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SPECIAL REPORT

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PRESIDENT NIXON COMMENTS ON FAVORABLE REACTION TO PEACE PROPOSAL

Savannah, Georgia -- Following is the transcript of informal remarks by President Nixon to newsmen on the dock of Skidway Island near Savannah, where he dedicated a new ocean science center October 8:

(President Nixon) I talked to Secretary Rogers this morning and he was very pleased with the reaction, world-wide. Of course, all of the messages are not yet in, but up to this time it has been a very, very good reaction from leaders all over the world supporting the peace initiative that we have taken.

The other thing that is significant is that we had very good support in the House and Senate. That is significant because the leaders in Hanoi have said over and over again, publicly, and all the experts say that they believe this, that they are going to wait for political division in the United States to get them at the conference table what they can't win on the battlefield.

The fact that Americans of both parties supported this peace initiative, people like Senator Mansfield, the leader of the Senate, and others, this is, of course, very important in presenting a united front on the peace initiative. So we were glad that we had support at home, support abroad, good editorial support from those that I saw in the United States.

The immediate reaction in Hanoi, of course, is no indication of what their reaction will be later. The immediate reaction always has to be one of what appears to be rejection in such a case.

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AMERICAN EMBASSY - TOKYO

But if the situation continues as we think it will, of broad world support for the peace initiative, and broad support within the United States, I believe that Hanoi will recognize that this is a very serious proposal. It is one that is fair to them and fair to us, and it is one that they should seriously consider rather than simply to repeat the same old lines that they have repeated previously.

We have made some new proposals and now we think that they have the opportunity to make some new proposals. If they do, we can make some progress. That is the way we are going to play it. We didn't make this simply to have a propaganda line, as I pointed out. We made this proposal because we wanted to cover every base that we could. That is why we offered the cease-fire, a total cease-fire. That is why we offered a total withdrawal of all of our forces, something we have never offered before, if we had mutual withdrawal on the other side.

That is why we had a very forthcoming position on the release of all prisoners without regard to trading one for one or two for one. We will release all we have, they will release all they have. That means not only we, but the South Vietnamese as well, and all Indochina countries.

And while we indicated, too, that we were flexible on these matters, it seems under these circumstances that this is now the chance, the time, to make some progress at the peace table.

Next week we will get the official response from Hanoi in the public session and we would hope that it would indicate some progress. But whether it does or it does not we intend to continue to press this. It takes a long time to get a peace proposal like this after a long war on the tracks, to get progress on it.

We are not going to be discouraged by rejections. We are not going to be discouraged by attitudes that we would expect. Because we feel so strongly that this is a fair proposal we are going to continue to press it in every world forum, in Paris, and, of course, in the event that the opportunity is presented, to the North Vietnamese and other channels.

(Question) Mr. President, I realize you are not trying deliberately to connect any local political considerations, domestic political considerations, but as a pragmatist do you feel there will be a spin-off from this in your own personal popularity in the weeks ahead? Do you think that will be of any benefit to the Republican Party as you move around and try to support and help some of these candidates?

(The President) I don't feel it has that kind of effect. I feel, of course, it was not intended for that. If we intended it for that, I am politically enough astute to have done it about four days before the election. Then we would not have known what the result would have been, and people would have voted their hopes rather than realities.

We did this at the right time, from the standpoint of trying to make progress in the negotiations, and at a time when all of our advisors thought it could be made without jeopardizing our forces in Vietnam.

Now having done that, the effect, politically, I do not think is particularly significant at this time, and particularly in view of the fact that we have bipartisan support for it. If the other side, if another candidate would make it a political issue, then it would be politically significant. But since there is bipartisan support for this proposal, I believe it is not going to have any particular effect on the campaign.

Note to Editors: An outline of President Nixon's October 8 proposal and a list of previous U. S. peace moves are attached.

