

# [Vietnamization and its effects essay](https://assignbuster.com/vietnamization-and-its-effects-essay/)

Vietnamization and its Effects

Vietnamization and it’s Lasting Effects on South Vietnam and it’s Fall

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Background

Vietnam was a country that was far removed from the American

people until their history and ours became forever interlinked in what

has come to be known as the Vietnam conflict. It is a classic story

of good guys versus bad, communism versus freedom, and a conezt

struggle for stability. Americas attempt to aid the cause of freedom

was a valid one, but one that ended up with South Vietnam being

dependent upon us for its very life as a nation.” Vietnamization” was

the name for the plan to allow South Vietnam to ezd on its own, and

ended in leaving a country totally on its own, unable to ezd and

fight.

Vietnam was a French territory until the Viet Minh insurgency of

the late 1940’s and through 1954. Although regarding this uprising as

part of a larger Communist conspiracy, Americans were not

unsympathetic to Vietnamese aspirations for national independence.

The ensueing defeat of the French brought an end to the first stage of

what was to be a thirty year struggle. The Indochina ceasefire

agreement (Geneva Accords) of July 21, 1954 led to the creation of

seperate statesin Laos and Cambodia, and the artificial division of

Vietnam into two republics. In the North theCommunist Viet Minh

established the democratic of Vietnam, and in the south a random

collection of non – Communist factions, led by Ngo Dinh Diem, formed

the Republic of Vietnam. The general elections provided for by the

agreement never took place, and the two states quickly drew apart.

The United States immediatly threw its support behind the southern

regime and extended military aid through a Military Assiezce

Advisory Group (MAAG) under the command of Lt. General John W.

O’Daniel.

American objectives in South Vietnam were reletively simple and

remained so — the establishment and preservation of a non – Communist

government in South Vietnam. Initally, the most pressing problem

was the weakness of the Saigon government and the danger of cival war

between South Vietnam’s armed religious and political factions. Diem,

however, acting as a kind of benevolent dictator, managed to put a

working government together, and O’Daniel’s advisory group, about

three or four hundred people, went to work creating a national army.

Slowly, under the direction of O’Daniel and his successor in October

1955, Lt. General Samuel T. Williams, the new army took shape. The

primary mission of this 150, 000 man force was to repel a North

Vietnamese invasion across the Demilitarised zone that seperated North

and South Vietnam. Diem and his American advisors thus organised and

trained the new army for a Korean – style conflict, rather than

for the unconventional guerrilla warfare that had characterised the

earlier French – Viet Minh struggle. President Minh also maintained a

subeztial paramilitary force almost as large as the regular army.

This force’s primary task was to maintain internal security, but also

acted as a counter weight to the army, whose officers often had

political ambitions that were sometimes incompatible with those of

Diem. From the beginning, such tensions weakened the Saigon

government and severly hampered its ability to deal with South

Vietnam’s social and ecenomic problems.

