

361 Statement on United States Troops in Vietnam.
September 16, 1969

AFTER careful consideration with my senior civilian and military advisers and in full consultation with the Government of Vietnam, I have decided to reduce the authorized troop ceiling in Vietnam to 484,000 by December 15. This compares with the ceiling of 549,500 which existed when this administration took office. Under the newly authorized troop ceiling, a minimum of 60,000 troops will have been withdrawn from Vietnam by December 15.*

Since coming into office, my administration has made major efforts to bring an end to the war:

- We have renounced an imposed military solution.
- We have proposed free elections organized by joint commissions under international supervision.
- We have offered the withdrawal of U.S. and allied forces over a 12-month period.
- We have declared that we would retain no military bases.
- We have offered to negotiate supervised cease-fires under international supervision to facilitate the process

*Actually, the total reduction in authorized ceiling strength amounts to 65,500. But within the authorized ceiling, all units are shown at 100 percent strength. In actual practice, most units are slightly below full strength, so that actual strength normally is less than the authorized ceiling by 1 or 2 percent.

of mutual withdrawal.

- We have made clear that we would settle for the *de facto* removal of North Vietnamese forces so long as there are guarantees against their return.
- We and the Government of South Vietnam have announced that we are prepared to accept any political outcome which is arrived at through free elections.
- We are prepared to discuss the 10-point program of the other side, together with plans put forward by the other parties.
- In short, the only item which is not negotiable is the right of the people of South Vietnam to determine their own future free of outside interference.

I reiterate all these proposals today.

The withdrawal of 60,000 troops is a significant step.

The time for meaningful negotiations has therefore arrived.

I realize that it is difficult to communicate across the gulf of 5 years of war. But the time has come to end this war. Let history record that at this critical moment, both sides turned their faces toward peace rather than toward conflict and war.

NOTE: The President also recorded portions of this statement for television and radio broadcast.