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Peace Talks 340

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PARIS AP - The chief of the U.S. delegation to the Vietnam peace talks revealed today that President Nixon made a secret proposal to the Vietnamese Communists to resume the talks today.

"The only response came in the form of a mushrooming invasion of the Republic of South Vietnam by North Vietnamese troops," Ambassador William J. Porter told an airport news conference as he returned from consultations in the United States.

Nixon made his secret proposal "through a private channel," on April 1, Porter said, and the Communist side received it the next day. The proposal thus was made two days after the first effect of the big North Vietnamese offensive below the demilitarized zone was felt. The South Vietnamese on March 30 were driven from the first of the string of border bases they lost.

Porter gave no clue to the identity of the private channel and did not explain why Nixon made his proposal in that fashion and secretly.

The ambassador said he thought it "useful" to make a statement "to clear away the rubbish which has accumulated around the Paris peace talks." It seemed likely that his statement was in reply to a French government statement Wednesday urging that the peace talks be resumed promptly, a statement that the State Department said was "one-sided . . . because it picks up demands of the North Vietnamese and Viet Cong delegati

Porter recalled that on Jan. 25 Nixon and President Nguyen Van Thieu presented an eight-point proposal "which certainly constituted a reasonable basis for discussion and negotiation."

He said the Communists "adamantly refused to examine with us our proposals or those which they had previously presented themselves and which they had put forward in ultimatum form on a take-it-without-question basis. The only response we received to our eight-point proposal was a massive military buildup."

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"On March 23," Porter continued, "the South Vietnamese and U.S. delegations said that we would agree to future meetings if the other side proposed specific topics . . . related to a peaceful settlement. We also made it clear that if events made it appear desirable, we ourselves would propose meetings. Now that was a sincere effort to put the talks on a business-like basis."

Porter said the North Vietnamese and the Viet Cong "raised the cry that we were sabotaging the negotiations."

"Howe you can sabotage anything which they never permitted to exist is quite a question," he commented.

"I can reveal to you for the first time," Porter went on, "that after a thorough review of the situation, President Nixon personally directed that a message be sent through a private channel to the other side stating our willingness to resume the Paris talks on April 13. The only response to this overture came in the form of a mushrooming invasion of the Republic of South Vietnam by North Vietnamese troops and the classic example of prevarication in the Viet Cong statement that no North Vietnamese troops were involved in that military operation."

The U.S. diplomat recalled that the Communist side has since said it wants more meetings of the peace talks.

"We don't doubt it," Porter commented, "but no one who is familiar with the history of the Paris talks can claim that the fact of having meetings is equivalent to the fact of negotiations."

"If there is a real desire to negotiate, the other side, as we have told them, can communicate that to us through any channel of their choosing. They will find us ready and willing to begin on that basis. Too much time has been wasted here, and that's bad enough, but the thought of meetings at gunpoint which would also waste time is even less acceptable."

Porter said, however, that he expected to remain in Paris "for a while to give every possibility to a resumption of the talks, assuming, or providing, that the other side is ready to cooperate."

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