At the beginning of 1968 the military strength of the Saigon

government was, on paper, impressive. The regular armed forces

consisted of about 250, 000 men, organisedinto a conventional army,

navy, air force, and marine corps, well equipped with tanks,

artillary, ships and aircraft, Behind the regulars was a similar –

size militia – like organization, the Territorial forces. Although

consisting mainly of small rifle units, the territorials had begun to

recieve modern radios, vehicles, and small arms during the early

1960’s, and their capabilities had increased considerably. The

organization of the armed forces mirrored most Western nations; a

civialian Ministry of Defence directed a military general staff which

headed a heirarchy of operational commands and various support and

training facilities. The Territorial Forces, a formal part of the

armed forcse since 1964, was apportioned amon the forty – four

province cheifs, the principle administrators of Vietnam. In

comparison, the Viet Cong army looked pertty weak. With some

80, 000 lightly equipped regulars, back by about 80, 000 – 100, 000 part

– time geuirillas and supported by a few thousand North Vietnamese

troops and a fragile supply line hundreds of miles long, it was hardly

an imposing force. Nevertheless, this force had inflicted a series of

defeats on the South Vietnamese troops, all but throwing then out of

the copuntryside and back into the cities and towns. Vietnamization

In the spring of 1969 Presiden Richard M. Nixon initiated his

new policy of “ Vietnamization.” Vietnamization had two distinct

elements: first, the unilateral withdraawl of American troops from

South Vietnam; and, second, the assumptionof greater military

responsibilities by the South Vietnamese armed forces to make up for

that loss. Mlilitary planners had based previous withdrawl plans on

reductions in enemy forces. Vietnaminization rested on the twin

assumptions thqat the combatants would not reach any kind of political

settlement, or underezding, and that the fightinh in the South would

continue without any voluntary reduction in enemy force levels.

Although in theory the subsequant withdrawl of American troops

depended on improvements in Souh Vietnamese military capabilities and

the level of combat activity, in practice the timing and size of the

withdrawals were highly political decisions made in the United States.

Senior advisors in Vietnam were asked for their opinions on South

Vietnam’s ability to handle a Viet Cong threat, or a combined Viet

Cong – North Vietnamese threat, and their answers were for the most

part the same. They agreed that South Vietnam would be able to

“ contain” a Viet Cong threat except in the III Corps Tactical zone,

wherecontinued American air and artillerary support would be needed.

Against a combined threat, however, all doubted that the South

Vietnamese could do little more than hold their own, and judged their

offensive capabilities marginal at best. Although they made no

recomendations as to how the South Vietnamese could deal with either a

Viet Cong or a combined threat, and suggested no changes in their

military organization or stratedgy, all saw a pressing need for more

air, artillery, and logistical support, and more attention to training

and retaining troops. Most recommendedmore promotions based on

merit, and more stationing of troops near home to reduce desertions.

Phasing the American troops out of Vietnam could take no less than

five years was often mentioned. The four senior advisors were hopeful

that the South Vietnamese could eventually deal with the insurgency by

themselves, but none felt that they could handle a conventional North

Vietnamese threat or a combined Viet Cong – North Vietnam opponent.

On March 5, 1969, Melvin R. Laird, Nixon’s new secretary of

defence, visited Saigon, accompanied by General Wheeler. Briefed by

the MACV (United States Military Assiezce Command, Vietnam) on the

situation in Vietnam, Laird declaired his satisfactionwith the

progress that had been made, both in the war effort and in the South

Vietnamese armed forces, and instructed Abrams (commander od the MACV)

to accelerate all programs turning over the war to Saigon. He returned

to Washington, and his determination to effect a major change in

American policy tward the war in Vietnam remained fixed. In

subsequent discussions with Nixon, Henry Kissenger (the president’s

special assiezt for national security, and the Joint Cheifs of

Staff, he pursued this goal vogorously, presently persuading the

president to embark on a policy of what he called “ Vietnamization” —

turning the ground war over to the South Vietnamese.

On April 10, Kissenger, with the approval of the president,

directed Laird to prepare a specific timetable for Vietnamizing the

war. The plan was to cover all aspects of U. S. military, para –

military, and civilian involvement in Vietnam, including combat and

combat support forces, advisory personnell, and all forms of

equipment. Neither a further expansion of the South Vietnamese armed

forced nor the withdrawl of the North Vietnamese Army was envisioned.

Instead, through phased troop withdrawls, the American military

presence in Vietnam was to be reduced to a support and advisory

mission. Troop withdrawls were to begin July 1, 1969, with

alternitive completion dates of December 1970, June 1971, and December

1972. Kissenger requested an initial overall report outline by June

1. Thus, despite the divergent U. S. agencies involved in the war

effort and despite the unanimous opinion of these same agencies that

the South Vietnamese could never deal with a combined Viet Cong –

North Vietnamese Army threat, the new administration had instructed

the American military command to develop plans for turning over almost

the entire ground war to the South Vietnamese. Tward the end of 1969,

the first American troops left Vietnam, never to return.

