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PRG Press Briefing - July 1, 1971  
Duong Dinh Thao  
Questions and Answers

Q. (Goldsmith - AP)

There is a certain ambiguousness in paragraph 1 of page 3 in Mrs. Binh's statement. She says "the parties will come to agreement at the same time on the modalities," at the same time as what? What does it mean?

A. If the U.S. Government set a terminal date for withdrawal from South Viet-Nam in 1971 of the totality of U.S. forces and those of the other foreign countries in the U.S. camp, the parties will immediately agree upon the modalities concerning the two questions: 1) guarantee the safety of the withdrawal for all troops of the U.S. and the other countries in the U.S. camp; 2) release of all captured militaries (sic) of all parties and of the civilians captured in the war. We have said "at the same time" because withdrawal of these troops and release of the captured military will begin at the same time, on the same date and will be completed on the same date. I do not believe that there is any ambiguousness in the term "at the same time."

Q. (Goldsmith - AP)

It's very important. Now you are saying "immediately" which changes somewhat the sense of this first paragraph because if you say "the parties will immediately agree upon the modalities" this implies that the U.S. must announce a date before the process of reaching an agreement can begin. Is this correct?

A. The difficulty is not to reach an agreement about the modalities, because once the U.S. Government has announced that it sets a deadline in 1971 for withdrawal of U.S. troops, the two questions of guaranteeing the safety of the withdrawing troops and the release of captured military will become settled immediately.

The question that arises is that the Nixon Administration must put forward a deadline for withdrawal in 1971 for all American troops and those of the other foreign countries in the American camp. Once the U.S. Government has set this deadline in 1971, troop withdrawal and release of captured military and civilians will take place during that period in 1971 and will be completed during that period.

Q. (Kalisher - CBS)

Then it is the U.S. that must make the first step, set the date?

A. That is correct. We give the Nixon Administration the choice for a date in 1971 for total withdrawal of U.S. troops and the troops of the other foreign countries in the American camp.

Q. (Redmont - Westinghouse)

If the U.S. accepts point one outright, that is to say, to set a deadline, can we then conclude that you believe it possible and likely that all troops can go home around Christmas and all prisoners do likewise?

A. If Mr. Nixon sets a deadline for troop withdrawal either in September or October or November, the U.S. Government will be in a position to withdraw all U.S. military personnel by Christmas. As far as we are concerned we shall guarantee the safety of the withdrawing troops. The day this withdrawal is completed, is also the day on which release of all captured military and civilians will be completed. That is why the question whether all U.S. military including the captured ones can celebrate Christmas and New Year in the States is really up to Mr. Nixon.

Q. (Giniger - NYTimes)

Point one of the proposal put forward today deals with the military aspect of a settlement and point two concerns

the political aspect. Could you clarify the exact connection between the military settlement and the political settlement and more specifically if for instance the dual operation of withdrawal and release may be begun, completed even, without reference to the political situation in Saigon.

A. As I said earlier, if Mr. Nixon sets a deadline in 1971 for withdrawal of all U.S. troops from SVN, the release of all captured military and civilians will be completed before the deadline. I believe that this point is already quite clear. Concerning the overall settlement of the war undertaken by the U.S. against the population of SVN and concerning the political settlement of the problem, the U.S. has set up an administration in its pay to carry out neocolonialism. That is another question to be resolved. That is why, once the question of U.S. troop withdrawal and prisoner release are settled, and the political problem has not yet been settled, one must continue to solve it because we want to be independent, we want self-determination for the population of SVN and we must continue to work to solve this political problem. I believe that this is quite clear.

Q. (Vila - AFP)

Does it mean that you will continue with military means if the Saigon government remains in power?

A. If the Saigon administration continues to wage war against the people, the people must obviously oppose this by all means. If there is in Saigon an administration standing for peace, independence, neutrality and democracy, we will initiate conversations with the administration to settle peacefully the political problem.

