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VIETNAMIZATION: THE PROGRAM AND
 ITS PROBLEMS

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VIETNAMIZATION: THE PROGRAM AND ITS PROBLEMS

Summary

The Nixon Administration's Vietnamization program encompasses a wide range of American and South Vietnamese activities designed to help South Vietnam defend itself against the Vietnamese Communists, the goal being to withdraw all or at least most of U.S. military forces from Vietnam. The origins of Vietnamization date back to 1967, but President Nixon expanded the program and broadened its objectives after he took office. Since the spring of 1969, U.S. troop strength in Vietnam has dropped from 543,000 to below 200,000. Administration statements indicate that the American troop level will reach 35,000 sometime in 1972. The Administration has stated that the U.S. will keep a residual force of this size in Vietnam until all U.S. prisoners of war in the hands of the Communists are released and until South Vietnam has a "chance" to defend itself.

Vietnamization has sought to develop multi-functional South Vietnamese armed forces that can perform tasks essential to the country's security. The Army of the Republic of Vietnam (ARVN), supported by the Vietnamese Air Force (VNAF), will be responsible for defense against North Vietnamese main force units, particularly along or near South Vietnam's borders. Behind the ARVN, territorial militia called Regional Forces and Popular Forces provide security for pacified villages, hamlets, and cities; the militia is in turn backed by the People's Self-Defense Forces, which are units of armed citizenry.

To implement the program, the Vietnamese armed forces have been increased in size from 700,000 in April 1968 to over 1,100,000. Emphasis has been given to modernizing equipment and weaponry and upgrading the long-neglected Regional and Popular Forces.

The major successes of Vietnamization to date lie in the assumption by the Vietnamese of nearly all of the ground combat responsibility from U.S. forces without any appreciable damage to South Vietnam's security. Security, in fact, has gained considerably since 1968 with substantial progress in pacification, particularly in the southern half of South Vietnam. North Vietnam has not attempted a major offensive since 1968, and most of the large-unit fighting between North and South Vietnamese troops has taken place in Laos and Cambodia.

Problems and unanswered questions remain, however. The ARVN, largely trained and equipped on the model of the U.S. Army, lacks the firepower of its American counterpart. The ARVN has suffered from a chronically weak logistics system, and this is still a potential source of difficulty. This is especially true with regard to air transport and supply, where the South Vietnamese continue to be heavily dependent on the United States. South Vietnam's air force has improved considerably since 1968; but even when Vietnamization of the VNAF is completed in 1973-74, it will not be able to carry out all of the functions presently performed by the U.S. Air Force in Indochina.

These deficiencies heighten the importance of the residual force question and of the functions a residual force would perform if one should remain after 1972. The limited capabilities of the VNAF also raise the

prospect that the United States may continue bombing of North Vietnamese infiltration routes in Laos and Cambodia for the indefinite future.

South Vietnam's armed forces also suffer from leadership and morale problems. These result partially from the class and social structure of South Vietnamese society, which often prevents capable people from attaining leadership positions in the ARVN and elsewhere. Only limited gains have been made toward eliminating this situation. The often-discussed low morale of the armed forces is the product of both war weariness and conditions of service. Attempts to improve morale have focused primarily on conditions of service; small gains have been made, mostly in the direction of allowing service closer to one's home.

Enemy capabilities may have a decisive bearing on the ultimate success or failure of Vietnamization. The United States Government apparently believes that North Vietnam no longer has the military resources to wage the big-battle war of the 1965-68 period. Rather, it sees the future of the struggle as one primarily of protracted war. Critics of the Administration have questioned this assessment and have argued at various times that South Vietnam lacks either the material resources or the will to survive in the long run.

I. Definition of Vietnamization

The Nixon Administration has given a very broad definition to its Vietnamization program, encompassing a host of American and South Vietnamese activities within the Republic of Vietnam. In November 1970 Under Secretary of State U. Alexis Johnson defined it for the House Subcommittee on Foreign Operations and Related Agencies as follows:

Vietnamization is on the nonmilitary side what is usually embraced in the term 'pacification'; that is, the extension of Government control, Government services and the presence of the Government within the countryside.

On the military side, Vietnamization means improving the training, improving the equipment, and improving, in general, the capabilities of the Vietnamese forces to deal with the enemy they face.

These two things, together, mean a lessening need for a U.S. role and are thus what enable us to bring about a reduction 1/ of our forces without endangering the existence of this program.

President Nixon, in his foreign policy report to the Congress in February 1970, asserted that:

Vietnamization has two principal components. The first is the strengthening of the armed forces of the South Vietnamese in numbers, equipment, leadership and combat skills, and overall capability. The second component is the extension of the pacification program in South Vietnam.

The military aspect of Vietnamization--strengthening the capabilities of South Vietnamese armed forces-- is thus closely related to pacification, for military security is a key element in the assertion of the Government

1/ U.S. Congress. House of Representatives. Committee on Appropriations. Supplemental Appropriation Bill, 1971. Hearings before Subcommittees of the Committee on Appropriations. 91st Cong., 2nd sess., 1970. Washington, U.S. Govt. Print. Off.: 1249.

of Vietnam's control in the countryside. Other elements, both political and economic, also affect the military aspects of Vietnamization. Most Americans, however, think of Vietnamization strictly in terms of the withdrawal of American forces from South Vietnam. The military aspect of Vietnamization can, in this sense, include U.S. troop withdrawal and the upgrading of South Vietnam's armed forces. President Nixon has often linked the two by describing the latter as a major factor in determining the pace of the troop pullout. South Vietnamese military capabilities have become increasingly important in this respect because of the lack of progress in the Paris talks.

II. Origins of Vietnamization

Official public discussion of the concept of Vietnamization began in 1967 after nearly three years of full-scale U.S. combat involvement in South Vietnam. General William Westmoreland, commander of U.S. forces in Vietnam, in November 1967 spoke of gradually turning over the fighting to the South Vietnamese in a National Press Club speech. He asserted that in 1968 the United States would undertake "Phase III" of its war strategy, which would include an upgrading of South Vietnam's Regional and Popular Forces, providing the ARVN with new equipment to prepare it to "take on an ever-increasing share of the war," and turn "a major share" of the frontline defense of the DMZ to the ARVN. During "Phase IV," Westmoreland said, U.S. forces could "begin to phase down" as the ARVN developed its capabilities. The ARVN would "take charge of the final mopping up of the Vietcong" and

would show that it can handle Vietcong."^{1/}

Although the 1968 Tet offensive disrupted Westmoreland's strategy in part, the Pentagon produced a plan shortly after the beginning of the Paris negotiations in May 1968. It was based on the assumption that the United States and North Vietnam would negotiate a mutual troop withdrawal from South Vietnam. Therefore, the plan set as its basic objective the upgrading of the ARVN to enable it to handle a continued Vietcong insurgency. This entailed partial modernization of the ARVN's weapons and equipment - to include small arms, vehicles, and radios, improvement of combat support and logistics capabilities, and augmentation of the size and effectiveness of the Vietnamese navy and air force. This program, however did not envisage that the South Vietnamese armed forces would be able to deal with North Vietnam's army.^{2/}

The Nixon Administration altered the May 1968 plan for two reasons. The plan did not specifically provide for a strategy of a unilateral, phased American troop withdrawal; and, in Secretary Laird's view, it was

^{1/} Department of State Bulletin, December 11, 1967: 785-788

^{2/} U.S. Congress. House. Committee on Armed Services. Hearings on military posture. Part I. 91st Cong., 2nd sess., 1970. Washington, U.S. Govt. Print. Off.:7022-7023.

