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BRUCE RESPONDS TO AMBIGUOUS HANOI PROPOSALS (750)

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PARIS, JULY 15 -- A COMMUNIST PEACE PROPOSAL DISGUISED AS A SIMPLE TRADE OF PRISONERS OF WAR FOR UNILATERAL U.S. WITHDRAWAL APPARENTLY CONTAINS ALL THE OLD HARSH AND UNCOMPROMISING DEMANDS OF PREVIOUS POSITIONS, U.S. AMBASSADOR DAVID K.E. BRUCE CHARGED AT THE PARIS TALKS JULY 15.

MR. BRUCE PARTICULARLY STRESSED THE URGENCY OF ARRANGING A CEASZ-FIRE. "THERE IS NO MORE PRESSING MILITARY QUESTION THAN THE NEED TO STOP THE KILLING THROUGHOUT INDOCHINA," HE SAID. "ARE YOU NOW WILLING TO CONSIDER CEASE-FIRE SEPARATELY AND JOIN US IN A REAL EFFMRT TO END THE FIGHTING FIRST?

"I EARNESTLY HOPE YOUR ANSWER IS YES, FOR I CAN THINK OF NOTHING MORE UNIVERSALLY DESIRED OR MORE HELPFUL TO SETTING THE STAGE FOR SERIOUS NEGOTIATIONS ON ALL THE OTHER ISSUES HERE," THE U.S. DELEGATION CHIEF CONTINUED.

AMBASSADOR BRUCE GAVE SPECIFIC REPLIES TO QUESTIONS BY THE COMMUNIST SIDE ON THE SUBJECT OF THEIR LATEST PACKAGE OFN PROPOSALS FOR ENDING THE VIETNAM WAR, AND IN TURN ASKED THE COMMUNISTS FOR SPECIFIC REPLIES TO QUERIES ABOUT THEIR AMBIGUOUS OFFER.

THE AMERICAN AMBASSADOR SPELLED OUT U.S. REACTION TO THE HIGHLY PROPAGANDIZED COMMUNIST SEVEN-POINT PLAN ADVANCED ON JULY 1 AS HE MADE HIS OPENING REMARKS AT THE 121ST PLENARY SESSION OF THE PARIS MEETINGS.

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AMBASSADOR BRUCE SAID THE COMMUNIST OFFER TO RELEASE AMERICAN PRISONERS OF WAR IF PRESIDENT NIXON WOULD SET A WITHDRAWAL DEADLINE BY THE END OF THIS YEAR WAS HEDGED WITH GRAVE CONDITIONS. "YOU HAVE ADVERTISED YOUR PROPOSALS AS A SIMPLE TRADE WHICH WOULD RESULT IN THE RELEASE OF PRISONERS OF WAR CONCURRENTLY WITH THE TOTAL WITHDRAWAL OF AMERICAN AND ALLIED FORCES," HE TOLD THE OTHER SIDE. "YET IT APPEARS THAT YOU HAVE YOURSELVES APPLIED FAR-REACHING AND SELF-SERVING CONDITIONS TO PRISONER RELEASE WHICH ARE AS HARSH AND COMPREHENSIVE AS ANYTHING YOU HAVE PREVIOUSLY INSISTED UPON."

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THE U.S. AMBASSADOR THEN ASKED: "HOW MANY PRISONERS FROM OUR SIDE DO YOU PLAN TO RELEASE AND WHO ARE THEY? DO YOU ALSO INTEND TO PROVIDE WHATEVER INFORMATION YOU HAVE ON OUR MEN MISSING IN ACTION IN SOUTHEAST?...WHEN YOU SPEAK OF RELEASE OF PRISONERS OF WAR, DO YOU INCLUDE THOSE MEN CAPTURED BY YOUR FORCES OR FORCES UNDER YOUR CONTROL IN LAOS AND CAMBODIA?"