Q. (Valery - NYDaily News)

In this connection, you speak of this new administration which could be created by "any method", I mean by "various means." May I ask you an "if" question, among those means are also the elections which will take place in Vietnam in August, in October. I mean by that if a new administration comes out of these elections and proclaims that it is ready to observe independence, neutrality, etc., ... would you consider it as a worthwhile partner with which to build the government of national concord?

A. I will share two ideas with you: 1) As long as the U.S. troops remain in South Vietnam and ~~that~~ elections are organized by the Thieu administration, these elections cannot be really free and democratic. This must be stated quite clearly. Today the Nixon administration is staging elections to keep the Thieu administration in power. 2) If by various means the political, social and religious forces in SVN, which yearn for peace and national concord, form in Saigon a new administration standing for peace, independence and democracy then we shall be prepared

to initiate talks with that administration. For such a new administration in Saigon formed by political, social and religious forces in SVN, we respect the choice of the appropriate means. It's sufficiently clear.

Q. (Giniger, NYTimes)

Can you be more specific about the "various means?"

A. I believe that all these political, social and religious forces have available to them all the possible choices as to the means to be used to reach such an administration.

Q. (Valery - NYDaily News)

You have asked if this is sufficiently clear. But let us assume that the result of the forthcoming elections is not a victory for the present team. That there is another team, for instance General Minh, ~~and~~ another team and that this new team proclaims itself according to your concept, would you consider it a worthwhile partner?

A. I want Mr. Valery to understand me when I say that there can be no free and democratic elections in SVN as long as there are still American troops in SVN and as long as the elections are organized by the Thieu administration. As to the new administration which will be formed in Saigon by various means and which stands for peace, independence, neutrality and democracy, we are prepared to engage in conversations with ~~all~~ that administration and I believe that we are displaying good will because

we do not demand that any particular means be used. It is sufficient that there be in Saigon a new administration declaring itself in favor of peace, independence, neutrality and democracy.

Q. (Vila, AFP)

The proposal of the overall ten-point solution referred to formation of a provisional coalition government. In the seven-point proposal it is a broad-based government of national concord that is mentioned. Are the two terms synonymous or is there a significance in the fact that you didn't use the formulation "provisional coalition government?"

A. The NLF and the PRG have always advocated a policy of broad union and broad national concord in order to obtain victory in the resistance against aggression and to build up an administration which broadly represents all strata of the population of SVN. The spirit of national concord has been stressed by us from the formation of the NLF until today. This reflects the aspirations of the South Vietnamese people and if we advocate the formation of a government of national concord this reflects our spirit of national concord.

Q. (Lenart, Far East Review)

I should like to revert once again to the expression "by various means" when you refer to a political solution. You have spoken about finding a solution which genuinely represents the aspirations of the people, a government in Saigon which is for peace, independence, and neutrality. You have explained that elections under the present Thieu government cannot guarantee this. Are you interested in working out a formula for elections in SVN that can guarantee this, for instance for the elections scheduled for October?

A. In order for genuinely free and democratic elections to take place in SVN, a government of national concord must be entrusted with the task of organizing them. And it is because we want genuinely free and democratic elections that we advocate formation of a government of national concord.

Q. (A Dutch Journalist)

I have two questions: (1) During the press briefing that immediately preceded this one, the question of whether this seven-point program was new or not was discussed. Can you tell us what in your opinion is the new point or the new detail which characterizes the seven-point program. My second question: If my understanding is correct, the release of prisoners would be staggered, that is to say you release prisoners as the U.S. withdraws its troops, this means that a time comes when there are almost no U.S. troops and you said that you guarantee the withdrawal...the dismissal of the prisoners. What are the guarantees that are offered?

