

JUN 10 1972

FILED 15 MAY 72

THE NEW YORK TIMES, SATURDAY, JUNE 10, 1972

Vietnamization: Is It Working or Isn't It?

Senator William Proxmire, Democrat of Wisconsin, inserted this material in the Congressional Record of May 22, 1972. It is excerpted here.

Mr. Proxmire. Mr. President, on Monday, May 15, Secretary of State William Rogers appeared before the Foreign Operations Subcommittee of the Senate Appropriations Committee. I have the honor to chair that subcommittee.

In the course of the Secretary's appearance, he made the astonishing assertion that Vietnamization is working. I have regard for Mr. Rogers. He is a conscientious and able man. He has served this country selflessly and under the most trying circumstances, but for the Secretary of State to claim that Vietnamization is working, after all the evidence we have seen, is outrageous.

I ask unanimous consent that excerpts from the hearing that relate to the questioning of Mr. Rogers on this remarkable illusion be printed in the Record.

There being no objection, the excerpts were ordered to be printed in the Record.



United States
of America

Congressional Record

PROCEEDINGS AND DEBATES OF THE 92^d CONGRESS, SECOND SESSION

Senator Fong. Mr. Secretary, I want to congratulate you for the policy that you have established in cooling the trouble spots of the world. You have taken care of the Berlin crisis and, in the Middle East, the shooting has stopped. Vietnam seems to be the only hot spot now, and there has been a lot of criticism about Vietnamization. "Vietnamization has not worked," the present onslaught by the North Vietnamese against the South Vietnamese, and some stories come up about the soldiers' refusing to fight and they have been driven back, and from this they draw the conclusion that Vietnamization has not worked. Now, could you speak to that?

Secretary Rogers. Yes, Senator. We believe that the Vietnamization program is working. Let me tell you what the Vietnamization program is as I see it. It was to turn over the principal responsibility for combat to South Vietnam, to permit the withdrawal of American ground combat troops in Vietnam, to hold out the most responsible and reasonable proposals for negotiated settlement that we could while this was happening and to make sure that South Vietnam was not overrun by military forces during this period of time.

Now, I don't have to elaborate at any length what has happened; we have reduced the number of ground combat troops by almost a half a million, almost 500,000; we have withdrawn American combat troops. The total incremental cost of the war has gone down from about 21 million to 7 million or something in that order.

We had, until about two months ago, by everyone's standard, cooled the situation so that the fighting was de-escalated, the casualties were way down. You note two years ago we were running 300 Americans killed a week, and now we are in the neighborhood of 10 or less. So, from that standpoint, we think Vietnamization has worked well.

We always recognized, Senator, that at some point a time would arrive when the South Vietnamese would be faced with the responsibility of defending themselves. We have said all along that when that occurred, we would help them with their air and naval support. Now, the President said, each time he announced troop withdrawals, that he would take whatever action was necessary if the enemy attempted to take advantage of that situation; and, as you know, recently massive invasion of South Vietnam occurred and, for the first time, all of the combat divisions of North Vietnam were sent into either Laos, Cambodia or South Vietnam, and they used a great deal of equipment, heavy equipment, new, modern equipment; and South Vietnam, of course, is faced with the problem of defending itself under these circumstances.

They are doing quite well. The reports yesterday and the day before indicated that they are doing quite well. We think they will be able to defend their country. We are providing, as you know, air and naval support, and we are going to continue to do that.

In the meantime, I think, we have provided the most responsible and forthcoming proposal on negotiated settlement that a nation could propose. President Nixon, in his statement, proposed a total withdrawal of our military forces from Indochina in four months on the condition that there would be an internationally supervised ceasefire in exchange for prisoners of war. That seems to have been forgotten; a lot of people forget that he has made this proposal, but it is a very reasonable proposal. We think that it is a proposal that the other side should accept, and I notice that some leading members of the Senate have indicated that they thought so, too.

Therefore we think Vietnamization has worked. We realize that we are going through a difficult period now. We think South Vietnam is going to defend itself.

Senator Fong. You are pretty sure that South Vietnam will be able to defend itself?

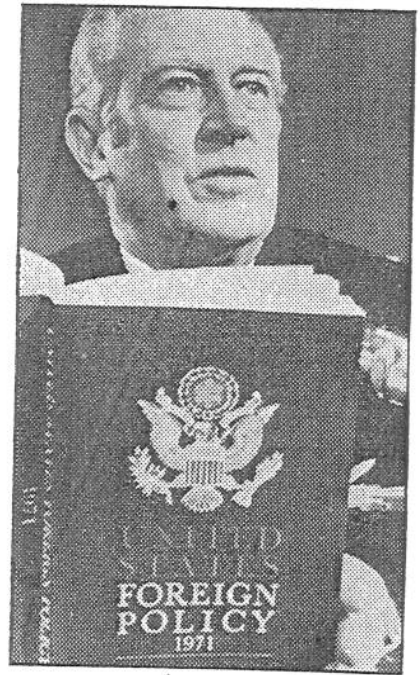
Secretary Rogers. Yes, we feel that way.