THE CHIEF U.S. NEGOTIATOR REITERATED THAT THE UNITED STATES IS READY TO NEGOTIATE A TIMETABLE FOR COMPLETE WITHDRAWAL AS PART OF AN OVERALL SETTLEMENT. "BUT THE FIXING OF A WITHDRAWAL DATE MUST BE THE RESULT OF A GENUINE NEGOTIATING PROCESS," HE ADDED, "NOT A PRICE WE MUST FIRST PAY JUST FOR NEGOTIATIONS TO BEGIN OR A UNILATERAL ACTION WE MUST TAKE BECAUSE YOU SO DICTATE."

AMBASSADOR BRUCE SAID THE UNITED STATES IS WILLING TO STUDY THE COMMUNISTS' LATEST SEVEN-POINT PLAN, BUT SUGGESTED THAT THE COMMUNISTS GIVE RECIPROCAL SERIOUS ATTENTION TO ALLIED PEACE OFFERS. HE ALSO MADE IT CLEAR TO THE HANOI AND VIET CONG SPOKESMEN THAT THE UNITED STATES WOULD NEVER YIELD TO THEIR DEMAND TO IMPOSE ANY GOVERNMENT ON SOUTH VIETNAM, NOR BE A PARTY TO THE FORCED DEPOSAL OF THE FREELY ELECTED SAIGON GOVERNMENT.

"YOU ASK ABOUT OUR INTENTIONS REGARDING THE GOVERNMENT OF THE REPUBLIC OF VIETNAM," THE AMBASSADOR TOLD THE COMMUNISTS. "OUR ANSWER TO THIS HAS ALWAYS BEEN PERFECTLY CLEAR. I REPEAT IT ONCE AGAIN TODAY. THE SOUTH VIETNAMESE PEOPLE MUST BE ALLOWED TO DETERMINE THEMSELVES THEIR OWN POLITICAL KUTURE."

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AFTER THE FOUR-HOUR MEETING, AMBASSADOR BRUCE TOLD NEWSMEN THAT HE AGAIN HAD URGED IN VAIN A RESTRICTED, NON-PUBLIC MEETING TO DISCUSS THE LATEST COMMUNIST SCHEME. "I SOUGHT TO ELICIT SOME CLARIFICATION OF THEIR PROPOSALS, PAST AND PRESENT, BUT WITHOUT ANY RESPONSE," HE REPORTED. "NOR DID I GET ANY ANSWER TO THE QUESTIONS I PUT TO THEM. THEY PURSUED THEIR USUAL FALSE PROPAGANDA AND REASSERTED THEIR USUAL PRECONDITIONS."

THE REPUBLIC OF VIETNAM'S CHIEF NEGOTIATOR, AMBASSADOR PHAM DANG LAM, ALSO POINTED OUT AT THE JULY 15 SESSION THAT THE COMMUNISTS INSIST ON USING THE MEETINGS AS A "PROPAGANDA FORUM." HE DECLARED: "SINCE THE PRESENT CONFLICT IS AN AGGRESSION BY NORTH VIETNAM AGAINST SOUTH VIETNAM, THE WAR WILL NOT BE ENDED BY THE SIMPLE WITHDRAWAL OF THE ALLIED FORCES, BUT IT WILL BE ENDED ONLY WHEN THIS AGGRESSION CEASES."

AMBASSADOR LAM ADDED:

"IT IS OBVIOUS THAT AS LONG AS NORTH VIETNAM MAINTAINS ITS TROOPS IN SOUTH VIETNAM, AS LONG AS IT CONTINUES TO USE THE TERRITORIES OF THE NEIGHBORING COUNTRIES AS INFILTRATION ROUTES INTO SOUTH VIETNAM AND AS LONG AS IT HAS NOT RENOUNCED IMPOSING BY FORCE AND VIOLENCE A POLITICAL REGIME OF ITS OWN LIKING ON THE SOUTH VIETNAMESE POPULATION, THE CONDITIONS FOR GENUINE AND LASTING PEACE ARE FAR FROM BEING MET." ITEM

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