



**what
Vietnamisation
means**

"Vietnamisation" is the latest Pentagon catchphrase. It is the label attached to the strategy intended to cut the dollar cost of the war, and curb the strength of opposition inside the United States by reducing GI casualties, while at the same time maintaining a full scale war of remarkable brutality against the Vietnamese people.

In Saigon, repression, torture, and assassination of those who wish to end the war, of those who support a provisional coalition government, increases. Yet President Nixon has pledged full political and military support to the Saigon enclave.

"Vietnamisation" is a plan to get a mercenary, US-armed Saigon army to wage war on the vast majority of the population of Vietnam. There has been no civil war in Vietnam. There is no civil war in Vietnam. This is a plan to create and perpetuate a civil war.

It ignores the unity of the Vietnamese people - which the full terror of Western technological warfare has not broken - and their unquenchable determination to win peace and independence, free from foreign invaders.

It ignores the fact that the Provisional Revolutionary Government of South Vietnam was formed in June 1969 after extensive local elections, and that this provisional government administers 80% of the area of South Vietnam. It ignores the Vietnamese 10-point peace plan (based on the 1954 Geneva Agreements) still waiting to be negotiated in Paris.

The detailed evidence presented here was collected by an inter-religious Study Team sent to Saigon to investigate stories of arbitrary arrest and imprisonment by the Thieu-Ky regime. On the following pages is a major part of the Study Team's report made to the US Senate and Congress. The whole of the evidence printed here is taken from the Congressional Record.

Members of the Study Team included Robert Drinan, SJ, Dean of the Boston College Law School; Rep John Conyers (D. Michigan); Bishop James Armstrong, United Methodist Church; Rabbi Siegel, Jewish Theological Seminary; John Pemberton, American Civil Liberties Union; and Admiral Arnold True, USN (retired).

From the Congressional Record. Proceedings and debates of the 91st Congress, First Session.

US Study Team
on Religious and Political Freedom on Vietnam

In the Senate, 17 June 1969
the Hon Abraham A. Ribicoff of Connecticut

"Mr President, it has been stated that our presence in Vietnam is for the purpose of supporting the right of self-determination by the South Vietnamese. It is deeply disturbing that the ruling government in South Vietnam has been authoritarian in its treatment of political dissent.

"Rumours and stories of arbitrary imprisonment of opponents of the Government in South Vietnam have been persistent for some time. Last week, however, the rumours were shown to be based on facts by the US Study Team on Religious and Political Freedom in Vietnam."

In the House of Representatives, 17 June 1969
the Hon Ogden R. Reid of New York

"Mr Speaker, a report recently issued by a private study team of eight members clearly documents the continued and pervasive deprivation of religious and political freedom in South Vietnam ...

The chief findings of the team are:

1. Many thousands of persons being arrested in South Vietnam are denied all procedural protection. Arrests are made by a variety of local and national officials - by district police, special security forces, military forces and intelligence units - each exercising 'relatively unfettered discretion'.
2. The Thieu-Ky Government's widespread and increasing use of the extra-constitutional Military Field Tribunal has been responsible for the sentencing and imprisonment of additional thousands of persons, denying them the fundamental elements of fair hearing and often failing to serve prior notice of the charges against them. Many of these prisoners remain without trial in the hands of the arresting authorities, while the remainder have been removed to prisons by administrative action without charges or trials.

3. The Study Team agrees with those who say that repression, though not as obvious and violent as under the Diem Government, continues to be pervasive and brutal. While some persons visited appear to reflect modern notions of penal administration and certain prison officials seemed sensitive to the needs of inmates, the sheer weight of witnesses' statements concerning physical abuse seemed overwhelmingly conclusive. It became clear that whatever amelioration appeared in the formal correctional institutions, torture and brutality are widespread in the arresting and interrogation process.

4. Without question the Thieu-Ky Government uses the words 'communism', 'neutralism' and 'coalition' to silence dissent and weaken political and religious opposition. Student peace movements, Buddhist pleas for non-violence and a 'third solution', and the freedom of the press have been systematically suppressed by an insecure government that relies more on police state tactics and American support than upon true representation and popular support. As one Vietnamese attorney phrased it: 'One cannot fight for freedom without insuring freedom at home.' ...

In a message cabled directly to President Nixon from Saigon the Study Team said: 'Speaking for peace or in any other way opposing the government (in South Vietnam) easily brings the charge of communist sympathy and subsequent arrest. There can be no illusion that this climate of religious and political suppression is incompatible with either a representative or a stable government.'

