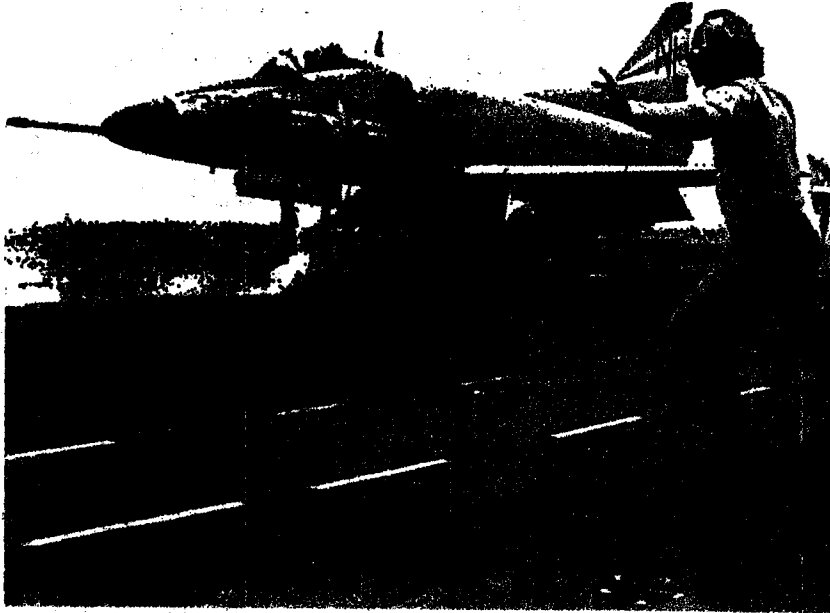


Vietnamization Plus American Forces



U.S. Navy

By ADM. U. S. GRANT SHARP

SAN DIEGO — Vietnamization has become a household word in the United States. We understand that the Vietnamization program is succeeding and that the rate of withdrawal of our ground combat forces may be accelerated. We hear that the ground combat rôle may be assumed completely by the South Vietnamese some time toward the end of this year. Less well known and given little emphasis is the continued need for other combat forces in Southeast Asia, even after the Vietnamese take over the ground combat function.

The process of Vietnamization was described very clearly by the President in his report to the Congress on United States foreign policy for the 1970's on Feb. 18, 1970. He said: "American forces will continue to be withdrawn in accordance with an orderly schedule based on three criteria: The level of enemy activity; progress in the negotiations; and the increasing ability of the South Vietnamese people to assume for themselves the task of their own defense."

Let's examine the three criteria. The level of enemy activity declined markedly after the Cambodian invasion, testifying to the success of that operation. Now the enemy is making a considerable effort to build up his forces, possibly in preparation for an increase in his level of activity. Progress in the negotiations is nil. They have been a complete failure. This brings us to the capability of the people of South Vietnam to defend themselves. They have made remarkable progress. It has been a magnificent achievement. They will soon be

Troops, Carriers and Bombers Needed 'for Some Time to Come'

able to take over the ground combat function.

What will that mean insofar as our participation is concerned? Can we pull out all of our forces and come home? There will still be many tasks that the South Vietnamese cannot perform because they do not have the equipment or the trained personnel.

Let's consider the Army. A number of our helicopter companies will be needed to give the Vietnamese the mobility that is so essential in this type of warfare. I assume we will need to supplement the Vietnamese artillery with U.S. units for they must be short of the total fire power necessary to protect their troops. In the field of logistic support they will have to have our assistance. It is my understanding that United States units remaining will be protected by our own security forces, as they should be.

There will be a sizable U.S. Army presence in Vietnam for some time.

Air power is an important requirement in Southeast Asia until the North Vietnamese aggression is finally concluded. In South Vietnam close air support of the ground troops will be supplied increasingly by the South Vietnamese Air Force as it grows in capability. The longer range interdiction of the supply lines in Laos and Cambodia will be a task for American aircraft for the foreseeable future, in my opinion. Aircraft based in South

Vietnam and in Thailand as well as carrier-based planes must be available for this mission. Thai-based planes will include the B-52's and tactical fighter bombers. Continued pressure on the supply lines will reduce the ability of the North Vietnamese to step up the war in both South Vietnam and in Cambodia, and is a most important part of our support for our friends in these countries.

Reconnaissance flights over North Vietnam must be continued in order to detect any major buildup of forces and supplies. These flights must be flown at low level to discover material that might be under camouflage. Aircraft must be ready to attack if reconnaissance planes are fired upon. The air power should be capable of renewing the air strikes on North Vietnam if that should be required, for the mere presence of this capability has a deterrent effect on Hanoi.

All of these tasks add up to a considerable amount of air power, ground and carrier based, that cannot be phased out soon.

The United States Navy has turned over the riverine warfare mission to the South Vietnamese navy, together with all boats and equipment. The brown water tasks have been phased out—but the blue water tasks remain. The attack carriers with their protective cruisers and destroyers are still needed to participate in the air missions I have outlined above. They also must be ready to move to any trouble spot that might develop in the Southeast Asia region or to the North—for example, the forces in Korea might require support.

I find it difficult to see how the Navy can be phased down much further for some time. Our Navy has recently been cut back and faces even more drastic reductions due to the inadequate defense budget. I believe they will be hard put to meet all their commitments.

Thus we see that Vietnamization proceeds, our forces do phase down; but the American presence in the Southeast Asia area is going to be large for some time to come. We must continue on until we attain our objective in South Vietnam—the people of that country must be allowed to decide their own future. As I see it there is a need for creative recognition of the continuing commitment in Southeast Asia. I am confident that the American people will support this commitment if they fully understand why we must stay on.

Admiral U.S. Grant Sharp, now retired, served as Commander in Chief of the Pacific Theater (including Vietnam), from 1964 to 1968.
