

U.S. Plans Ways to Bolster Saigon for '72 Enemy Push

By WILLIAM BEECHER
Special to The New York Times

JUN 15 1971
JUN 16 1971

WASHINGTON, June 15—The Nixon Administration is engaged in a broad policy review aimed at determining courses of action that might improve South Vietnam's ability to withstand military assaults next year, after most American forces have been withdrawn.

"In my view," one senior Government planner said, "this is the most important review we've made since the decision to pull out the first troops two years ago."

The review is being conducted against a backdrop of increased Congressional demands to speed up the disengagement process and of budgetary pressures to cut costs in the war zone.

Other key developments include an estimate by the National Security Council that North Vietnam is building toward a new offensive in the South next year. The Administration is also concerned about the effects a major South Vietnamese military defeat in the spring of 1972 might have on Republican fortunes in the

Presidential election in November.

Well-placed Administration sources disclose that, against the expected North Vietnamese threat, officials are focusing on the following major questions:

¶How rapidly can most of the remaining United States forces be withdrawn after the 184,000-man level is reached on Dec. 17. Many planners expect President Nixon to scale down to a residual force of 30,000 to 70,000 men by July 1, 1972, but to leave enough flexibility in the pace of reductions so that many of them can be timed for May and June.

¶Should this residual force include many helicopter and artillery units to "stiffen" South Vietnamese defenses, or should it be made up primarily of advisers to Saigon's forces plus large numbers of supply teams to pack up the billions of dollars worth of weapons and equipment that are to be returned home?

¶Should all or most of the

Continued on Page 15, Column 1

Continued From Page 1, Col. 6

10 jet fighter-bomber squadrons in Vietnam be returned along with American ground troops? One plan would remove all of them from Vietnam but shift several to Thailand where they would join with eight squadrons already there in continuing attacks on the Ho Chi Minh supply trail in Laos.

¶Should the South Vietnamese Government be persuaded to reinforce its northern provinces, considered the most likely area of enemy assault, and encouraged to conduct many small hit-and-run ground attacks into southern Laos next winter and spring to keep the enemy forces off-balance?

'69 Policy Shift Cited

In stressing the importance of the current review, a senior planner said the initial troop-withdrawal decision taken two years ago represented a reversal of the strategy of maximum pressure on the enemy in South Vietnam and a decision to "train equip and force Saigon to begin taking over its own war."

"Until now," this official continued, "we've retained enough ground and air reserves in Vietnam so we could back Saigon either against an attack or in an assault of its own, in Cambodia, for instance, and in Laos. But now we're at the point where even this combat reserve is coming out and Saigon will really be on its own."

Administration officials disclosed that a recently completed study by the National Security Council estimated that Hanoi had seven military options during the next dry season, which runs from November through May.

These range from continuation of the present strategy of protracted war, involving sporadic attacks on outposts and rocket assaults on coastal bases and South Vietnamese cities to all-out offensives throughout South Vietnam and Cambodia.

The most likely prospect, the analysis concluded, is of offensives in the northern provinces of South Vietnam, closest to North Vietnamese bases and supplies, and possibly in the Central Highlands.

Foe Seeking to Extend Trails

Planners at the Pentagon, the State Department and elsewhere point out that Hanoi's unexpected efforts to keep the Ho Chi Minh complex of trails open to traffic through the current rainy season, together with its efforts to expand the supply routes westward, have convinced most analysts that new offensives are being planned.

Analysts believe that the North Vietnamese may attempt some small-scale rocket and ground attacks prior to South Vietnam's presidential election in October in an attempt to undermine President Nguyen Van Thieu's chances of re-election.

But they generally do not believe that North Vietnamese and Vietcong forces are capable of a sustained offensive that soon. The enemy forces will not have built up enough supplies for large-scale operations until at least January or February, they feel.

One general said: "Next summer is the make-or-break period. If we can get the Saigon Government successfully through the dry season, they'll have almost another year to further bolster their position. And, not incidentally, it should also carry us safely past our own November elections."