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DEPARTMENT OF STATE

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TRANSCRIPT OF PRESS BRIEFING BY STEPHEN LEDOGAR
THURSDAY, JULY 8, 1971, 5:25 P.M.

MR. LEDOGAR: Good afternoon, Ladies and Gentlemen. Today, Ambassador Bruce called upon the other side to join with us in making a fresh start to the Paris Peace Talks on Viet-Nam. You will note from the press release that we gave our preliminary analysis and reaction to Hanoi's seven points of last week, and we proposed further exploration of the proposals before us. To further this end, we suggested that the next session of these meetings be a restricted one in which we could pursue serious negotiations, as the Ambassador put it, free from the glare of publicity.

Unfortunately the other side refused to agree to such a restricted session, and in the end, we agreed to meet in a plenary one next Thursday.

Do you have any questions, please?

Q Yes. Apparently Xuan Thuy spoke five times and the others spoke three times each, and so on, in the discussion which followed. Could you tell us what Ambassador Bruce had to say in the discussion following

the preliminary discussion?

A Yes. He returned four times to the same theme of why won't you, first of all, respond to the proposal for restricted session, and then, towards the end, why do you respond in such a fashion. That was the theme of it.

In the beginning, they ignored it, and then later they came up with this variety of answers that I believe you have just been briefed on.

For the life of me, I can't understand how on the one hand they say to us, "The forum of the meeting is not important;" and on the other hand, insist that the form of the meeting cannot be changed.

We would hope that they would at least try restricted sessions, give them a chance. For two and a half years now, we have been condemned to plenary sessions only, and we are hopeful that at this juncture, with these noises and signals that we have heard around, there might be an opportunity for us to at least try restricted sessions. And yet they insist the forum is of no importance.

Q To clarify that just one minute. All his four answers were concentrated on this question.

There were no further attempts to clarify any of the substance.

A That is correct.

Q You are putting such great emphasis on restricted sessions. Are you equally keen on private, secret meetings, which is not exactly the same.

A We have, as you know, a policy of having no comment on the whole subject of private or secret meetings.

Q Steve, we have been given a list of four specific questions that Madame Binh apparently asked Ambassador Bruce. What sort of response was there to these four specific questions?

A Well, you have the four questions there.

Q Yes.

A As I recall them off-hand, one of them was: Are you ready to give a response? Another one, which points do you find positive and which ones do you find unacceptable? Another one was, are you ready to set a date, etc.

The Ambassador then replied: "In reply to your supplementary remarks and questions advanced by your side

today, I would like you to recognize, as I have frequently stated, that we are ready to consider in negotiations your seven points, as well as any other points that may have been or may be sponsored by either side. To that end, I have proposed that we met next week in a restricted session and that you cease to deal with these serious matters in frivolous and irresponsible propaganda terms."

In essence, what we are saying is, those are exactly the sort of questions we would like to answer in restricted sessions.

Q Why couldn't you answer them in plenary session?

A Because to do so is to deal with them in an irresponsible and frivolous manner.

Q I don't see why your responses should be in a frivolous manner.

A You know, Peter, as a man very experienced here -- I am sure you are one who will recall that the total experience of North Vietnamese negotiators in previous conferences has been that all progress that was made, was made in restricted sessions. I refer you to Geneva '54, and Geneva '62. Their side, or their allies,

proposed restricted sessions at both of those conferences.

Q Mr. Ledogar, there has been so much activity in Washington all week, of which we have all heard, and that Mr. Kissinger has been in Southeast Asia, there have been rumors of great progress going on in the Delegation here, and we have had reports that the American Delegation here was quite favorable to these proposals. How do you explain that against the response of the Ambassador today?

A Well, I am afraid I can't comment on your reports as to what your antenna have picked up on U.S. public reaction and on what you have heard about our Delegation's reaction. We are going to have to stand on the very carefully worded and worked over and coordinated response that the Ambassador made today.

Now, in a sense, your question assumes that it is of one sort, and I don't agree with any such assumption. I would point out to you, for example, he said that "We have examined carefully your remarks of last week and will continue to do so." Further on in his speech he said, "We would wish to explore them further with you, and in subsequent meetings, we will be seeking clarifications on

specific points." And further on down in the speech, he said, "We recognize that they"-- referring to their proposals-- "deal with matters requiring serious discussion." Then, as I pointed out earlier in my summation, he said "Let us make a fresh start here. We propose a restricted session." "

Q Does your answer to Peter Kalisher's question mean that you consider that no progress can be made on the discussion of the seven-point proposals unless and until the other side agrees to meet in restricted session. That is my first question.

