

VIETNAMIZATION AND URBANIZATION

The goals of Nixon's Vietnamization program are basically twofold: to "pacify" the people of South Vietnam and to pacify the people of the United States. The process of Vietnamization is not, as the administration claims, a question of deescalating the violence on the US side as a prelude to a negotiated settlement. Nixon has shown his complete lack of interest in a negotiated settlement by his failure to replace Ambassador Lodge at the Paris Peace Talks, leaving the North Vietnamese and NLF with the insulting option of dealing with a diplomatic subordinate. The crux of the Vietnamization program is to reduce the number of American troops sufficiently in order to pacify American public opinion, and keep casualties to a minimum, yet guarantee that the level of violence on the US side in Indochina does not decrease so as to achieve a military solution.

"Vietnamization" is one part of the strategy: make the South Vietnamese do the foot slogging dirty-work and take the casualties in place of the Americans. The other essential part is "Urbanization" -- this involves two parts: (a) admitting their failure to secure control of the countryside in S. Vietnam, the US is withdrawing to the towns and cities which are easier and less costly to hold. At the same time, the air war has been greatly stepped up with the avowed intention of devastating the non-urban areas which are defined as VC territory and thus fair game. This process involves defoliation, craterization (millions of craters, 45 feet wide and 30 feet deep, caused by B-52 raids, now pock-mark vast areas of the S. Vietnamese countryside) (b) depopulation of the countryside is the other key element of the "urbanization" strategy. The strategic theory finds its most sophisticated expression in the work of the distinguished Chairman of the Harvard Government Department (now doing research at the Center for Advanced Study of the Behavioral Sciences at Stanford), who argues that since the VC guerillas rely upon the people, like fish rely on water, the water must be drained off by forcing the peasants to move into the towns. The practical implications of Prof. Huntington's thesis are monstrous: villagers are herded together, with the meagrest of possessions, and shipped to concentration camps or suburban slums in the towns where conditions are atrocious and where little attention is paid to their welfare. Meanwhile, their villages are razed and their land is subjected to constant bombing and strafing.

Up until recently, if the American people were content to accept a strategy which minimized the cost to America in terms of American lives, Vietnamization was acceptable. If, however, they were also concerned with the welfare of the people of S. Vietnam, Vietnamization could only provoke horror and disgust. Even in terms of the former option, however, the invasion of Cambodia marks the failure of the Vietnamization program. As the pentagon has stated, the invasion was necessary "to strengthen the Vietnamization program." However, if past experience of both France and the US in Indochina is any guide, the result is more likely to be just the opposite. The war will not only be widened but also prolonged. The only alternative to deeper involvement of US troops in an ever-widening war on the land in Asia is total, rapid, unilateral disengagement.