

Whys of Vietnamization

WASHINGTON — We need more honesty and candor in the national debate on how best to get out of the Vietnam war.

It is hard to understand why the critics of Mr. Nixon's paced withdrawal feel they must rest their case on distortions of the President's position.

FOR EXAMPLE, the McGoverns, the Hatfields and the Fulbrights and others keep repeating these contentions:

That the President has no intention of withdrawing from the defense of South Vietnam.

That the purpose of Vietnamization is to keep the war going.

That it doesn't matter in the least to the United States what condition we leave South Vietnam in or what happens in South Vietnam after we leave.

When they advance arguments like these, what do they expect the American people to believe about their own credibility? Aren't they insinuating that they alone are honest in what they say, and those they criticize — like their contentions that the President is scheming to remain in Vietnam indefinitely — are dishonest and not to be believed? Does the evidence support this view?

Casualties are one-fifth what they were two years ago and are greatly reduced since Cambodia. Shortly a total of 260,000 U.S. combat troops will have been withdrawn and more are to follow this spring. Vietnam war costs have been cut in half already.

Take the matter of Vietnamization. No one has misstated the alternatives to Vietnamization more precisely than Sen. Edmund Muskie. In his Philadelphia speech

last week he fashioned an argument to suggest that the President would be wrong and the United States badly off no matter whether Vietnamization is a success or a failure.

Muskie's contention was that if Vietnamization works well, this would simply mean continued war, and that if it works badly, the United States would stay on in Vietnam to keep fighting the war.

The purpose of Vietnamization is to help train and equip the South Vietnamese to defend their country from outside attack. Can Sen. Muskie conscientiously say that Vietnamization is wrong, is bad, is undesirable?

The President has never said nor implied that if in the end South Vietnam cannot defend itself the United States would do so. We are using U.S. air power in Vietnam, Cambodia and Laos today because the South Vietnamese are not yet equipped and trained to do it themselves.

I HAVE SUGGESTED that the critics of paced withdrawal carefully skirt the real issue. They do not explain why they think it is unimportant to leave the South Vietnamese in the position to have a good chance of maintaining the independence of their country. They do not address themselves to this crucial matter which the President put in these words in his latest report to the nation:

"It matters very much how we end this war.

"To end a war is simple.

"But to end a war in a way that will not bring on another war is far from simple."

The purpose of paced withdrawal is to make Vietnamization possible and thus to lay the groundwork for future peace.