too dependent upon a successful outcome of the Paris negotiations.^{1/}

The new Laird plan, as drafted in the spring of 1969, expanded both the program and its objectives. Vietnamization, as defined by Laird, now aimed at making the South Vietnamese armed forces capable of dealing with a continuing North Vietnamese presence in the South. This, according to Laird, would allow the United States to begin withdrawing troops from Vietnam. Laird outlined the new program to the Senate Armed Services Committee in March 1969:

I regret to report, however, that I see no indication that we presently have a program adequate to bring about a significant reduction in the U.S. military contribution in South Vietnam. The current operating assumption as stated to me is that even the currently funded modernization program for the South Vietnamese forces will equip the South Vietnamese forces only to withstand the VC insurgents that would remain after all North Vietnam forces had been withdrawn to North Vietnam. Also the presentation given to me by the MACV Staff was based on the premise that no reduction in U.S. personnel would be possible in the absence of total withdrawal of North Vietnamese troops.^{2/}

Laird proposed as a new objective for the program "the effective assumption by the RVNAF [Republic of Vietnam Armed Forces] of a larger share of combat operations from American forces" so that "U.S. forces can in fact be withdrawn in substantial numbers." He voiced his more pessimistic view of the

^{1/} U.S. Congress. House of Representatives. Committee on Appropriations. Subcommittee on Department of Defense. Department of Defense appropriations for 1971. Part I. Hearings before the subcommittee. 91st Cong., 2nd sess., 1970. Washington, U.S. Govt. Print. Off.: 310-311.

^{2/} U.S. Congress. House of Representatives. Committee on Armed Services. Hearings on Military Posture. Part I. 91st Cong., 2nd sess., 1970: 7023.

Paris negotiations by saying that "U.S. forces cannot remain in substantial numbers indefinitely to contain the North Vietnamese threat, if a negotiated settlement proves unobtainable."^{1/}

III. Vietnamization and U.S. Troop Withdrawals

A. Phases of the Program

Under the Nixon Administration's Vietnamization program, the reduction of the U.S. force level in Vietnam has not been solely dependent on the success of the Paris talks. Early in his Administration, President Nixon established three criteria to determine the pace of troop withdrawals: progress in the negotiations, the level of enemy activity, and the upgrading of South Vietnamese military capabilities. Accomplishment of the last of these, according to the President, gave him the flexibility to continue removing American forces even if the Communists would not negotiate an acceptable solution to the war. Vietnamization thus became an alternative to the negotiations. U. S. officials have stated that troop withdrawals to date have been carried out largely in accordance with progress in the training and equipping of the South Vietnamese.

Vietnamization, as linked with U.S. troop withdrawals, involves three phases as described by Secretary Laird during Congressional testimony in February 1970:

^{1/} Ibid., pp. 7023-7024.

Phase 1 is the period during which the U.S. ground combat role is transferred to the forces of South Vietnam.

Phase 2 involves the transfer of logistics and support activities to the Republic of Vietnam.

Phase 3 envisages a small, remaining U.S. military advisory group in South Vietnam.^{1/}

The timetable for completion of each phase remains obscured, and there obviously is an overlapping of Phases 1 and 2. The Administration has refused to set a timetable for the withdrawal of all U.S. forces. In the past, the President and others in the Administration have argued that such a timetable would remove the incentive for the Communists to negotiate; for by acceding to North Vietnam's demand that the United States set a date for total withdrawal, Washington would lose a bargaining tool--the threat of a continued U.S. military presence--to extract concessions from the Communists.

B. The Residual Force Question

Until early 1971, Administration officials indicated that under Phase 3 of Vietnamization the United States intended to maintain a "residual force" in South Vietnam more or less permanently once the bulk of American forces had withdrawn. It was expected, these officials said, that a residual force would have essentially an "advisory" role. Secretary Laird told the Subcommittee on Defense, House Committee on Appropriations, on November 18, 1969, that:

^{1/} U. S. Congress. House of Representatives. Committee on Appropriations. Subcommittee on Department of Defense. Department of Defense Appropriations for 1971. Part I. 91st Cong., 2nd sess., 1970. Washington, U.S. Govt. Print. Off.: 311.

If negotiations are not successful, I would assume that some U.S. troops would remain in Vietnam but not at the same levels that are in Korea or in Europe.^{1/}

He went on to describe the mission of the residual force:

The U.S. forces stationed in Korea and West Germany are there to meet a very different type of threat and under different circumstances; therefore, the situation in South Vietnam does not provide a relevant comparison with the situation in those two countries. As the security situation stands now in South Vietnam, it is our intention to move toward a MAAG/U.S. Advisory Force as soon as possible.^{2/}

Laird told the same subcommittee in February 1970 that "there may be some similarity" between a Vietnam residual force and U.S. forces presently in South Korea, but he added that:

We do not envision the military advisory group in Phase 3 of the Vietnamization program as being the same size force as we have in Korea.^{3/}

Again, stressing the permanent character planned for such a force, Laird declared:

Under the Vietnamization program in the third phase, we anticipate that a military assistance mission will remain in Vietnam. This will not be as large a force as the one we have in Korea at the present time, nor will it be a large force like the one we have in Europe. It would be a military assistance mission, and we would have this requirement for some time to come.^{4/}

^{1/} Nicksch, Larry A. Statements by Secretary of Defense Melvin Laird on the concept of a U.S. "Residual Force" in South Vietnam. U.S. Library of Congress, Congressional Research Service, April 12, 1971: 2.

^{2/} Ibid.

^{3/} Ibid., p. 3.

^{4/} Ibid., p. 4.

The Nixon Administration revised its policy on a residual force early in 1971, tying it more closely to the Paris negotiations. While a number of factors may have influenced this change, including increasing dissatisfaction in the United States over the course and length of the war, it is apparent that a major reason has been growing concern over the prisoner of war issue.

Beginning in February 1971, the President developed seemingly new criteria for a residual force. He spoke of keeping a residual force in South Vietnam until (1) the Communists released American prisoners of war and (2) Vietnamization had progressed to a point where South Vietnam had a "chance" of successfully resisting a Communist takeover. During an interview with six newspapermen on April 16, 1971, the President summarized his position:

But it will be necessary for us to maintain forces in South Vietnam until two important objectives are achieved: One, the release of the prisoners of war held by North Vietnam in North Vietnam and other parts of Southeast Asia, and, two, the ability of the South Vietnamese to develop the capacity to defend themselves against a Communist take-over--not the sure capacity, but at least the chance.^{1/}

The President also made it clear that the Administration no longer envisioned a permanent residual force:

Our goal, however, is a total withdrawal. We do not have as a goal a permanent residual force, such as we have in Korea at the present time.^{2/}

^{1/} New York Times, April 17, 1971.

^{2/} Ibid.

The President stressed in the interview that the residual force would include air power:

As far as Mr. Laird's statement was concerned, what he was referring to was that pending the time we can have a total withdrawal consistent with the principles that I laid down in my speech last week, it will be necessary for the United States to retain air power and to retain some residual forces.^{1/}

The President further discussed his criteria during an April 29 news conference. He once again stated the conditions for a total U.S. withdrawal:

The Americans are coming home, and we will achieve our goal of a total withdrawal. But that goal will be achieved only when we also get our prisoners of war back, and when the South Vietnamese develop the capability to have a chance to defend themselves against a Communist take-over.^{2/}

He was asked if the two conditions were inseparable--in other words, could a total withdrawal take place if one of the conditions was realized before the other. He answered:

The residual force, I think first, Mr. Lisagor, with regard to the POW's will be indefinite. In other words, if the North Vietnamese are so barbaric that they continue to hold our POW's, regardless of what we do with regard to withdrawal, then we are going to keep a residual force no matter how long it takes.

