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Vietnamization of the War

by Joe Escobar - Sunday, May 24, 2015, 9:57 AM

This forum thread is for Vietnamization of the War posts and replies.

After studying the required materials, address the various questions. To make your POSTS, click the reply link in this, MY post. To reply to another student's post, be sure to click the reply link within in THEIR post.

IMPORTANT - SUBJECT LINES

BE SURE to use an informative subject line for your post. Do NOT simply leave it RE: Vietnamization of the War

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Seperating Vietnamization

by Christina Bergman - Tuesday, May 26, 2015, 9:52 PM

Question 1: What problems surfaced to hamper efforts to conclude the war?

I think the main problem was just that the South and the U.S. had different goals than the North. They probably all wanted peace, but their vision of what that was in the end was different for both sides. The North wanted a unified, communist Vietnam. On the other hand, the U.S. and the South wanted South Vietnam to remain separate and independent. And neither side wanted to give an inch, afraid of giving their adversary the upper hand. That fundamental difference and attitude made things difficult.

Oh, and of course the stupid table thing. I never knew how important the shape of a table could be...My, goodness. That was a ridiculous time-sucking ordeal.

Question 2: Was President Nixon right in de-coupling Vietnamization and American troop withdrawals from negotiations or were the two strategies essential complements to each other?

I think Nixon was right to separate Vietnamization from negotiations. He said in his speech that, "An announcement of a fixed timetable for our withdrawal would completely remove any incentive for the enemy to negotiate an agreement. They would simply wait until our forces had withdrawn and then move in." And I completely agree. If he had discussed it with the North and eventually said, "Okay, we'll have everybody out by such-and-such a date." It would've only been taken advantage of. He might as well have said, "Well, here ya go. It's all yours." Nixon would have been giving them exactly what they wanted. A cease-fire or something of that sort should be established before negotiations, but complete withdrawal should not have been a prerequisite for peace talks. Because he decided to say, "Yes, we're going to do it. But, no, we're not going to tell you when," he left them with a guarantee of us leaving their country (which is what they wanted), but without giving them an opportunity to just wait things out and not come to any agreements and I think that was the right decision.

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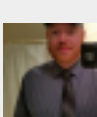
Re: Seperating Vietnamization

by Christina Bergman - Sunday, May 31, 2015, 3:23 PM

Just thought this would be good to add...I found this quote in *America’s Longest War* and I thought it represents the attitude of the peace talks very well, and shows why they went nowhere for so long: “Having invested so much blood, treasure, and prestige in a struggle of more than ten years’ duration, neither side was yet willing to make the sort of concessions necessary for peace. Perhaps more important, each side still felt it could get what it wanted without compromise.” (Herring 311).

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a few interesting citings from Herring
by [Timothy Conway](#) - Sunday, May 31, 2015, 4:58 PM

I think that was a very good citing from (Herring 311) and is a good synopsis of the peace talks in Paris.

I would also like to add citing from *Americas Longest War* " ***The Saigon regime could never quite overcome its origins as a French puppet government. Political fragmentation, the lack of able and far-sighted leaders and a tired corrupt elite that could not adjust to the revolution that swept Vietnam after 1945 afforded a fragile basis for nationhood.***" (Herring p.351) I think this sums up the personality and inner workings of the South Vietnamese government. This makes me question if Vietnamization would have worked even if it was implemented early in the war. Also on the same page (Herring p.351) "***The United States could provide money, weapons and advice, but it could not furnish the ingredients necessary for political stability and military success.***"

Vietnamization is a strategy that should have been the policy before the U.S. got bogged down in Vietnam and may have given the South confidence and tools to fight for themselves and the reliance on the U.S. would not have been an issue. It's a policy that had the highest chance of accomplishing the U.S. goal in creating a non-communist state to block communist expansion but looking at the Saigon regime from hindsight it might have been a waste of treasure and political hegemony in the world. "***Saigon collapsed from within as much as from external assault.***" (Historian David Elliot)

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a Difficult balancing act
by [Timothy Conway](#) - Tuesday, May 26, 2015, 11:17 PM

Some problems that hampered the conclusion were the all three sides paid very high prices in treasure, lives, time and the political positional Hegemony in the region. The North did not give in to any consolatory gesturers from the U.S. and wanted one thing... To unify their country and ultimately dominate anyone who opposed them. The U.S. wanted to prove to the world it was the superpower it was after World War II and after and to prevent the spread of communism. The South Simply wanted to have a non communist state and to be independent from the dependency that they became accustomed to from the United States. All three were fighting, bombing, rocketing and infiltrating during negotiations and that does not show any diplomatic gestures to the opposite side of the table.

