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Press Release - "So Goes the Nation:" The Vietnam Peace Talks

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FEATURE

"SO GOES THE NATION"

By

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THE VIETNAM PEACE TALKS

As I write this column the outlook for President Nixon's five point peace proposal, which he announced in a television broadcast, October 7, is quite uncertain. The initial reaction from the North Vietnamese and National Liberation Front delegates to the Paris Peace Talks was negative. This was unfortunate, but understandable, since the President chose to make the first presentation of United States proposals in a public announcement rather than through Ambassador Bruce at the talks themselves. We also understand that Saigon is not entirely behind the proposals, and there is opposition in the Cambodian government.

American reaction has been favorable, on the whole. For those who have been arguing for such proposals as a cease fire, an international conference on Indochina, a mutual exchange of prisoners of war, and a political settlement which takes all interests into account, the President's announcement was belated but welcome. For the vast majority of Americans, who want the war ended, but who have not been partisans for one approach or another, the President's statement gave new hope that the fighting and the killing may be coming to an end. Only those who are committed to winning a military victory in Indochina stand outside the mixture of support, hope, and skepticism which greeted the President's speech.

Speculation about the future of the President's proposals will take two courses. The first relates to the prospects for success in Paris and in Southeast Asia. The second concerns the effect of his move on the November congressional elections. The second question is likely to assume some prominence as the negotiators in Paris settle down to the hard questions related to President Nixon's five point program and Madam Binh's eight point proposal. The President denied that his proposals constituted a "gimmick", but it would

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be naive to assume that he was not aiming for political advantage at home in the timing and the manner of his announcement.

Because the President of the United States occupies such a commanding position on public issues, there is no reason to assume that he will not get a major part of the attention on the Vietnam peace issue in the next few weeks. It should not be forgotten, however, that the steps proposed by the President have been urged on him for several months by some, and have been put forward by others for several years. Some of those proposals have been attacked as coming from "unpatriotic" Americans, by some of the President's closest political allies.

But the primary issue is not the political benefits the President or any other political leader may gain from the efforts to end the war in Southeast Asia. The primary issue must remain the best ways to end the fighting and the killing. The President's speech of October 7 did not settle that issue. It simply opened the door for United States negotiators to pursue some alternatives with their counterparts at the bargaining table in Paris. The success of the proposals will depend on the authority and flexibility the President has given Ambassador Bruce, and the determination and vigor with which the Ambassador is able to pursue the negotiations. It also depends on the kind of response the other side gives in the weeks ahead, and the attitude of the South Vietnamese government.

The President has made his proposals. Now it is time for the diplomats to go to work in their own way and without interference. All those concerned with an end to the fighting and killing must forego the political temptations in the situation and exercise a high degree of statesmanship and restraint. With that, we may succeed.

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