

# U.S. Plays Down Reports Of Discord With Saigon

NYTimes By BERNARD GWERTZMAN FEB 9 1972

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WASHINGTON, Feb. 8—The State Department today discounted suggestions of disagreement between the United States and President Nguyen Van Thieu of South Vietnam

over negotiating flexibility on the latest allied peace proposal. Charles W. Bray 3d, the department's spokesman, said it was an exaggeration to say that there was a "chill" in relations with Saigon. He asserted that Washington was in close consultation with the South Vietnamese on any proposals made to the North Vietnamese.

## Thieu Said to Be Angry

News reports from Saigon this morning had indicated that Mr. Thieu was angry over Secretary of State William P. Rogers's remarks in a news conference last week in which he stressed that the United States was "flexible" and was willing to negotiate any of the eight points of the new peace plan with the North Vietnamese side.

Mr. Rogers's expression of flexibility had specifically included Mr. Thieu's offer to resign one month before a new election that would be supervised by an electoral commission drawn from all elements of Vietnamese politics.

According to the Saigon reports today, Mr. Thieu objected to the implication that the United States might negotiate, over Saigon's head, the length of his tenure in office.

As part of the agreed United States-South Vietnamese eight-point peace plan made public by President Nixon on Jan. 25, an electoral commission would be set up to supervise a new election and Mr. Thieu would resign one month before the

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election.

At a news conference last Thursday, Mr. Rogers was asked if the United States was "flexible" on the question of "the length of time that President Thieu would resign prior to the election."

Mr. Rogers replied "Yes, we are."

## 'Slip of Tongue' Suggested

Privately, some State Department officials said that Secretary Rogers probably had made "a slip of the tongue" in his quick answer to the question. They also said that Mr. Thieu, who has had to swallow pride in agreeing to the resignation offer, was probably reacting to South Vietnamese hard-liners who felt that he was already too conciliatory to the Communists.

Yesterday, Bui Diem, the South Vietnamese Ambassador here, had lunch with Ellsworth Bunker, the United States Ambassador to South Vietnam, and William H. Sullivan, Deputy Assistant Secretary of State for East Asian Affairs. Mr. Dien was reported to have mentioned Mr. Thieu's concern but to have made no formal protest of Mr. Rogers's remarks.

Meanwhile, the debate over Mr. Nixon's eight-point plan continued in Washington today with Republican Congressional leaders continuing to criticize prospective Democratic electoral candidates who have not given support to the plan.

The debate was heated up yesterday by a televised interview with H. R. Haldemann, a top White House aide, who said that critics of the Nixon plan were "consciously aiding and abetting the enemy."

The Administration argues that Hanoi has delayed negotiating a settlement because it

believes the anti-Nixon forces in the United States would put pressure on Mr. Nixon to make additional concessions. It has urged unanimity at home to present a united front to the North Vietnamese.

Hugh Scott of Pennsylvania, the Republican leader of the Senate, came out of a White House meeting with Mr. Nixon and other Cabinet members to tell newsmen that Mr. Nixon believed that "politics stops at the water's edge, where Presidential candidates could otherwise endanger ongoing negotiations."

He said Mr. Nixon had made the following statement:

"The present Administration's emissaries in Paris must be able to speak with the full force and authority of the United States. Nothing should be offered in the political arena that might undercut their hands. Too many lives are at stake. Our negotiators in Paris represent not only the present Administration but the United States."