Question 2

Nixon Decoupling the Vietnamzization from the negotiations was a good move because in order to negotiate effectively you can not show your hand and to have a strong strategy behind you to give you confidence to proceed. Plus you don’t want to give the enemy an upper hand on knowing your strategy. “*The obstacle is the other side's absolute refusal to show the least willingness to join us in seeking a just peace. And it will not do so while it is convinced that all it has to do is to wait for our next concession, and our next concession after that one, until it gets everything it wants* (Nixon speech 1969)

The two strategies of Vietnamization and troop withdrawal was a “double edged sword” in its own right. With the Vietnamization of South Vietnam was a good policy on paper and should have been enacted under the Johnson administration. This was what the Nixon administration inherited from the Johnson administration, and Secretary of Defense Laid. Laid even gave this policy its name.(Herring: P.288 first paragraph) I found it funny that President Nixon seemed to sell it like it was his idea and put it under the Nixon Doctrine.“*Let me briefly explain what has been described as the Nixon Doctrine—policies which not only will help end the war in Vietnam, but which is an essential element of our program to prevent future Vietnams.*” (Nixon Speech 1969) but than later gave a little political nod to Laid “*The Vietnamization plan was launched following Secretary Laird's visit to Vietnam in March. Under the plan, I ordered first a substantial increase in the training and equipment of South Vietnamese forces*” (Nixon speech 1969) Vietnamization was a good strategy because it did put the responsibility on the actual people who where fighting for their freedoms and against communist aggression. This motivation is very powerful to ones mind and hart, a good example would be the North Vietnamese and their motivation to unify the country under one flag.

The troop withdrawal had to compliment Vietnamization because it would force them to the front lines and foster majority of the fighting. And relieve the burden on the U.S forces allowing them to withdrawal. Laird stated to Nixon “*The United States should drastically increase military aid to bolster South Vietnams ability to defend itself. A concurrent program of regular U.S. troop withdrawals, sensibly balanced between, too much, too soon and too little too late.*” (Herring: P288) This was a delicate balance to achieve because of two questions. 1.) Can the South Vietnamese be ready to bare majority or all of the fighting and 2.) At what rate does the U.S. withdrawal its forces?

This balance of removing troops and leading from behind (while leaving) proves most difficult with people that have been so depended on the Americans presence in South Vietnam in all aspects of life, protection, socially and most importantly economically. In the early stages there were on average 2,000 desertions among the military of South Vietnam a week. (A television History of Vietnam: episode 7) this was a bi product of Vietnamization that probably could not have been avoided at the time Nixon set the policy into action. I think that this byproduct could have been avoided if this policy of Vietnamizaion and troop withdrawal were implemented years earlier.

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Re: a Difficult balancing act
by [Veronica Sandow](#) - Friday, May 29, 2015, 7:31 PM

The troop withdrawal should have complimented Vietnamization. It would have complimented the strengthening of Southern forces if the time tables had not been rushed and if Nixon had not been so desperate to save face. "To appease critics at home, he speeded up the timetable of American troop withdrawals. Over the protests of Abrams, he ordered the removal of 100,000 troops by the end of the year, leaving 175,000 in Vietnam, of whom only 75,000 were combat forces." (Herring p305)

It threw the delicate balance off and under-minded the weakness of the South Vietnamese forces. As you point out, they were having high desertion rates as a result of Nixon policies. If the troops had stayed there, in larger numbers and for a greater length of time, this could have been worked out. Instead of seeing the issues and trying to work it, we saw issues and got out quicker.

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Re: a Difficult balancing act
by [Timothy Conway](#) - Sunday, May 31, 2015, 5:13 PM

I agree the time table was rushed and did not help the Vietnamization process at all. Troop Withdrawals had to happen but in any type of occupation it must be done at a slower pace to avoid a power vacuum. Example: troop withdrawal in Iraq, look at the huge vacuum that was created and with out a government that was strong enough to stand on its own in return arguably created fringe radical groups such as ISIS.

