

Rogers Says U.S. Supports An Indochina Peace Parley

By TERENCE SMITH

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WASHINGTON, Feb. 10—Secretary of State William P. Rogers said today that the United States would give its unqualified support to “any kind of conference, in any format” that would bring peace to Indochina.

“We would back a reconvening of the 1962 Geneva Conference, or for that matter, any activity of the International Control Commission in Laos,” the Secretary said in a brief, unscheduled news conference at the State Department.

His remarks constituted the broadest statement to date on the Administration’s willingness to support and participate in a new enlarged Indochina conference.

President Nixon first suggested the idea formally last Oct. 7, but neither the North Vietnamese nor the Pathet Lao, the Communist-led forces in Laos, have demonstrated any interests.

Endorses Aiken Plan

Mr. Rogers also endorsed a new proposal for an all-Asian peace conference outlined today by Senator George D. Aiken, the senior Republican on the Foreign Relations Committee.

In a speech on the Senate floor, Mr. Aiken called on all the Southeast Asian nations involved in the fighting, plus Communist China, to convene a new conference in an effort to end the conflict.

Speaking to reporters at the State Department, Mr. Rogers made the following other points in response to questions:

“After May 1, United States forces in South Vietnam will be employed “outside the combat role.” With that remark, the Secretary seemed to shore up a much-discussed Administration promise to disengage American troops from active combat by May 1—a deadline that was effectively muddled yesterday by Administration spokesmen who mentioned “midsummer.” “I don’t want to say that they will be totally out of the combat role,” Mr. Rogers said, “but for all major combat assignments, they will be out.”

The United States is encouraged by the Israeli Government’s stated willingness to talk about reopening the Suez Canal before a formal Middle Eastern peace settlement. The Secretary said the Egyptian proposal for a pullback of Israeli troops from the canal,

and the Israeli counterproposal for a mutual reduction of forces were both “worthy of consideration.”

“No assault of any kind is contemplated against North Vietnam. Vice President Nguyen Cao Ky of South Vietnam was quoted as saying that it might be necessary to attack bases inside North Vietnam. Mr. Rogers said this view was not shared by President Nguyen van Thieu, nor was such an operation under serious consideration.

Earlier in the day at the Pentagon, a senior defense official declined to comment on the possibility of such a strike by south Vietnamese troops.

“If I were a North Vietnamese strategic planner,” the official said, “I’d have to be worried about operations against the southern provinces. If the enemy denuded his defenses in that area, he’d have to be worried.”

But the official, who declined to be identified by name, insisted that he was not suggesting that such an operation was contemplated at this time. However, he refused to rule it out.

Denies G.I.’s Entered Laos

In his news conference, Mr. Rogers categorically denied a news agency report from Saigon that more than 100 American soldiers had entered Laos and joined the fighting there three days ago. He also dismissed as “pure bunk,” a Chinese Communist assertion that the United States was seriously considering the use of tactical nuclear weapons against North Vietnam.

Discussing the Aiken proposal for an all-Asian peace conference, the secretary noted that many of the provisions of the 14-nation 1962 conference on Laos had been consistently violated by North Vietnam. Speaking of the provision for international inspection, he said:

“They are not willing to have an independent body inspect the situation in Laos because they know it would confirm their presence there.”

Proposals to reconvene the Geneva conference have been made periodically, most recently by the French Foreign Ministry last spring, but they have always failed for lack of support from the Soviet Union. Co-chairman of the conference along with Britain.

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