

Rogers Says Muskie Hurt Prospects of Peace Talks

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By TERENCE SMITH FEB 4 1972

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WASHINGTON, Feb. 3—Secretary of State William P. Rogers accused Senator Edmund S. Muskie today of jeopardizing the prospects for a negotiated peace in Vietnam by rejecting the President's latest peace proposals before the enemy replied formally.

In a news conference dominated by the kind of political charges seldom heard from a Secretary of State, Mr. Rogers rejected the criticisms of the Nixon plan made in a speech here yesterday by the Maine Democrat, who is a leading contender for the Democratic Presidential nomination. The Secretary also denounced the two-point peace proposal that Mr. Muskie put forward.

"I think this particular speech, coming at this time, was most inappropriate and harmful to our national interest," Mr. Rogers said.

Gripping the lectern at the State Department briefing room and raising his voice for emphasis, he continued:

"I think every man who is running for public office—and I am speaking particularly of Presidential candidates—should ask himself every time he makes a statement whether it serves the national interest or not."

"I am dismayed," Mr. Rogers said, "because what has happened is that we have a rejection, here in our country, by a prominent political official, before the enemy has rejected our proposals."

Commenting on the revised peace plan advanced by the Vietcong today at the Paris peace talks, Mr. Rogers said it was "by and large a repetition of what they have said before." But he added that he considered it noteworthy that the Vietnamese Communists had not rejected the eight-point Nixon plan.

He maintained that the Communists had indicated "some interest" in the Nixon plan, adding:

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ing, "We have diplomatic conversations with others that indicate they think the President's proposal might be a way out."

The White House took note of the "new language" contained in the revised version and promised to give it careful study. Ronald L. Ziegler, the Presidential press secretary, declined further comment.

Campaigning in Wisconsin today, Mr. Muskie defended his speech yesterday with the following statement:

"For years, every time an American Senator has made a proposal to bring this war to an end earlier, he has been greeted with the same response from our Government as Secretary Rogers used today.

"It is apparent that the other side will not accept the terms the Administration has set. Hanoi's official newspaper said so last Saturday and today's developments in Paris confirm it.

"I believe they would respond seriously to the terms I have suggested. That means the killing of American boys in Vietnam can come to an end sooner. I do not think it is against the national interest to try to promote this goal."

Outlining his own peace proposal yesterday, Mr. Muskie urged that the United States set a firm date for the withdrawal of all American troops, ships and bombers in return for the safety of the withdrawing forces and the release of American prisoners of war. He said the United States should also make it clear to South Vietnam's Government that it must seek a political accommodation with the Communist or lose even indirect United States military support after the withdrawal of American troops.

The eight-point United States plan which President Nixon disclosed in a telecast Jan. 25, offers total withdrawal six months after an agreement is reached on ending the war and calls for a new South Vietnamese election at that time, with President Nguyen Van Thieu resigning beforehand.

Mr. Muskie charged in his speech yesterday that Mr. Nixon's proposals were no more than an attempt "to win at the conference table what we have not won and cannot win on the battlefield."

Such Charges Rare

Mr. Rogers's appearance in the briefing room at noon was unscheduled and ostensibly was made to comment on his meeting during the morning and yesterday with the Irish Foreign Minister, Patrick J. Hillery, and the British Ambassador, the Earl of Cromer, on the crisis in Northern Ireland. The discussion quickly turned to Vietnam and Senator Muskie, however.

Four times during the hour-long session he returned to his criticism of Mr. Muskie and his peace plan. At one point he described the Senator's proposal for a negotiated solution of the military issues as "beating a dead horse," adding, "I think everybody in politics knows this."

Such political charges are rare in the State Department. Several times during the 1964 Presidential campaign, Secretary of State Dean Rusk challenged the foreign policy views of Senator Barry Goldwater, the Republican candidate. His comments were seldom as sharp as Mr. Rogers's today, however, and he usually did not mention Mr. Goldwater by name.

Secretary Rogers was asked whether his accusation that Mr. Muskie had jeopardized the chances for a negotiated peace led meant that Mr. Rogers was arguing for a moratorium on discussion of the Vietnam issue.

"Obviously in a political year candidates have a right to express their views, and I would not suggest that there should be an moratorium on it," he said. "But I think how you do it and when you do it and what you say has to be a matter each candidate must decide for himself."

On another Vietnam question, Mr. Rogers declined to say whether Mr. Nixon or his adviser for national security, Henry A. Kissinger, had any plans to meet in Peking later this month with Le Duc Tho, the leading member of the North Vietnamese Politburo who met secretly with Mr. Kissinger in Paris during private peace negotiations last year.

Mr. Tho is scheduled to arrive in Peking for a visit on Feb. 20, one day before Mr. Nixon and his party are to arrive there.

While he avoided a specific answer, Mr. Rogers's reply was so phrased that it appeared to be almost an invitation to Mr. Tho for a meeting. Stressing the Administration's flexible approach to the negotiations, the Secretary said: "We are prepared to negotiate in public or in restricted session or any other way that would seem to be productive."

In reply to an other question, Mr. Rogers expressed the view, as several administration officials have recently, that the enemy probably would attempt a major offensive in Vietnam, Laos and possibly Cambodia in the coming weeks.

The Secretary said he thought the North Vietnamese would do their best to stage "a spectacular, with the thought that they could divide the American people, and to make it difficult for us for obvious reasons during the President's trip to Peking."