I also agree with you that if the troops stayed in larger numbers and a lengthier time, the desertion rate would have been lower because the troops would have felt more confident that the U.S. was still fighting with them and believed in their sovereignty. The balancing act is very difficult and the rush to remove troops should be examined very carefully to avoid disasters like power vacuums and the falling apart of the armed forces.

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"Lose in Vietnam, bring the boys home."
by [Matthew Maffioli](#) - Wednesday, May 27, 2015, 8:11 PM

Question 1

Johnson ramping up the war, he was determined not to lose, though there really at that point could be no winner or loser, the negotiations in Paris were definitely a set back for Nixon, had he just pulled everyone out when he said the American people wanted him to it would have left a giant vacuum in the country. You can’t occur a country with that many troops for that long and just vanish. Especially at that point with the negotiations souring, as he goes on to say it would end up being a massacre. He knew he was stuck and didn't have much of a way out. When two presidency's actively pursue something the

third one in is going to be in a bit of a pickle as far as ending it.

Question 2

I think he was really just shooting in the dark. He wanted to end the war, the peace talks were going nowhere he knew he couldn't just pull out the troops at once.I think Training the South Vietnamese to fight their own war was a great idea. Was it actually his idea? I doubt that. By doing this you were removing a lot of Americans from a fight they shouldn't have been in while giving the people who were in the fight the tools needed to fight on their own. Once the project, or initiative got going you could do exactly what he did start bringing our men home. By strengthening their forces you could ease the burden on ours. It complemented each other incredibly well. That was probably the best thing they could have done to get us out of that war. Though I am sure this information made it to North Korea, so I would be interested to see what their higher ups thought of this plan and how they reacted towards it.

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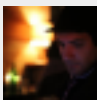


Re: "Lose in Vietnam, bring the boys home."

by Dylan Kohn - Friday, May 29, 2015, 8:36 PM

You touched briefly on the idea of once being involved in a country, vanishing isn't an option. It reminded me that our influence on Vietnam at the time wasn't just our military presence and our government assistance, but it was also our economic strength, our goods, services, and culture often contagious and appealing to other nations. Eliminating our troops at the time wouldn't allow us to actually vanish and wouldn't solve the governmental and economic issues they were also facing.

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Re: "Lose in Vietnam, bring the boys home."

by Matthew Maffioli - Sunday, May 31, 2015, 4:33 PM

Exactly, there was no way for us to completely pull out of the country without having extreme lasting effects. Not just the fact that the North Vietnamese would have swarmed in. I hadn't really thought about the economic strength we were contributing to them as well. That just compounds the point i was making, and you are too.

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Re: "Lose in Vietnam, bring the boys home."

by Laura Stewart - Sunday, May 31, 2015, 2:40 PM

The only issue with “strengthening their forces” to “ease the burden on ours” is that their forces weren’t strong enough without our assistance. This form of assistance could have been adjusted to just include weapons, but it would be difficult to withdraw all of our troops because it would have taken a much longer time for them to be completely independent. The plan failed in the fact that the North Vietnamese ended up taking over as soon as the South Vietnamese forces weakened. All of American efforts were fruitless without the success of the South Vietnamese. In order to make this plan work, the South Vietnamese would still need American support and would need to be large enough in number to fight the strong North Vietnamese.

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Re: "Lose in Vietnam, bring the boys home."

by Timothy Conway - Sunday, May 31, 2015, 6:00 PM

I agree with you It would have taken a longer time to create a more independent South Vietnamese Army and that they still needed American support to fight a much stronger North Vietnamese army. Gen. Abrams had bitterly

protested the new troop withdrawals, warning that they would leave South Vietnam vulnerable to enemy military pressure and could be devastating to the vietnamization program.(Herring p.295) Nixon heard warnings of the effects of troop withdrawals before the Vietnamization process was complete and seemed to ignore them even from top military brass. I would like to also point out that even U.S. officials had doubts on the Vietnamization policy. "*U.S. officials undertook the program with grave doubts. Most military experts agreed that without full American assistance, the South Vietnamese could not stand up against the combined threat of the North Vietnamese Army and NLF forces. Gen. Creighton Abrams criticized Vietnamization as a slow surrender and repeatedly protested the size and pace of U.S. troop withdrawals.*" (Herring p.291) Vietnamization was viewed as a path to peace with honor by Nixon and a slow surrender by Gen. Abrams, interesting on how one policy can be summed up by two polar opposite conclusions.