Second, however, with regard to the ability of the South Vietnamese to defend themselves..., we have a very good idea when that will occur. And as soon as that eventuality occurs, we will be able to move on that.

^{1/} Ibid. Administration plans for the Vietnamese Air Force (to be discussed later) indicate that the President may have been referring to air power in areas outside South Vietnam, such as Laos and Cambodia.

^{2/} Washington Post, April 30, 1971.

So, I think I am answering your question by saying, in effect, that the two are separable. One will occur before the other, unless the North Vietnamese do move on the POW's.^{1/}

The President appeared to be saying that progress in the Vietnamization program still constituted the main criterion for determining the pace of troop withdrawals, but that once South Vietnam had reached a certain level of capability, the second criterion, release of the prisoners, would then govern the withdrawal of remaining American forces. President Nixon emphasized the importance of a definite Communist commitment to release the prisoners. The President's words left the impression that he didn't believe the North Vietnamese would make such a commitment any time soon, for he said: "One/the point at which South Vietnam reaches the capability to defend itself/will occur before the other [release of the prisoners] unless the North Vietnamese do move on the POW's."

The President emphasized the duality of his criteria in his news conference of November 12:

If we do not get a negotiated settlement, then it is necessary to maintain a residual force for not only the reason--and this is, of course, a very primary reason--of having something to negotiate with, with regard to our prisoners, but it is also essential to do so in order to continue our role of leaving South Vietnam in a position where it will be able to defend itself from a Communist take-over.^{2/}

^{1/} Ibid.
^{2/} Washington Post, November 13, 1971.

The President appeared to shift course in his interview on January 2 with CBS correspondent Dan Rather. He placed full emphasis on the release of American POW's as the criterion for a total U.S. troop withdrawal and made no mention at all of South Vietnamese capabilities. Declaring that "our goal is to end the American involvement in Vietnam before the end of this year," he added that:

If that [negotiations] does not work, we will do it by withdrawal through Vietnamization, but if POW's are still retained by North Vietnam, in order to have any bargaining position at all with the Vietnamese, the North Vietnamese, we will have to continue to retain a residual force in Vietnam, and we will have to continue the possibility of air strikes on the North Vietnamese.

At another point, he again linked POW release to a total U.S. troop withdrawal:

I believe that as the enemy looks at the alternatives that they may decide as they see the American involvement ended, that it would be well for them not to retain our POW's and run the risk that it would be necessary for the United States to stay in Vietnam.

I know sometimes you and some of your colleagues have pointed out...that if when we had 540,000 in Vietnam, that had no effect in getting the enemy to negotiate on POW's, why would having 25,000 or 35,000 as a residual force have any effect? And the answer is, does the enemy want the United States to withdraw from Vietnam, or doesn't it.

However, the key to the interview may have been the President's remark that:

1/ New York Times, January 3, 1972.

I would say this, looking to the future, that as I have just pointed out, that when we come down to the end, as far as our own involvement in Vietnam is concerned, the question of whether or not they will return our prisoners in exchange for a total American withdrawal is one they will have a chance to answer...^{1/}

The President thus appeared to be setting the POW issue as the sole criterion for total withdrawal at some future time but not at the present.

A statement of clarification issued by the White House added to this impression in pointing up that South Vietnam's future was still a determining factor in U.S. policy.^{2/} Thus, taken together these statements imply that while sometime in 1972 (perhaps after the President's trip to Moscow and Peking) the President would decide that South Vietnam had reached the point of having a "chance" to defend itself, thus eliminating that criterion, he had not yet reached that decision.

The Administration reacted cautiously to the Vietcong's proposal of July 1, 1971, which provided that if the United States set a date for the withdrawal of "the totality of U. S. forces," the "parties" would "agree on the modalities" of POW release. Actual POW releases and troop withdrawals would "begin on the same date and will end on the same date." The Administration stated that certain points marked a change in the Communist negotiating position but that other points were unacceptable.

^{1/} Ibid.

^{2/} Washington Post, January 4, 1972. The statement asserted that President Nixon was "not dropping" his commitment to South Vietnam by tying a total U.S. troop withdrawal solely to POW release. It also asserted: "We are not dropping our desire and our criteria that the South Vietnamese have a chance to determine their own future."

The U.S. negotiators in Paris have attempted to gain from the North Vietnamese and Vietcong a clearer definition of certain points in the proposal, and U.S. officials have intimated that these points may mask a Communist demand for more concessions than a troop withdrawal in exchange for a release of U.S. prisoners.^{1/} Critics of the Administration have urged that the President set a troop withdrawal date to secure the release of the prisoners; they argue that a complete troop withdrawal will satisfy North Vietnam's conditions for prisoner release. On a telecast of April 7, President Nixon announced a new 100,000-man troop withdrawal, which would bring the American troop level in Vietnam down to 184,000 by December 1, 1971. In March, Secretary Laird went into some detail with regard to the expected troop withdrawal rate in 1972. He told newsmen on March 16 that:

The President has made it very evident that we will continue to withdraw at the rate of 3,000 men a week, and this program will continue to go forward.

When asked if this meant that, in accordance with the projected rate of

^{1/} On January 25, 1972, President Nixon disclosed that Presidential adviser Dr. Henry Kissinger had undertaken secret negotiations with the North Vietnamese in Paris. According to the President, Kissinger had initially proposed a military settlement based on a U.S. troop withdrawal date, release of prisoners and a cease-fire throughout Indo-China. Hanoi, according to the President, rejected the plan and insisted that a settlement provide for the end of all forms of U.S. aid and support of the South Vietnamese Government. In October, the United States secretly offered an eight point plan linking a troop withdrawal, prisoner release, cease-fire, and elections in South Vietnam supervised by an election commission in which the Vietcong could participate. President Thieu offered to resign one month before such elections. The President disclosed his offer on January 25, because the North Vietnamese, he said, had not responded to the proposal.

scale-down, the U.S. troop level would reach 50,000 by the end of 1972,

Laird replied:

According to the time schedule which has been announced by the President of the United States, you're a better mathematician than I am, but I think that your figures would check out in accordance with the President's time schedule which he has announced.^{1/}

In short, Laird thus appeared to confirm reports that projected the troop withdrawal course down to the point of a residual force.

In announcing a troop withdrawal of 100,000 men between May 1 and December 1, 1971, President Nixon accelerated the rate of withdrawal from 12,000 to 14,285 men per month. On November 12, he announced that 25,000 men would be withdrawn in December 1971 and 20,000 men in January 1972, thus leaving 139,000 in Vietnam on February 1, 1972. The President stated on January 2, 1972, that the next withdrawal would be at the same rate (22,500 men per month) or possibly at a higher rate.^{2/}

Press reports early in August cited Pentagon staff plans calling for the maintenance of a 43,000-man U.S. force through 1972.^{3/} In September, Orr Kelly, military writer for the Washington Star, stated that Pentagon officials now believed that the U.S. troop level would be down to the size of a residual force by the spring of 1972.^{4/} U.S. military sources in Saigon

^{1/} Congressional Record, March 16, 1971: E1896.

^{2/} New York Times, January 3, 1972.

^{3/} Washington Post, August 5 and 6, 1971.

