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## Cease-Fire for Vietnam

The standstill cease-fire proposal for Vietnam urged on President Nixon by fourteen Senators—including prominent “hawks” and “doves” of both parties—is far more than a scheme for a military truce. Its importance lies precisely in that it addresses the central issue, in the war and in the Paris negotiations, the political issue of who is to govern South Vietnam.

The White House, in welcoming “the objectives” of the Senators’ proposal while reserving judgment on its implementation, reiterated the old line that the next move is up to Hanoi. It is Hanoi’s intransigence and refusal to engage in “meaningful discussions” that is blocking progress in Paris, said Presidential press secretary Ron Ziegler.

The facts are not that simple. Hanoi has made a serious proposal for resolving the central issue in Paris—a provisional coalition government for South Vietnam pending elections. Washington is within its rights in rejecting that proposal, just as the Communists have rejected the American proposal to settle everything by elections. But the Nixon Administration has been wrong in refusing to make a negotiable counterproposal while insisting that the next concession must come from Hanoi.

Vague hints that a “sharing of power” with the Communists could be discussed, if Hanoi or the Vietcong would open private negotiations with the present Saigon Government, are hardly sufficient. What must be laid on the table in Paris, if the atmosphere is to be transformed, is a proposal that presents a tempting signal to the other side. Unless a clear indication is given of how Washington proposes that power be shared or divided in South Vietnam, there is nothing on the table to negotiate, apart from the already rejected coalition and election proposals.

A proposal in Paris to negotiate the terms of a standstill cease-fire could give such a signal. Properly presented, it could signify willingness to accept the *status quo* militarily, politically and territorially, pending discussion of a more permanent form of political accommodation or reconciliation.

Fundamental questions would have to be settled in the cease-fire negotiations before the fighting could be suspended, as was emphasized in the initial reaction to the Senators’ scheme by Hanoi’s chief Paris negotiator, Xuan Thuy. But it is precisely to entice Hanoi into such fundamental negotiations on a “compromise solution” that the Senators have urged their “new political initiative” on the President as the next order of business in Paris.

The Senators’ five-point proposal is not new in itself, as Senator Jackson emphasized in releasing his letter to the President. Its essential principles were first put forward by Clark Kerr’s National Committee for a Political Settlement in Vietnam. Cyrus Vance, the former deputy United States negotiator in Paris, urged a cease-fire on the White House and Congressional leaders for months.

What is new is the broad spectrum of bipartisan support the plan has now attracted among both supporters and opponents of the rejected Hatfield-McGovern amendment. It is an indication of the deep conviction in Congress, as in the country, that not enough is being done to end the war.

A similar consensus may also be in the making in South Vietnam. President Thieu has announced his willingness to discuss a standstill cease-fire in Paris, if it contains safeguards against violations and leads to discussion of an over-all settlement. His Buddhist opposition, which has just come in first in the Senate elections, has made a similar proposal of its own.

All this presents President Nixon with a unique opportunity. Whether or not Hanoi immediately accepts the proposal, Mr. Nixon could, by putting it forward, unite Americans and South Vietnamese, rally world opinion and confront the Communists with an offer of reasonable compromise that would put them under increasing pressure to negotiate.