

(Television interview referred to is that with Dan Rather, CBS, 2 Jan 72. Clippings on this intv filed Rix Ad.)

McGovern Accuses Nixon Of Deception on P.O.W.'s

NYTimes

By JOHN W. FINNEY JAN 4 1972

Special to The New York Times

WASHINGTON, Jan. 3 — Senator George McGovern charged today that President Nixon had "deceived the American public" by suggesting that Communist negotiators had rejected the approach of releasing American prisoners of war in exchange for the setting of a firm troop withdrawal date by the United States.

"It is simply not true, and the President knows it is not true, that our negotiators in Paris ever discussed with the North Vietnamese the question of total American withdrawal from Indochina in conjunction with the release of our prisoners," the South Dakota Democrat said in a statement.

Surprise in Capitol

In a television interview last night, Mr. Nixon said that the question of whether the prisoners would be released if the United States set a deadline for withdrawal of all its forces had been "under discussion at various times" in the Paris talks but that the North Vietnamese had "totally rejected" such a deal.

The President's statement caused some surprise on Capitol Hill, where doves such as Senator McGovern have been arguing that North Vietnam would release the prisoners if the United States would set a firm withdrawal date and criticizing the Administration for not making such an offer. Today's charge by Senator McGovern, who is seeking the Democratic Presidential nomination, indicated that the Pres-

Continued From Page 1, Col. 6

ident's statement might become an issue in the campaign.

The Senator's criticism came first in a news release and later in a brief news conference before the Senate television gallery.

He charged that the Administration was using prisoners to justify continued bombing of North Vietnam and was more interested in "propping up the corrupt Thieu regime" in Saigon than in securing the release of the prisoners.

At the White House, the deputy press secretary, Gerald L. Warren, declined to say whether or not a formal proposal of a withdrawal deadline and a release of prisoners had ever been presented by the United States to the North Vietnamese negotiators in Paris.

Clarification Sought

Mr. Warren explained that in September, after Senator McGovern had met with the Communist negotiators and concluded that a withdrawal deadline would lead to release of the prisoners, the United States delegation in Paris had "sought further clarification" of the North Vietnamese position.

But on Sept. 26, Mr. Warren said, a North Vietnamese spokesman in Paris made it clear that there would be no new flexibility on the Communist negotiating position.

According to State Department officials, the differences between President Nixon and Senator McGovern probably spring out of differing interpretations of what occurred in diplomatic discussions last September in Paris. A key issue in these discussions was whether the seven points that the Vietcong presented in a peace proposal in July were divisible or inseparable.

Point One in the Vietcong proposal called for the United States to set a date for withdrawal and said the prisoners would then be released. The

second crucial point called upon the United States to cease its support of the Saigon regime headed by President Nguyen Van Thieu and to accept a new provisional coalition government in South Vietnam.

According to State Department officials, the United States delegation concluded that the two points were inseparable and that the other side was demanding an end of American support for the Saigon regime as well as a troop withdrawal date as conditions for release of the prisoners.

But on the basis of his own discussion and of newspaper articles, Senator McGovern came to the differing conclusion, which he repeated today, that if the United States "set a date for the complete withdrawal of our forces and the cessation of the bombing in Indochina, it would signal the end of support for the Saigon regime and our troops would be allowed to withdraw safely and our prisoners freed."

"If we set a date for withdrawal," he predicted, "Thieu would resign within 48 hours."

Residual Force

In the Columbia Broadcasting System television interview, Mr. Nixon indicated that the United States would maintain a residual force of 25,000 to 30,000 troops in Vietnam until the prisoners were released.

He went on to say that as "we come down to the end as far as our own involvement in Vietnam is concerned," the Communist side will have a chance to answer the "question of whether or not they will return our prisoners in exchange for a total American withdrawal."

Some diplomatic observers believed the President could have been signaling a subtle shift in the Administration's position. No longer, they noted, was he citing his past condition for troop withdrawal of protecting the viability of the Saigon Government.

Continued on Page 11, Column 1