A. First if you will read our statement of today you will see that there is something new in all the points. At the beginning of this briefing I said what was new, concerning for instance U.S. troop withdrawal or the question of power in SVN. In the past, if memory serves, you have often asked me when release of the prisoners will begin and when it will be completed. We have explicitly stated when it will be, and when it will be completed. This is a new element. You are asking us how there can be in Saigon a new administration in favor of peace, independence, neutrality and democracy. And we

reply that this can be achieved by various means and that we are prepared to engage in talks with such an administration. This also is a new element. And if you look at each point there is something new in every one of them. You are now asking how we guarantee the release of all captured military and civilians. We specifically state that the parties will come to an agreement on the modalities to release all these captured military so that they can be released rapidly and it is based upon our will to release rapidly and entirely the military and civilian prisoners that we speak of the modalities of the release. What remains now is for Mr. Nixon to set a deadline in 1971 for withdrawal of all U.S. troops. I believe that what you must do is ask Mr. Nixon to set such a deadline in 1971.

Q. (Giniger, NYT)

Paragraph B of Point 1 refers to the release of military and civilian prisoners. You speak of release of military of all parties and of the civilians captured in the war, including American pilots captured in NVN. When you refer to the war, do you limit the war to the territory of Viet-Nam or do you also include Laos and Cambodia?

A. The U.S. has undertaken a war of aggression in SVN and has waged a war of destruction in NVN. That is why there are captured U.S. military prisoners and when we speak of their release we refer to military personnel captured in both South and North Viet-Nam.

Q. (? , La Libre Belgique)

I read in the paper this morning that the U.S. Supreme Court has permitted the Washington Post and the other newspapers to continue publication of the reports. What is your opinion about the value of freedom of the press and are you in favor of freedom of the press on the day peace is restored in Viet-Nam?

A. In the NLF manifesto of 1960, in the NLF political program of 1967, in the 12-point action program of the PRG, we have always demanded democratic freedoms in SVN including freedom of the press. And in our statement of today we said that the PRG is prepared to engage in conversations with an administration in Saigon declaring itself in favor of peace, etc.... on various questions including that of guaranteeing democratic freedoms, that is to say including freedom of the press.

Q. (Goldsmith, AP)

You said earlier that you would be ready to reach an agreement on Point One by itself, even if political questions are not resolved. In Paragraph B of Point 1 Mrs. Binh speaks of the release of all military of all parties, and I assume that this includes the 37,000 prisoners held by the Saigon administration. If one draws near an agreement on Point One, taken by itself, wouldn't it be possible for the Saigon authorities to prevent this agreement by refusing to release the 37,000 prisoners held in SVN?

A. The warmongering group which is presently in power in Saigon led by Thieu is a handful of American agents. The U.S. set it up and directs it to implement its war policy and to slaughter and jail our compatriots. We have repeatedly denounced them. The U.S. government must bear full responsibility for these acts. That is why if Mr. Nixon wants American captured military to come home soon he must order his agents to release all captured civilians. We will see then if Mr. Nixon wants his group of agents to oppose or not to oppose the interests of the SVN population and of the American people. We can recall here the words of Mr. Mansfield at the beginning of the conference that it is the dog that is wagging the tail and it should be the other way around.

Q. (Goldsmith, AP)

In <sup>other</sup> ~~order~~ words, the release of the 37,000 prisoners held by Saigon is a sine qua non for the implementation of Point One.

