

A
FILE / SUBJ.
DATE / SUB-CAT.
1/71

VIETNAMIZATION - Combat Role

NAME: Melvin R. Laird, Secretary of Defense
OCCASION: News Conference at Paris, France
DATE: January 6, 1971

QUESTION: Mr. Secretary, President Nixon in his appearance on Monday night said he could see the end of the U.S. combat role in Vietnam and implied it could come before 1972. Do you think that U.S. ground troops may be out of Vietnam this year?

ANSWER: We will be in a position in the course of this year where the American combat responsibility will be removed as far as South Vietnam is concerned. We are approaching that position on our May 1 troop ceiling deadline. Now, the position of American forces in South Vietnam after the mid-summer period of 1971, calendar '71, will be such that we will have a logistic role. We will have an air support role, and that the combat forces which will be assigned to the logistic support and artillery roles will not be a combat mission but will be a security mission. They will be there to protect and to secure the forces that are assigned these roles.

In the Phase I of the Vietnamization program, which will be completed this year, the combat responsibility in South Vietnam will be completely turned over to the South Vietnamese government. In Phase II of the Vietnamization program, as we move forward to turn over the responsibility in logistics, artillery and in air support, there will be combat troops assigned in a security role. Phase II of the Vietnamization takes a little longer because of the training that is required in the air support role, in the logistic role, and the artillery role.

I want to make it evident to all of you that we are ahead of schedule in all aspects of Phase II of the Vietnamization program in turning over the artillery, the logistic and the air responsibilities, which is Phase II of the Vietnamization program, from the military standpoint. We are ahead of schedule in Phase I, which is turning over the complete combat responsibility in-country to the forces of South Vietnam.