Senator Fong. Now, the mining of the harbors of North Vietnam—I understand that the harbors of South Vietnam were mined by the Vietcong and by the North Vietnamese in the early part of the war. Is that true?

Secretary Rogers. That is correct, yes. I think people forget that the enemy has been mining both the territorial waters and internal waters in South Vietnam for some time.

Senator Fong. And some ships have been damaged?

Secretary Rogers. That is correct.



Secretary of State Rogers

*“We believe that
Vietnamization
is working.”*

There was damage to foreign ships, including United States ships.

Senator Fong. Thank you.

Senator Proxmire. Mr. Secretary, if the Vietnamization program has worked—and I hope and pray you are right, and I certainly agree with you the most recent information we have is encouraging and heartening—but if it has worked, why is it necessary for the President to take this extraordinary action which would—we hope it won't, and maybe it won't—result in a confrontation with the Soviet Union, an action which could result in the destruction of ships and citizens of other countries, an action which was recognized by the previous Administration and which has been categorized as being quite extreme—mining a harbor—and which has been supplemented, of course, with the most vigorous bombing attacks in a long, long time, resulting in the deaths of tens of thousands of people.

If the Vietnamization is working and the South Vietnamese are able to take over more of this, why is this extraordinary kind of lethal and dangerous confrontation necessary?

Secretary Rogers. Mr. Chairman, I don't know as I want to repeat everything the President said in his message the other night, because I think it was

one of the great statements that has been made about this tragic war and, as you know, it has received overwhelming support of the American people, so I don't want to repeat all the things that he has said.

Senator Proxmire. I don't know that. I have seen some polls. If somebody asked me, “Do you support the President against the Communists?” of course I will say I do. But I have found in the mail I am getting and the wires I am getting—I have been out in my State every one of the last three weekends and talked extensively with literally thousands of people, and the overwhelming position I get is that the people are very deeply concerned, very much opposed to escalation here and feel very strongly that the President may have made a serious mistake.

The fact that poll takers come in and ask the people if they support the President in time of crisis when we are close to war with another country their affirmative answer is no surprise; people are patriotic and they will support their President in almost any circumstances when he is in confrontation with an enemy. But I just wonder if this represents real support of the American people for this kind of extraordinary action.

* * *
Secretary Rogers. The other Administration should have taken this action and the war might not have lasted as long as it did.

I think the logic was wrong, it was faulty—it was faulty in many instances in the past. I think that to now argue that the other Administration rejected this and therefore this is wrong is fallacious, it is a non sequitur. The very people that argue that the other Administration made mistake after mistake now cite this as an example of how wise they were not to bomb Haiphong.

Let me finish, Mr. Chairman, because in the first place, that is the least offensive maneuver that could have been taken. The enemy has been mining in South Vietnam during the war time and time again and there was very little or no criticism of them.

Secondly, the mining of the Haiphong harbor was not going to cause difficulty unless someone went to it. The mine is a passive weapon, it does not go to anybody, it only activates in the event that a ship goes to it.

Third, it was clear that if we were going to support the South Vietnamese and at a time when they were under this massive attack, and there is no denying that, that we should do these

things which were as restrained as we could devise.

All the predictions that were being made about how catastrophic this was going to be did not appear to have come to pass.

* * *
Senator Proxmire. I certainly hope you are right, Mr. Secretary. You and I have the same objective, we hope this war can end and we can achieve peace and end the killing.

* * *
The fact that the Administration, however, did not resort to this kind of action, either bombing Hanoi directly, bombing the city and mining the harbor, it seems to me represented some kind of restraint.

The restraint that was involved, although this mining may be a defensive measure, the fact is it is a measure aimed not simply at Vietnam but at the nations that were supplying it—Russia, China and other nations, so that it seems to me that under these circumstances what the Administration has done does represent a serious escalation of the war.

Furthermore, it is accompanied by an enormous amount of bombing and no matter what you say about the defensive quality of mines, there is nothing defensive about bombing.

There is no question it is going to result in the death of thousands of innocent people and it has, so I think we have to recognize that this kind of action on our part, especially when you recognize that the North and South Vietnamese both represent about an equal number of people, both about 17 million people, the Communist nations do supply the North, all the evidence that we have so far is that the supply has been far less than our supply of the South; China and Russia have been doing none of the fighting, none of the dying.