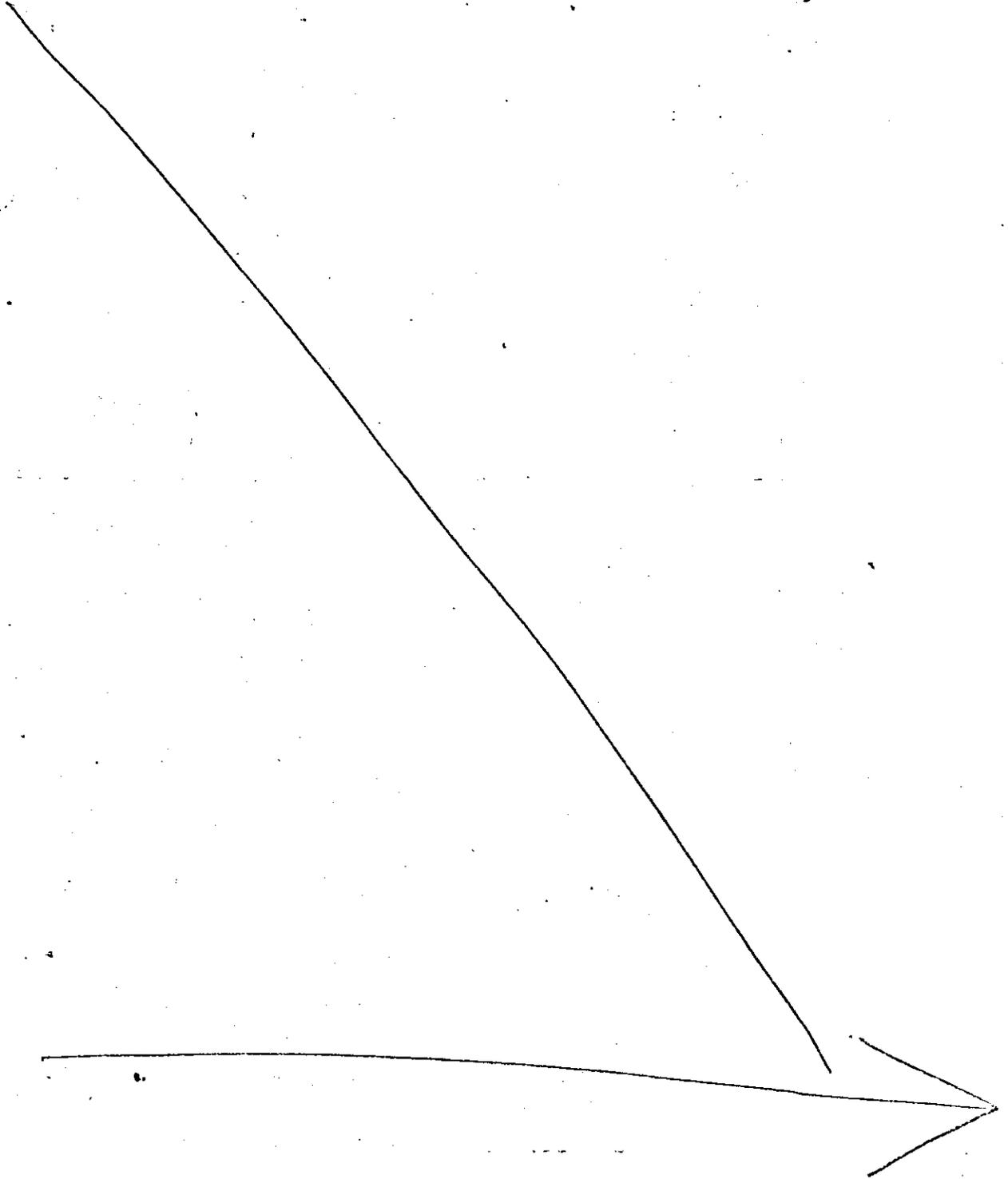
A. We are speaking about release of all military, of all parties, and of civilians captured in the war. If you speak of humanitarian feelings why reserve it only for American military prisoners and not to all the tens of thousands of civilians captured during the war. I believe that the questions must be put in these clear terms.

Q. (Mrs. Smith, KTHV, Wichita TV)

Mrs. Smith would like to ask if you accept the deadline for withdrawal of U.S. troops, are you prepared to make known at the same time, immediately, the names of the U.S. military captured in SVN?

A. What we are saying is that if Mr. Nixon sets a deadline in 1971 for withdrawal of all U.S. troops, the question of the release of captured military will immediately be settled and that the captured

military will rapidly return home and the release of captured military will be completed before this deadline set by Mr. Nixon in 1971.



