

Vietnam Donnybrook

By John H. Averill
L.A. Times Service

Washington

In staking out their separate Vietnam positions last week, President Nixon and Senate Democrats put themselves on a collision course that is likely to dwarf any of their previous confrontations.

This is because the two sides have now taken positions that are all but irreconcilable.

Analysis and Opinion

The Democrats, at majority of least a large tions that

them, adopted a resolution that calls for total withdrawal of all U.S. forces from all of Indochina within the next two years.

Mr. Nixon, in his foreign policy message to Congress on Thursday, made it clear that a significant U.S. presence will remain in South Vietnam well beyond two years.

implied that the price for total U.S. withdrawal would be not only the release of U.S. war prisoners but also a North Vietnamese withdrawal from Cambodia and Laos as well as South Vietnam.

UNNOTICED

This latter point went largely unnoticed before Congress adjourned for the weekend.

But Senate attaches who spotted it said it unquestionably will stiffen the resolve of those in Congress who have become increasingly disenchanted with the President's Indochina policy.

In addition, the President Just how the disenchantment or the Democrats' resolution will be translated into action is thus far unresolved and probably won't be for some time. That it will be done is taken for granted.

"There is no question but that the President is on a collision course with us," said Senator Ernest F. Hollings (Dem-S.C.), a member of the 14-man Senate Democratic policy committee that approved the Vietnam resolution Feb. 22. "It is my guess that as soon as the first relevant appropriations bill comes along something like our resolution will be offered as an amendment to it."

OFF GUARD

The policy committee's adoption of the resolution came without any advance warning and caught the White House off guard. It also caught unaware many Democrats who aren't on the committee.

Senate Majority Leader Mike Mansfield (Dem-Mont.), who had privately drafted the resolution over the previous weekend, presented it to the caucus of the Senate's 55 Democrats.

It provoked an acrimonious three-hour debate. In the end the resolution was approved by a vote of 36 to 12, with two abstentions. Two others approved it with reservations and three senators who were absent had not been contacted as the week ended.

The resolution was in five parts, the first being the call for total withdrawal from Indochina. The other four dealt with the role of Senate Democrats on domestic matters, none of which provoked controversy.

The withdrawal resolution said, in brief, that "... in the 92nd Congress the Senate majority should work to ...

end the involvement in Indochina and to bring about the withdrawal of all U.S. forces and the release of all prisoners in a time certain."

Although the last four words, "in a time certain," caused some confusion, Mansfield told reporters there was no room for doubt. He said the resolution meant total withdrawal before the current 92nd Congress expires on Jan. 3, 1973.

Thus, for the first time since the United States became involved in Indochina, did a significant faction of the Democratic party come

out unequivocally for total withdrawal within a certain time.

Largely because of Mansfield's low-keyed explanation of the resolution, the Republicans were slow to grasp its significance. Senate Minority Leader Hugh Scott (Rep-Pa.) called the resolution "vague." Senator Robert Dole (Rep-Kan.), the new Republican National Chairman, said, "To the extent that the Senate Democrats' action signifies a sincere endorsement of President Nixon's strategy for peace, I am for it."

However, by the following

Ahead

day the Republican rhetoric was far different. Senator Robert P. Griffin (Rep-Mich.), the minority whip, denounced the resolution as "bad politics" and said it "appears to be an attempt by Senate Democrats to make political capital out of a war that President Nixon inherited and from which he has been striving diligently and successfully to disengage us."

Mansfield disagreed.

For years a critic of U.S. involvement in Vietnam, Mansfield told Griffin:

"It is too bad that, in our scheme of things, when one

party or the other takes stand on a particular issue such as this, the cry of politics is raised."

What the resolution was designed to do, Mansfield said, was strengthen the President's hand by letting him know that if he withdrew all U.S. forces from Vietnam within the next two years he would have the support of Senate Democrats.

SKEPTICISM

Although Mansfield's remarks were greeted with skepticism by the Republicans, his past record would appear to underscore his sincerity.

It was learned that Mansfield and the policy committee, at several secret meetings last summer, discussed means of how Senate Democrats could persuade Mr. Nixon to undertake an accelerated and total withdrawal from Vietnam. It was finally agreed that Mansfield should call on the President and inform him that if he would subscribe to a total withdrawal he would have the support of Senate Democrats.

Mansfield carried the message to Mr. Nixon, who is said to have listened but made no commitments.