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withdrawal 1 (normass/deepe)

SAIGON, December 19--General William C. Westmoreland's optimistic statement concerning an American troop phase-out in two years is still sparking ~~cofe~~ coffee-shop debates, controversial discussions and Christmas party chatter.

The approaching Yuletide ceasefire has brought a resurgence of speculation about future ~~n~~ peace ~~negotiations~~ negotiations and a renewed ~~renewal~~ renewal of commentary about the phase-out of American troops General Westmoreland proposed last month while in the United States.

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withdrawal 2 (normass/deepe)

A Western diplomat at a recent cocktail party explained:  
"Frankly, we think Westmoreland's statement was simply grist for  
American electoral consumption. Of course, he can ~~withdraw~~ take out  
some troops and <sup>cut</sup> reduce American ~~casualties~~ casualties, but it will mean  
a reduction in the his patrolling and operating strength. Maybe  
his statement gave some worry to the South Vietnamese leadership,  
but there's indication of any other effect here."

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withdrawal 3 (normass/deepe)

Officially, South Vietnamese leaders, mostly generals, have said the withdrawal can be effected ~~with meaning~~ on the condition the Vietnamese armed forces is substantially reformed and re-organized; South Vietnamese officers of mid-level rank see little chance of a re-organization ~~sigj~~ significant enough to allow any ~~substantive~~ substantive phase-out of American troops.

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withdrawal 4 (normass/deepe)

A Republican politician, visiting from Washington, speculated, "I suspect (President) ~~to~~ Johnson is just sneaky enough to pull a few troops out of here before the election. It's quite clear he's got to pull some rabbit out of ~~the~~ his Vietnam hat."

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withdrawal 5 (normass/deepe)

A knowledgeable American official, speaking privately:  
"There's already a big white bunny with his ears popping out of the hat. Westmoreland could withdraw more ~~troops~~ than 100,000 American troops from Vietnam right now--and it wouldn't hurt the war effort at all. He's got enough logistical and support troops in here for a million-man American force. McNamara was right when he said Westmoreland should use his troops more efficiently ~~instea~~<sup>2</sup>—instead we are airlifting more in ~~instea~~ here. LBJ can withdraw 25,000 troops in July (1968); 25,000 in August, 25,000 in September and 25,000 in October."

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withdrawal 6 (normass/deepe)

In a small, open-air coffeeshop near ~~the~~ Saigon's "Wall Street" area, a group of businessmen with ~~business~~ contracts for the American military debated the question. One, a supplier of ~~locally produced~~ locally ~~produced~~ produced items for the American establishment, explained, "How can the Americans withdraw? Look at Cam Ranh Bay, <sup>the</sup> Danang and Long Binh bases. You know the Americans have started on a ten-year program to train Vietnamese ~~senior~~ senior officers."

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withdrawal 7 (normass/deepe)

Another in the group, commonly called by the Vietnamese "war profiteers," chimed in: "We've already made enough money off the American build-up; if the Americans stay longer we will make more money; if they withdraw we still have ~~enough~~ enough money to live abroad."

A third businessman, with several buildings rented to American personnel, ~~added~~ added: "The Americans can't withdraw. Look at South Korea. The war's been over for fourteen years ~~already~~ already, but the Americans are still there."

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withdrawal 8 (normass/deepe)

Some of the higher-level level Vietnamese ~~government~~  
civilian government officials are much more skeptical about the  
troop withdrawal; some are worried that General Westmoreland's  
statement was the forewarning of the Americans "selling the Vietnamese  
down the river;" subsequent reports of the Viet Cong attempting to  
contact American Embassy officials here and to enter the United  
Nations added fuel to this <sup>leak</sup> ~~view~~.

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withdrawal 9 (Normass/deepe)

This skepticism was expressed last week by Foreign Minister Tran Van Do, in an interview with this correspondent when he said: "It (the withdrawal) depends on the progress in the military field. Maybe General Westmoreland has more elements than <sup>WE</sup> us civilians to judge the situation." He suggested a "tacit agreement" might be reached for both North Vietnamese and American troops to de-escalate ~~simultae~~ simultaneously, explaining, "It might happen that the war will fade away without negotiations. I don't know; it might happen."

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withdrawal 10 (normass/deepe)

Questioned on the skepticism of his answer, the elder statesman of the newly-elected government, continued: "It's very, very difficult to know (about the withdrawal); it depends on the effect of the bombing of North Vietnam and on other ~~military~~ military factors. It's very difficult to judge the situation."

Later, he said, <sup>troop phase-out</sup> the ~~withdrawal~~ also would depend on how much of the Viet Cong infrastructure in the villages had been eradicated and how quickly the South Vietnamese political life <sup>could</sup> be re-organized.

"The Communists are convinced they can't take South Vietnam over by force; they will try the political way. <sup>It's</sup> It's the insidious way.

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withdrawal 11 (normass/deepe)

the National Liberation Front

"If ~~they~~<sup>AS</sup> can persuade the American public they are not Communist and that we had better form a ~~ga~~ coalition government with them, then you have seen in South Vietnam, because of the legacy of the past—twenty years of war against the ~~Green~~ French and the Ngo ~~Dre~~ Dinh Diem regime, the revolution and instability—we are not able to organize South Vietnam politically. You have seen during the elections we had 48 slates for the Senate and 11 for the Presidency. That means we are not yet politically organized...so we can not accept the National Liberation Front as a political party in South Vietnam. They will be the only political party with discipline and with the support of an army. They will do as they did in Eastern Europe— even if the Communist Party at the beginning is only a minority, it will destroy and liquidate all the other parties...that's why we do not accept to integrate the Front ~~in~~ as a body in South Vietnam—the integration of the Front will be the political way to take over South Vietnam which they could not succeed doing by force."

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withdrawal 12 (normass/deepe)

*QUIET,*  
The ~~mark~~ dignified ~~Reg~~ Foreign Minister said General

~~Westmore~~ Westmoreland did not repeat not consult with ~~the~~ South Vietnamese government officials before making his famous phase-out prediction last month.

(Hank: many thanks for accreditation letter which just arrived. Appreciate advisory if you want a special piece on Romney's Christmas visit; I suspect wires will cover him heavily. I'll coordinate with Beb about future filing, if any, this week. Regards Bev)

End Reuter