

Effort to Make a Deal

For the First Time Nixon Is Directing Troop Move to the Communist Capitals

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WASHINGTON, Nov. 12 — interest in progress at the Paris talks with the North Vietnamese and Vietcong. He implied that he was looking elsewhere, and officials believe his coming face-to-face meetings with the Chinese and Soviet leaders, have significantly augmented the possibilities.

The President indicated that he cannot afford to count on the influence of the Russians and Chinese on Hanoi, but their help would surely be welcomed — and we seemed to imply — reciprocated.

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ment can buy a bargain.

Working on the apparently justified premise that most Americans are reconciled to his pace of withdrawal, Mr. Nixon was trying to gain some tactical flexibility, even in the midst of a strategic retreat. The newly scheduled pullout of 45,000 troops will leave about 140,000 for bargaining in 1972, as well as the still overwhelming American air and naval power in Southeast Asia and the promise of continuing military aid and advice to the Indochina nations.

The President, it is thought, seeks that flexibility to satisfy both fears and hopes for the coming year in the war.

The fears related to what an anxious Government in Hanoi might still wish to accomplish on the battlefield. Mr. Nixon's private intelligence reports are said to be full of doubt that the North Vietnamese could mount another major offensive in 1972, but he wants to be ready to support the South Vietnamese in case of major challenge.

Some officials believe that Hanoi, having once toppled a Government of France and sealed the retirement of President Lyndon B. Johnson, may feel driven to pay even a heavy price for the chance to injure, Mr. Nixon politically. Against that possibility the President has long been seeking both military and diplomatic protection.

As he said again today, Hanoi's restraint will be a key factor determining the size and pace of the next troop cut. And as he hinted, he hopes through his new contacts with Peking and his warmer relations with Moscow to get them to urge restraint on the North Vietnamese.

The President's hopes for next year relate to the ever broader objectives of obtaining the release of American prisoners and, perhaps, a larger Indochina settlement that would ease his concerns over Laos and Cambodia as well as South Vietnam.

In reciting the criteria for continuing troop cuts, Mr. Nixon played down his former

Anxiety in Hanoi

By proceeding with their own negotiations with the United States, the large Communist powers have already evoked anxiety in Hanoi and helped Mr. Nixon to reduce the Vietnam inflammation in world diplomacy and American political life. Though they keep telling Washington that it must deal directly with the North Vietnamese to wind up the war, the President reiterated his hope for a larger settlement on Indochina, which would have to involve the Soviet Union and China as well as other nations.

Only a wider settlement could offer some relief to hard-pressed Cambodia and Laos, a reduction of American military aid to those countries and the ultimate disengagement of American air and sea power from the Indochina theater.

The moderate scope and low key of the President's announcement also offered him some domestic advantage. It leaves him free, as the pressures of a campaign year may require, to announce further large troops cuts in 1972, to proclaim the end of Vietnam service for draftees, to adjust the size of the residual force that his commanders would want retained in the war zone and to hold back the date of final disengagement for maximum diplomatic or political advantage.

Mr. Nixon's comment that American forces had ceased offensive operations and were now in a defensive posture has no new practical significance. American forces have not participated in a major offensive since the drive into Laos last year, and even then their ground combat role was supportive and defensive.

As the President observed, American casualties have been running at 10 a week compared with as many as 300 a week when he came into office. Though the war rages on, at great cost to the people and armies of Indochina, that decline has becalmed the American public and allowed Mr. Nixon to improvise with the final stages of his withdrawal plan.