Withdrawal

The withdrawal of U. S. military forces from South Vietnam

continued throughout 1971 and 1972 almost without a break in stride.

American military strength passed through the residual support phase

sometime in 1971, and in April, 1972 MACV began planning for a

possable total U. S. withdrawl as early as November 1973. As american

troopsredeployed, Vietnamization, the expansion of South Vietnamese

military responsibilities, marched steadily forward. The period was

marked by heavy combat. South Vietnamese cross – border operations

into Cambodia and Laos in 1971 met stiff opposition, and in early

1972 were countered by the North Vietnamese “ Easter” offensive into

South Vietnam. Fighting was intense, casualties and equipment losses

were high, and the nature of the combat was more or less

conventional. Guerrila warfare behind South Vietnamese lines was

negligable, while use of tanks, long – range artillary, and

sophisticated missles became commonplace.

As American combat units left South Vietnam and the South

Vietnamese assumed responsibility for the war, many advisors felt

their work load increasing. In September 1971, General Abrams

(commander of the MACV) directed that the current avvisory effort

focus primarily on management of support programs and revoltionary

development. The Southe Vietnamese regulars, he felt, were performing

reasonably well in the field and needed little operational advice.

Assiezce was most needed in areas of command and control, personnel,

logistics, training, communications, electronics, and in intelligence.

On the civilian side assiezce was needed in areas of local self –

defence, self – government, and economic self – development. He also

pointed out that the advisory effort was not being slighted. By the

end of the year, 66 percent of the U. S. military forces would have

left Vietnam, while the total advisory effort would have only declined

22 percent. Thiswould be primarily done by reducing the size and

number of the tactical detatchments.

The combat assiezce teams in the field had began dissappearing

even before 1972. With the exception of the airborne advisors and

some teams in the northern corps, MACV closed out all of the battalion

teams by June 30, 1971, and began phasi….. ng out the regimental teams by

September. By the end of the year, the U. S. Army tactictle advisory

strength had fallen from 5, 416 to 3, 888, and MACV staff strength from

1, 894 to 1, 395 and many were military cadre from leaving American

units trying to complete their twelve month tours.

During 1972 General Abrams, and his successor in June, General

Fredrick C. Wayand, threw the weight of the advisory effort into a

succession of material supply porjects that enabled the South

Vietnamese to complete existing modernization programs; to make up for

heavy combat losses; to create new units, and to fill their depots

with munitions, fuel, spare parts, and other supplies. The eventual

result was a massivesea and airlift between October 23 and December 12

1972 that brought over 105, 000 major items of equipment to South

Vietnam, about 5, 000 tons by air and the rest by sea.

In the field of supply the most critical and the most costly

item in the South Vietnamese inentory was ammunition. In 1972, under

MACV guidance, the Central Logistics Command established a more

detailed system to moniter the status of all munitions: base, field,

and unit depot stockage; unit expenditures; and ammunition

maintenance. Unused ammunition was subject to rapid deterioriation

and had to examined periodically and , if necessary, reconditioned of

destroyed. Stockage levels in each ammunition category were critical.

Munitions stocks increased from 79, 000 short tons in January 1969 to

146, 900 in January 1972 and 165, 700 in January 1973. However, a

normal monthly expenditure rate of 33, 000 short tons, which could rise

to over 100, 000 short tons per month in periods of intense combat,

made continued resupply by the United States vital. Another potential

problem was the vulnerability of ammunition dums; the enemy had

destroyed over 24, 000 short tons of depot ammunition during the

Easter offensive alone. The South Vietnamese would have to maintain,

protect, and ration their existing stocks as carefully as possible.

