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ROSCOE AND GEOFFREY DRUMMOND, PHLA. INQUIRER

WASHINGTON -- HERE IS REALISTIC CANDID JUDGMENT OF TOP NIXON ADMINISTRATION OFFICIALS ON HOW THEY BELIEVE THE VIETNAMESE WAR WILL END:

--THEY SEE NO PROSPECT OF A NEGOTIATED SETTLEMENT. HANOI HAS NEGOTIATED ONLY ONE ITEM IN TWO YEARS -- THE SHAPE OF THE CONFERENCE TABLE -- AND SHOWS NO WILLINGNESS TO NEGOTIATE ANYTHING MORE. THE UNITED STATES WILL NOT BREAK OFF THE TALKS; WE'LL BE THERE IF HANOI CHANGES ITS MIND.

-- THE NORTH VIETNAMESE AND THE VIETCONG ARE MILITARILY AND POLITICALLY WEAKER -- SIGNIFICANTLY WEAKER -- THAN AT ANY TIME SINCE THEY WERE NEAR VICTORY IN 1964. THEY KNOW THEY CANNOT WIN, BUT THEY BELIEVE OR AT LEAST ARE HOPEFUL THAT SOUTH VIETNAM WILL LOSE THROUGH INTERNAL DISSENSION.

-- BUT THE NORTH VIETNAMESE AND THE VC ARE NOT GIVING UP --

AND WON'T. THEY ARE ABANDONING THE STRATEGY OF MAJOR MILITARY CONFRONTATIONS, BY RETURNING TO PROTRACTED GUERRILLA FIGHTING WITH THE AIM OF POLITICAL DISRUPTION.

THEIR GOAL WILL BE TO FOMENT POLITICAL DISAFFECTION AMONG THE SOUTH VIETNAMESE, MAKE IT DIFFICULT FOR SAIGON TO RULE AND TO PROTECT ITS PEOPLE FROM TERROR AND SABOTAGE.

-- THE U.S. WILL CONTINUE ITS STEADY-PACED WITHDRAWAL ON THE NIXON TIMETABLE. BEFORE LONG AMERICAN COMBAT TROOPS WILL BE OUT, REMAINING U.S. SUPPORT FORCES WILL BE PRIMARILY VOLUNTEER AND THE SOUTH VIETNAMESE WILL BE ON THEIR OWN, WHOLLY IN CHARGE.

IS THIS THE WAY IT WILL HAPPEN? WILL IT WORK?

FOR THE FIRST TIME SINCE PRESIDENT NIXON BEGAN SUSTAINED WITHDRAWAL, WE HAVE BEGUN TO THINK IT WILL. WE ALWAYS SAW IT AS POSSIBLE. NOW WE BEGIN TO SEE AS ATTAINABLE WITH BETTER THAN AN EVEN CHANCE THAT THE SOUTH VIETNAMESE CAN AND WILL PREVAIL ON THEIR OWN.

WHY? BECAUSE THE UNITED STATES FINALLY HAS LEARNED THE LESSON IT SHOULD HAVE LEARNED IN KOREA -- AND DIDN'T -- AND THEREFORE FAILED TO APPLY IN SOUTH VIETNAM UNTIL ALMOST TOO LATE.

"WE'LL DO IT," WAS THE MOOD OF THE U.S. MILITARY WHEN WE WENT TO THE DEFENSE OF SOUTH KOREA, AND WE EITHER BELIEVED OR USED AS AN EXCUSE THE VIEW THAT THE SOUTH KOREANS WERE POOR FIGHTERS, COULD NOT BE TRAINED AND MADE READY.

NOW WRONG THE MILITARY WAS. IT GOT POGGED DOWN AND NEARLY LOST WHEN THE CHINESE INTERVENED MASSIVELY. AND THEN THE UNITED STATES BEGAN TO TRAIN AND EQUIP THE ROK FORCES WHICH PROVED THEMSELVES BRAVE, STURDY AND RESOURCEFUL FIGHTERS.

AND THEN THE UNITED STATES REPEATED THE MISTAKE ALL OVER AGAIN IN VIETNAM. "STEP ASIDE AND WE'LL DO IT," WE SAID, WHEN THE U.S. BUILDUP BEGAN IN 1965. "DON'T GET IN OUR WAY."

AND NOW WE'RE STEPPING ASIDE AND THEY'RE DOING IT. WE HAVE SEEN THE ARMY OF SOUTH VIETNAM GROW CONSTANTLY STRONGER IN MOREALE, LEADERSHIP AND IN BATTLETESTED INCENUITY.

THE SOUTH KOREANS BECAME GREAT SOLDIERS -- AMONG THE BEST -- AND SUPERB DEFENDERS OF THEIR OWN LAND WHEN WE GAVE THEM THE WEAPONS, THE TRAINING AND THE OPPORTUNITY.

THAT'S WHAT WE ARE FINALLY DOING IN SOUTH VIETNAM. TODAY THE ARMY OF THE REPUBLIC OF VIETNAM IS BEARING THE MAIN BRUNT OF THE FIGHTING AND WILL SOON BE BEARING NEARLY ALL OF IT. IT IS STRONG, DETERMINED -- AND THE VC ARE NOW FINDING IT PERSVASIVE. IT IS THE VC WHO ARE RUNNING FOR COVER.

THIS IS WHY WE BELIEVE THAT THE ONLY MAJOR ELEMENT OF UNCERTAINTY IS POLITICAL. WILL THE PRESENT GOVERNMENT OF SOUTH VIETNAM HAVE THE WILL AND THE WISDOM AND THE STABILITY TO PRESS FORWARD WITH NEEDED SOCIAL REFORM?

SURELY THIS IS WHAT THE WAR IS ALL ABOUT -- THE RIGHT OF THE PEOPLE TO CHOOSE THEIR OWN LEADERS. WE BELIEVE THIS WILL HAPPEN AND, IF IT DOES, SOUTH VIETNAM WILL HAVE WON BOTH THE WAR AND THE PEACE.