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Instability
by [Veronica Sandow](#) - Wednesday, May 27, 2015, 8:50 PM

Nixon was wrong in his choice to decrease troops while turning the war over to the South Vietnamese. The rate of progress was too slow to warrant pulling troops back while handing the war back to the South Vietnamese. “Most military experts agreed that without full American assistance, the South Vietnamese could not stand up against the combined threat of the North Vietnamese Army and NLF forces.” (Herring p291) This demonstrates the high level of opposition to the then-president’s decision. Nixon did not heed warnings of this plan’s large failures and even started to withdraw troops at an increased rate. (Herring p305) This contributed to the instability he had been warned of and it went downhill from there.

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Re: Instability
by [Laura Stewart](#) - Friday, May 29, 2015, 5:48 PM

The whole reasoning behind American involvement in the Vietnam War was to stop the potential threat of Communism. Yet, this was based off of speculation. If America did not want to have troops in Vietnam, then we should not have sent any troops overseas. Withdrawing troops would prove to be more difficult once they had established their dominion. I would agree with Nixon in his statement: “In January I could only conclude that the precipitate withdrawal of American forces from Vietnam would be a disaster not only for South Vietnam but for the United States and for the cause of peace. For the South Vietnamese, our precipitate withdrawal would inevitably allow the Communists to repeat the massacres which followed their takeover in the North 15 years before.” If the South Vietnamese military was stronger before the removal of American troops, then the return of soldiers would seem plausible. However, keeping the rate of withdrawal to the strengthening of the South Vietnamese was not proportionate.

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Re: Instability
by [Christina Bergman](#) - Sunday, May 31, 2015, 12:30 PM

I both agree and disagree with you. I agree that Nixon’s decision to speed up troop withdrawal wasn’t the smartest move. If he truly was trying to give the South Vietnamese the best fighting chance, he shouldn’t have tried to rush it like he ended up doing. But, I do think that, if done right, Vietnamization and troop withdrawal would have worked together perfectly to increase the effectiveness of the Southern troops (and it was really the only way to help them while we, in the meantime, tried to end our involvement in the war). The way I see it is that as time went on, the Vietnamese would learn how to be more effective in the battlefield and as U.S. troops withdrew, they would eventually learn to depend less and less on Americans and eventually they would know how to run things by themselves in the end. I mean, that’s what was supposed to happen. And so, in principle, it sounded great. But, you’re right. Timing was key and Nixon ruined it. Without adequate time to actually learn what they needed to learn, leaving too quickly probably just left them wandering in the dark to some extent.

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War for Peace
by [Dylan Kohn](#) - Wednesday, May 27, 2015, 9:30 PM

In President Nixon's speech to Americans in regards to the Vietnam War, he attempts to assuage the listeners/viewers by outlining the different steps that he had taken in order to try to resolve the conflict, defending his reasoning for staying in Vietnam as well as his pursuit of resolution. In walking this tightrope of pleasing both the doves and hawks, Nixon obviously knew that ultimately he would not be able to satisfy all citizens with the solution. Saying it's the "right way" is almost justifying that he hasn't been as successful as he promised on the campaign trail. Sadly it's an aspect heard frequently and as the latest presidential campaigns heat up, one we'll hear real soon again.

What got in Nixon's way as far as concluding the war was a number of aspects, and often was victim of his own undertakings. In allowing and encouraging delays in peace talks prior to his election, it strained relationships and made it even more difficult to even sit down at a table let alone get anywhere. His secrecy and paranoia also triggered skepticism in the North, making them resistant to make agreements. Also the North knew of the U.S disapproval of the war and the domestic uprisings, which was a bargaining chip for the North to simply not have to negotiate. And all Vietnamese people, regardless of location, simply wanted peace and unity for their country.

