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7-2-71

White House Is Exploring Offer Made in Paris Talks

By JAMES M. NAUGHTON JUL 2 1971

Special to The New York Times

WASHINGTON, July 1—The White House began exploring today the possibility that the latest Vietcong proposal at the Paris peace talks might form the basis for serious negotiations to end the war in Vietnam.

Ronald L. Ziegler, the White House press secretary, said an initial review of the seven-point peace plan appeared to show "positive, as well as clearly unacceptable, elements." He would not elaborate.

A State Department spokesman went so far as to characterize the proposal as the basis for further negotiations.

The White House continued to assert, however, that it would accept "no arrangement that would turn the 17 million people in [South] Vietnam over to the Communists."

Despite the ambiguity of Mr. Ziegler's remarks, they represented the most optimistic assertion the Nixon Administration has ever made about the Paris talks.

The news of the Vietcong proposal touched off a series of hopeful statements in Congress. Some of these contained hints that the developments in Paris could be traced to secret peace initiatives undertaken in recent weeks by President Nixon.

The proposals coincided, ap-

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parently to the surprise of the White House, with the departure tonight of Henry A. Kissinger, the President's assistance for national Security Affairs, on an unusual 10-day journey that will include stops in Saigon and Paris.

There were elements of caution evident in the Administration and elsewhere. Marshall Green, Assistant Secretary of State for East Asian and Pacific Affairs, told a Senate subcommittee the proposal needed clarification.

The Vietcong proposal called for a simultaneous withdrawal of all United States forces and release of American prisoners of war, both to be completed by the end of the year.

Mr. Ziegler, who had insisted only three weeks ago that a total American withdrawal by Dec. 31 would be precipitous, backed away from that position today.

He said the White House had been reluctant to agree to such a withdrawal deadline when it was proposed, on June 8, by Clark M. Clifford, former Secretary of Defense, because it referred to "a hypothetical proposition." Mr. Clifford had said such a timetable would lead to the release of American prisoners within 30 days.

The Vietcong proposal included a condition that the United States agree to stop the "Vietnamization" of the war, turning the fighting over to the South Vietnamese. It also contained the familiar insistence on formation of a coalition Government in Saigon.

Mr. Ziegler asserted, as did Charles W. Bray 3d, the State Department spokesman, that the formal United States posi-

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Associated Press

SPEAKS FOR VIETCONG: Mrs. Nguyen Thi Binh on way to present peace plan to U.S. delegate at Paris talks.

tion on the plan would be made known at the Paris talks. Mr. Ziegler described this reply, however, as a "negotiating posture," a description that appeared to imply more than the prospect of flat rejection.

One possibility discussed here was that the United States would attempt to discover in the next Paris session, a week from today, whether the prisoner issue was separable from the question of a political settlement to end the conflict.

Mr. Clifford offered the view, in a telephone interview, that the proposal gave the United States "an opportunity of negotiating an end to our military involvement without getting into the South Vietnamese political situation, which is a real can of worms."

There is also the possibility, however, that the Administration, determined not to undercut the position of President Nguyen Van Thieu, would attempt to delay any resolution of the issues of Paris until after the presidential elections in South Vietnam in October.

This theory did not coincide with the indications that dip-

lomatic initiatives of the Nixon Administration had been undertaken and might now be bearing fruit.

Senator Mike Mansfield, the Democratic leader and a leading critic of the Administration's Vietnam policies, told reporters today's developments "very likely fit in with the probes being made by the President over the past several months." He said that Mr. Nixon should get credit for "the initiatives he has undertaken."

Albert: 'Things Are Moving'

The House Speaker, Carl Albert, of Oklahoma, a supporter of the President's policies, said that he had got the impression at a breakfast meeting with Mr. Nixon on Monday that important diplomatic developments were under way.

"I don't want to get too deep into this, but we are getting communications from Hanoi, directly and indirectly, from Paris and otherwise, that things are moving," he said.

Senator George S. McGovern,

Democrat of South Dakota, and Mark O. Hatfield, Republican of Oregon, warned that they would reintroduce legislation seeking a mandatory deadline for total American withdrawal if the President did not, in Senator McGovern's words, "quickly grasp" the Vietcong offer.

Comments by supporters of Mr. Nixon, however, underscored the view that the offer was itself a sign of diplomatic progress.

Mr. Nixon's determination not to give in to earlier demands has "paid off," Senator Hugh Scott, the Republican leaders, said. "They are now coming to us. This is most encouraging."

The House Republican leader, Gerald R. Ford, made the same point, and added, "The North Vietnamese have moved closer to terms acceptable to us. The negotiators on both sides should now seek to resolve all problems standing in the way of a secure and permanent peace."