Three celebrated cases of political arrest have claimed international attention in recent months. They are the cases of Thich Thien Minh, one of the most influential Buddhist monks in South Vietnam; Truong Dinh Dzu, runner-up in the Presidential Election of 1967; and Nguyen Lau, wealthy publisher of the Saigon Daily News. ... Members of the Study Team were not permitted to see Mr Lau, still held without sentence. Nor were they permitted to see 13 other prisoners they had made specific requests to visit.

These three cases have not been isolated because they are more important than others, but because they are more well known. They are symptomatic of a climate of intellectual, religious and political repression that has led to the imprisonment, exile or silencing of

thousands of loyal Vietnamese nationalists, persons who are not pro-Communist, but who are critical of the Thieu-Ky Government, and who insist upon the right to think for themselves.

President Thieu proudly points to the 'new alliance' of political parties in South Vietnam as an indication of the breadth of his support. This alliance includes the Greater Union Force, the political arm of militant Roman Catholics refugees, the Social Humanist Party, a re-birth of Ngo Dinh Nhu's Can Lao party, The Dai Vet, an erstwhile grouping of anti-French nationalists, a faction of the Hoa Hao sect based in the Delta and the Viet Kuomintang, a pro-government bloc formed after the Tet Offensive in 1968. All of these parties, together, failed to capture half of the popular vote in the 1967 elections.

While there is genuine political opposition, most of it has been driven underground. Members of the Study Team met with leaders of five old-line political parties no longer permitted to function as recognised entities. These men had all been active in the resistance movement against the French and were ardent nationalists. Their parties have been outlawed, their request to publish a newspaper have gone unanswered and their voices have been muted. These men, and they reflect a vast middle-position in South Vietnam, struggled against the French and consider the Americans their new colonial masters. Over the past twenty five years they have known imprisonment and sacrifice. (A retired army general present had been in prison eleven times). They argue that unity and independence cannot be achieved under the present circumstances. One of them said: "We know the American government is anti-Communist. But when they look at Viet Communists they think of them as western communists. That is a bad mistake." It is the conviction of the Study Team that there will be no truly representative government in South Vietnam until voices such as these can be legitamised and participate in the democratic processes of the republic.

Doubtless the total number of political prisoners in South Vietnam - including those held as prisoners of war by intelligence agencies and in military prisons, as well as those in the correctional institutions and those held by various other arresting agencies - far exceeds the official statistics and estimates. Due to the wide range of arresting

and detention agencies, and the inadequacy of statistical methods, no accurate count of prisoners can be made.

Team members spent several hours at the Women's Prison - Thu Duc. The cells and large prison rooms were overcrowded. This was especially hard on nursing mothers and those with small children. 50 women, some with babies, lived in a crude building 40' by 30'. Sanitation was primitive and inadequate. There was evidence that some prisoners had not received medical attention.

Team members were especially concerned about the large number of prisoners who had not been sentenced after many months of detention, the looseness and inaccuracy of prison classification, the inhumanity of some sentences (one slight old woman who, according to her dossier, had passed V.C. letters, had served ten years of a fifteen year sentence), and the extreme youthfulness of many of the inmates.

Governor Minh told the Team that there were fifty children from birth to 13 years of age in prison (the very youngest, of course, belonged to the women prisoners), and forty young offenders from 13 to 17 years. To judge from both interviews and official explanations, the circumstances of many classified as 'Communist' did not justify this classification. Two students who were called 'Communist' were found by the Team members to be unsentenced detainees. Their dossiers said that they were being held because they had exhibited 'leftist' tendencies and had written for a Saigon University paper which was later suspended. In another building twenty per cent of the women said they had not been tried or sentenced.

Chi Hoa is often referred to as the 'show case prison' - since 1963 American funds have been available for the improvement of facilities, and American advisers have helped set up rehabilitation programs.

The Warden said that there were about 5,500 men and boys now in prison of whom 40% were 'communist' and only 6% were 'non-Communist political' prisoners. Each prisoner wore a coloured badge indicating his classification. The Warden estimated that 40% of the inmates had not yet been tried or sentenced.