Following the Easter offensive of 1972, MACV and the Joint Cheifs of

Staff suddenly decided that further additions had to be made. These

included two more M48 tank battalions; two additional air defence and

three more 175-mm. self – propelled artillery battallions; crews for

one hundred sophisticated antitank missle launchers; and, for the

South Vietnamese Air Force, thirteen aviation squadrons. The new air

unitsrepresented a major expansion and included aircraft for two

more squadrons of heavy CH-47, three of A-37 jet fighter bombers, two

of large C130 transports, and five of F5 jet fighters. Perhaps

anticipating some kind of agreement in Paris, the Department of

Defence agreed to ship this material to South Vietnam as soon as

possable under the code name Project ENHANCE and to raise and train

units and crews at some later date. At the same time, in order to

strengthen the territorials, MACV authorised more Regional Forces

battalions and enlarged province tacticle staffs to provide better

command and control.

To create these new units without violating the 1. 1 million

troop ceiling, MACV and the Joint General Staff again made

compensatory reductions in Popular Forces strength. Fall of Vietnam It

took almost one year for the North Vietnamese to rebuild their

strength and launch their own major offensive. On March 30 1972 three

North Vietnamese Army divisions crossed the Demilitarised Zone in

northern South Vietnam, overrunning advance bases of the new South

Vietnamese 3d Division; three days later, three more enemy divisions

headed south across the Cambodian border twards Saigon, surrounding

positions held by the 5th Division in the III Corps Tacticle Zone, and

two weeks after that, two other divisions attacked the 22nd Infintry

Division in the Highlands, while smaller units struck at towns in Binh

Dinh Province along the coast. Because of the timing of the attacks,

they were quickly called the “ Easter Offensive.” Through all of this,

the North Vietnamese had only won two district towns, Loc Ninh, near

the Cambodian border, and Dong Ha, opposite the Demilitarised zone, a

small showing for the heavy prices they paid.

The ceasefire agreement of January 23 1973 marked an end to the

American policy of Vietnamization. The agreement specified the

complete withdrawl of all American military forces from South Vietnam,

including advisors, and the end of all U. S. military actions in

support of Saigon. The North Vietnamese, in turn, agreed to put a

ceasefire in place, the return of Amerocan Prisoners of War, and an

end to infiltration in the South. The accord caught many American

generals by suprise, including General Abrams, the new Army cheif of

staff (Abrams had stepped down as MACV commander on June 28 1972

to replace General Westmoreland as the Army chief of staff, and the

U. S. Senate confirmed the appointment on October 12). He had felt

that the United States would end up with some type of permanent ground

and air comittment similar to that in South Korea. Instead, there was

to be no residual support force, not even an advisory mission, and, in

theory, the Viet Cong and Saigon governments were to settle their

political differances at some later date.

The ceasefirebegan at 8 o’clock on Sunday, January 28 1973, and

the war ground to a temporary halt. In the sixty days that followed,

slightly over 58, 000 forign troops departed South Vietnam, including

about 23, 000 Americans, 25, 000 Koreans, and a few hundred assorted

Thais, Fillipinos, and Nationalist Chinese. Their leaving left about

550. 000 South Vietnamese regulars and another 525, 0000 territorials to

face a regular North Vietnamese army that Americans estimated at

500, 000 to 600, 000 troops, of which about 220, 000 were in South

Vietnam and the rest close by. The final U. S. withdrawals were timed

to match the release of American prisoners of war by the North

Vietnam. MACV headquarters dissolved on March 29, and three new

agencies took over it’s remaining functions. Thus ended the ill fated

American involvement in Vietnam.

In late 1973, the cease fire was broken by the sending of 18

divisions from North Vietnam into the south. This, in time, would

become one of the worst blood baths of the war. This continued

through 1975, when the enemy came to be in near Saigon, and elements

of the underground political opposition came into the open and held

meetings to voice their antigovernment feelings. The government moved

in and on March 27 1975, arrested a number of poeple suspected of

plotting a coup. On April 2 1975, the South Vietnamese Senate even

adopted a resolution holding President Thieu personnally responseable

for the detiorating situation and asking him to take immediate steps

to form a broader cabinet. It was speculated that to save what they

could, the government should send a plenipotentiary to Paris and ask

the Fench governmentto act as official intermediary in negotiations to

be conducted with the Communists. But President Thieu appeared only

incredulous.