We have lost 50,000 dead Americans, 250,000 wounded, we have poured enormous amounts of supplies in. The requirement for an offensive action in which North Vietnam is engaging, of course, is much more serious than the defensive action.

Under these circumstances to say that Vietnamization is working sounds to me like pretty Pollyannish optimism.

* * *
Senator Fong. The interesting thing about it, Mr. Secretary, is that the escalation is on our side and not the escalation on the other side. They started and invaded with 15 divisions, all the divisions they had in North Vietnam. They came in, they started with a massive invasion and this was re-escalation.

All we did was to try to stop that invasion and I don't call it an escalation on our part.

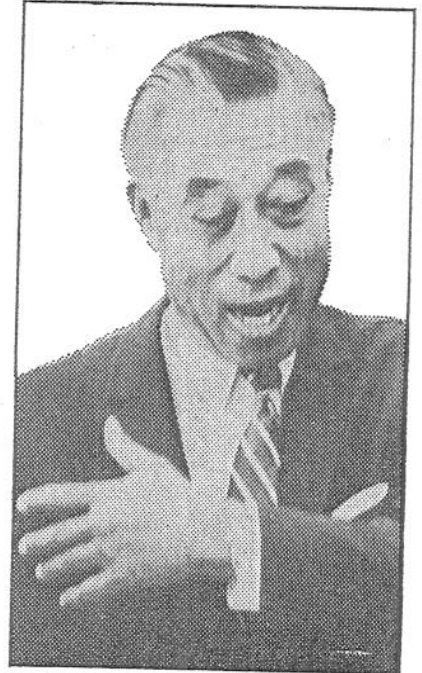
Secretary Rogers. I think, Senator, you could not be more right. I cannot get over the fact that we keep talking about how we have escalated the war. Mr. Chairman, the war was escalated by the other side. It is just as simple as that.

Two months ago, every one in this country was saying, fine everything is going well. What changed it? What changed it?

Senator Proxmire. There is no question that they have engaged in aggression, sure. I will admit that, I agree to that, that is right.

Secretary Rogers. That is escalation.

Senator Proxmire. That is true but it is also true and I don't think we are



Senator Fong, Hawaii Republican

*“All we did was
to try to stop
their invasion.”*

being honest or fair if we don't agree that we have stepped up the bombing enormously. Sure, they stepped up their invasion. They have put for the first time a conventional kind of invasion as Senator Fong says, with divisions, with tanks and so forth, in the field. That is the case.

Secretary Rogers. Senator, if somebody is trying to break into your house and you try to push him out the

window, are you escalating it? We are in this situation; the other side escalated it. You said so yourself. They have escalated it. What we are trying to do is take a defensive measure to prevent that escalation from proceeding. It is as simple as that. The decisions the President made were based on the fact that this escalation occurred and he advised the other side before that happened that if they escalated, if they attempted to take advantage of our position as we were withdrawing our troops, then he would take the necessary action and he did that.

But he did it because they escalated the war, not the United States. And it seems to me that every time an American talks about this he should say that to himself; he should say the escalation resulted from what the enemy did, not what the United States did.

Now, the bombing that we are engaged in involves military targets. The enemy is attacking civilian populations. They have killed 20,000 civilians in South Vietnam. There is very little said about that. We are bombing military targets, we are not bombing civilian populations.

• • •
Senator Proxmire. Let's recognize how we started out. We are starting out discussing whether Vietnamization is working. Now if we are going to go in with a bombing that is greater in North Vietnam than our planes dropped on all the countries throughout World War II, if we are going to put the greatest Navy in the world at the disposal of South Vietnam against little North Vietnam, if we are going to have the greatest Air Force in the world engage in the kind of tremendous activity it is, then I don't know how you can say that whatever military progress is being made here is being made as a result of Vietnamization.

Secretary Rogers. I didn't say that.

Senator Proxmire. The South Vietnamese are not doing it and that was the fundamental question.

Senator Fong asked you how Vietnamization is working and certainly on the basis of what has happened here, not only with our mining the harbor, but with our enormous amount of bombing and with the terrific amount of supply, the fact that we have supplied that million-man army with our own expenditures with \$100 billion does not sound to me as if Vietnamization is doing the job.

The South Vietnamese are not doing it, we are responsible for the fact that they are able to defend their country, although we poured in far, far more.

Do you deny that, far more supplies than the Russians and Chinese have poured in?

Secretary Rogers. Oh, no.

Senator Proxmire. You would not deny it?

Secretary Rogers. No, I would not deny it.

