

Harriman Asserts Nixon Delays Pullout to Save Saigon Regime

By TAD SZULC

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WASHINGTON, June 11 — W. Averell Harriman, former United States representative at the Vietnam peace talks, in Paris, said today that the Administration was unwilling to discuss a date for the withdrawal of American troops from Vietnam because "it is quite clear" that the President "wants to see the present Government in Saigon maintained."

Mr. Harriman, in testimony before a House Foreign Affairs subcommittee, said that there would be "no problem" in getting American prisoners released from North Vietnam if the United States set a firm withdrawal date.

Mr. Harriman supported the plan offered Tuesday by Clark M. Clifford, former Secretary of Defense.

Under Mr. Clifford's plan the Communist would agree to release the prisoners 30 days after Mr. Nixon set a date for withdrawal.

Mr. Clifford's proposal was put forth as the Senate began debating the McGovern-Hatfield amendment, which would require the withdrawal of all American forces from Vietnam by the end of this year.

Mr. Harriman said that the Nixon Administration was unwilling to discuss the Clifford proposal.

Vote Due Wednesday

The "end-the-war" amendment, co-sponsored by Senators George S. McGovern, Democrat of South Dakota, and Mark O. Hatfield, Republican of Oregon, will be voted on Wednesday. Indications are that it will be defeated by at least 10 votes.

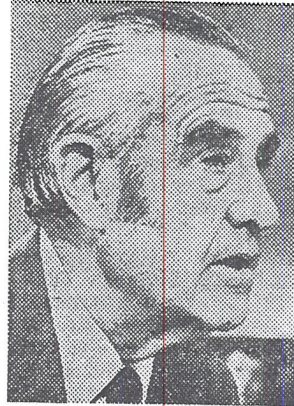
The amendment's supporters seem to be trying to force the Administration to concede that its reluctance to set a withdrawal date was related to the preservation of the Saigon Government and not to the issue of prisoners of war. If this could be accomplished, those backing the amendment believe, then some of the wavering Senators might be won over to the McGovern-Hatfield amendment.

An Administration official said privately that the United States request at the Paris talks yesterday for a secret meeting on the prisoner issue was made "with one eye on the Wednesday vote and the Clifford plan."

An American spokesman in Paris said there had been no response to the request for such a meeting.

Mr. Clifford said at a breakfast meeting with newsmen this morning that "so long as the United States says publicly that it doesn't want any part of it, there is no reason for them [the Communist delegates] to place the proposal on the negotiating table."

Mr. Clifford, who insisted that he had reasons to believe that his plan was acceptable to the Communists, said that Dec. 31, 1971, was not a "magic date." He said he believed that if Mr. Nixon told Hanoi that, for logistic reasons, more time



Associated Press

W. Averell Harriman at House hearing yesterday.

was required to withdraw all the troops, the other side would agree to a date such as April 1, 1972.

He said he felt certain that North Vietnam and the Vietcong would not insist on a commitment from the United States that no military and economic aid to South Vietnam would be maintained after the troop withdrawal.

Xuan Thuy, the chief North Vietnamese delegate at the peace talks in Paris, left it unclear in a recent newspaper interview whether Hanoi would attach such a condition to the freeing of American prisoners of war.

Mr. Clifford said there has been a "change in attitude by the other side," and expressed his belief that even continued United States bombing of the Laos infiltration routes would not interfere with the prisoner release if the withdrawal date is set first.

Mr. Clifford said that "word was brought back from a credible source" that his plan was acceptable to Hanoi and the prisoners could be "promptly" released.

Change in Attitude Seen

He refused to identify his sources, but said that he had been regular touch with persons who had been traveling to Hanoi and Paris and was convinced that the Communist attitude was changing.

Mr. Clifford said, however, that he had no contacts with "formal representatives" of North Vietnam or the Vietcong.

If Mr. Nixon does not set the withdrawal date, Mr. Clifford said, "the most acute peril will face us." He said Communist pressures would then force the United States to halt the gradual withdrawals, or "even reverse the process," and "increase the bombings."

This, he said, would lead to "crisis in our policy and our country."