

New Phase of Vietnam Debate

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WASHINGTON, April 1—The nation's passion over the Calley verdict and confusion over the Laos invasion have combined to produce a brand new phase of the Indochina debate here. And the central element of that debate, for reasons of policy as well as politics, has become the issue of a date for final disengagement.

News
Analysis

Whatever the past divisions between hawks and doves, or conservatives and liberals, it is clear from the polls and the discussions in Congress that more and more of the country is united in its desire to quit Indochina — sooner rather than later and, for a growing segment of the population, regardless of the consequences there.

The daily reports of civilian as well as military casualties and the preoccupation at home with talk of war crimes and high-level guilt are leading a large number of legislators on all sides to conclude that the country cannot stand much more such pressure.

To what extent President Nixon will yield to these sentiments is not yet known. In recent weeks, he has repeatedly stressed his desire to "play the game out" until the survival of a non-Communist South Vietnam can be assured. But as he showed today with the gesture of temporary relief for First Lieut. William L. Calley Jr., Mr. Nixon knows that his hopes for Vietnam ride on his ability to soothe anxieties at home for yet another prolonged period.

Faster Pace Is Sought

Critics of the President's management of the war, notably among the Democrats in Congress, are trying to capitalize on the public's unrest to force the pace of disengagement. They will try to "legislate" a date on which all American military involvements in Indochina should be ended, meaning no later than the end of the next year.

Mr. Nixon appears still to be resisting the idea, but he has already hinted that he will counter next week by offering instead a date on which he hopes to end the American responsibility for ground combat in Indochina, probably no later than the end of this year.

But these would be two very different "dates."

The drive for a finite and total pledge of withdrawal brings together three camps of critics here: those who do not believe Mr. Nixon intends to withdraw from the war alto-

Date of Final Pullout Now Has Become Key Element

gether as long as South Vietnam is threatened, those who think he might withdraw if pushed hard enough by public opinion and those who wish to share the political credit if his program of disengagement turned out to satisfy the American voter in 1972.

President Adamant

Unless he shifts his tactics radically, however, Mr. Nixon will stand by his refusal to set a date for total withdrawal, an end of air operations and a cutoff in supply and transportation support for the South Vietnamese.

He has said that this would torpedo what little incentive may remain for Hanoi to negotiate a settlement for all Indochina or even for the release of American prisoners.

He also said that such a date would allow North Vietnam to plan calmly for a major new military campaign once the Americans have quiet.

Privately, Mr. Nixon is believed to fear even more strongly that announcement of a terminal date could seriously undermine the stability of the Saigon regime or the

morale of the anti-Communist effort throughout Indochina. Indeed, it is with the threat of indefinite involvement with air power and at least "advisory" support on the ground that the President hopes to restrain Hanoi and shore up Saigon and Phnompenh until the South Vietnamese can truly assume the entire military burden.

"I know when we are going to get out," Mr. Nixon said in a recent interview. "But as far as a deadline is concerned, while the next announcement, I am sure, will give some indication as to the end of the tunnel, we are not going to tell the enemy now that there is no need for them to negotiate."

Clifford First to Offer Plan

The idea of becalming the American public by forcing self-reliance upon Saigon with a terminal date was first promoted in 1968 by Clark M. Clifford, then Secretary of Defense. It was picked up by dovish legislators of both parties and by the Democratic party's policy council. After the invasion of Laos in February, it caught on in many corners of Congress.

Senate Democrats voted 31 to 8 on Feb. 23 to work for withdrawal by the end of 1972. Last week, the Democratic policy council urged a cutoff of funds for the war by the end of 1971. Yesterday, the Democrats in the House voted 138 to 62 for complete withdrawal by the end of 1972, after voting 101 to 100 against the end of 1971.

Mr. Nixon's aides have alternately described the President as bitter over these efforts to tie his hands as Commander in Chief or, for effect or with sarcasm, described him as pleased that the opposition party shares his desire for an early end of the war. The evidence suggests, however, that the White House resents this pressure, even though some of it has found support inside the Administration.

Secretary of Defense Melvin R. Laird has spoken publicly of the need for a "terminal date," though the phrase has never appeared in Presidential documents. He tried last winter to pledge an end of ground combat activity by May 1, only to be told publicly that Mr. Nixon would deal with that question at a later time.