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Rogers Bars the Abandonment Of U.S. Goals to Free Captives

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WASHINGTON, June 15— Secretary of State William P. Rogers said today that the United States could not abandon its "national objectives" in Vietnam to meet the "ransom" being demanded by North American prisoners of war.

"The North Vietnamese have decided undoubtedly that they are going to hold these prisoners to try to achieve political objectives, in effect using them for ransom payments," he said at a news conference at the State Department today.

"Although we have tremendous concern for the safety of the prisoners, we can't lose sight of our national purposes, and we can't absolutely abandon our national objectives to pay ransom."

Mr. Rogers's remarks constituted the clearest statement yet by the Administration of its thinking on the prisoner issue.

Setting of Date Ruled Out

He amplified that thinking at another point in the 35-minute news conference when he said that the United States' "national interests in the whole Pacific area require that we not set a withdrawal date at this time.

"We are not going to make any such announcement until our policy is implemented, until we are sure that the prisoners are going to be released," he said.

The Secretary's remarks took on added significance because they came on the eve of the Senate vote on a resolution to withdraw all United States forces from Indochina by Dec. 31.

The debate on the resolution, proposed by Senator Mark Hatfield, Republican of Oregon, and Senator George S. McGovern, Democrat of South Dakota, has focused on the question of whether the Administration is willing to withdraw United States forces solely in exchange for a prisoner release, or whether it is also

seeking the continued stability of the Saigon Government.

Mr. Rogers made it clear that the Administration's goals were not limited to the release of the prisoners.

In answer to a series of questions about the Administration's Indochina policy, Mr. Rogers made the following points:

¶ In the absence of an overall peace agreement, the United States intends to continue to provide economic and military aid to the South Vietnamese Government after American troops are withdrawn. He added, however, that the aid question could be negotiated as part of a final settlement.

¶ The United States still seeks an independent, non-Communist South Vietnam "to the extent that we want to prevent the North Vietnamese from overrunning South Vietnam militarily." The Secretary noted, however, that the Administration had repeatedly called on the Communists to participate in a fair election and had expressed its willingness to abide by the results of that election.

¶ The United States is spending "in the neighborhood of \$350-million" during the current fiscal year in the war in Laos, exclusive of the costs of the bombing of the Ho Chi Minh Trail network.

Mr. Rogers maintained that Congress has been aware of these costs, but conceded that "maybe that total hasn't been stated before."

The Secretary also conceded that "there is still a view in large segments of the American public that the Government somehow isn't coming clean on its Vietnam policy.

This view has been prompted by the length of the war, he said, and the fact that the public "thinks it has been misled in the past." A third reason, he said, "is that some of the things that we say sound the same as the things that were said before."