When his mind was set on preventing the presence of the ICCS, the enemy would not hesitate to shoot down a helicopter even when his liaison officer was aboard. This was exactly what happened to two ICCS helicopters flying on a mission to Lao Bao on April 7, 1973. One helicopter was shot down with eleven men aboard, including two NLF liaison officers; all were killed. The second helicopter, badly hit, was forced to crash land. The enemy later claimed that the helicopters had deviated from the authorized flight corridor. The fact was the enemy did not want the ICCS to poke its nose into the Lao Bao - Khe Sanh area, which was being developed into a gigantic logistics base complete with SAM anti-aircraft missiles. At Duc Co, another major enemy logistics base in MR-2, the ICCS team was forced to leave because life became impossible for its members. Not only did the enemy fail to supply them with basic necessities, but their movements were so limited that they were not free to carry out their mission.

Among the four ICCS members, Canadians were the most objective and dedicated to their work. As a result, they were frequently criticized and mistreated by the Communists, who even went to the extreme of arresting an entire Canadian observation team and releasing them only after a long interval. The investigation concerning the enemy violation at Sa Huynh was also noteworthy. The initial request for it came from the NLF who, after occupying Sa Huynh by force, wanted the ICCS to officiate their control over the port. It so happened that by the time the ICCS investigation team arrived, Sa Huynh had been reoccupied by the ARVN 2d Division. Seeing that the investigation could turn to the NLF disadvantage, the Communist representatives backed off. But the RVN kept insisting, and finally the Da Nang ICCS team arrived at Sa Huynh and confirmed that the NLF had, in fact, violated a RVN-held area. This was perhaps the first and only time that all four ICCS members unanimously agreed with the result of the investigation. The Chief of the Polish delegation, however, was relieved soon after the Sa Huynh affair. In July 1973, fed up with the uselessness of its role in the ICCS, Canada withdrew its membership and was replaced by Iran.
The Four Party Joint Military Commission, as defined by the Paris Agreement, was the primary organization whose mission was to enforce the ceasefire and to discover, investigate, and prevent its violations. It held its first working session in Saigon on the very day of the ceasefire. On that day the US directly brought from Paris 23 North Vietnamese and 10 NLF representatives. The delegation chiefs held their first official meeting on February 2, 1973. By February 8, the US had flown to Saigon a total of 802 North Vietnamese JMC members out of 825 authorized. On that date, the NLF had only 152 members. As a result the deployment of JMC teams ran immediately into trouble.

During February 1973, a few incidents occurred when Communist JMC members made their appearance at places outside Saigon. On February 8, when NVA and NLF members arrived at their assigned quarters in Ban Me Thuot, they were met with a hostile mob which threw rocks at them, injuring a few NVA members. In Hue and Da Nang, the population also staged demonstrations and was on the verge of violence when the police intervened.

The NLF military delegation made a habit of raising complaints and protests as a pretext for not deploying personnel to local teams or to fill authorized strength. Their protests were about practically everything: quarters, facilities, diplomatic immunity, security, freedom of movement, and contact with the press. Quarters and facilities assigned to the NLF teams were mostly comfortable bases or installations vacated by American units or civilian agencies and carefully selected by joint US-RVN effort. By any standards, they were the best available locally. Still, NLF men, who were so used to the privations of jungle or swamp life, complained incessantly about lack of comfort and facilities. The physical security for JMC and ICCS headquarters throughout the country was provided by the National Police and the RVNAF military police. It was held tight because the RVN government knew the public antipathy toward the Communists could cause them physical harm or embarrassment. A few incidents, however, were unavoidable in the first few days of JMC operation. As a matter of fact, local RVN authorities made every effort not to offend US officials, who at that time labored to have the Agreement...
implemented and respected. Thus the problem of diplomatic immunities and exemptions was apparently raised only for the sake of making protests. The same thing applied regarding contact with the press. The JMC Communist delegation was allowed to meet the press and later to conduct press conferences. The RVN policy then was inclined toward openness and dialogue because it felt that the more something was kept under wraps, the more it drew curiosity. But it was precisely those Communist-run press conferences that became increasingly tedious and boring. Accustomed to discussion and debate, the foreign and local press soon lost interest and shunned these conferences altogether. Understandably, they did not want to waste time listening to one-way propaganda lectures.

In general, the RVN government was truly chary of Communist presence in the cities, but since it was inevitable, RVN officials did what they could to keep things in check and to avoid a breakdown. As far as freedom of movement was concerned, JMC vehicles were absolutely free to go everywhere unchecked as long as they flew their own colors. However, the Communists themselves limited JMC movement because, in the first place, their internal control was so tight that it hardly allowed any stray visit; and secondly, the Communists must have been chary of strolling downtown among a hostile crowd. So, Communist complaints were just a screen behind which they hid conspiracies of their own.

