

(NYTimes version, 3 Oct 72, filed Nix Ad.)

The importance of a specific peace plan

NO 5-1
5 Oct 72

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If Sen. George McGovern is going to put forward a specific Vietnam peace plan, as Mrs. McGovern has promised, he will have the opportunity to draw a sharp distinction between himself and President Nixon on this issue. And perhaps that is what McGovern needs to give himself something like "presidential stature" and thereby to turn his campaign around.

In the first place, a detailed McGovern peace plan would appear in sharp contrast to Nixon's record. The President last outlined his own proposals last spring, while also announcing the mining of North Vietnamese harbors and the resumption of heavy bombing of North Vietnamese cities; so far the proposals have not produced peace, while the mining and bombing have produced an intensified war.

A clearly stated McGovern plan, moreover, would dramatize the President's failure to make good his pledge of 1968 "to end the war and win the peace" in Vietnam, particularly since we have the word of Richard J. Whalen, in his book "Catch the Falling Flag," that "nothing lay behind the 'pledge' except Nixon's instinct for an extra effort of salesmanship when the customers started drifting away." Whalen was at the time a Nixon adviser and speech writer, but resigned before the 1968 election.

A focal point

In the second place, while any McGovern peace plan would probably be in reasonably sharp contrast to Nixon's position, there is one point on which the Democratic candidate could give valuable focus to his generalized position—which is that he would immediately stop the bombing, withdraw all American forces, end all forms of aid to the Thieu regime, and expect in return that the North Vietnamese would send home their American prisoners of war.

Implicit in this position is McGovern's



ENGELHARDT

'COG-O-O'

—Engelhardt in the St. Louis Post-Dispatch

willingness to let the Thieu regime fall, as not being worth further American support after seven years of war and an even longer period of military assistance. But the North Vietnamese in the Paris talks and in several conversations with American interviewers seem to be insisting on more than such implicit assurances that the political chips in South Vietnam will be allowed to fall where they may; apparently, they want a negotiated arrangement for the political future of South Vietnam, in order to make the United States a party to that arrangement and prevent a renewed American intervention in Indochina.

While no one outside the government can be sure just what it said in the secret talks at Paris, the Nixon Administration seems unwilling so far to accede to Hanoi's demand for an interim tripartite government composed equally of representatives from the Viet Cong, from the present Saigon regime excluding only President Thieu, and from "independent"

or "third force" political figures in South Vietnam.

Some light was shed on the impasse in an article on the Op-Ed Page of The New York Times by David Livingston, a New York labor leader who has conferred in Hanoi and Paris with Le Duc Tho and in Washington with Henry Kissinger. Livingston wrote that Dr. Kissinger told him that, while he favored such a negotiated settlement, the North Vietnamese would not in fact agree in private talks to the participation in the tripartite interim government of anyone from the Saigon regime. But when Livingston reported this to Le Duc Tho, he wrote, Tho replied, "It is easy to solve this problem. Let each segment in the coalition pick its own representatives."

Lies and propaganda

In this war of lies and propaganda, there is no sure way to judge who was telling Livingston the truth; perhaps, by the peculiar lights of diplomats, both Kissinger and Tho thought they were. In any case, in view of George McGovern's implicit position that he will not support the Thieu regime, why should he not now make it explicit that he would accept an interim tripartite coalition, with each segment to choose its own representatives?

If the issue is peace, as most Americans seem to think, and not the survival of the Thieu regime, as Nixon so often seems to suggest, this position ought to make it clear that McGovern is the true "peace candidate." If the President charged, as he surely would, that McGovern was encouraging Hanoi to wait upon his election to negotiate a settlement, the senator could reply that this was better than attempting to bomb the North Vietnamese into submission to the Nixon view, and that in any case, as a major-party presidential candidate, his views on Vietnam were of profound and legitimate importance to the American electorate and the world community.

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Besides, it was just four years ago this month that Mr. Nixon, the Presidential candidate, said of President Johnson and his associates: "Let me make one thing clear. Those who have had a chance for four years and could not produce peace should not be given another chance." Mr. McGovern ought to make that clear, too; and how better than by telling the nation precisely how he intends to "produce peace."
