find your legal argumentation regarding the 1949 Geneva Convention on POWs wholly unconvincing. In any case, as I said in my statement earlier today, we deal here not only with a technical legal question, we deal with questions of decent and humanitarian treatment which the international community expects nations to accord to prisoners of war and their families.

If you treat the prisoners of war humanely, as you claim, then you should be willing to permit access to them and to the POW camps by an impartial body, such as the international committee of the Red Cross. If you claim to have a humane policy, you should provide accurate information about all the men without delay instead of informally providing a few names, in a piecemeal fashion. Are you prepared to take these two steps?

Let me remind you once again that we have proposed, since the very first session of these Paris meetings, that your side and ours enter into negotiations for the release of all prisoners of war on both sides. As I said earlier, we see no reason why this cannot be done. We have today proposed immediate discussions of all questions affecting prisoners of war, including both their treatment and their early release. The best evidence of a humanitarian policy on this issue would be an affirmative response to our proposal.

Finally, today I asked your side to verify a report that prisoners would be allowed to receive a letter a month and a package of less than six pounds every other month according to certain postal procedures. I also asked whether this means that the prisoners, too, would be permitted to write to their families on a regular basis. If you do not have with you today the information to answer these questions, I hope that you will be in a position to reply at the earliest possible opportunity.

DEPARTMENT OF STATE

FEBRUARY 5, 1970

FOR THE PRESS

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FEBRUARY 5, 1970

NO. 30A

AMBASSADOR HABIB'S SUPPLEMENTARY REMARKS

Following is the text of four supplementary remarks by Ambassador Philip C. Habib at Fifty-Third Plenary Session of the New Paris Meetings on Viet-Nam, February 5, 1970.

I

We have sought from the beginning of these meetings to discuss in meaningful ways all the basic issues involved. The prisoner of war question is a basic issue in these Paris meetings. It is not a propaganda matter. It is a serious humanitarian question as well as a question of your legal obligations. It is not a question to be avoided as you have sought to avoid it today by wild charges and evasions of the basic considerations and obligations involved.

There are essentially three aspects in the prisoner of war question. First, the treatment of prisoners of war while they are detained; second, the release of sick and wounded prisoners of war; third, the release of all other prisoners of war. None of these questions needs await a resolution of the conflict.

Your side claims to treat prisoners of war humanely. Now what does "humane treatment" mean? Both in the 1949 Geneva Convention, and apart from it, the world community has demanded that humane treatment of prisoners of war include the following:

- 1) Identification of and accounting for all prisoners;
- 2) That all prisoners be permitted to communicate with their families on a regular basis;
- 3) That seriously sick and wounded prisoners be promptly repatriated; and
- 4) That impartial observers be permitted to verify that prisoners of war are being treated humanely.

Your side has not lived up to these standards of humane treatment. Your side has not even been willing to discuss the application of these standards of humane treatment. Let us take just one of these standards of humane treatment. Let us take just one of these standards at this time. That is the identification of all prisoners of war.

We have made available lists of all prisoners of war in our hands. Your side refuses to give the names of the prisoners of war you hold. The question is: are you prepared to do as we have done and provide the names of all prisoners of war that you held, without delay?

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You claim that you treat American prisoners of war humanely. What we have been trying to do is to clarify what you mean by humane treatment and to relate it to normal international standards.