

NIXON SAYS 45,000 MORE U.S. TROOPS WILL QUIT VIETNAM BEFORE FEB. 1; TO KEEP 139,000 THERE AS PEACE AID

NEW TOTAL 139,000

President Ties Future Cuts to Progress on P.O.W.'s and Truce

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News conference transcript
is printed on Page 10.

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Special to The New York Times

WASHINGTON, Nov. 12—President Nixon announced today that he would withdraw 45,000 more American soldiers from South Vietnam by Feb. 1, retaining a force of 139,000 men to strengthen his hand in seeking a negotiated settlement of the war.

At an unscheduled news conference in the White House, the President said that a decision on future withdrawals would be based in part on progress in obtaining the release of American prisoners of war and on the prospects of a cease-fire throughout Indochina.

But he emphasized that he could not now foresee a "striking breakthrough" at the deadlocked peace talks in Paris and that he could not offer "false encouragement" to the prisoners' families.

'Further Down the Road'

Underscoring his desire to bargain the end of the war, the President said that American air power would continue to support South Vietnamese combat forces "until there is a negotiated settlement or—looking further down the road—until the South Vietnamese have developed the capability to handle the situation themselves."

In response to a question he remarked that the Americans still in Vietnam had "already concluded" their ground combat role by disengaging from all but defensive operations. That view had been stated by officials before, but its reiteration could be interpreted as a signal of sincerity to enemy negotiators. [Question 5.]

[Questions 9, Page 10.] The decision to limit the next withdrawal phase to a two-month period and retain a sizable American ground force in Vietnam appeared to be based on tactical considerations as well. The withdrawals will occur during the dry season, when infiltration of Communist forces and combat activity are normally at their heaviest.

In Saigon, the Government said that the new withdrawal program was based on improved security in South Vietnam, The Associated Press reported.]

Mr. Nixon said that if the enemy activity stepped up significantly, "it could be very dangerous to our sharply decreased forces in South Viet-

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NIXON WIDENS CUT IN VIETNAM FORCE

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nam."

This withdrawal phase, the shortest in duration of the six scheduled by Mr. Nixon since he began pulling out American forces in mid-1969, will leave 139,000 troops in the war zone nine months before the Presidential election. When Mr. Nixon scheduled a 100,000-man withdrawal last April, he asked to be held accountable at the election if he failed to end the American involvement.

He described the two-month phase as a "substantially increased" rate of withdrawal despite its brevity. For the two-month period the average rate of reduction would be 22,500 a month. During the seven-month withdrawal phase that will end with a troop ceiling of 184,000 on Dec. 1, the "withdrawals represented a rate of about 14,300 a month.

Taken as a whole since the withdrawals began the monthly rate through January would be 13,200.

In response to a question Mr. Nixon said that it would not be helpful to link the attempt to end involvement in Vietnam with his forthcoming journeys to Peking and Moscow.

"We will, of course, welcome any assistance," he said, "but we are not counting on it from either source." [Question 10.]

He appeared to be attaching greatest importance to an agreement reached directly with the North Vietnamese and Vietcong as a means of achieving peace.

He said the United States had not "given up on the negotiating front"—leaving open the possibility that a forum other than Paris might be the site of negotiations. The announcement today, Mr. Nixon added, "is somewhat of an indication that we have not given up on the negotiating front."

Effort on Prisoners

Despite the unwillingness of Communist delegates in Paris to separate the prisoner issue from deliberations on the American role in Vietnam, the President said that he would continue to press for a negotiated release of prisoners because "that is the track on which we eventually are going to have success in getting our prisoners back." [Question 7.]

The withdrawal announcement was the first that Mr. Nixon made directly to White House correspondents rather than in a televised address to the American people.

There had been speculation until the last few days that he might set a terminal date for involvement in Vietnam and announce the gradual reduction of United States troops to a small residual—or as the White House now prefers to call it—"transitional" force.

The President appeared at the regular 4 P.M. briefing held daily by Ronald L. Ziegler, his press secretary, and made a brief statement on the withdrawal. Then he answered questions for 25 minutes on Vietnam and a few other subjects.

Later the President and Mrs. Nixon flew by helicopter to Camp David, the Presidential retreat in Maryland. He will return to the White House Sunday.

Mr. Nixon said that 25,000 men would come home in December because, "obviously, we would like to get a few more out before Christmas," and he scheduled 20,000 more.

Although Mr. Nixon has consistently linked the withdrawals to three criteria—the level

of enemy activity in South Vietnam, progress in turning over American combat duties to the South Vietnamese and efforts to negotiate seriously toward a conclusion of the war—he altered the criteria somewhat today. The changes appeared to lay greater stress on the hope of achieving a negotiating breakthrough.

The factors he will consider before announcing additional withdrawals by Feb. 1, Mr. Nixon said, are these:

¶Enemy activity, "particularly" infiltration that could imperil the shrinking American forces in Vietnam.

¶Progress in the Vietnamization program.

¶"Any progress that may have been made" on release of prisoners "wherever they are in Southeast Asia" and toward obtaining a cease fire for all of Southeast Asia.

Mr. Nixon did not link the third factor specifically to the Paris talks.

Decline in Casualties

Asked whether he could foresee the end of the United States combat role in Vietnam, Mr. Nixon said that based on casualty rates—which he said had fallen from 300 a week when he took office nearly

three years ago to 10 per week during the last month or so—American combat forces were already in an entirely defensive role. All ground offensive operations are undertaken by the South Vietnamese, he said.

At the same time Mr. Nixon stressed his view that it is increasingly important to continue American air strikes on Communist routes of infiltration into Vietnam.

He warned that "if we see any substantial step-up in infiltration" through Laos and Cambodia, "we will have to not only continue our air strikes, we will have to step them up." [Question 9.]

Responding to a query whether the United States was "sliding into another Vietnam in Cambodia," the President said: "In Vietnam, conscious decisions were made to send Americans there to become involved in combat. I am not criticizing the decision; I am reflecting what the situation was." [Question 19.]

Asked if he planned to keep a residual force of 40,000 or 50,000 troops in Vietnam until the prisoner issue was settled, Mr. Nixon responded by again stressing that a negotiated settlement would mean a "total withdrawal" of American forces.

He said that would include "discontinuation of our air strikes" as well as the withdrawal of Americans stationed elsewhere in Asia in support of the combat forces in Vietnam.

Without a negotiated settlement, he said, it would be necessary to maintain some residual force—primarily to use as a bargaining counter in search of release of the prisoners and, secondarily, to continue defending the South Vietnamese from a "Communist takeover."

The White House did not specify which elements would be involved in the December and January withdrawals. Military planners from the Pentagon and from Vietnam will meet within two weeks in Honolulu to work out the list. There was speculation, unconfirmed by the Pentagon, that one or two brigades of the 101st Airborne Division would be involved.

Saigon Upholds Decision

SAIGON, South Vietnam, Saturday, Nov. 13 (AP)—The South Vietnamese Government said today that President Nixon's decision to cut United States troop strength by 45,000 over the next two months was based on improved security.

A Ministry of Foreign Affairs communiqué said:

"In consideration of the improved general security situation now prevailing in Vietnam, the Government of the United States and of the Republic of Vietnam have held consultations on the redeployment of American troops back to the United States.

"The two Governments have decided that a total of 45,000 American soldiers will be pulled out from Vietnam during the two month period of December 1971 and January 1972. This reduction of troops is being carried out concurrently with the common efforts toward the modernization and strengthening of the Vietnamese armed forces."