Demands that President Thieu should resign and transfer his

powers at once to General Duong Van Minh were resurrected in earnest.

A coalition government led by General Minh, it was said, stood a

better chance of being accepted by the Communists; if so, more

bloodshed could be averted. On Monday April 21, during a meeting at

Independance Palace, President Thieu announced his decision to step

down. He inferred that the United States wanted him to resign, and

whether or not he consented, certain generals would press for a

replacement. As required by the Constitution of South Vietnam, he was

prepared to transfer the presidency to Vice President Tran Van Huong.

Finally, he asked the armed forces and the national police to fully

support the new president. In the evening of April 21, 1975, the

televised transfer of power ceremony took place at Independance

Palace. After President Huong took over, he immediatly went about

imposing certain forceful measures, among which was a formal ban on

all overseas travel. Servicemen and cival servants who had fled to

foreign countries were ordered to return within thirty days; if they

failed to do so, their citizenship would be revoked, and all their

belongings confiscated. The only people that the new government would

allow to go overseas were the old and the ill; they were to be

permitted to seek treatment out of the country after posting a large

bond (to say nothing of the large bribes required to obtain such a

pass).

In the meantime, the militry situation became increasingly bad.

In the afternoon of Sunday April 27 1975, the defence minister, Mr.

Tran Van Don, led a military delegation composed of general officers

of Joint General Staff and the commander of CMD in an apperance before

a meeting before both houses of Congress. By 7: 30 pm, 138 senators

and representatives were present. Mr. Don summarized the military

situation: Saigon was now surrounded by fifteen enemy divisions under

the control of three army corps. The Saigon – Vung Tau Highway had

been cut, and enemy troops were advancing tward the Long Binh base.

At 8: 20 pm, the General Assembly voted to hand over the presidency to

General Minh. The next day, Monday April 28, 1975 at 5: 30 pm, General

Minh was sworn in as president. President Minh was much more

confident. He based his conviction of an eventual political

arrangement with the Communists on these ficts as he saw them: (1)

The Communists did not have a solid structure in Saigon – negotiations

would provide more time for solidation.(2)The provisional

government wasstrongly anti – Communist and the Communists preferred

a “ two Vietnams” solution.(3)It was believed that Communist China

preferred a divided Vietnam and a unified Vietnam would pose a threat

to China’s border. Finally, “ The Communists know that the people of

South Vietnam don’t like Communism. Since it is impossible for the

Comminists to kill them all, it is to their advantage to negotiate.

So he firmly believed that a government with him at the head would be

more acceptable to the Communists, and that they would be willing to

negotiate with him for a political solution.

President Minh waited in vain for a favorable word from the

other side, but none came. The response of the Communists was

omnious: they bombed Tan Son Nhut Air base the moment he was sworn in,

and shelled Saigon barely twelve hours later. Still a last ditch

effort was attempted by President Minh’s people to contact the

Communists through their representative at Tan Son Nhut. But the

answer was evasive and intimidating. It was then that President Minh

realised that all hope was gone. He gave twenty – four hours for all

U. S. personnel to leave South Vietnam. The evacuation proceeded

ferverishly throughout the night and was over at 5: 00 am on April 30.

At 10 : 00 am on April 30, 1975, President Minh ordered the armed forces

to stop fighting, and gave in to all Communist demands. And the

Republic of South Vietname came under Communist control and no longer

existed as a free nation.

Conclusions

The United States policy of Vietnamization was a good idea, but

the time was not ripe for it to best be used. Saigon’s military

strength was rated by nearly all experts in South Vietnam as uncapable

of handleing a combined threat. True, Vietnamization was not what led

to the total withdrawl of troops from Vietnam, but the opinions

pressed by Lairdhad somewhat of an affect on our agreeing to sign a

ceasefire agreement. Also, if we had used Vietnamization’s program of

building up South Vietnam’s armed forces more extensively, South

Vietnam might still be in exiezce today.

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