THE NIXONS'

WALTER BENNETT

PAT NIXON WITH WHITE HOUSE TREE
"The more the better."

ever, the entire family will not be together on Christmas. Julie and David Eisenhower are flying—student fare—to Brussels, where David's father, John, serves as U.S. Ambassador to Belgium.

In all the White House Christmas cheer, there was only one discordant incident. As the President prepared to turn on the 5,000 lights decorating the big national Christmas tree in the Ellipse, he declared: "May this moment be one when America looked forward to a decade in which Americans could enjoy Christmas at peace with all the countries of the world." Antiwar demonstrators in front of the tree raised an antiphonal chant. "Peace now!" said the protesters, who call themselves "the Washington Area Grinch Resistance" after the character in the Dr. Seuss story, *How the Grinch Stole Christmas.* "Stop the war!" they chorused.

Raising his voice, the President continued: "Today America is not at peace. What we want for this nation is not only peace now, but peace in the years to come—peace for all people in the years to come."

THE WAR
Changed Atmosphere

Since he took over the presidency, Richard Nixon has operated on the assumption that Hanoi expects to win the Viet Nam War in Washington, as it won an earlier phase against the French in Paris. Last week, in announcing that the U.S. would withdraw 50,000 more troops by April 15, the President took another step to force North Viet Nam to re-examine that basic premise.

Nixon's announcement brought to 110,000 the number of troops scheduled to be removed by next spring. A few critics said that his pace was too slow, others that it was entirely too fast—but there were not too many complaints from either side. The new withdrawal left Nixon slightly behind the timetable he had hoped to beat—former Defense Secretary Clark Clifford's estimate that 100,000 men could be pulled out by no later than the end of 1969. But in Nixon's view, the move served a more important purpose. It helped to mute domestic dissent, making it more difficult for leaders of the slipping antiwar movement to sustain interest in their drive for a faster U.S. disengagement.

Gig to Drag. The change in atmosphere has been remarkably swift. White House aides concede that the protest movement was rapidly gaining momentum at the time of its nationwide Moratorium Day activities of Oct. 15. The President's Nov. 3 speech urging the "silent majority" to speak out gave thrust to the counterprotesters. Yet his defiant attitude toward antiwar demonstrators also energized the massive peace marches in Washington and San Francisco on Nov. 15.

That proved to be a high point. Until recently, says an Administration official, "the home front was running in the French pattern." No longer. Says another Nixon lieutenant: "The steam has gone out of the protest movement." Sam Brown, coordinator of the Viet Nam Moratorium Committee, grudgingly agrees. The President, Brown admits, scored "a tremendous political coup by managing to identify himself with the cause of peace." The antiwar movement, he adds, is suffering a "short-term kind of lethargy."

Other peace leaders hope that it will only be short-term. They see no point in trying to stage other mass rallies, and are worried about possible violence, dwindling funds and the probability that frigid weather will bring disappointing turnouts. "The first time around, a march is a gig—the second time, it's a drag," observes one analyst of the movement. This month's emphasis on low-key community efforts has yielded little publicity, although planned Christmas Eve prayer vigils around the country this week might do better. The Moratorium Committee has also decided to abandon plans to increase its activities by one day each month. Asked Marge Sklencar, one of its coordinators: "What could we do for eight days in May?"

Moving adroitly to exploit the protest doldrums, Defense Secretary Melvin Laird announced last week that troop withdrawals would make possible a 10% cutback in draft calls for 1970—to a total of 225,000. At the same time President Nixon in his ten-minute televised speech again appealed effectively for broad backing. Though Hanoi is counting on "division in the U.S." to bring it victory, he said, the "demonstration of support by the American people for our plan to bring a just peace has dashed those hopes." The statement might have been somewhat premature, but Nixon's support is clearly growing. A Gallup poll published last week showed that even on college campuses Nixon's Viet Nam policies are now approved by 50% of the students. Among

Top of the Decade

With the 1960s approaching their end, TIME's editors have looked back to recall, in each department, the ten biggest, most consequential events of those turbulent years. Herewith the top news stories in national affairs:

- Bay of Pigs, 1961.
- Freedom rides start in South, 1961.
- Civil rights march on Washington, 1963.
- John Kennedy assassinated, 1963.
- Race riot in Watts, 1965.
- President Johnson announces that he will not seek re-election, orders partial bombing halt in Viet Nam, 1968.
- The Rev. Martin Luther King Jr. assassinated, 1968.
- Robert Kennedy assassinated, 1968.
- Disorders in Chicago during Democratic National Convention, 1968.
- Nixon's political comeback, 1968.

the nation's adults, the Administration's war policies enjoy 64% support.

Battlefield reversal would inject new vigor into the protest movement, as the President knows well. In his address, he took note of "one disturbing new development." Communist infiltration into South Viet Nam, he reported, has recently risen "substantially." His aides estimated the rate at some 8,000 men a month, about 70% of last year's unusually high pace. Most of the new troops seem to be moving into sanctuaries along the Cambodian border, prompting some military advisers to predict another coordinated *Tet* offensive around February or March.