Team members talked with several monks who are in prison for resisting the draft. These monks were the only prisoners in any of

loose by any measure, even by the most generous measure of allowance for the exigencies of civil and guerrilla warfare. The evidence is more than adequate to sustain the conviction of the Study team that this looseness is used deliberately to suppress political dissent and to oppress some religious groups. In particular loyal nationalists who are in basic disagreement with the government fear with good reason retaliation for expressing their views.

Loose and inadequate standards and procedures do not represent concessions to those wartime exigencies.. Minimisation of risk of war-like activities against the government is not achieved by the imprisonment, for instance, of loyal nationalists who advocate forming a coalition government with NLF representatives. Nor does minimisation of such risks require imprisonment of powerless people in so-called 'insecure' areas, who are arrested on suspicion with the expectation that brutal interrogation may yield a 'confession' which will warrant detention.

Credible testimony of instances of arrests fitting both these examples was given the Study Team from many sources (See Section 11).

Authority for imprisonment of non-conventional criminals is found in the State of War Law, Law No. 10/68 which authorises among other things: The search of private houses both by day and night. Fixing the place of residence of those elements judged dangerous to national security. Prohibition of all demonstrations or gatherings harmful to public security and order. Prohibition of the distribution of all printed matter harmful to national security. Control and restriction of communication and travel, consonant with security requirements.

In particular the euphemistic language of the second paragraph quoted requires elaboration. Under it, numbers of persons are 'assigned residence' in one or other of the provincial or national prisons by action of a Provincial security committee for specific but renewable terms, not exceeding two years, because they are 'judged' to be 'elements dangerous to national security'. In fact it was determined that students with nothing more than the notation in their files that they exhibited 'left wing tendencies' are being incarcerated in national prisons whose administrator classified them in his census as 'communist'. Others claimed to the Team that they had been detained

for no other reason than that local officials responsible for their arrest expected to extort bribes as conditions for their release.

Because of the long periods for which individuals are often held and interrogated prior to any disposition, often for six months or more the procedures for determining who is to be arrested and for how long he is to be detained and interrogated take on a special importance. Moreover, the frequent and serious physical abuse about which the Team heard most often occur during this period. Although they seem to be employed as 'aids' to interrogation, they are forms of cruel and barbarous punishment against which the citizen needs every conceivable procedural protection.

In fact procedural protections are essentially non-existent at the arrest and interrogation stage. Such detention for interrogation frequently continues for many months and it is at this stage that the bestial brutality the Team encountered occurs.

No society can pretend to be free that permits 'administrative' detentions of the kind handled by Provincial security councils. One Team member was privileged to visit the members of one such Council as its regular weekly session was being concluded. Members of the council each possessed a typewritten list of the names of the individuals whose cases were being considered; approximately 100 names were on the list for a single afternoon's consideration. He was told that on heavy business days the Council sometimes continues to meet into the evening. An officer brought the relevant files to the meeting and read to the Council the information required.

Without notice to the arrested person, without his presence or that of witnesses to the facts relevant for determination, without confrontation or opportunity for rebuttal, to say nothing of the rights of counsels or to appeal, the liberty of each of the 100 persons listed was summarily determined and detentions in prison were ordered for periods renewable by like procedure - of up to two years.

The Study Team has reached the conclusion that the Thieu-Ky government has, through the extensive and increasing use of the extra-constitutional Military Field courts, imprisoned thousands of persons without the most fundamental elements of a fair hearing and in a shocking number of instances, without even apprising the imprisoned

'persons of the charges against them. This extraordinary development has had such a devastating effect on the people of South Vietnam and such a chilling impact on all political activities that it seems important to chronicle in some detail the process by which the present Saigon Government, in the name of a wartime emergency, can deny persons arrested for political 'offences' all of the guarantees which Vietnamese constitutional statutory law gives the persons accused of crime...

... No matter how favorably they are viewed, these courts serve as the instrument by which the Thieu Ky Government imprisons and thereby silences its critics.

Article from New York Times of June 18 and 19 1969

"From now on," the President said, pounding his fist for emphasis, "Those who spread rumours that there will be a coalition government in this country, whoever they be, whether in the executive or the legislature, will be severely punished on charges of collusion with the enemy and demoralizing the army and the people. I will punish them in the name of the constitution."

Repression in Saigon. Speech of Hon William Ryan of New York in the House of Representatives June 19 1969

Mr Speaker, despite the claims of two administrations that the United States is fighting to defend democracy in South Vietnam true political freedom still does not exist for the people of that country. Numerous reports by journalists and private citizens who have visited South Vietnam continue to relate violations of the most basic civil liberties and freedoms, and the Saigon government of President Thieu continues to suppress non-communist groups anxious to obtain a peaceful settlement of the war...