^{4/} Washington Star, September 14, 1971.

gave some credibility to Kelly's account by reportedly saying that the American fighting role would formally end June 30, 1972, and that an advisory/support assistance group of 40,000 to 50,000 would replace the present Military Assistance Command setup.^{1/} President Nixon on January 2, 1972, indicated that he was thinking of a 25,000 to 35,000-man residual force in 1972.^{2/}

Another important question that could affect the duration of a residual force is the functions such a force would perform. It may be assumed that a force performing a variety of functions would be more permanent than a group limited to administering the U.S. military aid program. Secretary Laird has consistently stated that Phase 3 would constitute a military advisory mission; but as shown by the policy of the Kennedy Administration, such a mission could have a variety of roles. These could include such fields of activity as logistics, engineering, air support, and air transport (helicopters). This question was reportedly the subject of a broad policy review by the Administration during the summer of 1971.^{3/}

C. U.S. Ground Combat Role

By May 1, 1971, the Vietnamization program was slated to be at or near the end of Phase 1, the assumption of the "ground combat role" by South Vietnam. Administration statements indicated, however, that some

^{1/} Washington Star, September 18, 1971. New York Times, September 19, 1971.
^{2/} New York Times, January 3, 1972.
^{3/} New York Times, June 16, 1971.

American forces would be engaged in combat after that date. In January 1971, Secretary Laird and other Pentagon spokesmen set July 1971 as the time South Vietnam would take over "combat responsibility." U.S. forces, they asserted, would have a "security mission" of protecting U.S. logistics and support personnel; and in this capacity, they could become involved in combat. Laird on January 11, 1971, told reporters in Saigon that U.S. forces would remain "ready to pursue and ready to seek out the enemy when the time comes."

^{1/} Secretary of the Army Stanley Resor stated in May 1971 that South Vietnam would assume the major ground combat responsibility by "the end of the summer." Resor said that the United States had already withdrawn 70 percent of all ground maneuver battalions and that 34 still remained. These, he said, would be engaged in "active defense," which he described as small-unit patrolling action designed to protect U.S. bases and support troops. However, he refused to rule out larger-scale operations.^{2/} U.S. military sources in Saigon stated in September 1971 that at the conclusion of the withdrawal period ending December 1, 1971, the United States would have left in Vietnam 20 combat maneuver battalions compared to a high of 112 in April 1969.^{3/} By mid-November, the number of combat maneuver battalions had reportedly fallen to 19, with a total strength of under 20,000 men.^{4/}

^{1/} Washington Post, January 12, 1971.

^{2/} Ibid., May 18, 1971.

^{3/} Washington Star, September 18, 1971.

^{4/} Washington Post, November 13, 1971.

President Nixon summarized the U.S. combat role in his news conference of November 12, 1971:

Well, the combat role, let us understand, based on the casualties, as far as the offensive situation is concerned, is already concluded. American troops are now in a defensive position. They, however, will defend themselves, and what casualties we have taken--they are very small--will be taken in that defensive role.

You will find, as you analyze the battlefield reports...that the offensive activity, search and destroy, and all the other activity that we used to undertake, are now being undertaken by the South Vietnamese.^{1/}

IV. Vietnamization, 1968-1971: Progress and Weaknesses

A. Training and Equipment

Vietnamization seeks as its primary objective the assumption by the South Vietnamese Armed Forces of the total responsibility for military security within South Vietnam. In the context of a war that is part conventional and part guerrilla, this entails the development of a multi-function force that can carry out several types of security-related tasks. Under the present plan, South Vietnam's regular army forces (assisted by air and naval forces) will be responsible for defense against North Vietnamese main force units, particularly along or near South Vietnam's borders. Behind the ARVN, South Vietnam's territorial militia, the Regional Forces (RF) and Popular Forces (PF) handle provincial and village-hamlet security against Vietcong guerrillas. The Regional Forces generally operate on the province level, while the Popular Forces concentrate on smaller

^{1/} New York Times, November 13, 1971.

localities, particularly villages and hamlets. Within the villages and hamlets themselves (and in the cities), plans call for the People's Self-Defense Forces, units of armed citizenry, to assume the security responsibility increasingly.

To implement Vietnamization, the size of South Vietnam's armed forces has been increased substantially, and the South Vietnamese have received considerable quantities of new weapons from the United States. The size of the armed forces (army, navy, air force, Regional Forces and Popular Forces) grew from about 700,000 in April 1968 to over 1,100,000 at the end of 1970--an increase of 40 percent. Since then the size of the armed forces has leveled off. The regular army (ARVN) reached a strength of 427,500 in July 1971; its total strength is expected to reach 450,000, organized into ten infantry divisions and one airborne division. The navy and air force numbered about 40,000 and 45,000, respectively, in July 1971.^{1/}

Much of the growth of South Vietnam's armed forces has been achieved from expansion of the Regional Forces and Popular Forces--from 305,000 in April 1968 to over 515,000 today. Moreover, in 1968, the Government decided to train and arm the People's Self-Defense Forces. However, while the People's Self-Defense Forces presently number some three million members, only 400,000 weapons have so far been issued to them.

In the early stages of Vietnamization, the U.S. Command emphasized modernization of South Vietnamese weaponry. By the end of 1969, the

^{1/} New York Times, July 12, 1971.

United States had supplied M-16 rifles to all ARVN and RF and PF units. The ARVN also received 1,200 tanks and armored vehicles, 30,000 machine guns, 4,000 mortars, more than 500 heavy artillery pieces, 20,000 radios, and 25,000 jeeps and trucks.^{1/} Officials in the U.S. Military Assistance Command reportedly pointed out at that time that except for helicopter and fighter planes, the Vietnamese armed forces had received more than 90 percent of their fundamental requirements.^{2/} General Earle Wheeler, Chairman of the Joint Chief of Staff, stated in Congressional testimony early in 1970 that:

Although general shortages still exist throughout the regular military forces, these regular forces have been uniformly supplied with their basic military equipment needs and all units are at or near their authorized equipment levels.^{3/} We are also continuing to equip the Regional and Popular Forces.

By the summer of 1971, South Vietnam's navy had received over 600 ships and naval craft from the United States. South Vietnam's air force strength climbed from 20 squadrons in 1968 to 36 squadrons in 1971.

The People's Self-Defense Forces have not received modern equipment, and there are apparently no plans to turn over M-16's to them. The 400,000 weapons distributed thus far are generally obsolete, consisting of such items as World War II-vintage M-1 rifles and shotguns.

1/ Washington Post, December 14, 1969. New York Times, October 4, 1969. U.S. Congress. House of Representatives. Committee on Armed Services. Hearings on Military Posture. Part I. 91st Cong., 2nd sess., 1970, p. 7610.

2/ New York Times, October 4, 1969. Buckley, Tom. The ARVN is Bigger and Better, but---. New York Times Magazine, Oct. 12, 1969: 122.

3/ U.S. Congress. House of Representatives. Committee on Armed Services. Hearings on Military Posture. Part I. 91st Cong., 2nd sess., 1970, p. 6913.

Training has also been improved and increased. By the end of 1969, a total of 100,000 Vietnamese soldiers and militia members were in attendance at 25 schools and 33 training centers. In 1969 about 93,000 students completed one or more of the advanced military courses in the schools, compared to 44,000 in 1966. The number of South Vietnamese receiving specialized training in the United States quadrupled from 1,600 to 6,000 per year by the beginning of 1970.^{1/}

B. The ARVN

1. Accomplishments

The accomplishments of South Vietnam's armed forces to date lie in these areas: (a) improved combat performance; (b) the takeover of ground combat responsibility from the United States; and (3) gains in pacification security. The 427,000-man regular army (ARVN) is responsible for much of the success in the first two categories. Regional and Popular Forces account for the third.

