

VIETNAMIZATION - An Alternative to Negotiations

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The Administration attaches great importance to the negotiations here at Paris and the important work being carried on by Ambassador Bruce and the negotiating team here in Paris. The aim, of course, and the goal of this Administration is still very much a negotiated settlement as far as Southeast Asia is concerned.

We in the Department of Defense have had the responsibility for pushing forward with the Vietnamization program and have always emphasized the importance of the Vietnamization program and its important association with a negotiated settlement. Vietnamization does not take the place of negotiation--it merely complements negotiations, and should negotiations fail, the Vietnamization program, particularly the military aspects of it, gives a substitute and gives us the opportunity for withdrawal and for disassociation and disengagement as far as the United States military forces are concerned. And this program, during the last 18 months, has made substantial progress.

The South Vietnamese forces have become much better equipped, much better trained, and the leadership has improved to the point where they are able to take over the military burdens in Southeast Asia and particularly in South Vietnam. This progress that we have made with the military aspects of the Vietnamization program, however, is important, but we still attach greater importance to the negotiated settlement as far as Indochina is concerned, and we believe that the progress that we have made in Vietnamization does put our negotiating team in a stronger position here in Paris.