

S. Vietnam Reds Relent on U.S. Pullout Date

BY ARTHUR J. DOMMEN,

SAIGON — The South Vietnam National Liberation Front has just effected a shift in its position on withdrawal of American troops.

It dropped its usual demand for all American forces to be out of Vietnam by June 30, 1971, and set no new date.

Since that has been one of the two key issues at the Paris talks, the move will provide material for close study by American diplomats.

The NLF appears to have sought to avoid drawing too much public attention to its shift by revealing it in stages and by having different spokesmen make the actual announcements. The front has used this method before.

Confirmation of the shift came in the text of a New Year's broadcast of greetings by lawyer Nguyen Huu Tho, the chairman of the NLF central Committee Presidium, which has just been received in full here.

To Silence Guns

Reiterating the NLF's position on the demand for withdrawal of American troops from South Vietnam, Tho said:

"We will stop shooting at the U.S. troops and at the troops of the pro-U.S. countries if the U.S. Administration declares that all U.S. and foreign troops will be withdrawn from South Vietnam."

Tho thus omitted the usual reference to the June 30 withdrawal date, that up to now has accompanied the restatement of this demand. More important, in the view of observers, Tho did not set a new date.

Tho's statement, in fact, represents the final step in a staged retreat by the NLF from its original demand that all U.S. and foreign troops leave South Vietnam by next June 30.

Last Dec. 10, in addition-al prepared remarks to her prepared text at the 94th session of the Paris conference, Mrs. Nguyen Thi Binh, the chief of the NLF delegation, repeated the position that cease-fire would follow after the United States declared its decision to withdraw by June 30.

The next step occurred a week later, on Dec. 17.

After the 95th session in Paris North Vietnam's chief delegate, Xuan Thuy, told newsmen that because of the obdurate stand of the American delegation: "I, therefore, proposed that if the United States is not willing to accept June 30, 1971, as the date for final withdrawal of all its troops, then it should suggest another reasonable date."

This moved the negotiating process to the point of declaring that the terminal date for withdrawal is a negotiable issue.

In the context of the confrontation between the American and North Vietnamese view of the origin

of the war in South Vietnam, this represents a major development.

Hanoi's basic view is that the United States is the aggressor in South Vietnam and must withdraw its troops unconditionally.

The American view of the war, on the other hand, consistently has been that American troops are in South Vietnam at the request of the legal government of South Vietnam.

The Nixon Administration last year supported a move in the U.S. Senate to defeat a proposal that would have unilaterally established a withdrawal deadline for American troops from South Vietnam.

There was no information available here as to whether the NLF's concession on the troop withdrawal issue is part of a broader negotiating move in Paris or elsewhere that could be tied in with moves on a political settlement in South Vietnam—the other major issue under negotiation.

Tho, as chairman of the NLF Central Committee, outranks Mrs. Binh. Thus his version of the NLF stand on its troop withdrawal demand, leaving out any specific date as the deadline demanded, can be considered to be completely authoritative, analysts here believe.

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