

# The Reaction In Washington

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Washington

The White House yesterday began exploring the possibility that the latest Vietnamese Communist proposal at the Paris peace talks might form the basis for serious negotiations to end the war in Vietnam.

White House press secretary Ronal L. Ziegler said an initial review of the Communist peace plan appeared to show "positive, as well as clearly unacceptable, elements." He would not elaborate.

A State Department spokesman went so far as to characterize the proposal as the basis for further negotiations.

The White House continued to assert, however, that it would accept "no arrangements that would turn the 17 million people in (South) Vietnam over to the communists."

Despite the ambiguity of Ziegler's remarks,  
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they represented the most optimistic assertion the Nixon administration has ever made about the Paris talks.

The news of the Communist proposal brought a series of hopeful statements on Capitol Hill. Some of these comments contained hints that the developments in Paris could be traced to secret peace initiatives undertaken in recent weeks by President Nixon.

## KISSINGER

The Communist proposal coincided with the departure last night of Henry A. Kissinger, the President's assistant for National Security Affairs, on a 10-day journey that will include stops in Saigon and Paris.

The Communist proposal called for a simultaneous withdrawal of all United States forces and release of American prisoners of war, both to be completed by the end of the year.

Ziegler, who had insisted only three weeks ago that a total American withdrawal by December 31 would be precipitous, backed away from that position yesterday.

He said the White House had been reluctant to agree to such a withdrawal deadline when it was proposed, on June 8, by Clark M. Clifford, former secretary of defense, because it referred to "a hypothetical proposition." Clifford had said such a timetable would lead to the release of American prisoners within 30 days.

## CONDITION

The Communist proposal included a condition that the U.S. agree to stop the "Vietnamization" of the war, turning the fighting over to the South Vietnamese. It also contained the familiar insistence on formation of a coalition government in Saigon.

Ziegler asserted, as did Charles W. Bray III, the State Department spokesman, that the formal U.S. position on the plan would be made known at the Paris talks. Ziegler described this reply, however, as a "negotiating posture," a description that appeared to imply more than the prospect of flat rejection.

One possibility discussed here was that the U.S. would attempt to discover in the Paris session next Thursday whether the prisoner issue was separable from the question of a political settlement. Clifford offered the view, in a telephone interview, that the proposal gave the U.S. "an opportunity of negotiating an end to our military involvement without getting into the South Vietnamese political situation, which is a real can of worms."

There is also the possibility, however, that the administration, determined not to undercut the position of President Nguyen Van Thieu, would attempt to delay any resolution of the issues at Paris until after the presidential elections in South

Vietnam in October.

Democratic leader Mike Mansfield, a leading critic of the administration's Vietnam policies, told reporters that the developments "very likely fit in with the probes being made by the president over the past several months." He said Mr. Nixon should get credit for "the initiatives he has undertaken."

House speaker Carl Albert of Oklahoma, a supporter of the president's policies, said that he got the impression at a breakfast meeting with Mr. Nixon on Monday that important diplomatic developments were under way.

"I don't want to get too deep into this, but we are getting communications from Hanoi, directly and indirectly from Paris and otherwise, that things are moving," he said.

Senator George S. McGovern (Dem-S.D.), and Mark O. Hatfield (Rep-Ore.) warned that they would reintroduce legislation seeking a mandatory deadline for total American withdrawal if the president did not, in McGovern's words, "quickly grasp" the

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