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Vietnam

A Peace Proposal For the President

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FED UP WITH what they regard as the Nixon Administration's continuing exploitation of U. S. prisoners in North Vietnam for political purposes, men in both houses of Congress who favor withdrawal from Vietnam have decided to meet the issue head-on.

Leading the effort is California Congressman Robert Leggett, who has the active support of Michigan Republican Congressman Don Riegle. They are now privately circulating a proposal for signature, in the form of a letter to the President. It may yet become a proposed amendment.



Their proposal is called "Proportional Repatriation" and will be co-sponsored in the Senate by George McGovern (Dem-S. D.) and Mark Hatfield (Rep-Ore.).

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THE LETTER PROPOSES that Mr. Nixon tie together his twin desires to end the war and release the prisoners in the form of a new negotiating offer in Paris. The plan would be to offer an equal percentage of withdrawal in American forces from Vietnam as the enemy releases an equal proportion of the prisoners it now holds.

Leggett, Riegle, McGovern, Hatfield and colleagues point out that the number and identity of U. S. prisoners is largely unknown, and their plan would require North Vietnam first to state the number of prisoners and then identify them.

This disclosure would be matched by a U. S. agreement to withdraw all troops by a stated interval — say, 12 months — if each withdrawal were matched by a corresponding prisoner release.

A mutually acceptable intermediary, either a country or an international agency, would receive and hold prisoners as they are released and simultaneously monitor U. S. troop departures to insure to the enemy that we were not substituting replacements.

Finally, the proposal requires North Vietnamese consent to checks and inspection by the third country or organization to insure that no additional prisoners are being held beyond the official numbers on which the mutual release is based.

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By tying troop withdrawal to prisoner release, the sponsors feel, they will have de-politicized the prisoner issue and at the same time given the enemy the assurances he has asked for in exchange for release.

When Senator McGovern discussed the proposal with Averell Harriman, he was told that while Harriman was negotiating in Paris he stressed that North Vietnam was hurting itself by refusing even to identify the prisoners. Harriman was convinced by his Paris experience that there would be no action on the prisoners until a firm timetable for U. S. withdrawal had been set.

The Leggett plan would at least test the good faith of this position. Would the enemy, given the guarantee of a fixed U. S. timetable for total withdrawal, match those withdrawals with comparable prisoner releases?