

Ford Rejected as 'Gambit' Nixon Bid to Yield Pardon

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WASHINGTON, Sept. 29— President Ford dismissed as a "conversational gambit" an offer two weeks ago by former President Richard M. Nixon to relinquish the unconditional pardon granted to Mr. Nixon, a senior White House official said tonight.

The official, commenting on a report in Time magazine that Mr. Nixon had offered to "return" the pardon and that Mr. Ford had declined, said the account was "an essentially accurate" version of a telephone conversation the former President initiated on Sept. 17.

But the White House aide cautioned that Mr. Ford regarded the overture as "small talk" and that the President "certainly didn't consider it a serious offer."

The news magazine, in an issue scheduled for distribution tomorrow, reported that Mr. Nixon made the offer after telling Mr. Ford that he regretted the "trouble" the pardon had caused since the President issued it on Sept. 8.

'More Right Than Wrong'

White House spokesmen had no official comment on the report tonight. Robert T. Hartmann, a Presidential counselor who is among Mr. Ford's closest associates, said that he "never heard of the offer."

Another senior White House aide said, however, that he had discussed the Sept. 17 conversation with the President and that the account, by Hugh L. Sidey, chief of the magazine's Washington bureau, had resulted from a "friendly chat" Mr. Sidey had with Mr. Ford last week.

Mr. Sidey described the par-

don discussion in a column in which he said that the President's decision to grant the pardon "may be shown to have been more right than wrong."

Mr. Sidey described the conversation as follows:

"A fortnight ago, Nixon phoned Ford. Nixon said that he was sorry for all the trouble the pardon had caused. Then he offered to send the pardon back if it would help. No, said Ford, he did not want that. He told the ex-President to stand firm. It would blow over. Ford told Nixon that he thought his decision was the right one. He still feels that way."

The White House official said that the President's recollection of the discussion was that Mr. Nixon had been engaging in a conversational "courtesy" that Mr. Ford felt compelled to "brush aside" in reply.

According to the aide, the

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comments on the pardon were only the opening part of a brief conversation, lasting fewer than 10 minutes, in which Mr. Ford and Mr. Nixon dealt largely with foreign affairs. Mr. Nixon was said to have asked how the strategic arms limitation talks with the Soviet Union were progressing, and urged Mr. Ford to retain Secretary of State Kissinger.

Informal Conversation

"There was nothing formal about it," the official said of the conversation about the pardon. "If Mr. Nixon's lawyer sent a legal document proposing to return the pardon, that would be another matter."

One White House official said that lawyers he had consulted were not even sure that it was legally possible to renounce or revoke a pardon once it had been formally proclaimed.

Mr. Nixon's associates in California said that they doubted that the former President would make a serious offer to return the pardon. One of Mr. Nixon's associates, who has discussed the pardon with the former President, said Mr. Nixon was annoyed because the President said at a news conference on Sept. 16 that acceptance of the pardon could be interpreted as an admission of criminal guilt.

The associate suggested that Mr. Nixon raised the subject with Mr. Ford the next day, Sept. 17, to express his displeasure with Mr. Ford's statement at the news conference