NOTES ON U.S. PEACE MOVES, 1969-1970

October 8, 1970: President Nixon proposes five-point peace plan as follows:

1. Standstill cease-fire which would involve:
 - a. International supervision,
 - b. No military build up by either side,
 - c. Applicable to all forms of warfare, bombings to assassinations,
 - d. Effective in all of Indochina,
 - e. To be regarded as a bridge or transition to a political settlement.

2. Indochina Peace Conference which would:
 - a. Build on the 1954 and 1962 agreements,
 - b. Supplement but not replace present Paris talks.

3. Negotiate firm withdrawal timetable for all U. S. forces in Indochina.

4. Political settlement which would:
 - a. Reflect the will of the South Vietnamese people,
 - b. Reflect realistically existing political relationship of the various forces in South Vietnam,
 - c. Be one that all parties will abide by, once established.

5. Prisoner of war release (civilians and military) on both sides, immediately.

January 25, 1969: Ambassador Henry Cabot Lodge restates U.S. position making following points: "(a) Re-establishment of the Demilitarised Zone: both sides should publicly declare their readiness to respect the Geneva Agreements of 1954 and there must be an effective system of international inspection and verification; (b) the nations of the region most concerned for Vietnam's peace and stability should participate in any inspection arrangements; (c) there should be early discussion of the mutual release of prisoners."

April 24, 1969: Ambassador Lodge repeated that the US was prepared "to begin the withdrawal of its forces from South Vietnam simultaneously with the external forces of the other side. There must be a withdrawal of all North Vietnamese forces from Cambodia and Laos back to North Vietnam and an agreed end to all military activity in the Demilitarised Zone. The US saw no reason why the military and political aspects of a settlement could not be worked out by the South Vietnamese themselves."

May 8, 1969: Ambassador Lodge put forth the so-called Lodge Plan:

"We are not seeking military victory.

"We believe that peace should give the South Vietnamese people the opportunity to determine their own future without external interference.

"We are seeking a mutual withdrawal of external forces from South Vietnam which could begin simultaneously with US and North Vietnamese withdrawals. This would be tangible and visible evidence of the professed desire of both sides to negotiate a peace settlement.

"We are seeking restoration of the Demilitarised Zone.

"We propose the early release of prisoners of war.

"We will support the reunification of Vietnam in the future by the free decision of the people of the North and the people of the South.

"We support the principle of non-interference between the two Vietnams, pending reunification.

"We support full compliance with the Laos Accords of 1962, and respect for the territorial integrity and neutrality of Cambodia.

"We envisage a cessation of hostilities as an essential element in an ultimate settlement.

"And, finally, we believe that adequate international agreements to verify and supervise the carrying out of military agreements and insure respect for and continued adherence to the military and political elements of a settlement is vital, so that the peace that will be achieved may be enduring. "

May 14, 1969: President Nixon announces the U.S. "Eight Point Plan"

- " 1. As soon as agreement could be reached, all non-South Vietnamese forces would begin withdrawals from South Vietnam.
- " 2. Over a period of 12 months, by agreed stages, the major portions of all U.S., allied and other non-South Vietnamese forces would be withdrawn. At the end of this 12-month period, the remaining US, allied and other non-Vietnamese forces would move into designated base areas and would not engage in combat operations.
- " 3. The remaining US and allied forces would move to complete their withdrawals as the remaining North Vietnamese forces were withdrawn and returned to North Vietnam.
- " 4. An international supervisory body, acceptable to both sides, would be created for the purpose of verifying withdrawals and for any other purposes agreed upon between the two sides.
- " 5. This international body would begin operating in accordance with an agreed timetable and would participate in arranging supervised ceasefires.
- " 6. As soon as possible after the international body was functioning, elections would be held under agreed procedures and under the supervision of the international body.
- " 7. Arrangements would be made for the earliest possible release of prisoners of war on both sides.
- " 8. All parties would agree to observe the Geneva Accords of 1954 regarding Vietnam and Cambodia and the Laos Accords of 1962. "

November 3, 1969: President Nixon in a major address reveals recent, private U. S. initiatives for peace which include: two offers for a rapid, comprehensive settlement which President Nixon made soon after his election through an individual who was directly in contact on a personal basis with the leaders of North Vietnam; personal meetings which the President, Secretary of State Rogers, and the President's assistant for national security affairs, Dr. Henry Kissinger, had with representatives of the Soviet Union to enlist their assistance in getting meaningful negotiations started; extended discussions with representatives of other world governments; a private and personal plea by President Nixon in a letter to North Vietnam's President Ho Chi Minh on July 15, 1969, "to move forward at the conference table toward an early resolution of this tragic war." The President's initiative was rejected.

