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Nixon's Chances in Race Seem Enhanced

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WASHINGTON, Oct. 26—Official declarations that a peace settlement is now within President Nixon's reach brought joy today to his political strategists, who have spent a trying 10 days defending themselves against charges of political espionage and searching for a fresh burst of good news.

The general feeling here was that Henry A. Kissinger's optimistic diplomatic forecasts this morning would enhance Mr. Nixon's chances in the Nov. 7 election. They were expected to neutralize or at least draw public attention from the recurrent allegations about White House campaign techniques.

At the same time, however, even the most ebullient of Mr. Nixon's men conceded privately today that the President's chances of reaping full benefit from the sudden movement toward peace depended heavily on three unknowable factors.

McGovern's Claim

The first is whether Senator George McGovern can impress the voters with his claim that Mr. Nixon could have achieved the same result four years ago.

A second—and related unknowable—is whether some people believe an "election-eve" settlement is being deliberately arranged and whether that belief would rob the President of some of the gains he might otherwise hope to win.

The third and most important is whether the diplomatic deal itself collapses under pressure from Saigon, thereby reinforcing Mr. McGovern's claim that President Nguyen Van Thieu, and not Hanoi, is the real obstacle to peace.

Mr. Kissinger, who has often said—with a smile—that he is naive about political matters, tried to come to grips with all three problems at his briefing this morning. He said the present bargain was not obtainable four years ago or, for that matter, at any time until Oct. 8, when Hanoi dropped its unacceptable demand that the United States "predetermine" the composition of a post-war government in South Vietnam.

As for election-eve timing, Mr. Kissinger insisted that it was largely coincidental and that it was Hanoi, and not the United States, that had asked

for a settlement by Oct. 31.

He expressed strong hopes that the bargain not only would survive Saigon's protests but also that it could be completed after only one more round of bargaining with the North Vietnamese.

In private conversation today, strategists recalled ruefully the events of 1968 when President Thieu's election—even refusal to join the United States in peace talks in Paris had damaged Hubert H. Humphrey's chances to defeat Mr. Nixon.

The parallels between the closing days of the 1968 campaign and the present one are striking. On Oct. 31, four years ago, President Johnson announced a bombing halt and the start of what he hoped would be "intensive" negotiations. One day later, amid indications that the Republicans had been encouraging Mr. Thieu to hold for a better deal, the South Vietnamese President announced that he could not participate in the talks and Mr. Humphrey's brief lead in the polls evaporated.

Difference This Year

A major difference this year, however, the Republicans argue, is that Mr. Thieu cannot reasonably expect a better deal from the Democrats. Mr. Nixon's present plan calls for a cease-fire in place, withdrawal of United States forces within 60 days of an agreement, roughly simultaneous prisoner exchanges, the prohibition of reinforcements, and an elaborate institutional framework for the settlement of political differences.

Mr. McGovern's, by contrast, calls for withdrawal of American troops within 90 days of his inauguration, a move he hopes would be matched by a prisoner exchange. He would leave the military and political future of Vietnam to the Vietnamese.

Mr. McGovern has said that if elected he would order a cease-fire on Inauguration Day, remove all troops from Indochina within three months, and withdraw support from the South Vietnamese Government. He says he fully expects the North to release prisoners after these steps are taken, but he also promises to keep some residual forces near Vietnam

until the prisoners are free.

The basic differences between the two positions, as now stated, arise from Mr. McGovern's unwillingness to demand an advance commitment from Hanoi on the release of the prisoners—a commitment which is part of the Nixon arrangement—and his frank acceptance of the probable collapse of the Saigon Government.

The Democratic nominee, in a speech delivered at the University of Iowa today, espoused to the accord much as Mr. Nixon's strategists expected he would and, indeed, much as he had hinted he would. He said he welcomed the news but asked Mr. Nixon why it took him "another four years to bring an end to the war" and urged him not to let "General Thieu block this settlement."

But for the moment at least, the headlines and the initiative seemed to belong to the President—as did the responsibility, in the words of one White House aide, "for keeping the whole thing from flying apart."

Mr. Nixon's strategists seemed confident that he could build upon the voters' ancient reluctance to switch Presidents in midstream as long as there is a sense of forward progress. But they conceded that Mr. Kissinger's most difficult days might lie ahead.