

Washington: President Nixon's 'Fair Solution'

By JAMES RESTON

WASHINGTON, April 23 — In his latest report on the war in Vietnam, President Nixon said: "A fair political solution should reflect the existing relationship of political forces within South Vietnam. We recognize the complexity of shaping machinery that would fairly apportion political power in South Vietnam. We're flexible. We have offered nothing on a take it or leave it basis."

This opens up some room for negotiation and raises some fundamental questions. No political party or coalition now has the power to govern or control all the territory or people of South Vietnam. The National Liberation Front and its military arm, the Vietcong, control some areas, the Saigon Government controls others, particularly the populous cities, and even within the urban areas largely dominated by the Thieu-Ky regime, there are contending Communist and non-Communist political personalities and organizations.

The Compromise

What the President seems to be saying is that neither side can be expected to negotiate away at the peace table what

it has gained after years of fighting on the battlefield, but that a "fair political solution" would produce a different government reflecting "the existing relationship of political forces within South Vietnam."

Is It Acceptable?

If this means what it says, the President is offering to accept a coalition government of the existing non-Communist and Communist organizations, and this raises the question whether such a coalition government would be acceptable to the present Saigon Government and to the National Liberation Front and North Vietnam.

There is no evidence on the public record that they would accept. The enemy has insisted that the Saigon regime should be replaced by a coalition of the existing political forces before the peace settlement is negotiated, and the Thieu-Ky regime has vowed to block the formation of a coalition government including the Communists, by military force if necessary.

This raises fundamental questions for President Nixon. Has he secured in private the agreement of the Saigon gen-

erals for the "fair political solution" he proposed? If so, has he put this agreement privately to Hanoi and the N.L.F.? If not, does he propose to fight on to maintain Thieu and Ky in control, giving them a veto over what he defines as a "fair solution"?

It may be, of course, that these questions are ruled out by the enemy. Hanoi and the N.L.F. see the American forces slowly fading away. They have their military sanctuaries across the borders of Laos and Cambodia. They may prefer to wait until most U.S. combat troops have departed, and take their chances of destroying the Vietnamese armies and taking over the Government by themselves.

Sounding Out Saigon

Still, the President has emphasized the importance of a negotiated settlement as soon as possible, and it is therefore important to know whether Saigon has accepted his "fair solution" or is insisting on American troops staying there and fighting for some other solution. If it is the latter, we should at least be told what "solution" Saigon proposes.

"The death of a single man in war," the President said in

his report, "whether he's a American, South Vietnamese Vietcong or North Vietnamese is a human tragedy. That's why we want to end this war and achieve a just peace."

The Fundamental Question

This is a sound principle—even at this late date after over 40,000 American dead and over a million Vietnamese—but many more are likely to die unless negotiations can be arranged on the basis of a new government in Saigon.

Ever since Mr. Nixon came into the White House, the fundamental question has been the political control of South Vietnam. Saigon on the one hand and Hanoi and the N.L.F. on the other have been fighting for the control of the country. Mr. Nixon, however, is now clearly asking for a compromise settlement denying total control to either.

He is not prepared to use all the power at his command to compel the enemy to accept this, but at least he should be able to tell the American people whether Saigon accepts his "fair solution," and if not, whether he expects this country to fight on for some other "solution" so far undefined.