

Report Nixon Ready to Make New PW-Pullout Offer

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WASHINGTON—President Nixon in November will offer North Vietnam a withdrawal by May, 1972, of all U.S. air, land and sea troops, except for 2000 military advisers, in exchange for release by Hanoi of all American prisoners by December 31, high administration officials disclosed today.

The President will explain, these officials said, that if the dramatic new offer is rejected, the United States will continue to withdraw its troops but intentionally leave behind a residual force of at least 50,000 men as long as the prisoners remain interned.

(In Saigon, military sources said the U.S. will maintain no combat activities after June 30.

(Defense Secretary Melvin Laird, however, said in a Warrenton, Va., news conference that "there is no basis on which that kind of speculation can go forth at this time." He said "There is no goal other than the one the President has set for Dec. 31.")

Little Hope

Administration officials have little hope Hanoi will agree to release the prisoners before the United States actually completes its withdrawal, but policymakers think the Nixon offer may lead to a substantive counter-proposal.

Instead of releasing all prisoners by December Hanoi might offer to release a certain number with each phase of the withdrawal.

That could mean, for example, that if remaining U.S. troops were halved by spring, half the POWs would also have been returned.

Response

The Nixon offer could be a response to the seven-point

proposal made last July when the Communists at the Paris peace talks announced they were ready to release all prisoners by the end of 1971 if all American troops were withdrawn by then.

The Communists later de-

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defined their offer to mean total U.S. withdrawal from all of Indochina and an end to all U.S. economic and military aid to Saigon.

Nevertheless, the Communist package was considered significant because of the apparent downgrading of the demand for removal of the present South Vietnamese government.

Officials here explained Hanoi may have exhausted its use of the prisoners for propaganda purposes and may now be willing to use them to bargain for American withdrawal.

Peking Trip

President Nixon also is thought eager to arrive in Peking — a trip now expected late this year — on the heels of a commitment by the United States for withdrawal of all Vietnam troops.

Presumably, this would let the chief executive sound out the Chinese on their willingness to help end the Vietnamese conflict.

Progress in the Paris peace talks would be a definite political plus for Nixon

at the start of a presidential campaign year.

Best Feature

The most attractive feature of the Communist plan in July was the offer for simultaneous liberation of prisoners and American troop withdrawal.

"The two operations will begin at the same date and will finish at the same date," the proposal said. Until then, the Communists had offered merely to begin immediate discussions on prisoners as soon as the United States set what they consider a reasonable date for withdrawal.

American troop strength in Vietnam is scheduled to fall below the 184,000 figure that President Nixon announced would be met by Nov. 15. The chief executive also is expected to announce a speed-up of the current monthly withdrawal rate of 14,000.

Included in the 31,800 servicemen still to be pulled out in the current withdrawal phase are seven combat battalions, which will leave 20 U.S. maneuver battalions still in Vietnam from a high of 112 in April, 1969, military sources said.