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Administration Vietnam Policy Restated Again

By Murrey Marder 1-6-72
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Secretary of State William P. Rogers said last night that U.S. forces remain in South Vietnam for the dual purpose of helping that nation "determine its own future" and also to gain the release of American prisoners held by North Vietnam.

Rogers' explanation was the second time this week that the Nixon administration has restated its Vietnam policy. Each time, there has been a subsequent statement intended to clarify the original remarks, first by President Nixon, then by Rogers, followed by differing interpretations about what they meant.

In a television interview Sunday, President Nixon said the "one circumstance" that will determine how long any American forces remain in Indochina will be "the situation with regard to our POW's."

The next day, a White House press spokesman put back into U.S. policy the other standard criterion that the President had omitted. The United States, said the spokesman, was "not dropping" its requirement that link the presence of U.S. troops to the South Vietnamese development of their own ability "to determine their own future."

Some listeners concluded, nevertheless, that the U.S. position had shifted.

Secretary Rogers faced the same question in an American Broadcasting Co. television interview recorded Tuesday and broadcast last night. Rogers was asked if the President's omission was "merely an oversight."

Secretaries of State do not

ascribe "oversight" to Presidents. Rogers therefore attempted to square the circle of controversy.

The President's collective comments, Rogers said, "have all made it clear that our purpose is to provide the opportunity for South Vietnam to continue to determine its own future. Now we also are very concerned about the welfare of the American prisoners of war . . ."

Rogers' however, went on to say that "I think South Vietnam can provide for its own security"; that "we think they can defend themselves," and also that "the American forces are going to be out of there, for all practical purposes, in 1972."

These remarks rekindled suspicion that the U.S. position was shifting, causing the State Department to attempt a further clarification, even before Rogers' comments were broadcast.

This amplification, put out under a news embargo to coincide with the release of the Rogers' interview, was issued by press spokesman Charles W. Bray.

"It is clear from the context in which the Secretary was speaking that he is addressing himself to the progressive success of the Vietnamization program and the ability of South Vietnam to take up the military slack which flows from withdrawal of American troops from South Vietnam. I do not believe he intended to imply that the process was complete as of now and it would be a mistake to read his remarks in that way."