

Thieu's Plan Hit By U.S.

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Nixon Rejects Any Limited Cease-Fire

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By Murrey Marder

Washington Post Staff Writer

The Nixon administration broke publicly yesterday with South Vietnamese President Nguyen Van Thieu's plan to substitute a Christmas cease-fire for the one of indefinite duration that the United States is negotiating with North Vietnam.

"We have a proposal now being negotiated on a cease-fire," said White House press secretary Ronald L. Ziegler, "and we support no other position on a cease-fire."

The administration was obliged to declare its position through a combination of events that raised questions about whether the United States was abandoning its diplomatic track with North Vietnam and turning instead to the totally different, very limited alternative proposed by Thieu on Tuesday.

The White House statement amounted to a backhanded confirmation that the Nixon administration is still headed toward concluding the delayed negotiations with North Vietnam on a settlement to disengage American forces from the war.

Ziegler, however, refused to discuss the state of the Paris negotiations between Henry A. Kissinger and North Vietnam's Le Duc Tho which were suspended Wednesday. Ziegler would say only that Kissinger, who returned from Paris Wednesday night, and his deputy, Gen. Alexander M. Haig Jr., held lengthy consultations with President Nixon yesterday.

Le Duc Tho, North Vietnam's chief negotiator in the secret talks, similarly will leave Paris today to report to his government in Hanoi, the North Vietnamese delegation announced.

In Paris, observers con-

strued Tho's departure as a signal that North Vietnam believes there is nothing of major substance left to discuss and that the United States must now decide if it will proceed with an agreement, although technical experts on both sides will continue meeting in Paris.

At the formal Paris peace conference, North Vietnam yesterday appeared to be putting maximum pressure on the United States to force President Thieu to accept the terms negotiated between Kis-

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singer and Tho, Jonathan C. Randal of the Washington Post Foreign Service reported. The mood at the public conference was gloomy, with a resumption of acrimonious exchanges.

North Vietnam insisted that the Saigon government must sign any eventual cease-fire agreement, a demand apparently made to prevent the Thieu regime from taking the position that it is not bound by any cease-fire signed by the United States. Many Saigon sources have indicated that Thieu might try to take that course.

Nguyen Thanh Le, Hanoi's spokesman in Paris, had said in discussing the secretly negotiated draft proposal on Oct. 27 that the United States could sign with Secretary of State William P. Rogers "representing" the Saigon regime, and North Vietnamese Foreign Minister Nguyen Duy Trinh "representing" the Vietcong. Afterward, said Le, all

four foreign ministers could sign the document.

Evidently on second thought, however, North Vietnam concluded that it must foreclose the Saigon government from repeating its refusal to sign the 1954 Geneva accords which ended the French Indochina war. Le said yesterday: "Now we stress that the accord must be signed by all four parties."

The sequence of developments that caused the White House yesterday to shun President Thieu's plan for a limited cease-fire began with what diplomatic observers believed to be a lack of coordination between U.S. officials in Paris and Washington, instead of a deliberate plan to clash with Thieu.

At the formal Paris peace talks, Heyward Isham, acting chief of the U.S. delegation, made what amounted to a

marking-time statement to counter Communist charges that the United States is trying to "sabotage" an agree-

ment. Isham called for a return to "a reasonable dialogue."

He went on to say, however, that South Vietnam's chief delegate, Pham Dang Lam, had introduced "proposals for various specific actions" made by South Vietnamese President Thieu. "Are you prepared," Isham said to the Communist side, "to examine these proposals objectively and to engage in serious discussion of them?"

As U.S. sources explained later with some embarrassment, the intent was standard diplomatic courtesy in the formal conference, to call attention to an ally's proposal. But in this case, attention was being called to a proposal that cuts right across the nine-point package settlement of the war negotiated between Hanoi and Washington.

In addition, Saigon's Lam read into the conference record extracts from President Thieu's speech, a speech in which Thieu attacked the nine-point draft as a "false

peace solution" that would expose South Vietnam to a Communist takeover. In place of it, Thieu proposed an experimental cease-fire, starting at Christmas, the exchange of prisoners, and negotiations between Saigon, Hanoi and the Vietcong, without the United States.

News agencies reported Isham's remarks as "support" of Thieu's alternative plan, casting doubt on the U.S. position in its entire negotiations with North Vietnam.

The Nixon administration, which had maintained deliberate public silence on Thieu's proposal (officials said privately that the United States spurned the proposal), was put on the spot. The White House was compelled to say if it was switching positions, even though it evidently wanted to avoid public disagreement with Thieu at this point.

Press secretary Ziegler, on instructions, took the way out of saying that Isham's remark "apparently was taken out of context." Ziegler then re-

peated, in response to all questioning, that "we support no other position on a cease-fire" apart from the proposal under negotiation in Paris with North Vietnam. The spokesman declined to make any direct comment on Thieu's proposal, nor would he discuss U.S. plans to try to break the apparent deadlock between Washington and Saigon over the broad cease-fire plan.

In Paris, Mrs. Nguyen Thi Binh, foreign minister of the Vietcong's Provisional Government, charged that the U.S. refusal to sign the Washington-Hanoi draft accord on Oct. 31, as originally projected, has now put the negotiations "back at their starting point."

U.S. officials disagreed. But the

the American press spokesman in Paris, David Lamberton, acknowledged that attempts to complete an acceptable settlement "are obviously taking longer than we first anticipated."