

Reston Reports

Campaigning And the Peace Terms

Sarasota, Fla.

President Nixon's account of his secret efforts to negotiate a peace in Indochina has clearly helped him in the Florida presidential primary election campaign, and embarrassed the leading Democratic candidates for the presidency.

His peace terms are extremely complicated, but what stands out in the shorthand of stump campaigning is that he offered to withdraw all his troops if he got all U.S. prisoners of war released—and that this was rejected by Hanoi and the National Liberation Front.

Accordingly, Muskie, Humphrey, McGovern, and Lindsay, when they point to the critical conditions which are basic to the President's peace terms, find themselves caught in a tangle of complex and ambiguous qualifications, and even in danger of seeming to be sympathetic to the enemy.

Ironically, it is not the press here but the families of the American prisoners of war who have cut to the heart of the issue and made clear that Mr. Nixon is demanding, not only the release of the POWs, but the neutralization of all of Indochina, the end of all infiltration by foreign troops (are the South Vietnamese com-

munist "foreign" in South Vietnam?), a cease-fire and an election process which is virtually certain to restore the Thieu government to power in Saigon.

OBSERVATION

For example, Mrs. Gerald A. Gartley of Dunedin, Fla., whose Navy lieutenant son, Mark, was shot down over North Vietnam in August of 1968, observed here that while Mr. Nixon was obviously trying to free the POWs, the safety of the Thieu government and Mr. Nixon's own presidential future were also apparently important considerations and may even have "come first."

This, of course, cannot be anything more than Mrs. Gartley's personal speculation (nobody but the President knows which of his conditions come first). But several things are fairly clear:

- Both sides in the war have now put forward specific terms of peace unacceptable to the other side.

- Hanoi and the NFL are asking the President not only to get out of Indochina but to take all his equipment with him, including the equipment now in the hands of the South Vietnamese, and stop future military aide to Saigon. Dr. Henry Kissinger has fairly characterized this as a demand that Washington abandon Saigon and, in effect overthrow the Thieu government.

- At the same time, Mr. Nixon is demanding that the enemy give up the positions it has gained by years of fighting in South Vietnam, Laos and Cambodia, and accept a cease-fire just at the time when the enemy is mounting an offensive and U.S. ground troops are withdrawing.

DEMAND

It is clear that Washington is not going to abandon Saigon under what amounts to a demand for Saigon's surrender, and that Hanoi and the NLF are not going to order a cease-fire and abandon military positions they have won in the last ten years at the cost of millions of lives.

So the stalemate continues.

Here in Florida, Mr. Nixon's complicated peace terms will be a good political issue at least until the primary voting on March 14, but thereafter, when his military and political terms are finally analyzed and widely understood, they may well be seen not as a means to peace, but as a cause for continuing the war. And by November, that might not be a very popular argument for re-election.

A
News
Analysis

Column incomplete.
See NYTimes 28 Jan 72,
filed Nix Ad.