

Vietnamization Termed No Quick Path to Peace

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WASHINGTON, Feb. 25 — President Nixon said for the first time today that the policy of Vietnamization cannot, "except over a long period," end the war in Indochina.

The policy will fulfill the objective of reducing American involvement in the fighting, he said, but "if Vietnamization leads to perpetuating the war, it is not by our design, but because the other side refuses to settle for anything less than a guaranteed take-over."

It was the most direct Presidential response yet to one of the most frequently heard criticisms of his Indochina policy — that it contains the seeds of open-ended fighting among the Indochinese peoples in the wake of the American withdrawal.

The President's raising of this possibility in the 1971 message on foreign affairs was in direct contrast to his 1970 message and several major speeches during the last year in which he has spoken of Vietnamization — the policy of turning the responsibility for the war over to the South Vietnamese — as leading to a "just and lasting peace."

Tone is Restrained

The tone was in keeping with the restraint in the 28-page Indochina section of the 1971 report. Mr. Nixon said that while he felt the record of the last year was one of achievement, "serious difficulties remain," and "we do not intend to add to a painful record of prematurely optimistic assessments on Vietnam."

Under a section entitled "Problems for the Future," the President noted the enemy's

continued military capacity and determination, the negotiating deadlock in Paris and determination, the negotiating deadlock in Paris and the difficulties in sustaining the momentum of the pacification program in South Vietnam.

"If winding down the war is my greatest satisfaction in foreign policy," he said, "the failure to end it is my greatest disappointment."

The President restated in some detail the five-point peace proposal he first announced on Oct. 7, and said: "We frankly expected that our elaboration of political principles and the Oct. 7 peace initiative would produce some movement from the other side." Despite the absence of movement, Mr. Nixon said, "we will not give up on negotiations."

Laos and Cambodia

Without specifically mentioning the South Vietnamese invasion of Laos, Mr. Nixon presented the Administration's rationale for the allied operations into that country and Cambodia.

"If Hanoi were to gain control of Laos and Cambodia," he said, "a large portion of the more than 140,000 Communist troops now engaged in these countries would be freed to fight in South Vietnam." The Administration could not pursue its withdrawal program, he added, without taking into consideration "the unavoidable facts on its flank" and acting to counter them.

Despite the problems, Mr. Nixon contended that his Administration had made "consistent and unmistakable" progress toward its goal of "winding down the war."

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