Statistics employed to measure combat efficiency, including "kill ratios," plus the findings of many independent observers indicate that there has been a significant improvement in combat performance of some ARVN units. Better training and weaponry account for a good part of this; but other factors, such as leadership, the development of the Regional and Popular Forces, and changes in military command personnel, have also contributed. The South Vietnamese kill ratio now stands at 5 enemy to 1 South Vietnamese

^{1/} Washington Post, February 23, 1970. New York Times, October 4, 1969.

overall, and rises to as high as 10 to 1 in some encounters.^{1/} This compares to a common ratio of 1.5 to 1 in 1965. The ARVN now accounts for four-fifths of enemy killed (although a portion of this is due to U.S. air power), and the South Vietnamese now take the bulk of allied casualties. South Vietnamese casualties in 1970 included 20,914 killed, compared to 103,638 enemy killed. South Vietnamese killed in 1971, to October 1, totaled 17,322; enemy killed for the same period reportedly totaled 87,418.

Some South Vietnamese units have displayed an outstanding performance since 1968 while others have shown at least some improvement. The First Division falls into the former category. In 1969, it took over defense of the DMZ from the departing U.S. Marines. In the spring of 1970, the First Division defeated the 27th North Vietnamese Regiment, which had crossed the DMZ.^{2/} The First Division suffered severe casualties in the fighting in Laos during February and March 1971, and most observers report it generally gave a good account of itself. Since taking over from U.S. forces in Military Region I, the First Division, although thinly spread, has suffered no significant setbacks in defending South Vietnam's northern provinces.

^{1/} Sink or Swim. Far Eastern Economic Review. v. LXVIII, May 28, 1970: 22
^{2/} Washington Post, April 6, 1970.

The ARVN Seventh Division, long rated as one of the poorest South Vietnamese units, took over operations in the Mekong Delta from the U.S. Ninth Division in 1969. By February 1970, the Christian Science Monitor^{1/} reported that the Seventh "has suffered severe setbacks" in the Delta. The Government reacted by replacing the Division commander with a former brigade commander of South Vietnam's Airborne Division, one of the ARVN's best. Since then, the Seventh has suffered no serious setbacks, but it should be noted that the allied operation in Cambodia of May-June 1970 relieved the Delta of North Vietnamese pressure.

By the beginning of 1971, South Vietnamese forces had assumed most of the ground combat responsibility from U.S. troops. South Vietnamese casualties in 1970 were more than four times the U.S. total. By the end of the year, American combat deaths were running below 30 per week, and by October 1971 they had fallen below 10 per week. According to news reports, many of the American deaths resulted from mines and booby traps rather than direct engagement with the enemy. ARVN battalions, not American, were making most of the forays on the ground. Pentagon statistics show that the ARVN in 1970 conducted 9,904 ground operations of battalion size or larger while Americans and other allied units conducted 839, or roughly one-twelfth as many. By way of comparison, American and other allies conducted one-fifth of the ground operations in 1968 and one-third in 1967. For the first six months of 1971 the ARVN conducted 4,579 operations of battalion size or larger to 387 for the United States and other allies, for a ratio of about 12 to 1 as in 1970.

^{1/} Christian Science Monitor, February 10, 1970.

Following the allied operation in Cambodia in May-June 1970, South Vietnamese forces took over defense of the South Vietnam-Cambodia border in the 11 provinces closest to Saigon in Military Region III. By August 1970 the ARVN was defending South Vietnam's entire border with the exception of a small area in Military Region II (Central Highlands) guarded by a brigade of the First Cavalry Division. During the shift in Military Region III, U.S. forces moved to inner and more secure positions nearer to Saigon. U.S. forces continued to hold the primary responsibility in Binh Dinh Province along the coast in Military Region II through 1970, but they are presently being phased out of Binh Dinh. In Military Region I (northern South Vietnam), ARVN forces had by the latter part of 1970 assumed the primary combat burden near Khesanh and in the Ashau Valley.^{1/} By mid-1971, South Vietnamese forces had ground combat responsibility for the entire length of South Vietnam's border with Cambodia and Laos.^{2/}

The quick reversal of U.S. and South Vietnamese roles in Military Region III after the Cambodian incursion of May-June 1970 was the result of the allied attack. Capture of the Parrot's Beak and Fish Hook sanctuaries eased enemy pressure in that area significantly. Moreover, elimination of the Cambodian port of Sihanoukville as a funnel for enemy supplies to Military Regions III and IV was a major factor in the sharp decrease in

^{1/} New York Times, August 12 and 23, 1970.

^{2/} Ibid., September 12, 1971.

Communist activity there since early 1970.^{1/} Peter Osnos of the Washington Post concluded after a survey of the Delta region that:

A year of fighting in the former Communist sanctuaries of Cambodia appears to have achieved an important allied objective--maintaining a stable security situation in South Vietnam's populous southern regions.^{2/}

Osnos' statement points up the major success of Vietnamization and the ARVN to date: that the ARVN has assumed nearly all of the ground combat responsibility inside South Vietnam without any appreciable damage to South Vietnam's security. The trends in pacification (see section E., below, for a discussion of the subject) continue to be generally favorable, and North Vietnam has not attempted any large-scale offensive since 1968. Particularly within the last two years, most of the fighting between North and South Vietnamese forces involving large-unit action has occurred in Cambodia, where the ARVN has, for the most part, been successful.^{3/} Supporters of Vietnamization argue that the South Vietnamese operations in Cambodia and Laos have kept the enemy off balance and have prevented Hanoi from launching large-scale attacks against South Vietnam. Thus, they say, in terms of the overall U.S. objective of preserving an independent, non-Communist South Vietnam, Vietnamization has succeeded to date. Critics of Vietnamization

^{1/} Washington Post, October 5, 1970. Columnist Joseph Alsop reported that evidence uncovered at Sihanoukville by U.S. intelligence indicated that 21,000 tons of enemy supplies passed through the port per annum before its closure. President Nixon said in his foreign policy message of February 1970 that most of the Communist supplies for the southern half of South Vietnam had come in through Sihanoukville.

^{2/} Washington Post, May 28, 1971.

^{3/} The ARVN withdrawal from Snoul in June 1971 has been the only significant South Vietnamese defeat in Cambodia in 18 months of fighting there.

point out, however, that the ARVN's performance in Cambodia and Laos has been uneven. They also speculate that North Vietnam may be deliberately waiting until all American forces are withdrawn before launching an all-out assault on South Vietnam.

2. ARVN Campaigns in Cambodia (1970) and Laos (1971)

Many observers have pointed to operations in Cambodia in May-June 1970 and Laos in February-March 1971 as significant tests of the ARVN's performance. The combined U.S. and South Vietnamese operations in Cambodia in May and June 1970 were designed to clean out Vietcong/North Vietnamese sanctuaries along the border and provide an additional six to eight months' time to implement the Vietnamization program. President Nixon on June 30, 1970, said that ten major operations had been launched against a dozen of the most significant base areas with 32,000 American troops and 48,000 South Vietnamese participating at various times. U.S. ground combat units were restricted to a zone extending only to 21.7 miles from the border, but South Vietnamese forces engaged in combat actions over a much broader area of Cambodia.

By nearly all accounts, the ARVN performed well in Cambodia. The ARVN was aided by favorable (flat) terrain and weather conditions which permitted it to operate on a conventional scale, fully employing its armored units. Given these advantages, the ARVN was able to conduct wide-ranging operations in Cambodia over the two-month period and, with the Americans, largely succeeded in driving the North Vietnamese out of their border sanctuaries. Peter Kann of the Wall Street Journal reported from Cambodia in July 1970 that:

Even long-time critics concede that ARVN has been operating efficiently and effectively--at least by its own standards of operation within South Vietnam. Regiments that rarely ventured out on anything more taxing than a two-day operation in South Vietnam have been constantly on the move and in contact with enemy forces for six to eight weeks in Cambodia.

