

3 SENATORS AVER NIXON SAID HE HAD PULLOUT DEADLINE

But White House Disagrees
With Version of Session
Before Vietnam Talk

DISPUTE OVER BRIEFING

Ziegler Declares President
Told Them Nothing That
Public Did Not Hear

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WASHINGTON, April 8 — Three Senate leaders said today that President Nixon indicated at a private briefing yesterday that he intended to withdraw all United States troops from Indochina by a specific date, but the White House vehemently denied it.

One of the Senators, the Republican leader, Hugh Scott of Pennsylvania, quoted the President as having said, "I have a date in mind. I have a plan and timetable for ending this war."

But Ronald L. Ziegler, the White House press secretary, insisted in reply that Senator Scott, the Republican Whip, Robert P. Griffin of Michigan, and the Democratic Whip, Robert C. Byrd of West Virginia, had not been told anything at a private meeting with the President that Mr. Nixon did not say to the American people in his televised speech last night.

A Plan Is Acknowledged

Mr. Ziegler said that Mr. Nixon had a definite plan for concluding American involvement in the war but added: "It would be incorrect to say the President has, at this time, a specific date which he feels his plan will be accomplished by."

In his address last night, Mr. Nixon said his goal was "total American withdrawal from Vietnam," but he specifically rejected demands that he set a public date to achieve the goal. That might be popular, the President said, but it would give away the bargaining counter to obtain the release of American prisoners of war and would permit the enemy to plan his attacks at a time of greatest American vulnerability.

The three Senators all said, in separate remarks to reporters, that they received the impression from Mr. Nixon two hours before he made the speech that he had a terminal date in mind, even if he could not disclose it.

They suggested that the date

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would coincide with the end of the President's term, but were not in agreement on a precise time. Senator Scott said that the date might "float" a few days or weeks one way or another but that "I am satisfied he has a fixed date for ending the war."

Senator Griffin said that "in a practical sense," the date would coincide with the November, 1972, Presidential election.

"He did not set a definite date," Senator Byrd told newsmen, "but I had the very definite impression from what was said that the President has a date in mind."

One suggestion raised on Capitol Hill was that Mr. Nixon, seeking to satisfy members of his own party who are eager to tell the public the war will be over soon, would prefer to allow the impression to come from the Senators rather than the White House.

Senator Scott, in a statement issued immediately after the President's speech, said, "I know he has a timetable. For obvious reasons, he cannot tip his hand to the enemy."

Declines to Be Specific

Mr. Ziegler, pressed for an explanation, at one point declined to be specific about the situation because he said it could lead to "misinterpretation" of the President's policy. He insisted that "what the President meant was very clear in his remarks last night."

The White House was trying, meanwhile, to produce a set of statistics that would support the assertion Mr. Nixon made in his address that "South Vietnamese casualties have also dropped significantly in the past two years."

Official South Vietnamese figures, made available by the Pentagon today, showed that there were 21,833 South Vietnamese killed in combat in 1969 and 23,346 killed in 1970.

Asked for an explanation, a senior White House adviser to the President said that Mr. Nixon based his statement on a comparison of the number of South Vietnamese killed in the first two months of 1969, as Mr. Nixon took office, and the first two months of 1971.

Superior Termed Incorrect

On that basis, the Pentagon statistics would show a decline from 3,736 casualties for the two months in 1969 to 3,158 for the comparable period this year. But the figures would not reflect the fierce fighting, with a heavy toll in South Vietnamese lives, during the combat operation in Laos that the South Vietnamese completed last month.

But a more junior White House aide said that his superior was incorrect about the statistics. He said that the President's remark was based on a comparison of casualties for all of 1968, during the Johnson Administration, and all of 1970, under Mr. Nixon.

On that basis, the national security official said, there was a 12 per cent decline, from 24,323 to 21,385. When it was pointed out that the Pentagon figures on South Vietnamese casualties for 1970 totaled 23,346—not 21,385—the aide inquired and said that there were two different sets of statistics.

The White House was counting uniformed military casualties, including South Vietnam's regional forces and popular forces, but another set of statistics also included para-military forces, such as the pacification teams and national po-

lice, the White House official explained.

He said these statistics showed a drop from 27,915 during all of 1968 to 23,346 for all of 1970. In either case, the official maintained, the casualties were recorded while the number of South Vietnamese in the military rose more than 300,000 and American forces were turning over an increasing combat burden to them.

Asked how a senior adviser to the President could provide incorrect statistics to bolster what Mr. Nixon said, the subordinate said that the adviser was "great on philosophy and concepts, but he always jumbles his figures."