

PRESIDENT PLANS A 12,000-MAN CUT IN VIETNAM FORCE

30 Aug 72
Authorized Troop Ceiling
to Be Reduced to 27,000
Over Next 3 Months

BOMBING WILL CONTINUE

Nixon, at News Conference,
Links Any Letup to Gain
on Diplomatic Front

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SAN CLEMENTE, Calif., Aug. 29 — The White House announced today that the American force in Vietnam would be reduced by 12,000 more men over the next three months.

The announcement, issued at the Western White House by Ronald L. Ziegler, the Presidential press secretary, said the authorized level would drop from 39,000 on Sept. 1 to 27,000 on Dec. 1.

At a news conference after the announcement, President Nixon said he would "look at the situation again" before Dec. 1 to assess the prospect for further withdrawal. But he said that any announcement on further withdrawals would be made after the Nov. 7 election "because we are not going to play election politics with this." [Question 4, Page 20.]

Bombing to Continue

President Nixon also said he would not stop the bombing of North Vietnam during the election campaign unless there was a peace settlement and would not reduce it unless there was "substantial" progress in the peace negotiations.

Asked whether he might "call off the bombing or slacken it" in the absence of an over-all settlement, Mr. Nixon replied: "Absolutely not."

A moment later, he seemed to leave open the possibility that he might reduce the level of bombing—but he tied even a modest reduction to convincing evidence of "progress on the negotiating front which is substantial."

Tone Is Optimistic

Projecting a generally optimistic but firm tone on the course of the war, the President said he would not allow political considerations to influence his bombing strategy. He recalled that President Johnson had stopped the bombing during the 1968 campaign and thereby increased the prospects of Vice President Hubert H. Humphrey, who was Mr. Nixon's opponent. However, he went on, he did not intend to resort to any "gimmick" or "election-eve tactic" while American prisoners remain in North Vietnam. [Question 6.]

Mr. Nixon's basic conditions for ending the bombing and the mining of North Vietnamese harbors, as set forth in his May 8 speech, call for an internationally supervised cease-fire throughout Indochina and the return of the prisoners.

Mr. Nixon refused to set any limits on the duration of American bombing except to say that "reports that we would probably be bombing in North Vietnam two or three years from now" were "quite ridiculous." He said he felt confident that, in time, the

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South Vietnamese would be able to assume "total defense" of their country, and asserted that even now South Vietnamese pilots were flying half of all sorties in support of ground action.

Time for a Settlement

On the diplomatic front, the President said he felt the time had come for a negotiated settlement, in part because the North Vietnamese, while capable of launching "a spurt here and there," were incapable of overrunning South Vietnam. But he said he could not say at this point that any "breakthrough" had yet occurred in private negotiations between Le Duc Tho and Henry A. Kissinger, the President's adviser on national security. [Question 3.]

The announcement of a new

12,000-Man Cut in Force by December

troop withdrawal means that by Dec. 1, Mr. Nixon will have reduced the authorized ceiling from 549,500 to 27,000 during his term in office — a reduction of 95 per cent. Today's was the 10th in a three-year series of withdrawal announcements that began on June 8, 1969.

The actual number of troops withdrawn could be slightly more or less than 12,000. There are actually 37,000 troops in South Vietnam today — 2,000 less than the authorized ceiling. Meanwhile, however, Mr. Nixon has vastly accelerated the air war. Mr. Ziegler conceded, in answer to questions, that there were now between 77,000 and 83,000 American personnel in Thailand and in ships off Vietnam engaged in the air war against the North. This represents an addition of over 30,000 men since March 3, when North Vietnam launched heavy attacks on the South.