August 6, 1970: Ambassador David K. E. Bruce makes his initial statement at 78th plenary session:

" I am here, ladies and gentlemen, to discuss all of the proposals we have made both in public and in private as well as to discuss the proposals you have made. Our purpose is to reach the earliest possible negotiated settlement which gives due consideration to the legitimate concerns of both sides. We set forth no preconditions to negotiation. Both sides need to examine each other's position realistically. We both need to take another look.

"If we set about our task at these meetings in this spirit, I believe we could find the way to a genuine negotiation of a settlement of the Vietnam conflict. I ask for your cooperation in this task; I offer you mine. "

1970 statements on negotiations by President Nixon, Secretary of State William Rogers and others:

"To the North Vietnamese tonight I say again -- the door to a negotiated peace remains wide open. Every offer we have made at the conference table, publicly or privately, I herewith reaffirm. We are ready to negotiate, whenever they are ready to negotiate, whenever they are ready to negotiate." (FN 1)

"What we have to do is to go down the diplomatic trail, and that is why we are exploring with the Soviet Union, with not too much success to date. But we are going to continue to explore it with Great Britain, with the Asian countries that are meeting in Djakarta, and through every possible channel, (that is,) methods through which the neutrality of countries like Cambodia and Laos, who cannot possibly defend themselves . . . is guaranteed without having the intervention of foreign forces." (FN 2)

"We have made and will continue to make every possible effort to end this war through negotiation at the conference table rather than through more fighting on the battlefield. Let us look at the record. We have stopped the bombing of North Vietnam. We have cut air operations by over 20 percent. We have announced the withdrawal of over 250,000 of our troops. We have offered to negotiate all issues with only one condition -- that the future of South Vietnam be determined not by North Vietnam, not by the United States, but by the people of South Vietnam themselves." (FN 3)

"A series of efforts has been made to resolve the question of North Vietnamese and Viet Cong presence in Cambodia through negotiation or through various forms of international action. The latter have included appeals to the United Nations, calls for reactivation of the International Control Commission, and proposals by the Secretary General of the United Nations and others for a broad international conference. All of these efforts have been opposed and frustrated by Hanoi . . . We still prefer to end this war by negotiation. However, I am convinced we will not have serious discussions so long as the enemy believes that he can ignore our warnings and reject our flexible proposals for a settlement. We are not increasing our demands. All of our negotiating proposals remain on the table. If negotiations continue to be blocked, we will pursue Vietnamization and withdrawal according to the schedule announced on April 20." (FN 4)

"Q. Mr. President, is the United States prepared to pursue with equal fervor in Paris negotiations to find a political settlement of this war, including the possibility of discussing with the other side a coalition government?"

"A. We are prepared to seek out only in Paris but in any other forum a political settlement of this war. We are not prepared, however, to seek any settlement in which we or anyone else impose upon the people of South Vietnam a government that they do not choose. If the people of South Vietnam choose to change the leaders they presently have, that is a decision we will accept. President Thieu has indicated he will accept it. But we do not intend to impose at the conference table on the people of South Vietnam a government they do not choose." (FN 5)

"Q. Mr. Secretary, on April 20, the President gave a progress report on the troop withdrawal, and down toward the end of it he spoke of the negotiations and he referred to the fact that a fair political solution in Vietnam should reflect the existing relationship of political forces within South Vietnam. What does he mean by that? Is he talking there about allowing the NLF, the Communists to control some local areas if a negotiation process produces that kind of a settlement?