One adviser quoted by the President last week contends that the war in the field is going so well that a new Communist offensive would make little difference because it could not succeed. Sir Robert Thompson, a top British expert on guerrilla warfare who was commissioned by Nixon to reassess the situation in Viet Nam, insists that the enemy is just not capable of mounting an effective drive (*see box*).

Air of Confidence. Whether the South Vietnamese will be able to handle the Communists as the U.S. withdrawal continues remains uncertain. None of the units replacing U.S. outfits has been tested in sustained heavy combat, and some still suffer high desertion rates and severe shortages of ammunition. But they are now doing more of the fighting, and their fatalities are regularly running four times as high as the figure for U.S. troops. Perhaps most important, the government is belatedly enforcing full mobilization, and claims to have added 88,000 troops in the past six months. That more than covers U.S. withdrawals so far, and brings South Vietnamese troop strength to 1,090,000.

In Saigon, according to TIME Correspondent Marsh Clark, while "statements of optimism are far more muted than in the halcyon days that preceded *Tet* in 1968, there is an unmistakable air of confidence." For one thing, there is the feeling that pacification has finally taken hold. Moreover, the Thieu regime, says Clark, "is a going concern. While Thieu is not a popular hero, he heads a government that is stable."

Whether the Nixon plan will really work depends on two elements. The first is whether Hanoi resumes all-out offensive tactics, which could set back pacification, increase U.S. casualties and force Nixon to slow the withdrawals. The second is whether the South Vietnamese prove capable of handling the Communists and willing to persevere. "As a nation, they are young, uneducated, poor and very tired," Clark concludes. "But unless the Communists start improving their situation on the battlefield and in the hamlets, we may be surprised to discover the fact of an independent, anti-Communist and quite impertinent South Viet Nam."

The President's Guerrilla Expert

THOUGH Viet Nam has been his specialty since 1961, Sir Robert Thompson was never influential with either John Kennedy or Lyndon Johnson. It was Richard Nixon who embraced his views wholeheartedly—most likely because they coincide with his own.

Suave, controlled and bearing a striking resemblance to the late actor Herbert Marshall, the Cambridge-educated Thompson, 53, was knighted for devising the strategy that ultimately defeated local Chinese Communist terrorists in Malaya in the 1950s. He was then Britain's secretary for defense of the Federation of Malaya; later (1961-65), he served as head of the British advisory mission in Viet Nam. Now retired from government, he is an occasional consultant for the Rand Corp., the noted U.S. think tank. His experience in Malaya convinced Thompson that counterinsurgency does not require massive forces, large-scale bombing or continual pursuit of the enemy. He contends that such tactics play into the hands of guerrillas by increasing casualties and enlarging the scope of the combat. Thompson emphasizes localized "police" actions to protect the population against guerrilla attacks and to ferret out subversives. That proved easier in Malaya, where the terrorists were often ethnically different from the local population, than in Viet Nam, where friend and foe may be indistinguishable. The Malaya guerrillas also had no handy sanctuaries across nearby borders.

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Thompson's perspective has brought him alternately in and out of phase with the prevailing U.S. strategies in Viet Nam. He still subscribes to the domino theory that a Communist success in Viet Nam would jeopardize other shaky governments in Southeast Asia and even as far away as Latin America. He approved Kennedy's commitment of U.S. advisers and his accent on unconventional Special Forces. He advised the late South Vietnamese President Ngo Dinh Diem to undertake a program of protected "strategic hamlets," but the program flopped when Diem moved too quickly, ignoring Thompson's warning to make certain that his troops could hold each area. In *No Exit from Viet Nam,* written after the enemy's 1968 *Tet* offensive, Thompson indicts President Johnson's excessive buildup and General William Westmoreland's use of unwieldy units to carry out unproductive "search and destroy" missions. Thompson warmly endorses the more limited "spoiler" tactics devised by General Creighton Abrams.

AP

SIR ROBERT THOMPSON

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At President Nixon's request, Thompson recently spent five weeks touring Viet Nam. He found some of the improvements since 1968 to be "astounding." Though the *Tet* offensive was a Communist psychological victory, he contends, it was militarily "suicidal." "The thing that surprised me more than anything else was the extent to which the government has regained control in the countryside," he said last week. "The V.C.'s population base has been eroded. The population is gradually losing confidence in the ability of the Viet Cong to win. It is coming in toward the government. The war isn't won, but we're in the kind of position from which we could win."

Thompson is not as worried as some U.S. military advisers about current Communist infiltration. He contends that the enemy has lost at least 500,000 troops in the past two years—roughly comparable to the U.S. Army's losing 5,000,000 men. The replacements, he reports, are mainly ill-trained teen-agers. "The Viet Cong are no longer 10 feet tall. They are more like frightened 16-year-olds." Thompson does not, however, see a quick end to the war. "It could take three to five years before Hanoi is compelled to give up her purpose and to negotiate a real settlement," he says. Until that happens, he advises, the allies should adopt "a long-haul, low-cost strategy" that relies more on the South Vietnamese army—a prescription that fits Richard Nixon's "Vietnamization" program perfectly.