A May I answer that part first? My answer to that is that it means to indicate only that it is hypocrisy on the part of the other side to pretend either, one, they don't know what restricted sessions are, or, two, that they don't understand the value and the importance of them, and at the same time pretend that the forum is of no import.

What is the second part?

Q Did Ambassador Bruce in any case mention at all today the question of the withdrawal of North Vietnamese troops from South Viet-Nam? That seems to be paramount in the mind of some of our colleagues in

Washington?

A Well, not directly, but he referred to the fact that our proposals as well as their proposals would be the basis for any consideration. We repeated directly and by inference that we do not accept this proposition that any negotiations that are going to take place have to be on the basis of their program exclusively.

Q Steve, you mentioned a few minutes ago, talking about wanting restricted sessions and hopefully they would lead somewhere, and you referred to noises and signals we have heard around. What were you referring to by that phrase?-- noises and signals?

A Well, most of them were elicited by your colleagues. For example, we heard Madame Binh saying, as she came out of her meeting with Maurice Schumann, when asked, what she thought of the White House reaction that there are initially at first glance both positive and unacceptable elements in Hanoi's seven-point plan, she said: "Well, have them tell us which are the positive ones and which are the unacceptable ones." Previously they have indicated that their plan could be considered

only as a whole. You have seen also a report by one of your colleagues saying that -- again reporting a conversation by Mrs. Binh in which she indicated, according to your colleague, that her proposals were not put forth on a take it or leave it basis, And furthermore, the interview in The New York Times with Le Duc Tho, again indicating, or trying to indicate, flexibility.

Q What is your impression today?

A We are going to have to study what they had to say today very carefully and try to figure out what is their reason, what is the significance of their refusal of the real first opportunity to come to grips with the problems that are brought up by their own program.

Q Steve, I have one question more on the same thing. Are you going to answer specifically the four questions that Madame Binh put to you at the next plenary session?

A We never talk about what we are going to do next week.

Q A question probably that everyone has asked, what is a restricted session? Will you explain the difference between a restricted and a plenary session?

A Yes. A plenary session -- and to be accurate, the ones that we engage in here are, I would imagine to diplomacists, only quasi-plenary -- but, at least the way the practice has been developed here, you receive either directly by text in hand, or through briefings from myself and my opposite numbers on the other delegations, the substance of everything said in the course of conversation, in the course of the meeting.

In a restricted session, you would presumably know only about the fact that it took place, the duration, the participants, and presumably the participants would agree upon some statement -- that I am sure you would regard as innocuous -- to the effect that "Today we met at such-and-such a time, the problems of Southeast Asia were discussed, and we agreed to meet again tomorrow morning at 10 o'clock."

And those two are as distinguished from a private meeting where theoretically you would not know that it had taken place.

Q Why don't we want the people to know what goes on at these sessions?

A It isn't that we don't want the people to know. That is not the approach at all. It isn't a question

that we don't want the people to know. We want to give the Delegates the chance to talk to each other without having the gallery looking over their shoulder. It is the same reason why you, as a television newsman, cannot bring your camera onto the floor of Congress or into a courtroom. And it should not have to be defended by us. It has to be defended by the other side, because it is the normal, natural, habitual procedure in international conferences.

Q But against that, why isn't it right for the gallery to look over your shoulder? What have we got that shouldn't be available to the public?

A We can't conduct negotiations for peace like you would conduct an auction, or something, where all the bidding is in public. You have to deal in subtleties. You have to deal in conditional sentences, and hypothetical, etc. Peter, you understand the difference.

Q I understand that you are not as willing to go to the mat in front of everybody as they are.

A They are not willing to go to the mat in

in front of everybody. They are only willing to say, "Now you must make your first declaration in front of everybody."

Q That I understand.

A You do understand that. So, you do understand what the obstacle is to any further progress.

Q Not if you answer the four questions that she gave you, then you can then say, you know, whatever you want to say after having first made this declaration.

A If the forum is of no importance to the communist side, and if they truly want the answers, then they ought to agree to another format. We are willing to give our answers, our responses.

Q It has been suggested that their persistent refusal in the past to agree to restricted sessions is because they didn't want to talk to the Saigon government. Would the American Delegation entertain the possibility of restricted sessions "a deux", that is, with North Viet-Nam alone?

A Yes, we would.

Q The only difference I see between a restricted session and a private meeting is, aside from the point just raised as to who will be there, the one difference is that the restricted sessions would be and would take place at the same place, instead of a public meeting. What is the objection to having a meeting this afternoon or tomorrow?

A The other side's refusal to participate.

