

Document #3—Speech by President Richard Nixon April 7, 1971, delivered over national television

I am glad to be able to begin my report tonight by announcing that I have decided to increase the rate of American troops withdrawals for the period from May 1 to December 1 [1971]....

By the first of next month, May 1, we will have brought home more than 265,000 Americans—almost half of the troops in Vietnam when I took office.... Casualties were five times as great in the first three months of 1969 as they were in the first three months this year, 1971....

Let me review now two decisions I have made which have contributed to the achievements of our goals in Vietnam.... The first was the destruction of enemy bases in Cambodia.... American troops were out of Cambodia in sixty days, just as I pledged they would be. American casualties did not rise; they were cut in half. American troop withdrawals were not halted or delayed; they continued at an accelerated pace.

Now let me turn to the Laotian operation. As you know, this was undertaken by South Vietnamese ground forces with American air support against North Vietnamese troops which had been using Laotian territory for six years to attack American forces and allied forces in South Vietnam....

Did the Laotian operation contribute to the goals we sought? I have just completed my assessment of that operation and here are my conclusions:

First, the South Vietnamese demonstrated that without American advisers they could fight effectively against the very best troops North Vietnam could put in the field.

Second, the South Vietnamese suffered heavy casualties, but by every conservative estimate, the casualties suffered by the enemy were far heavier.

Third, and most important, the disruption of enemy supply lines, the consumption of ammunition and arms in the battle, has been even more damaging to the capability of the North Vietnamese to sustain major offensives in South Vietnam than were the operations in Cambodia ten months ago.

Consequently, tonight I can report that Vietnamization has succeeded. Because of the increased strength of the South Vietnamese, because of the success of the Cambodian operation, because of the achievements of the South Vietnamese operation in Laos, I am announcing an increase in the rate of American withdrawals. Between May 1 and December 1 of this year, one hundred thousand more American troops will be brought home from South Vietnam....

As you can see from the progress we have made to date and by this announcement tonight, the American involvement in Vietnam is coming to an end. The day the South Vietnamese can take over their own defense is in sight. Our goal is a total American withdrawal from Vietnam. We can and we will reach that goal through our program of Vietnamization if necessary. But we would infinitely prefer to reach it even sooner—through negotiations....

Let me turn now to a proposal which at first glance has a great deal of popular appeal. If our goal is a total withdrawal of all our forces, why don't I announce a date now for ending our involvement?...

The issue very simply is this: Shall we leave Vietnam in a way that—by our own actions—consciously turns the country over to the Communists? Or shall we leave in a way that gives the South Vietnamese a reasonable chance to survive as a free people? My plan will end American involvement in a way that would provide that chance. And the other plan would end it precipitately and give victory to the Communists....