I am certain that if Mr. Nixon sets a deadline for withdrawal of all U.S. troops, so~~x~~ that they can all go home rapidly American wives and mothers will have the happiness to be reunited with their husbands and children in the U.S. at the earliest possible time.

Q. ( ??? )

In your statement, the government of national concord has three component parts; can you be more explicit?

A. The three component parts represent all the population of SVN, without taking into account political or religious opinions. 1) Members of the PRG. 2) Individuals who are in the new Saigon administration and who are genuinely in favor of peace, independence, neutrality and democracy. 3) Individuals who are neither members of the PRG nor of the new Saigon administration I have just mentioned; these are individuals in favor of peace, independence, neutrality and democracy, including individuals living abroad for political reasons. If this government is made up of these three component parts, it will reflect all social strata of SVN, all political and religious opinions of SVN. Is there a fourth component?

Q.

One of the components could contain some members of the present Saigon government?

A. I said that a new administration must be formed in Saigon in favor of peace, independence, neutrality and democracy. Whether within this new administration there would be individuals who are in the present administration is entirely up to the political, social and religious forces. We have nothing to do with this. This new administration in Saigon will initiate conversations with us, PRG, to lead to the formation of a government of broad national concord and this new administration in Saigon may or may not include individuals who are in the present administration among the members of the government of national concord. That is up to them.

Q. (Edith Lenart - Far East Review)

A. I believe that I have run considerably over time, I suggest that the next question be the last question today and anyway we will have other opportunities to discuss this in the future.

Q. (Edith Lenart - Far East Review)

I continue to be fascinated by your "various means." You say that the elections within the framework of the constitution of SVN are worthless as long as the present government remains in Saigon. The elections held in October

will be held in a worthless setting so the choice for you is either negotiations in which you participate to find another representative government or a coup in Saigon. Do you have other thoughts falling within the meaning of "by various means?"

A. I believe that the expression "by various means" is very broad and I believe that the political, social and religious forces in SVN have available to them all the possibilities to choose these means. The question that arises is whether Mr. Nixon is prepared to renounce his support of the warmongering NVThieu group presently in power in Saigon. And I believe that is why Mrs. Lenart's question should be put to Mr. Nixon. As far as we are concerned, it is enough that there be in Saigon an administration standing for peace, independence, neutrality and democracy. I believe that you can thereby see our good will and our flexibility.

Q. (Giniger - NYTimes)

I ask your indulgence for a moment. You referred to your good will regarding release of the prisoners and I want to call upon that good will so that you will do everything feasible so that the 17 journalists still missing in Indochina will be released or that we may at least know something about them. I know that most of them were in

Cambodian territory when they were reported missing but perhaps you have means unknown to us to find out something about their fate. I should like to stress that this is a problem which is always present in the minds of all the journalists here, who have been thinking about these events very seriously since the day they occurred.

A. I will not reply to Mr. Giniger's question but I must say the following: the NLF, the PRG and our population are always displaying humanitarianism, even towards American soldiers who have killed our compatriots, once they have been captured. We understand the concern of our journalist colleagues about those reported missing in Cambodia. As we said, this is a matter within the competence of the GRUNK and the FUNK. We are convinced that the GRUNK, the FUNK and the entire population of Cambodia feel as we do, that they observe a policy of correctness and humanitarianism toward American military, toward soldiers of the Saigon puppet army as well as towards the Lon Nol soldiers captured and toward all persons held by the armed forces of liberation of Cambodia.

Q. (Vila - AFT)

On this very point I have here a despatch just in from Belgrade where the Minister of Foreign Affairs of Prince Sihanouk's government states: "the investigations ordered by Prince Sihanouk have established that none of these

journalists are today in the hands of the FUNK."

A. You should know that what takes place in Cambodia is within the competence of the GRUNK and the FUNK.

I will end my briefing at this time.