

The Haldeman Smear

The charge by White House "chief of staff" H. R. Haldeman that unnamed critics of President Nixon's latest peace proposals are "consciously aiding and abetting the enemy" is, in the context in which it was made, a vicious smear. It strikingly recalls the hysterical, irresponsible cry of treason that paralyzed public debate and policy-making in the dark days of the late Senator Joseph R. McCarthy.

The White House says that Mr. Haldeman was merely expressing "his own personal point of view" in his pre-taped television interview the other morning. The President cannot so easily isolate himself, however, from the public comments of a man who has been a close personal associate for many years and who currently serves as coordinator of White House affairs.

This newspaper, along with many other long-time critics of Vietnam policy, have found considerable merit in the Administration's latest peace proposals, and we have said so. But the proposals are not beyond legitimate criticism. Honest debate on the critical issue of how to end the war is an essential part of the American democratic system. It should not—and we believe will not—be smothered by a resort to calumny and invective, even when indulged in at the highest level of government.

Reaction in letters to the editor, 17 Feb 72