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# White House Suggests Clifford Is Playing Politics

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WASHINGTON, June 9—The White House suggested today that Clark M. Clifford, former Secretary of Defense, and others were raising false hopes about American prisoners of war "for domestic political purposes."

Mr. Clifford responded with a statement tonight in which he carefully refused to debate the White House over politics or motives, asking only that his proposal for the release of American prisoners be put before the North Vietnamese and judged on its merits.

Under the proposal, which Mr. Clifford set forth in a speech here yesterday, the United States would withdraw all its forces from Indochina by Dec. 31, in exchange for which the North Vietnamese would release American prisoners of war within 30 days of the withdrawal agreement. The United States could abandon its end of the bargain if Hanoi failed to set the prisoners free within the stipulated time limit.

Mr. Clifford said that he had "reason to believe" that the prisoners would be set free if the United States agreed to a

deadline for a unilateral withdrawal.

Facing a second day of intense questioning about the Clifford proposal, the White House press secretary, Ronald L. Ziegler, said that any such speculation about Hanoi's willingness to agree to a new plan "might be an attempt to exploit the plight of the prisoners of war for domestic political purposes" and tended, in any event, to raise "false hopes."

### Clifford Is Named

Asked whether he thought Mr. Clifford's statement fell into this category, Mr. Ziegler responded:

"I think my remarks would relate to the raising of false hopes, yes."

"By Clifford?" he was asked. "Yes," he replied.

At another point, Mr. Ziegler was asked whether he thought Mr. Clifford and others — they were not identified — who had suggested that Hanoi might agree to release prisoners in exchange for a withdrawal deadline were themselves pawns in an effort by North Vietnam to score a propaganda victory.

He replied that he did not know the source of Mr. Clifford's hopes, but he added that other reports "that have been

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## and Raising False Hopes With Proposal on Prisoners

generated by the North Vietnamese" are regarded by White House officials as an effort by Hanoi to create a false impression of flexibility.

### 'Hard Position' Cited

In fact, he asserted, the North Vietnamese have refused "to move off their very hard position" in official negotiations in Paris.

President Nixon and Mr. Ziegler hold that the North Vietnamese have agreed only to "discuss" the prisoner issue after a firm commitment by the United States to withdraw its forces by a certain deadline.

Echoing these comments, Sec-

retary of State William P. Rogers told reporters on his arrival from Paris today that there had been "no change in their basic position."

### 'Mere Propaganda'

He described as "mere propaganda" North Vietnamese hints that they were now prepared to release the prisoners in exchange for a withdrawal date, and added:

"By talking to people not involved in the negotiations, they want to create an impression that they are ready to make a deal. If they are interested in changing their position, they can talk to Ambassador David

Bruce [United States negotiator at the Paris peace talks]. All they have to do is pick up the telephone."

Mr. Ziegler also returned to a theme he had stressed yesterday, that the Clifford timetable would require a withdrawal "so precipitous that it would not give the South Vietnamese the opportunity to defend themselves and determine their own future."

The Administration is said to believe that substantial United States support will be required into 1972 if the Saigon regime is to have a chance to sustain itself after the Americans withdraw. Most observers here con-

sider that this belief — rather than the ambiguity of the North Vietnamese position — is the most compelling factor behind the Administration's frigid response to the Clifford proposal.