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Nixon had several aims in Vietnam peace plan

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and
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WASHINGTON — The central aim of President Nixon's dramatic revelation of the secret but now aborted U.S.-Hanoi peace negotiations was so completely to undercut domestic political attack on his Vietnamization policy that Hanoi would know it could no longer win the war in the halls of Congress and the presidential campaign.

Thus, in confidential talks with White House aides and his legislative leaders, Mr. Nixon flatly said on Tuesday evening:

"What I'm going to say in my speech is an answer to reasonable people with reasonable doubts about how to end the war, but it is not an answer to those demanding total American surrender."

In short, by laying out his eight-point peace plan on national television, the President was playing for a strong national consensus for Vietnamization if Hanoi continues obdurate. That would mean leaving a residual force of American troops in Vietnam for a long time, together with the continued bombing of supply and infiltration targets in Laos and North Vietnam.

Master political strategy

But that master political strategy was by no means the only object of Mr. Nixon's stunning revelations. They came, by no coincidence, only short weeks before the President's history-making trip to Peking.

For months, Mr. Nixon's foreign policy experts in the State Department and White House have been puzzled as to how much Peking has learned from Hanoi of the secret American peace initiatives. The two long conversations between Henry Kissinger, the President's top adviser on opening talks with China, and Prime Minister Chou En-lai last year are still cloaked in secrecy. Nevertheless, there is strong reason to doubt that Mr. Nixon authorized Kissinger to tell Chou even the broad outlines, much less the intimate details, of the continuing negotiations in Paris with Hanoi's agent, Le Duc Tho.

Tipping off Peking

Accordingly the President could not be sure that his proposals for what he called "a peace that is fair to both sides" were known to or even suspected by the Chinese

Communists. Peking and Hanoi have been operating on different wavelengths for a long time, a diversion of interests that grew much wider with Kissinger's first visit to Peking last summer.

Now, Mr. Nixon's Chinese hosts will have the full story in ample time to study and digest before the President arrives in Peking next month. With the Soviet Union having an ever-larger hand in Hanoi's military incursions into South Vietnam, the American peace initiatives toward Hanoi could play a vital role in the developing U.S.-China rapprochement.

Two other important birds

Beyond that, moreover, Mr. Nixon tried to kill at least two other important birds with the stone he hurled on Tuesday evening.

Top Nixon political advisers have worried for months that Republican candidates for all offices this year are running scared on the Vietnam issue. Their well-grounded fear: That with most Democratic presidential candidates calling for immediate and total withdrawal conditioned only on the return of U.S. prisoners of war, Republicans would gradually be forced on the defensive.

'Flying blind'

"We have been flying blind," in the words of one top party leader. "We needed an answer and now we have one."

The other bird the President tried to kill is the host of amendments in the Senate and House setting a date certain for complete U. S. pullout from Vietnam in exchange for release of the POWs. The appeal of those amendments is mounting with the approach of the November election. Now, Republican leaders have informed Mr. Nixon they feel confident that end-the-war resolutions can be modified to conform with the President's eight-point plan which would enable Mr. Nixon to sign them into law.

The short-term answer

Whether the President has correctly judged the American political temperament on these points remains to be seen but a spot-check of shrewd political opinion across the country indicates the short-term answer is yes.

The first real test will come if, as Mr. Nixon suspects, the North Vietnamese mount what he is privately calling "a big offensive" in the next two or three weeks and the U.S. counters with new heavy attacks from the air. In that event, Mr. Nixon now has a prepared political position to fall back to: his new peace plan.