It was the NLF itself which took advantage of and caused delays in the pickup of its personnel to and from JMC meetings. Pickup points were invariably selected with a malicious design. They were usually located in key contested areas, and if we agreed to send helicopters there, we might implicitly attest to the extent of NLF control. Although the RVN balked at some suggested pickup points, it agreed to most of them. Nevertheless, the JMC/NLF delegation never counted more than 314 members out of 825 authorized. As a result, after citing all kinds of reasons for delay, the NLF finally participated in only four JMC Regional Teams and absolutely shunned all local teams. In contrast, North Vietnam fulfilled its obligations quite correctly by deploying personnel to all seven JMC regional teams and five local teams. After the Hue and Da Nang incidents, however, North Vietnam withdrew its JMC teams from Regions I and II. By mid-March 1973, all protests raised by the NVN and NLF delegations had been
satisfactorily settled by the US and the RVN, but the deployment of NLF personnel to JMC local teams did not make any progress.

Despite the remarkable achievement of the Four-Party JMC in the settlement of prisoner exchanges, it failed in its primary mission of bringing about a ceasefire. The trouble was that Communist representatives were never in place at designated areas, thus making it impossible for the JMC teams to carry out their mission and causing difficulties to the ICCS at the same time. The ICCS needed the NLF presence in order to conduct visits, observation tours, or investigations. The final result was that neither South Vietnamese party was too anxious to make use of the JMC as its mission had intended. No investigations were completed except for the unique Sa Huynh investigation, which the Communists had initially requested and then tried to sabotage.

In keeping with its protocol, the four-party JMC ended its mission after sixty days of operation, leaving it up to its successor, the Two-Party JMC. But during the entire course of its existence, the two-party JMC never arrived at an agreement, whether it was organization, component membership, deployment, or operation. The NLF never cared to bring its personnel up to authorized strength. Only its delegation at the Central JMC in Saigon was officially active, but even it appeared to have lost interest in the game, except for the deliberate effort to use its office as a forum for propaganda and a listening post. The ceasefire problem, meanwhile, was left dangling and perhaps it could never be settled at all despite the solemn guarantee and affirmation of peace provided by International Conference held in Paris in late February 1973, a conference attended by the United Nations Secretary General himself.

Implementing Article 12 of the Agreement, both the RVN and the NLF delegations met at La Celle St. Cloud in suburban Paris on March 19, 1973 to discuss the political future of South Vietnam. The RVN delegation chief, Deputy Prime Minister Dr. Nguyen Luu Vien, was an affable, modest man given to open and friendly talks. His counterpart, Nguyen Van Hieu, was quite the opposite. Their positions were irreconcilable, and the gap between was too great. There were six major issues that invariably came
to a deadlock every time they were raised: the ceasefire, the National Council of Reconciliation and Concord, the guarantee of freedom and democratic rights, the civilian prisoners, the reduction of troops, and the elections. By the end of April 1973, when the 90-day delay for settlement of South Vietnam's internal problems expired, the two delegations had not even agreed on an agenda! And so the talks dragged on futilely.

The implementation of the Agreement, despite delays and conflicts did succeed quite remarkably in three areas: the exchange of prisoners of war, the withdrawal of US and allied forces, and the de-mining of North Vietnam. On the very day the Agreement was officially signed, the four signatory parties exchanged lists of prisoners among themselves. It was agreed that US troop withdrawal and the exchange of prisoners take place at the same time and be completed within 60 days. During his January 24, 1973, press conference, Dr. Kissinger announced that the return of US prisoners would be carried out in increments spaced out every two weeks. Subsequent plantings were based on this schedule. From the lists exchanged in Paris, North Vietnam admitted to detaining 594 American prisoners, including 562 servicemen, 24 civilians, and 8 third-country nationals.

Later, North Vietnam also returned three additional prisoners whose names were not on the list, 2 Americans and 1 Korean. Successful as it was, the prisoner exchange did not proceed without incidents. There were instances of conflict and contests of wit and many delays due to the uncompromising and secluded attitude of the Communists. At one time, US helicopters and officials had to wait ten hours at Loc Ninh under a scorching sun until problems were weeded out. On March 22, 1973, when it was apparent that NVN did not want to release American prisoners captured in Laos, the US delegation had to threaten to suspend the 3d and 4th withdrawal increments and the de-mining to exact a concession from NVN on March 29.

At the time of the ceasefire, there were 23,516 US and 30,449 allied troops left in South Vietnam. Their withdrawal was spaced out in four increments 15 days apart. After one delay expressly imposed to
exert pressure, and as the last group of American prisoners of war returned, the final withdrawal increment was completed on March 29, 1973.

In Paris, the RVN delegation also handed to the Communist side a list of 27,000 prisoners, both North Vietnamese and NLF. When they were released, 238 among them chose to stay behind and threatened suicide if forced to return. Except for three seriously ill prisoners to be returned at a later date, the total number of prisoners returned to the Communists amounted to 26,508. It is noteworthy to mention here the fact that prior to handing the 27,000-prisoner list to the other side, the RVN had taken expedient steps to grant returnee status to more than 10,000 cooperating Communist prisoners, thus enabling them to live legally in South Vietnam after release from reeducation centers. In exchange for 27,000 released, the RVN took back a total of 4,608 veterans. North Vietnam held 410 prisoners of the RVN as hostages to demand the return of its 238 turncoats. The RVN had compiled a list of its servicemen missing in action: 31,818 in total. Thus more than 25,000 were still detained by the other side. Even if there had been unverifiable deaths among them and even if many had chosen to stay within Communist ranks, the remaining total, whose existence the other side preferred to ignore, was sizable indeed.