The June 18 New York Times reported that four members of a liberal opposition group that had called for the formation of a non communist government of reconciliation to negotiate with the NLF had been ordered to report to the Saigon police for 'questioning' on June 17.

But as Averell Harriman... said during the course of an interview with me last week: "President Nixon has never said that he's opposed to a coalition. He's said that he's against the imposition of a coalition

government, and therefore, a discussion of a coalition government seems to be a perfectly normal thing to have go on."

Governor Harriman went on to express his disappointment at the fact that freedom of speech and press does not exist in South Vietnam, noting in particular his dismay at the closing of the 37th newspaper since President Thieu announced a little over a year ago that his government was going to cease censorship.

If the goal of the administration is, as President Nixon has said, to secure free elections in South Vietnam, we must as Governor Harriman has urged, insist that President Thieu create a climate of freedom in order to let those elections to held. Governor Harriman pointed out that :

"We have got a very good method of talking to him and that is: unless you do this we're not going to continue a line of trying to support this government. Even after the 25,000 troops are out, there will be well over 500,000 Americans there. He won't last very long if we pull out our troops."

Mr. Speaker, thousands of people are being arrested by the Thieu Ky regime, many of whom have been detained or jailed without charge or benefit of trial. There is an estimate of at least 20,000 non-communist political prisoners. Torture and physical abuse are widespread, especially in the detention and interrogation centres. The large majority of prisoners are held because they oppose the government. . . is this then what we are defending and fighting for and for which so many of our young men have died?

Hon. Benjamin S. Rosenthal of New York (H. of R. June 19 1969)

Mr. Speaker, ending American support for the Thieu Ky government will certainly cause that government's early fall. This is the best indication that the government lacks any real basis of support among the Vietnamese. The sooner we make the hard decision to abandon these leaders whom we installed in an earlier less enlightened policy, the sooner we can end with dignity and honour, our tragic involvement in the affairs of the Vietnamese people."

Quoted from The Nation, 7 July 1969

Editorial on the report of the US inter-religious study team, sent to Saigon to investigate stories of arbitrary arrest and imprisonment by the Thieu-Ky regime.

Before leaving for Vietnam, the team conferred with members of the White House staff and received assurances that the number of political prisoners in South Vietnam was decreasing. In Saigon, a few days later, the American Embassy official most familiar with the problem of political prisoners admitted that the number is increasing steadily, and further, that this increase will continue as the US 'pacification' programme extends further into the countryside. The American Embassy stand is that the prisoners are an internal concern of the South Vietnamese government - this is a convenient fiction to cover an inconvenient fact - that the US mission is ferretting out suspected 'communists' in Vietnamese villages and turning them over to extra-constitutional 'military field courts' which lack any procedural safeguards and which in many cases employ torture to extract confessions or information.

Political prisoners in South Vietnam number at least 20,000 and 25,000 is a more likely figure. All are classified as 'communists' although many are guilty of nothing more than advocating a coalition government, or steps towards ending the war patterned on President Nixon's proposals. The de facto criterion of 'communism' is opposition to the war policies of the dictatorship, but even that is not essential. In the Chi Hoa jail the survey group saw 200 children between the ages of 10 and 14; the charge against some of them was likewise 'communism'.

If the number of political prisoners in South Vietnam is assumed to be 25,000, that, in a country with a population of 17 million, is the equivalent in the United States of 300,000 political prisoners.

What Vietnamisation Means

- extracts from the U.S. Congressional Record.

A copy of this pamphlet has been sent to the Prime Minister, the Foreign Secretary, members of the TUC General Council, members of the Labour Party Executive, members of the Liberal Party Executive, and the British Council of Churches.

The information documented here should strengthen the argument and the resolution of all those who have consistently opposed the war as an unjust and brutal invasion of a small, poor country by an immensely rich and militarist world power.

It should help to enlighten those who have sincerely believed that the Saigon 'government' must in some way represent a significant section of the Vietnamese population, and that there must be some reasonable basis for United States, and British, sponsorship of the Saigon generals headed by Thieu and Ky.

It is published in the hope that readers will help to extend the already very wide support for the millions of Americans who are determined to go on demonstrating opposition to the war until President Nixon agrees to begin negotiations for the total withdrawal of all US forces, weapons and bases from Vietnam.

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