The strategies of Vietnamization was not separate from the removal of U.S. troops simply because the formulaic approach the U.S. took was to not make the South Vietnamese their own representatives, but to make them soldiers and government officials in our own image, to be the democratic and military power that we were. The U.S. failed to see the differences in the culture and were unable to accept that Vietnam did not want to be a little United States.

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Return and Refuel
by [Laura Stewart](#) - Wednesday, May 27, 2015, 11:05 PM

Question 1

Attempting to make peace during the war was more difficult than imagined. The Paris talks were proving to be pointless. There was little to no agreement made throughout their negotiations. In fact, “no progress whatever has been made except agreement on the shape of the bargaining table” (Nixon). Along with the difficulty in Paris, America was strongly motivated to keep communism from spreading. Without this victory in Vietnam, other nations may have fallen to communist rule. Therefore, America committed troops to Vietnam. After the American troops entered Vietnam, withdrawing them would prove to be difficult on multiple fronts. “For the South Vietnamese, our precipitate withdrawal would inevitably allow the Communists to repeat the massacres which followed their takeover in the North 15 years before” (Nixon). America concluded to train the Vietnamese to defend themselves. However, this would take time. If the enemy struck back even harder than before, then it would be problematic to take out all American troops without having the newly trained Vietnamese ready. This process along with the inability to reach a conclusion through negotiations left the war lingering.

Question 2

Pairing the Vietnamization and American troops withdrawals was essential to the success of the Vietnamese. The removal of American troops may not result in the victory of the South Vietnamese, but it would mean the return of American troops and the withdrawal of American involvement. Allowing the Vietnamese to defend themselves would prove to be the natural solution. The people should have been able to fight for themselves. Still, they were not strong enough. This is why American aid was necessary. “Though he said the choice to not withdraw all American forces immediately may have seemed wrong, he promised that the tougher choice, instituting a policy to help the South Vietnamese defend their own freedom, would bring greater chances for a lasting solution to this conflict and other similar conflicts in the future” (Baumann). Both the enforcement of Vietnamese training and American withdrawal were necessary.

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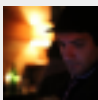
Re: Return and Refuel
by [Dylan Kohn](#) - Friday, May 29, 2015, 8:33 PM

You bring up some good points as far as some of the concerns in negotiations, given that the North were able to organize and carry out synchronized attacks such as Tet. I don't, however, see the Paris talks as pointless, but more designed for something other than peace talks. It was a great soapbox for both sides to gain leverage and support while still playing the game and farce of actually going through making actual discussions of peace. I think because the sides were so far apart as far as what they wanted and what they were willing to compromise at the time, that it wasn't effective.

It's interesting that when discussing whether Vietnamization and the removal of troops is joined together that the reason for the war is more readily apparent. Where there is so much debate and confusion, the only way to justify leaving is to address why we were there in the first place.

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Re: Return and Refuel

by [Matthew Maffioli](#) - Saturday, May 30, 2015, 3:58 PM

I agree, I felt like Nixon was the first president to realize it was "their war" not "our war" and that they were the only ones who can win it. The South vietnamese were essential to winning the war, and training them to fight instead of us fighting was really the only way. If we fought the war for them, or continued too it would never have ended because they never would have been able to defend themselves.

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Re: Return and Refuel

by [Joseph Foley](#) - Sunday, May 31, 2015, 6:26 PM

Thanks for the post. President Nixon was certainly the first U.S. President to reverse America's involvement in Vietnam, but I think that many leaders recognized and realized the need before that point. The U.S. had been involved in the area for decades leading up to this point, with many reluctant political and military leaders involved. Nixon took over when the anti-war fervor had reached a boiling point, exiting Vietnam was becoming a political must.

President Johnson seemed dismayed to be inheriting the conflict. Despite his stubborn and strong willed reactions, he struggled mightily with the decision to commit more troops and resources. Poor communication and advice from his advisors did not help the situation. As we have witnessed in our recent material, many leaders from the U.S. would have preferred to let the South Vietnamese fight their "own war." The fear of communism spreading played a large influence in our involvement and escalation.

I would agree that Nixon got the ball rolling in regard to departure, but I would argue that many leaders had already recognized the need. Unfortunately, like our entrance into the conflict (Gulf of Tonkin), our departure raised many questions. The South Vietnamese were left confused and weak, much like the beginnings of the war.



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