

Nixon Aide Says Salinger Could Harm Peace Efforts

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WASHINGTON, Aug. 17—The Nixon Administration charged today that contacts between representatives of Senator George McGovern and North Vietnamese officials could damage the quest for peace in Indochina.

Ronald L. Ziegler, the White House press secretary, first said he did not want to discuss the issue in "detail." But he then volunteered a sharply worded statement asserting that representatives of Mr. Nixon's Democratic opponent might say something in contact with the enemy that could jeopardize [the President's] peace efforts."

A particular representative in question at Mr. Ziegler's briefing this morning was Pierre Salinger, a McGovern aide who said yesterday that he had met twice in Paris with North Vietnamese officials in an effort to determine whether American prisoners might be released before the end of the war.

In a response issued while he was campaigning in Wisconsin today, Mr. McGovern described Mr. Salinger's mission as no more than a "brief, middle-level inquiry about prisoners of war" that could not possibly interfere with serious talks.

A far greater danger, Mr. McGovern insisted, was Henry A. Kissinger's "highly publicized global junket" that, he said, could well impede "quiet, serious professional negotiations."

This latest exchange between Mr. McGovern and the Nixon camp represented a further escalation of the increasingly bitter war of words over an is-

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sue — the war in Vietnam — that many politicians had expected to disappear.

The verbal conflict began last week after a charge by Sargent Shriver, the Democratic Vice-Presidential nominee, that Mr. Nixon had missed a chance for peace early in 1969. It continued after Ramsey Clark, a former Democratic Attorney General and a McGovern ally, criticized the Administration's bombing policies, and it has now embraced the Salinger mission.

Tactics of Opponents

Despite the heat and frequent confusion caused by the verbiage, the political tactics on both sides seemed increasingly clear.

The McGovern camp seems intent on belittling Mr. Kissinger's latest talks with North Vietnamese officials as electioneering aimed at neutralizing protest at home, while portraying the Democrats as earnest and versatile seekers after an early peace.

The White House, meanwhile, seems eager to portray the missions undertaken in Mr. McGovern's behalf as an inducement to the Communists to prolong the war, while making sport of some apparent confusion in the McGovern camp over the purpose of these missions.

In the Senate today, for example, Hugh Scott, the Republican minority leader, noted that Mr. McGovern, after first telling newsmen in Springfield, Ill., yesterday that Mr. Salinger had not been operating under the South Dakota Democrat's "instructions," issued a statement two hours later saying that Mr. Salinger had met with North Vietnamese negotiators "at my request."

Senator Scott said the episode further enhanced Mr. McGovern's reputation for "indecisiveness and lack of credibility."

As for the substance of the meeting, Mr. Ziegler stressed that he was not saying that the Salinger talks in Paris had, in fact, damaged the prospects for a negotiated settlement.

But the thrust of his comments was that independent negotiations by Mr. Nixon's political opponents could hardly enhance the solid diplomatic front that Mr. Nixon believes is essential to present to Hanoi in the coming weeks.

Mr. McGovern said today that Mr. Salinger had been "careful not to do anything to jeopardize the talks." He insisted that the larger issue was whether the negotiations now under way in Paris were themselves a serious effort to achieve peace or merely a delaying action contrived by Mr. Nixon to protect the South Vietnam regime of President Nguyen Van Thieu.

'Stalling' Is Alleged

"Mr. Nixon has manipulated Mr. Kissinger and he has manipulated American public opinion to appear to be negotiating seriously, when actually he has been stalling to prop up General Thieu's Government in Saigon," the Democratic nominee said in part.

He said further that the President had placed General Thieu's survival "ahead of the interest of releasing our prisoners or bringing the troops home" and that Mr. Nixon was only playing politics with Mr. Kissinger's diplomatic travels.

"The suspicion is well-founded," he said, "when you consider it comes right on the eve of the Republican National Convention."

Mr. McGovern explained again today—as he had yesterday—that the purpose of the Salinger mission was to see whether Hanoi might release the prisoners before the fighting ends. But he also said that while he had no complaints with Mr. Salinger's efforts he would not undertake any more independent efforts to secure the release of the prisoners. He said he was convinced that Hanoi would not let them go until the war ended.

This was not taken to mean, however, that Mr. McGovern or his running mate would abandon public criticism of the President's approach to the war. Indeed, one of the reasons why Mr. McGovern said he had rejected the President's offer of intelligence briefings from Mr. Kissinger was to leave himself free to continue his attacks on the Administration's policy.

Mr. McGovern, who designates Paul C. Warnke, his national security adviser, to meet with Mr. Kissinger instead, also complained that he had found earlier conversations with Mr. Kissinger unproductive.

Mr. Kissinger promptly retorted that he had never really had a full foreign policy discussion with the South Dakota Democrat. Their meetings, he said, had been largely social. Thereupon, Mr. Kissinger designated his deputy, Gen. Alexander Haig, to give the briefings to Mr. Warnke.