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PRESIDENT NIXON'S PRESS CONFERENCE. JUNE 19, 1969

QUESTION: Former Defense Secretary Clark Clifford has suggested that 100,000 American troops ought to be out by the end of this year and we ought to say all ground troops will be out by the end of 1970. I wonder if you think that is a realistic timetable?

THE PRESIDENT: We have started to withdraw forces. We will withdraw more. Another decision will be made in August. I will not indicate the number, because the number will depend upon the extent of the training of the South Vietnamese, as well as developments in Paris and the other criterion that I have mentioned previously.

As far as how many will be withdrawn by the end of this year, or the end of next year, I would hope that we could beat Mr. Clifford's timetable, just as I think we have done a little better than we did when he was in charge of our national defense.

QUESTION: Mr. President, you expressed the hope earlier for substantive talks on Viet-Nam, perhaps in the next three months. I wonder, Sir, in this process, and before elections are held in Viet-Nam, are we wedded, to whatever degree, to the government of President Thieu?

THE PRESIDENT: When you use the term "wedded to the government of President Thieu, "I would not say that the United States, insofar as any government in the world is concerned, is wedded to it in the sense that we cannot take any course of action that government does not approve.

On the other hand, I do not want to leave any doubt on this score:

President Thieu is the elected President of Viet-Nam. He is cooperating with the United States in attempting to bring this war to a conclusion. He has made a very forthright offer and has supported our position that we have made, and I know will be making an offer of his own with regard to a political settlement. Under those circumstances, there is no question about our standing with President Thieu.

I would also say further that insofar as our offers are concerned, we are not going to accede to the demands of the enemy that we have to dispose of President Thieu before they will talk. That would mean a surrender on our part, a defeat on our part, and turning over South Viet-Nam to the tender mercies of those who have done a great deal of damage to those in North Viet-Nam.

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