Q That is still -- you say --

A Now, wait a minute. Let's take the questions one at a time. What is to keep us from turning today's session into a restricted one? The answer is the other side's refusal. What is the next question.

Q No, the question is, what is to keep us from proposing or having such discussions as you suggested would have to be had, in private and in secret, and still continue to have these plenary sessions as regularly as they have been?

A We have made it clear many times that the existence of restricted sessions, or the existence of secret sessions, or any other kind of sessions, need not necessarily interfere with the regular or alternate conduct of plenary sessions. If the people feel

at any time they need a plenary session to have a catharsis, then fine, we will agree to one.

Q Well, the feeling here is that time is going by. We have an offer to release those prisoners by Christmas or before. The question is whether by demanding a secret session, instead of responding to these questions, we are not delaying the decision on the question of releases.

A Well, I don't agree with your interpretation. That remains to be proved. That is what we are trying to find out-- do we have an offer to release the prisoners? And, incidentally, what prisoners? They now make it clear that they are only talking about some of the prisoners. They now make it clear that the wife of the man who is lost in Laos and the wife of the man who is lost in Cambodia need have no opinion whatsoever with regard to the seven points and the Allied reaction to them.

So I just don't agree with

your analysis, because we don't have enough information yet to realize whether there is a real offer as opposed to a false offer. We do have an indication that if it is an offer on prisoners, it is only an offer on some prisoners.

Q Steve, you usually, or quite often, have given us a capsule impression of a given weekly session afterwards. What is your impression this week, and specifically as to whether the exchange and the tone indicates whether things are moving in any particular direction, forwards, backwards, or what?

A Well, Milt, there isn't any particular capsulizing adjective that comes to mind. It was an intensive session today. It was certainly a disappointing one, when we realized that there was going to be no response on the part of the other side, only a repetition of demands. Yet, on the other hand, there was a certain lack of polemics that I am sure you would recognize, as a veteran of 50 or 60 of these. It is hard to say. There certainly was no movement. They made no attempt to clarify the ambiguities and to respond to the questions that we raised about their proposals last week.

Q Do you have any details on the arrival of Henry Kissinger?

A No, I don't. My preliminary understanding is that it is going to be late Saturday evening, and he will depart sometime Sunday afternoon.

Q Leaving Sunday afternoon.

A Leaving Sunday afternoon, but I don't have the precise times yet.

Q Will you be reachable during his visit?

A By him, yes.

Q No, by us. [Laughter.]

A Also.

Q Is he staying at Ambassador Watson's?

A That is my understanding, yes.

Q Are we likely to see him at all, either at the airport or the Embassy or the residence?

A I don't think he has any plans for a confrontation with the press.

Q Does he plan to meet with Le Duc Tho?
do you know?

A I know of no change from the most recent White House announcement to the effect that he has no plans to seek a meeting with Le Duc Tho or Xuan Thuy.

Q You made no approach to the other side about that?

A Well, I am in the habit of not answering that kind of question. I am repeating what the White House said. I am not trying to mislead you, but I am trying

to keep faith with my own rules.

Q I have a hypothetical question. Would a meeting with Le Duc Tho or Xuan Thuy, if it took place, come into the framework of one of those restricted or secret sessions? [Laughter.]

A Well, there is nothing in the rules of procedure providing for this. I will say this, though, to help your understanding, Bernard, if it took place without your knowledge, it would be by definition a secret meeting. If you found out about it, it would be a restricted meeting. [Laughter.] If you found out exactly what they said to each other, it would be one of the meetings like we had today.

Q Steve, Le Duc Tho said he would welcome a private meeting with Mr. Kissinger if he were prepared to meet him. What if he doesn't meet? What do we deduce from that, that there is no point in meeting at all in secret sessions?

A My suspicion is that that statement that you just recognized, given Mr. Kissinger's excellent communications, has been noted by him. I have not had his reaction yet.

Q Supposing Mr. Le Duc Tho asked for a meeting. Up to now, we are all reasoning it is imperative for Mr. Kissinger to first ask for a meeting. Supposing Mr. Le Duc Tho picks up a phone first --

A That is a hypothetical question and I am not competent to answer it, anyway.

Q If we all turn up at the airport, do you figure he will acknowledge us?

A I would suggest that you have a pool, you have one man out there willing to share the information with four wire services, to confirm he is on the ground, because he has no intention of saying anything to any newsman.

Q Is he coming into Orly?

A I don't know, because it is a Special Mission aircraft, not a scheduled airline.

Q He is coming, isn't he?

[The briefing terminated at 5:45 P.M.]