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## Sound Motive, Dubious Method

The Senate will vote tomorrow on the Hatfield-McGovern amendment to set a timetable for ending the war in Vietnam, an objective devoutly wished by millions of Americans. The framers of the measure have labored responsibly and creatively to extend the deadline for withdrawal of American forces and to allow the President flexibility in applying that deadline.

The question the Senate must decide is whether adoption of the resolution will enhance the prospects of negotiating an honorable settlement in Paris and genuinely extricating the United States from its disastrous adventure in Vietnam.

It is an excruciatingly difficult question for those who deplore—as we do—the lack of candor and the outright deception practiced by this and the two previous Administrations with regard to the American involvement in this Asian morass. And there can be no doubt that in the course of this ill-starred adventure the Executive has often bypassed or ignored the Congress.

There is genuine danger for the American system in Vice President Agnew's reckless assaults on Senators Hatfield and McGovern and their allies, honorable men whose records refute his "pacifist" and "isolationist" labels. They have long agonized over ways to help free this country honorably from a fruitless and divisive involvement and they deserve better than to be attacked as architects of "a blueprint for the first defeat in the history of the United States."

The basic question remains, however: is this amendment the right way either to redress the imbalance of power in the Government or to advance the prospects for American withdrawal and peace in Vietnam?

The argument is used that the timetable in the amendment is roughly the one the President has set for himself; and that its passage would thus be a contribution toward a joint Executive-Legislative policy. But the President is careful to preserve his options and it seems unwise to fix a withdrawal schedule for him by law, even one that contains the loopholes now put into it by the measure's sponsors.

Most important, in our view, is the probable effect of a withdrawal deadline on the peace talks in Paris. Mr. Nixon insists that, despite the lack of a new negotiating brief, David Bruce has been given latitude to explore all possible avenues to a satisfactory settlement. It is just such vagueness that has caused many Senators to despair that American troops will ever be out of Vietnam unless Congress applies an independent prod.

A prod undoubtedly would be useful; the question is what kind it should be. That Hanoi has been stonewalling in Paris is no excuse for Washington's failure to take the initiative there.

Our own belief is that the best way to end the stalemate in Paris is through prompt United States sponsorship of a proposal for a standstill cease-fire by all forces in Vietnam. A Senate resolution to this effect might help to end the war. The Hatfield-McGovern plan, which differs merely in timetable from the Administration's Vietnamization objective, would only end the American involvement—and assure that the war goes on. For there will be little incentive for Hanoi to negotiate a settlement if the President is under Congressional mandate to meet a deadline for evacuation, however diluted.

The sponsoring Senators have labored overtime to make their amendment more reasonable and flexible, but we cannot believe that its adoption will bring closer the goal they seek.