South Vietnamese operations in Cambodia are all the more impressive in that many have been conducted beyond the range of American logistical and firepower support.^{1/}

The South Vietnamese success in Cambodia was a major factor in the decision to turn over South Vietnam's border defense to the ARVN. By early June, American and South Vietnamese military planners reportedly decided that the ARVN was ready to assume the bulk of the defense of the southern half of South Vietnam's frontier.^{2/} This area was soon expanded to include much of the northern and northwestern border. In making this decision, American officials in Saigon and Washington were described as "surprised and elated" over the South Vietnamese performance in Cambodia.^{3/}

The ARVN incursion into Laos (February-March 1971) had more mixed results. Most observers believed that the South Vietnamese had at best only partially achieved the allied objective of disrupting North Vietnamese infiltration over the Ho Chi Minh Trail; even a White House "fact sheet" of April 3 evaluating the operation was cautious in drawing long-range conclusions. U.S. intelligence sources did assert that by the end of the

^{1/} Wall Street Journal, July 21, 1970.

^{2/} New York Times, June 11, 1971.

^{3/} Ibid.

operation the flow of supplies down the Trail was only one-fifth the normal flow for that time of year.^{1/} Independent observers pointed out that in the initial stages of the ARVN push, U.S. officers believed it would continue until May and that the South Vietnamese might drive as far as 25 miles west of Tchepone.^{2/} As it turned out, the ARVN took and held Tchepone for only a few days in March before retreating; by the last week in March, the ARVN had withdrawn from Laos under heavy pressure from the North Vietnamese.

Widely publicized accounts near the end of the campaign of South Vietnamese soldiers fleeing Laos tended to create the impression of an army unwilling to fight, but many if not most observers on the scene concluded that on the whole the South Vietnamese fought well. A Far Eastern Economic Review correspondent, who was highly critical of the operation, stated that:

It was not their fault, primarily. Considering the relatively short time they have been given to develop military skills to match those of their enemies, the South Vietnamese soldiers in Laos did not do too badly.^{3/}

1/ Washington Post, March 28, 1971.

2/ Ibid. March 28 and 29, 1971. Watershed for a War. Far Eastern Economic Review, V. LXXI, March 27, 1971: 16.

3/ Watershed for a War. Far Eastern Economic Review, March 27, 1971: 16.

Washington Post correspondent Peter Jay made this evaluation:

As it was, the South Vietnamese fought their way out of a difficult situation with competence and bravery, despite occasional well-documented moments of panic. But there was no concealing the fact that they were badly outnumbered and in rapid retreat.^{1/}

Daniel Southerland of the Christian Science Monitor gave a similar assessment:

Despite the ferocity of the North Vietnamese counter-attack in Laos, many South Vietnamese soldiers, heavily outnumbered, appeared to have acquitted themselves well, and often splendidly.^{2/}

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- 1/ Washington Post, March 28, 1971.
2/ Christian Science Monitor, March 24, 1971.

These and other observers laid the blame for the operation's shortcomings on poor planning and an unrealistic view of conditions the ARVN would face in Laos. Allied intelligence, it was charged, was at fault for grossly underestimating North Vietnam's capacity to defend its redoubt in southern Laos. As it was, by March the North Vietnamese were able to assemble nearly 30,000 crack troops against the 20,000-man ARVN force.^{1/} Moreover, the North Vietnamese already had substantial anti-aircraft installations in the area, which, coupled with the generally bad weather, limited allied air support and supply. Air supply was particularly important to the South Vietnamese, for the mountainous terrain in southern Laos made the ARVN almost entirely dependent on it.^{2/} The intensity of anti-aircraft fire may be measured by the approximately 270 U.S. helicopters reportedly shot down by March 6, less than a month after the operation began.^{3/} During at least one major battle between North and South Vietnamese forces, intense North Vietnamese ground fire prevented American helicopters from reinforcing and resupplying a besieged ARVN fire base.^{4/}

Besides North Vietnamese ground fire, poor monsoon weather conditions often limited air operations, thus giving North Vietnamese troops time to prepare for a counterattack.^{5/} The mountainous terrain, some of the worst in

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- 1/ Watershed for a War. Far Eastern Economic Review, March 27, 1971: 16.
 - 2/ New York Times, February 24, 1971.
 - 3/ Ibid., March 7, 1971. The U.S. Command's final figures showed 608 helicopters damaged with 104 permanently lost.
 - 4/ Ibid., February 24, 1971.
 - 5/ Ibid.

Indochina, prevented the ARVN from employing its armor as it had done in Cambodia. Finally, there is the question of whether the South Vietnamese should have reinforced the ARVN in Laos instead of withdrawing when they did. President Thieu apparently personally ordered the withdrawal against the advice of the U.S. Command, which favored committing more troops.^{1/}

South Vietnam's casualties in the Laos campaign totaled some 5,000, including more than 1,000 killed. This represented one-fourth of the ARVN force that went into Laos and testified to the heavy fighting there. While the administration claimed that the operation enhanced Vietnamization by creating confidence among the South Vietnamese,^{2/} other observers argued that some of South Vietnam's best units, including the First Division and airborne and ranger units, were badly mauled, thus reducing South Vietnam's overall military effectiveness. According to the South Vietnamese military command, four to six of the ARVN's 22 combat battalions in Laos had "heavily engaged" the enemy--a euphemism that means they were rendered ineffective.^{3/}

Yet, the allied claim that over 13,000 North Vietnamese were killed in the fighting may be valid, since North Vietnam did not try to take advantage of the ARVN's weakened military condition in the northern provinces of South Vietnam by launching a major offensive. The Nixon Administration in a private White House memorandum reportedly estimated that the 13,000 figure "may be low."^{4/}

^{1/} Washington Post, March 29, 1971. Abrams, Arnold. Better Believe It, Dick. Far Eastern Economic Review, v. LXXII, April 10, 1971: 7.

^{2/} Washington Post, May 24, 1971.

^{3/} Ibid., March 26, May 24, 1971.

^{4/} Ibid., May 24, 1971.

3. Deficiencies

In examining ARVN deficiencies, many critics and observers of Vietnamization have compared the South Vietnamese army with its American counterpart. In some respects, comparisons can be made, because the ARVN has been largely trained and equipped on the American model. The ARVN, like the U.S. Army, has emphasized fire power. Heavy air and artillery support have been a major ingredient in ARVN successes to date. This is particularly true of ARVN units operating in remote areas along South Vietnam's frontier or in Laos and Cambodia. In these areas, where North Vietnamese forces often outnumber or equal the South Vietnamese, superior firepower has proven to be the difference between victory and defeat. John Paul Vann, at that time chief of the U.S. pacification effort in the Mekong Delta, took special note of this in testimony before the Senate Foreign Relations Committee in February 1970:

The reason I believe this is that in nearly every given set battle that I have reviewed in Vietnam wherein a conventional ARVN force met a conventional North Vietnamese force or a conventional U.S. force met a conventional North Vietnamese force, the winner was always our side. The reason was that our side had air and artillery and the other side did not.^{1/}

Despite this advantage, ARVN units are often not as well equipped as American units and do not have as much firepower. In February 1970, when U.S. officials were saying that the ARVN had received more than 90 percent of its fundamental requirements, an ARVN infantry division of 14,000 had

^{1/} U.S. Congress. Senate. Committee on Foreign Relations. Vietnam: Policy and Prospects, 1970. Hearings before the Committee on Foreign Relations. 91st Cong., 2nd sess., 1970. Washington, U.S. Govt. Print. Off.: 116.

