

Nixon Is Still Weighing Another Troop Reduction

NYTimes By BERNARD GWERTZMAN APR 25 1972

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WASHINGTON, April 24— President Nixon continued to deliberate today over whether he should order further troop cuts or suspend the withdrawal of United States ground troops from South Vietnam in light of the North Vietnam offensive there.

For a fourth consecutive day, Mr. Nixon remained at Camp David, in nearby Maryland, meeting with only a few close advisers and mulling the political and international implications of his Vietnam moves.

As the capital awaited the President's decision, a furor developed over reports from Paris that Mrs. Nguyen Thi Binh, the chief Vietcong negotiator, had sent a letter to members of Congress urging them to use their constitutional powers to end American involvement in Vietnam.

Several Congressmen and Senators angrily denounced the letter, even before most of them had received their copies. The White House, late in the day, joined the attack. Gerald L. Warren, the deputy press secretary, said, "I think members of Congress have every right to express outrage."

'Overplaying' Its Hand

"This presumptuous effort to inject herself into the American political process is folly on her part," Mr. Warren said. "The enemy is overplaying its propaganda hand. Its leaders obviously do not understand our system. Members of Congress are elected to represent the American people and to be responsive to the American people, and not to be responsive to the propaganda ploys of the enemy. We feel this arrogant effort by Mrs. Binh won't work because American Congressmen understand their responsibility."

In Paris this morning a Vietcong spokesman said Mrs. Binh's letter was sent to Congressmen by mail. It said, in part, "According to the U.S. Constitution, the Congress has the power to decide on the question of war and peace. Therefore, I urge you to stop President Nixon in taking an adventurous path wrought with unpredictable consequences."

Administration officials said that Mr. Nixon had been meeting with three aides—Henry A. Kissinger, his advisor on national security, John D. Ehrlichman, domestic affairs adviser, and H. R. Haldeman, the White House's chief coordinator—on what to do about the number of troops in Vietnam.

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Mr. Nixon has also solicited recommendations from Saigon on whether it would be prudent to make any cuts in American troops beyond the total of 69,000 due to be reached May 1. **Another Announcement Pledged**

When Mr. Nixon made his last troop-reduction announcement, Jan. 13, he said the level of 69,000 would be reached by May 1 and that another announcement would be made before that date "with regard to a further withdrawal."

The United States command in Saigon announced today that 8,500 troops were pulled out last week, leaving troop strength at 76,500.

Because of the increase in air and sea power in Indochina since Hanoi's offensive began at the end of March, however, the number of sailors and airmen attached to the Seventh Fleet in the South China Sea has been increased by 21,000 men, to a total of 38,000 in recent weeks. The Navy strength is not included in overall troop totals in Vietnam.

The success of Mr. Nixon's Vietnamization program has been measured in this country primarily by the speed with which he ordered American troops home. When he took office Jan. 20, 1969 the authorized troop strength was 549,500. Since June of that year, he has made seven withdrawal announcements.

The South Vietnamese were expected to take over the burden of fighting in their country. But the latest battlefield reports have caused considerable concern in Washington, particularly the apparent ability of the North Vietnamese to make significant progress in the Central Highlands area.

Since the Hanoi offensive began, Administration spokesmen have said that the President has ruled out the reintroduction of American ground forces in Vietnam. They have hedged on whether Mr. Nixon would make any further cuts once the 69,000 level was reached.

Of that total only about 6,000 will be combat troops. Some officials fear that a further withdrawal announcement might cause the South Vietnamese severe morale problems. But failure by Mr. Nixon to make another cut could lead to charges here that his Vietnamization program was not working.

The announcement due before May 1 had once been described as probably the final one before a Vietnam settlement. Mr. Nixon had said that he would keep a "residual force" of 25,000 to 35,000 men in Vietnam until all prisoners of war were released.