

Rogers Finds Some Basis For Hope in Paris Talks

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WASHINGTON, Jan. 27 — Secretary of State William P. Rogers said today that despite Hanoi's public denunciations, he was "somewhat encouraged" by the absence of a North Vietnamese rejection of President Nixon's latest Vietnam peace plan at the Paris talks.

Offering an optimistic assessment of the give and take at the Paris session today, Mr. Rogers said that not only had the other side not rejected the eight-point plan, made public by Mr. Nixon on Tuesday night, but also "they have been asking a few questions about what we mean."

Mr. Rogers said that he had just spoken by phone with William J. Porter, chief American delegate to the Paris talks, who gave him a briefing on today's session, at which Mr. Porter had outlined Mr. Nixon's peace plan. The plan had first been offered privately to the North Vietnamese in October by Henry A. Kissinger, the President's adviser on national security, and Mr. Nixon disclosed its existence on Tuesday.

Mr. Rogers spoke to a national foreign policy conference for editors and broadcasters organized by the State Depart-

ment. Newsmen or executives from 40 states were at the department for the start of the two-day session.

In answer to a question, Mr. Rogers said it was natural to inquire if the Administration's disclosure of the secret plan would "speed up or delay the possibilities of a negotiated settlement."

"My own view," he said, "is that if there is any inclination at all on the part of the other side to negotiate a settlement—and I think that is in doubt—then the statement by the President the other night, which was so effective, I think will have the effect of unifying the American people. And if they are convinced of that, I think they will be more inclined to work out a negotiated settlement."

Reporting on today's Paris session, he said:

"I am somewhat encouraged by the fact that they have not rejected our proposal in Paris this morning. There has been a good deal of invective about it, but it hasn't been rejected.

"And, secondly, they have been asking a few questions

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about what we mean, and how could they be sure that the electoral process would be fair?"

"Now, that is a good sign," he said.

"That is exactly what negotiations are supposed to do," he added, "supposed to provide an opportunity for each side to ask the other, 'What do you mean?' and, 'How can we be sure?' and so forth. Let's work it out."

Continuing to enlarge on this theme, Mr. Rogers said:

"Now, if they should get in that frame of mind, so that they want to actually negotiate, that would be fine. It is possible that we could work out a settlement. It is a perfectly natural question for them to say, 'Well, how can we be sure that the election will be fair?' Now, it seems to me, we have to say, 'Well, what do you want to do to provide fairness?'"

Asked to provide more detail on Mr. Rogers's reference to North Vietnamese questions, a State Department official said that at the Paris talks, the other side "asked directly or rhetorically, some interesting questions."

"The questions were couched in critical, or hostile language," he said. "They seemed to focus on two subjects: Do we contemplate a total withdrawal, and how do we define a total withdrawal; and they were poking around the edges of the electoral process—how did we define it; what did it involve."

The official said that this was "something of a departure from the past," although another informed source said that questions on those subjects have been asked before.

Others Not Optimistic

Mr. Rogers's apparent optimism about Paris talks was in contrast to widespread skepticism in Washington diplomatic circles. Most specialists on Vietnam have long believed that Hanoi would not agree to anything but a plan by which the Nixon Administration forced out the current Saigon leadership. The decision to make the Nixon plan public makes the likelihood of a negotiated accord even more remote, those specialists assert.

Mr. Rogers said that the Nixon Administration, although agreeable to new elections, would not take any action to force out the Government of President Nguyen Van Thieu in Saigon and hasten a Communist assumption of power.

"We are completely flexible about how that election is to be conducted," the Secretary went on, "or how we could determine who the people of South Vietnam want to represent them, and I don't know how anyone



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Secretary of State William P. Rogers at a foreign-policy conference, where he discussed the U.S. peace initiative.

could suggest that that isn't completely fair."

He said that the vast American commitment to South Vietnam — including the 45,000 Americans killed in action — made it impossible for the United States to say, "All right, we will take part in throwing out the present Government and letting the Communists put their leaders in and we'll just get out."

"That is impossible," he said. "We would lose our standing throughout the world, we have defense commitments with Korea and Japan and the Philippines, and other countries—Thailand. If we did that, our credibility, our standing in the world would go to zero."

Asked who would win an election in South Vietnam, Mr. Rogers, saying that the Thieu Government "has provided stability and a good deal of economic viability over these years," continued:

"So my guess would be, and I think it is a very sound guess, that the people in South Vietnam would support a free system. I think they are opposed to a Communist takeover of their country."

President Thieu has offered—as part of the Nixon plan—to resign a month before an election, to be supervised by an international organization. But he would remain as president for the first five months of the six-month pre-election process.

Stressing the Administration's contention that the Nixon plan had aroused widespread support here and abroad, Mr. Roger said:

"I think the conclusion that has been reached by the American people—and certainly by the international community—is that we have done everything we can to bring about a negotiated peace. I might say that I have just looked this morning at the cables we have had from around the world, and the world reaction is extremely favorable to the proposals that the President has made."

Reaction Called 'Favorable'

In answer to a question, he said the United States wanted a cease-fire throughout Indochina, including Cambodia and Laos, and was willing to withdraw all American forces from Indochina. But he said the United States would not give up its bases in neighboring Thailand.

In Washington, political repercussions of the peace proposals were continuing to be heard.

Herbert G. Klein, the White House communications director, said that "when one reads the comments of some of the Democratic Presidential candidates, such as Senators Muskie and McGovern, one can only conclude that they feel they were in a desperate race to see whether or not their criticism of the President's peace plan would be published more quickly than that of Hanoi."

Senator Muskie welcomed the President's initiative but expressed fear that his proposals for elections and a cease-fire would be "sticking points." Senator McGovern termed the President's "performance" a

"clever election-year maneuver that may gain some temporary political advantage but won't end the war."

Sees 'Irrational' Comment

"No one doubts the right of anyone in the United States Senate to disagree on policy," he said. "But if the Democrats, as a party, are to earn respect for sound and constructive criticism, they should seek the means of quieting the irrational line of comment such as is emanating from the Presidential candidates' line-up."

He also said: "The American people support the President and his peace proposal. The harping critics are out of step."

Also today, the National Peace Action Coalition, an antiwar group, issued a 16-point statement criticizing Mr. Nixon's plan. Its main point was that the plan "has already been rejected by the Vietnamese, which means it cannot be the basis for ending the war."

It said that the Nixon speech was designed "to take the heat off of him politically, and at the same time to prepare the American people for the coming escalation of the war, which the Nixon Administration is planning."

The group said that what the American people want "is not Nixon's eight-point plan, but a one-point plan: get out of Indochina now!"

Proposals Are Assailed

Antiwar groups attacked President Nixon's peace proposals yesterday and said they would step up their demonstrations against the war in Southeast Asia.

Opposition was expressed in a statement by the Peoples Coalition for Peace and Justice—a grouping of dozens of organizations representing students, clergy and others.

The statement was read at a news conference by Mrs. Cora Weiss of Women Strike for Peace. It charged the President's proposals would not stop the war and amounted to a death warrant for thousands of Indochinese and continued imprisonment for nearly 400 American prisoners of war.

A dozen members attending the coalition's conference at 345 East 5th Street, both in their statements and privately, said that the President's speech was an attempt to blunt the growing antiwar sentiment in the United States.

The coalition's program calls for demonstrations to coincide with President's departure for Peking, and for April 15, which is the deadline for tax payments. Demonstrations are also planned at the Republican and Democratic national conventions.