"(The Secretary) Well, Mr. Bailey, we've made it clear from time to time in our statements that we think an election is the best way to determine the will of the people. Now, if there's some other way to determine the will of the people, we certainly would consider that. And what the President was saying that if the Communists have 20 percent of the popular support in South Vietnam, they should have 20 percent of the representation, or 30 percent, whatever it might be. The point is that we're willing to negotiate to attempt to give the other side whatever representation they are entitled to have.

"Q. You're saying then that a coalition government, in and of itself, is not ruled out by us, the only thing ruled out is the imposition of a coalition before negotiations.

"(The Secretary) Or before an election. I don't like the word coalition, because it has a bad connotation. It suggests that the big powers are going to get together and make South Vietnam accept a particular --

"Q. But a government that is 20 percent Communist and 80 percent non-Communist is in effect a coalition.

"(The Secretary) Well, do you call it that in Italy? Is that a coalition government? There are lots of nations that have representation by the Communists that we don't refer to as a coalition government. But, forget the word for the moment. The United States is prepared and so is President Thieu to have the Communists represented in the government if that is the will of the people and if 20 percent of the people would like to have the vote for Communists then they would have 20 percent of the representation in the government." (FN 6)

"Q. Many Americans feel he (President Thieu) will not actually engage in meaningful negotiations if it involves bringing in the so-called other side into the government. Could you answer that directly?

"A. Yes, I can answer that by saying that he has already offered to meet with the other side in secret and privately, and to negotiate anything. As he said when he returned from the Midway meeting, everything is negotiable. In July, last July, he publicly offered the National Liberation Front, elections and participation in all aspects of the elective process, including the setting up of mixed electoral commissions, and he also offered to abide by the outcome of the elections, whatever they were. In October last year, and again in April this year, he offered to discuss cease-fire with the other side. In May, this year, he said that the Republic of Vietnam was ready to participate in any international conference which has the purpose of the restoration of peace in South Vietnam and for the area, and several times he has offered to discuss with the other side the problem of reunification." (FN 7)

"The issues involved are complex. It has been wisely said that the most difficult questions are not conflicts between right and wrong, but between one competing right and another. The great crises with which individuals or nations must deal are seldom free from factual or moral ambiguity. This is a complicated war . . . President Nixon has stated that major immediate goal of our policy. It is, he said, to bring an end to the war in Vietnam in a way that will secure a just peace. We have not sought, and do not seek, victory in the conventional military sense. This is a war of limited objectives. We seek only to meet our past pledges and give the Vietnamese people a reasonable chance to choose freely and develop their own form of government." (FN 8)

"Since January of 1969, we have taken steps on all fronts to move toward peace. Along with the Government of South Vietnam, we have put forward a number of concrete and reasonable proposals to promote genuine negotiations. These proposals were first outlined by me 13 months ago, on May 14, 1969 and by President Thieu on July 11, 1969. Through both public and private channels, our proposals have been repeated and amplified many times since.

"These proposals are designed to secure the removal of all foreign military forces from South Vietnam and to establish conditions in which all political forces can compete freely and fairly in the future of the country. Our principal goal has been to enable the people of South Vietnam to determine their future free of outside interference

"To indicate our good faith, to improve the climate for negotiations, we changed the orders to our commanders in South Vietnam. This has helped to reduce casualties. We have cut tactical air operations in South Vietnam by more than 20 percent. We initiated a troop withdrawal program which,

during the course of next spring, will bring American troop strength 265,500 men below the level authorized when this Administration took office.

These are not the actions of a government pursuing a military solution. They are the decisions of a government seeking a just peace at the conference table." (FN 9)

Footnotes

1. - Richard Nixon, speech, June 3
2. - Richard Nixon, news conference, May 8
3. - Richard Nixon, speech April 30
4. - Richard Nixon, note to U. N. Secretary General May 26
5. - Richard Nixon, press conference, May 8
6. - William Rogers, Face the Nation, June 7
7. - Ellsworth Bunker, television interview, May 10
8. - Stanley Resor, Chicago speech, May 15
9. - Richard Nixon, speech, July 1
