

# Nixon Plan Surprises Many at Pentagon

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Special to The New York Times

WASHINGTON, April 21

Most senior Pentagon leaders, military and civilian, learned of plans to withdraw 150,000 more United States troops from Vietnam over the next 12 months only when President Nixon announced the decision on television last night, according to Defense Department sources.

But after getting over their surprise, most of those involved in the planning of operations in Vietnam agreed that the move would probably result in removing most American units from direct combat assignments, relegating the remainder of American air, artillery and supply forces in Vietnam to a supporting role for South Vietnamese forces.

Mr. Nixon said that when the latest reductions were completed next spring, 284,000

United States troops would remain. A high Pentagon official said that this was a minimum target. "we hope to do even better," he said.

Defense planners said that most of the reductions over the next year would involve combat units, leaving the equivalent of two or three Army divisions to protect remaining close-support and supply elements. Current plans are to continue the withdrawals of the support troops after the newly announced reductions have been completed, they added.

Pentagon officials suggested that Mr. Nixon's decision to change the manner of determining and announcing force reductions in Vietnam, from once every three or four months to a 12-month period apparently represented an 11th-hour decision.

As of last Saturday, they said, the Joint Chiefs of Staff expected the next cut to be somewhere between 35,000 and 50,000 men, spaced over the next four months.

### Nixon Meets Joint Chiefs

They were said to have gained this impression from a meeting on April 13 between President Nixon and the Joint Chiefs at the Pentagon.

Mr. Nixon had come to the Pentagon, sources reported, to inform the Joint Chiefs of his decision to appoint Adm.

Thomas H. Moorer as their new chairman and Adm. Elmo R. Zuwalt Jr., as successor to Admiral Moorer as Chief of Naval Operations.

But the next Vietnam withdrawal was also discussed at that time, knowledgeable sources said.

According to one report today, some members of the Joint Chiefs did not learn of Mr. Nixon's plans to announce a year-long withdrawal until hours before he spoke on television. But spokesmen for the military leaders declined to confirm or deny the report.

The Presidential decision was so closely guarded, apparently for fear that it would be leaked out prematurely, that Assistant Secretaries of Defense and three-star and four-star generals normally brought into such plans got their first word of the decision while watching television at home.

### Plan Hailed in Saigon

Special to The New York Times

SAIGON, South Vietnam, April 21—President Nixon's decision to phase the next stage of United States troop withdrawals over a 12-month period

# Pentagon

the United States forces in Vietnam, is reported to have sought such discretion in the recommendations he submitted several weeks ago to the Joint Chiefs of Staff.

out the withdrawals later." The President's decision gives the commanders here the latitude to defer the redeployment for several months, if the situation requires. Gen. Creighton W. Abrams, the commander of

Armed Forces Radio network. "It gives up the flexibility we need to cope with new battlefield situations as they occur," the officer said. "This way, if the enemy launches a new series of attacks, we can deal with them first and carry

warm reception among senior American officers here today. "This is a schedule we can live with," one commander said after having listened to the President's address, which was broadcast live today throughout South Vietnam on the