Senator Proxmire. Then, how can you argue under these circumstances—that we have provided far more supplies, that there are 50,000 dead Americans, the enormous effort that we have made, the terrific amount of bombing, the mining of the harbor and then say that the reason for success here is because Vietnamization is working.

Secretary Rogers. I don't say that. I didn't say that.

Senator Proxmire. Then, it is not working?

Secretary Rogers. No, I didn't say that, either. The Senator asked me.

Senator Proxmire. Is it working or not working? Which is it?

Secretary Rogers. Well, if you let me finish, I will try to tell you.

I said that I think Vietnamization is working.

But we always said, Senator, and you have to keep this in mind, that we were going to continue to provide air support and naval support while our troops were being withdrawn and we said we were going to provide air support for some time thereafter.

* * *

Senator Proxmire. Would you hold for a minute? You certainly would not argue that this bombing is a matter of cover for our troops' withdrawal primarily.

Secretary Rogers. Well, it is part of it, yes, sir.

Senator Proxmire. Maybe for a very small extent, but the kind of bombing we have been engaging in with the number of sorties a day that we have engaged in with the terrific concentration of aircraft is a matter of assisting the South Vietnamese to defend their country.

Secretary Rogers. Yes.

Senator Proxmire. It is not a matter of withdrawing our troops. So that is part of our action.

Secretary Rogers. It is a combination. We are withdrawing our troops.

Senator Proxmire. 98 per cent. It is like an elephant and a mouse.

Secretary Rogers. It is a combination. We have made no secret of the fact it is a combination. We are going to continue to withdraw our troops and while this is occurring we are going to use our naval power and air power to protect our troops and to assist South Vietnam, and we are doing that.

Senator Proxmire. I am glad to get the conclusion from you, Mr. Secre-

tary, that in your view, you are not making an assertion that the Vietnamization is working.

Secretary Rogers. That is not correct.

Senator Proxmire. I understood you—

Senator Fong. Vietnamization is working?

Secretary Rogers. I said Vietnamization is working.

Senator Proxmire. I will read the transcript but I certainly got the impression that you agreed that the United States, with all we have poured into this with the enormous amount of bombing and the casualties and effort that we have made represents the real difference here; there is not Vietnamization, it is not the Vietnamese, the South versus the North Vietnamese that may be succeeding here, it is the American effort that is doing it and that is not Vietnamization, it is American contribution.

Secretary Rogers. That is your definition of Vietnamization. My definition of Vietnamization is that we would assist the South Vietnamese to defend their country and we would withdraw our troops and in that process, we would provide them military equipment and we would provide them air support.

* * *

Senator Proxmire. You know as well as I know it is the air support and the naval support that are the strongest military force in the world against a fifth rate military power which has perhaps one per cent or less of the military strength that we have. That is what is working here, that is what is effected, it is not the South Vietnamese. I don't know how any fair-minded person can say the South Vietnamese can fight and die and win as compared to the North Vietnamese. They have not done it. They have not showed even that they believe in their Government.

Senator Fong. Mr. Secretary, it is a fact that South Vietnamization is working, that is the reason that North Vietnam is getting out. It would be difficult for them to get in.

Secretary Rogers. No doubt about it at all in my mind.

Senator Fong. That shows at this time because we are down to a very,



Senator Proxmire, Wisconsin Democrat

“The President may have made a serious mistake.”

very small number of American combat units.

Secretary Rogers. And causes us the maximum embarrassment.

Senator Fong. And also if they waited any longer, perhaps South Vietnam would be too strong for them to hit.

Secretary Rogers. Yes.

Senator Fong. And so, Vietnamization is working, that is why they want to hit now.

* * *

Senator Proxmire. Mr. Secretary. I was about to go on to other things because we do have Dr. Hannah here to testify, too. You have done a fine job, as you always do, defending your position, but I would like to say that I just can't resist when you say it is no time to be critical.

It seems to me that when the President of the United States moves into a critical position like that, into a serious position like this, what good Americans do is to pray for the President and hope that he is making the right decisions but never ever to give up on criticizing. That is what makes our country different from other, totalitarian countries. It is our responsibility, if we feel the President of the United States is doing the wrong thing, to say so, to say so constructively and positively; but to criticize him when he is wrong seems to me that if a United States Senator with the responsibility we have, and when Senator Fong asked the question of this kind, “Is Vietnamization working?” and you say it was, and if I just sat here like a bump on a log and assume it is working and let you go with it, it seems to me I would be remiss in my duty. I think we should be critical of the President when he is wrong in all circumstances.

I think the President has done many things extremely well, and I have said so. When he has done them wrong, I think we should speak out vigorously and directly and immediately and not wait in any circumstances.