approximately 1,100 trucks as compared with 3,240 trucks for a 17,000-man U.S. infantry division. To take another item, radios, the ARVN division with 1,400 compared to 3,338 for the Americans.^{1/}

Today, the ARVN is equipped primarily with the M-41 Walker tank, a light tank which is no longer used by American forces.^{2/} The M-41's armor is believed superior to that of the Soviet-made PT-76 light tank, which the North Vietnamese used in Laos; but it is inferior to the Soviet T-34 and T-54 medium tanks, which North Vietnam also possesses.^{3/} The standard ARVN field pieces are the American 105 mm. and 155 mm. howitzers, but it is doubtful that the South Vietnamese have these in the same quantity as the Americans. The ARVN has armored cavalry squadrons but no armored divisions. Rifle company equipment is similar to that used by U.S. Army rifle companies except that the South Vietnamese do not have the 75 mm. recoilless rifle.^{4/}

The ARVN has suffered in the past from a weak logistics system, and this remains a potential source of difficulty as American forces depart. The weakness lies in both air transport shortages and organization at the ground level. At the beginning of 1970, for example, the U.S. Air Force was flying 70 percent of the transport supply for the ARVN.^{5/} U.S. officers admitted

1/ Washington Post, February 23, 1970.

2/ Institute for Strategic Studies. The Military Balance, 1971-1972. London, 1971: 52. The ARVN has some 200 M-41's plus M-24 and AMX-13 light tanks.

3/ Ibid., p. 51. North Vietnam is estimated to have 50 T-34's, 60 T-54's, and 300 PT-76's.

4/ New York Times, July 12, 1971.

5/ Washington Star, December 29, 1969.

early in 1970 that while the South Vietnamese were developing a logistics system, U.S. forces would have to perform much of the logistics functions for even the highly-regarded ARVN First Division. ^{1/} Secretary of the Army Stanley Resor stated bluntly in March 1970: "The ARVN logistic system is weak". ^{2/} In March 1971 he gave a similar assessment:

The Vietnamese military logistics must be improved to allow the South Vietnamese troops to fight on a sustained basis. This is most important, for with the departure of more and more Americans, the Vietnamese must eventually devise their ^{3/} own system of handling and transporting supplies of all kinds.

In mid-November 1971, Pentagon officials were describing the South Vietnamese armed forces as critically short of skilled, middle management logistics ^{4/} and technical personnel.

Phase II of Vietnamization is supposed to make the South Vietnamese self-sufficient in logistics. However, some experts, including Sir Robert Thompson, the British counterinsurgency authority who has advised President Nixon, reportedly believe that South Vietnam will need logistics assistance for some time to come. ^{5/} Administration sources are reportedly grappling with the problem of what functions the residual force envisaged in Phase III will perform. ^{6/} A multi-function residual force would continue logistics assistance to the South Vietnamese.

^{1/} U.S. Congress. Senate. Committee on Foreign Relations. Vietnam: Policy and Prospects, 1970. 91st Cong., 2nd sess., 1970, p. 529.

^{2/} U.S. Congress. House of Representatives. Committee on Armed Services. Hearings on Military Posture. Part I. 91st Cong., 2nd sess., 1970, p. 7613.

^{3/} U.S. Congress. House of Representatives. Committee on Armed Services. Hearings on Military Posture. Part I. 92nd Cong., 1st sess., 1971. Washington, U.S. Govt. Print. Off.: 2668.

^{4/} Washington Post, November 13, 1971.

^{5/} Washington Star, April 14, 1971.

^{6/} New York Times, June 16, 1971.

Another major problem for the ARVN is air transport and supply. In particular, the ARVN's mobility in the past has largely been dependent on the approximately 3,000 helicopters the U.S. Army has had in Vietnam. (The importance of helicopters in direct air support of ARVN forces will be discussed in connection with South Vietnam's Air Force.) At the beginning of 1970, for example, 75-80 percent of the helicopters used by the elite First Division were American.^{1/} In the Delta, the United States flew 90 percent of the helicopter support missions for South Vietnamese forces.^{2/} By May 1971, U.S. helicopters were flying about half of all helicopter missions for the ARVN.^{3/}

The importance of helicopter mobility has often been shown in operations in remote areas of South Vietnam or Laos and Cambodia where South Vietnamese forces and supplies must be brought in quickly to attack the Communists or reinforce ARVN troops already there. In 1969, the First Division, which assumed primary responsibility for the defense of the demilitarized zone, began to use helicopters extensively in remote areas of northwestern South Vietnam. Helicopter mobility enabled the First Division to engage the North Vietnamese quickly in this region.^{4/} The helicopters were supplied mainly by

^{1/} U.S. Congress. Senate. Committee on Foreign Relations. Vietnam: December 1969. 91st Cong., 2nd sess., 1970. Washington, U.S. Govt. Print. Off.: 9. U.S. Congress. Senate. Committee on Foreign Relations. Vietnam: Policy and Prospects, 1970. 91st Cong., 2nd sess., 1970, pp. 468-469, 558.

^{2/} U.S. Congress. Senate. Committee on Foreign Relations. Vietnam: Policy and Prospects, 1970. 91st Cong., 2nd sess., 1970, p. 123.

^{3/} New York Times, May 20, 1971.

^{4/} U.S. Congress. Senate. Committee on Foreign Relations. Vietnam: Policy and Prospects, 1970. 91st Cong., 2nd sess., 1970, p. 562.

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^{1/} U.S. Congress. Senate. Committee on Foreign Relations. Vietnam: December 1969. 91st Cong., 2nd sess., 1970. Washington, U.S. Govt. Print. Off.: 9. U.S. Congress. Senate. Committee on Foreign Relations. Vietnam: Policy and Prospects, 1970. 91st Cong., 2nd sess., 1970, pp. 468-469, 558.
^{2/} U.S. Congress. Senate. Committee on Foreign Relations. Vietnam: Policy and Prospects, 1970. 91st Cong., 2nd sess., 1970, p. 123.
^{3/} New York Times, May 20, 1971.
^{4/} U.S. Congress. Senate. Committee on Foreign Relations. Vietnam: Policy and Prospects, 1970. 91st Cong., 2nd sess., 1970, p. 562.

the U.S. 101st Airborne Division from its pool of 450 helicopters.^{1/}

The South Vietnamese incursion into Laos in February-March 1971, in which the First Division played a major role, was heavily dependent on U.S. helicopter support for both transport and firepower. At the height of the operation, U.S. helicopters were reportedly flying over 1,000 sorties a day into Laos, carrying supplies, evacuating wounded, and providing air cover.^{2/}

During heavy fighting at Krek in eastern Cambodia in September, U.S. helicopters and fixed-wing aircraft airlifted several thousand South Vietnamese troops into the Krek area to reinforce ARVN units under heavy North Vietnamese attack.^{3/} Lt. General Nguyen Xuan Thinh, deputy commander of ARVN forces in Cambodia, stated that South Vietnamese forces could not have held their positions at Krek without the various forms of U.S. air support. He noted that helicopter support was vital, especially for resupply.^{4/} South Vietnamese aircraft and helicopters accounted for only 40 percent of the troop and supply missions and 25 percent of the helicopter gunship

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- ^{1/} Christian Science Monitor, December 30, 1969.
 - ^{2/} New York Times, March 7, 1971; February 24, 1971.
 - ^{3/} Washington Post, September 30 and October 1, 1971.
 - ^{4/} Washington Post, September 30, 1971. Washington Star, October 8, 1971.

missions during the fighting at Krek.^{1/}

Under the Vietnamization program, South Vietnam's Air Force, which will provide helicopter support to the ARVN, will have 500 to 600 helicopters by 1974,^{2/} but this falls far short of the 3,000-3,500 possessed by the Americans. A shortfall of this magnitude will obviously affect ARVN capabilities, particularly its ability to carry out future operations in Laos, Cambodia, and remote border areas in South Vietnam. This will be especially true where the terrain prohibits the use of armor and transport vehicles. It would seem that another incursion into Laos on the scale of 1971 is unlikely, and if the battle for Krek is an indication of things to come, the ARVN may find itself in increasing difficulty in Cambodia as the U.S. withdraws.

