

Furor Mounting Over
Salinger's Paris Trip

Charges by McGovern, Nixon Sides

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Washington

The Nixon administration charged yesterday that contacts between representatives of Senator George S. McGovern and North Vietnamese officials could damage the quest for peace in Indochina.

White House press secretary Ronald Ziegler first said he did not want to discuss the issue in "detail" but then volunteered a sharply worded statement that emissaries acting on behalf of Mr. Nixon's Democratic opponent "might say something in contact with the enemy that could jeopardize (the President's) peace efforts."

The emissary in question at Ziegler's briefing was Pierre Salinger, a McGovern aide who said Wednesday that he had met twice in Paris with North Vietnamese officials in an effort to determine whether American prisoners might be released before the end of the war.

RESPONSE

In a response issued while he was campaigning in Wisconsin yesterday, McGovern described Salinger's mission as no more than a "brief, middle-level inquiry about prisoners of war" that could not possibly interfere with serious talks.

A far greater danger, he

insisted, was Henry A. Kissinger's "highly publicized global junket" that, he said, could well impede "quiet, serious professional negotiations."

This latest exchange between McGovern and the Nixon camp represented a further intensification of the increasingly bitter war of words over an issue — the war in Vietnam — which many politicians had expected to disappear.

The verbal conflict began

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last week after a charge by Sargent Shriver, the Democratic vice presidential candidate, that Mr. Nixon had muffed a chance for peace in early 1969. It continued after Ramsay Clark, a former Democratic attorney general and a McGovern ally, criticized the administration's bombing policies, and has now embraced the Salinger mission.

The McGovern camp seems intent on belittling Kissinger's latest talks with North Vietnamese officials as electioneering aimed at neutralizing protest at home, while portraying themselves as earnest and versatile seekers after an early peace.

The White House, meanwhile, seems anxious to portray the missions undertaken in McGovern's behalf as an inducement to the Communists to prolong the war, while making sport of some apparent confusion in the McGovern camp over the purpose of these missions.

SENATE

In the Senate yesterday, Republican minority leader Hugh Scott recalled that McGovern, after first telling newsmen in Springfield that Salinger was not operating under the South Dakota Democrat's "instructions," issued a statement two hours later saying Salinger had met with North Vietnamese negotiators "at my request."

Scott said the episode further enhanced McGovern's

reputation for "indecisiveness and lack of credibility."

Ziegler stressed that he was not saying that the Salinger talks in Paris had, in fact, damaged the prospects for a negotiated settlement. But the thrust of his comments was that independent negotiations by Mr. Nixon's opponents could hardly enhance the solid diplomatic front Mr. Nixon feels is essential to present to Hanoi in the coming weeks.

ISSUE

For his part, McGovern said yesterday that Salinger had been "careful not to do anything to jeopardize the talks," insisting that the larger issue is whether the negotiations now under way in Paris are themselves a serious effort to achieve peace or merely a delaying action contrived by the President to protect the Saigon regime of President Nguyen Van Thieu.

"Mr. Nixon has manipulated Mr. Kissinger and he has manipulated American public opinion to appear to be negotiating seriously, when actually he has been stalling to prop up General Thieu's government in Saigon," the Democratic nominee said.

He said further that the President has placed Thieu's survival "ahead of the interest of releasing our prisoners or bringing our troops home," and that Mr. Nixon is only playing politics with Kissinger's diplomatic travels.