^{1/} Washington Star, October 8, 1971. South Vietnam made another push into Cambodia at the end of November 1971. While the Government of Vietnam placed a heavy veil of secrecy around the operation, it appeared that it involved up to 15,000 men and was intended to relieve North Vietnamese pressure on Phnom Penh and possibly capture North Vietnamese base areas some 20 miles east of the Cambodia-South Vietnam border near Chup. However, reports on November 27 and 28 indicated that the drive was more limited in scope with emphasis placed on a logistics buildup and little offensive action in the direction of Chup. Lt. General Thinh stated on November 27 that he did not expect the South Vietnamese to fight any heavy engagements with the enemy during the operation. (See Washington Post 21, 23, 24, 28, 1971; New York Times, November 21, 23, 24, 1971.)

^{2/} New York Times, May 20, 1971. This compares to 100 at the beginning of 1969.

The United States, however, reportedly believes that South Vietnamese forces will have to use ground forces again to attack the Ho Chi Minh Trail in Laos. Statements by U.S. officials in October and November 1971 suggested that the United States would like to end the bombing of the trail in 1973 or 1974^{1/}. These officials said that when this happens, South Vietnam will have to rely increasingly on its ground forces to check North Vietnamese infiltration.^{2/}

U.S. officials have stated in the past that the United States does not wish to see the ARVN develop in the image of the U.S. Army. They have often voiced this sentiment in reference to the helicopter and mobility gap between U.S. and South Vietnamese forces.^{3/} Secretary Laird and other officials feel that South Vietnam can compensate for the lack of helicopter mobility through a better strategic positioning of ARVN and through the allied roadbuilding program.^{4/} The current roadbuilding program calls for about 2,500 miles of national and interprovincial all-weather roads. As of January 31, 1971, about 1,500 miles or 59 percent had been completed. The U.S. Army is expected to complete 1,700 miles of the program, with the South Vietnamese taking care of the rest. The South Vietnamese in mid-1970

1/ New York Times, October 29, 1971. Washington Post, November 13, 1971. Washington Star, November 10, 1971.

2/ Washington Star, November 10, 1971. Washington Post, November 13, 1971.

3/ U.S. Congress. House of Representatives. Committee on Armed Services. Hearings on Military Posture. Part I. 91st Cong., 2nd sess., 1970. Washington, U.S. Govt. Print. Office: 6918. U.S. Congress. House of Representatives. Committee on Appropriations. Subcommittee on Department of Defense. Department of Defense Appropriations for 1972. Part I. Hearings Before the Subcommittee. 92nd Cong., 1st sess., 1971. Washington, U.S. Govt. Print. Office: 418.

4/ U.S. Congress. House of Representatives. Committee on Appropriations. Subcommittee on Department of Defense. Department of Defense Appropriations for 1972. 92nd Cong., 1st sess., 1971, pp. 418, 501.

began working on 300 miles of road network.^{1/}

The road program is probably limited in the more inaccessible areas of South Vietnam such as the Central Highlands and the far northwest. Thus while valuable, it may not totally make up for the loss of U.S. air transport mobility.

Some observers and South Vietnamese officers dispute Secretary Laird and contend that the ARVN has, indeed, been modeled after the U.S. Army to an extreme degree. General Thinh said after the battle of Krek that: "Vietnamese units are trained to use the same tactics as the Americans, so we must have the same airpower."^{2/} While Thinh may have been concerned primarily with securing the best equipment for his troops, some American critics have argued that the U.S. training of South Vietnamese helicopter pilots has been needlessly lengthy because of the requirement to teach English to all trainees, which adds six months to a year to the total course of instruction. This, they claim, limits any significant increase in the number of South Vietnamese Air Force helicopter pilots. The critics insist that South Vietnam's helicopter capability could have been increased over the current planned level if the United States had organized helicopter schools in South Vietnam with instruction in Vietnamese.^{3/}

In summary, Vietnamization's achievements to date still leave several unanswered questions, the answers to which will determine the ultimate

^{1/} Ibid., 501, 711.

^{2/} Washington Post, October 10, 1971.

^{3/} Washington Post, June 16, 1971. New York Times, May 20, 1971.

the ARVN's failure to commission enlisted men in the field who have demonstrated leadership capabilities.^{1/} Instead, winning a commission in the ARVN often involves a man's family background, wealth, and political influence. Because a high level of formal education is required for admittance to Officer Candidate School (OCS), the junior officer ranks are largely reserved for members of South Vietnam's elite. ARVN soldiers of peasant background with little formal education have much less chance for advancement beyond the level of non-commissioned officer.^{2/} Under American prodding the Government of Vietnam has taken some steps to increase the number of non-commissioned officers admitted into OCS, but many observers doubt whether the officer corps will actively encourage such an effort.

The uneven lower-level officer leadership has had adverse effects on the ARVN performance. The ARVN has often been unable to launch the kind of small-unit operations below the battalion level which U.S. officers consider necessary to combat the guerrilla tactics of the enemy. In addition, junior officer leadership is so related to performance and discipline in the enlisted ranks that the deficiencies among ARVN junior officers have contributed to the ARVN's overall morale problems. The class distinction between officers and enlisted men can obviously impair communication and a spirit of solidarity between the two groups, which is necessary for the smooth functioning of any army.

^{1/} U.S. officials also point out that the rapid expansion of South Vietnam's armed forces since 1968 has placed a strain on the supply of leadership talent.
^{2/} Buckley, p. 132. Los Angeles Times, August 13, 1969. New York Times, January 26, 1971; July 12, 1971.

The desertion problem is probably the ARVN's biggest morale headache. Since 1967, an average of about 100,000 members of South Vietnam's armed forces have deserted every year with the bulk of the desertions coming from the ARVN.^{1/} Most of the deserters, according to U.S. officials, do not go over to the Communists but, instead, return to their homes. There, they sometimes join local Regional and Popular Force units. U.S. officials point to the "family problem" as the main cause of desertion.^{2/} ARVN enlisted men serve for the duration of the conflict at a pay level too low to support their families (\$15-\$20 a month for an enlisted man).^{3/} Allowances may boost income to about \$40 per month.^{4/} The ARVN leave system is practically non-existent. Thus, there is considerable pressure to desert and return home to support the family.

The same pressures help cause the dissatisfaction and discipline problems in the ARVN enlisted ranks, which observers have cited continuously since Vietnamization began. Reports coming out of Vietnam in August and September 1971 indicate an upsurge of looting, murder, and robbery involving ARVN soldiers. The New York Times quoted Henry B. Cushing, senior American adviser in Quangngai Province, as saying that the ARVN crime situation was

^{1/} U.S. Congress. Senate. Committee on Foreign Relations. Vietnam: Policy and Prospects, 1970. 91st Cong., 2nd sess., 1970, p. 532.

^{2/} U.S. Congress. House of Representatives. Committee on Appropriations. Subcommittee on Department of Defense. Department of Defense Appropriations for 1971. Part I. 91st Cong., 2nd sess., 1970, p. 437. New York Times, January 26, 1971.

^{3/} Kansas City Times, August 19, 1971.

^{4/} New York Times, January 26, 1971.