As to political prisoners, the RVN declared it detained 5,018 and immediately released 1,200 as a gesture of goodwill pending agreement with the NLF on internal issues. Meanwhile, the Communists admitted to detaining only 140 RVN cadres. After several protests and contests, the other side gradually raised the figure to 200, then 400, 429, and finally 637, while the RVN census recorded a total of 67,500 civilians kidnapped or captured by the enemy, including 17,000 cadres of all echelons.

Although the problem had been settled long before the signing of the Agreement, the Communists constantly invented delays and obstacles in the release of American prisoners with a view toward using them as leverage for pressing the RVN into releasing even criminals. This vicious stratagem caused much annoyance and was a waste of time.

Upon release RVN prisoners were given rest and recuperation and then, on request, were discharged from service. By contrast, released Communist
prisoners were immediately used to replace losses in enemy combat units. On June 10, 1973, a released Communist prisoner asked to return to our side out of war weariness. He gave the information that of the 1,000 prisoners the RVN released to the enemy on March 10 and 11, 1973, in Phu Yen province 700 men under the age of 30 were assigned to MR-5 units, and the remainder returned to their home villages to replenish local provincial units. All 1,000 had first undergone a 10-day reeducation course. Thus the exchange of prisoners practically gave the enemy all at once 27,000 experienced soldiers, enough to activate three infantry divisions.

In addition to prisoner exchanges and troop withdrawals, there was the problem of base-dismantling to be settled. During the first meeting of the Four-Party JMC delegation chiefs in Saigon, Tran Van Tra raised the issue and demanded the dismantling of US bases and the removal of US equipment. General Woodward, US delegation chief, informed him that the US no longer possessed any base or equipment in Vietnam and that all had become RVN property. This came to Tra as a shocking revelation. As a matter of fact, the enemy was confronted with a "fait accompli" because of the titular transfer of American bases and equipment that had been completed prior to the ceasefire. Certain non-transferrable equipment, meanwhile, was already listed for removal in conjunction with the withdrawal of US troops and was placed under supervision of both the ICCS and the JMC.

In the meantime, in keeping with the Western tradition of being bound by a signed agreement, the US Navy proceeded with the odious task of mine-clearing in all NVN ports and rivers. The task progressed quite slowly due to technological difficulties and also because of the need for re-negotiations. Nevertheless it was accomplished within the last 35-day delay as determined by the Paris Joint Communiqué of June 13, 1973. And so the only American obligation left with regard to North Vietnam was the promised post-war reconstruction aid which North Vietnam preferred to call "war reparations". This problem necessarily depended on the development of the situation and the outcome of the search for American MIA's and the remains of American KIA's.
By the end of 1972, in the wake of the Summer offensive during which North Vietnam committed the majority of its forces to the battlefields of the South, total enemy strength in South Vietnam was estimated at about 300,000. The bulk of enemy combat forces consisted of 14 regular infantry divisions, 30 separate infantry regiments and sapper, artillery, armored, anti-aircraft regiments, and other support units. In MR-1 alone, the enemy maintained seven divisions: five in the DMZ area and north of Hai Van Pass: 304, 308, 312, 320 and 324B; and two south of Hai Van Pass: 711 and NT-2. In MR-2, the enemy deployed three divisions: NT-3, F-10 and 968. In MR-3, major regular enemy units included two divisions: CT-7 and CT-9, and several sapper units. MR-4 was the usual operational area for the enemy 1st and CT-5 Divisions. (Table 7).

**ENEMY MAIN FORCES, CEASEFIRE PERIOD**

*Table 7*

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Divisions</th>
<th>Inf</th>
<th>Arty</th>
<th>AAA</th>
<th>Regiments</th>
<th>Infantry (separate)</th>
<th>Sapper</th>
<th>Arty</th>
<th>Armor</th>
<th>AAA</th>
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</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>MR-1</td>
<td>7</td>
<td></td>
<td>1</td>
<td></td>
<td>6</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>6</td>
<td>2</td>
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<td>MR-2</td>
<td>3</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>5</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>1</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>MR-3</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>1</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>8</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>1</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>MR-4</td>
<td>2</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>11</td>
<td></td>
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<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>TOTAL</td>
<td>14</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>1</td>
<td></td>
<td>30</td>
<td>6</td>
<td>10</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>12</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Note: Information made available by RVNAF/J-2/JGS
The enemy infrastructure and militia were greatly reduced after the summer offensive, with their total then estimated at a little over 40,000 men. This reduction in strength was to become a major impediment for the enemy in his land and population grab campaign of the ceasefire period (Table 8).

### ENEMY STRENGTH, CEASEFIRE PERIOD

**Table 8**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th>Combat units</th>
<th>Admin &amp; Rear</th>
<th>Guerrilla-</th>
<th>TOTAL</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>MR-1</td>
<td>79,450</td>
<td>35,240</td>
<td>5,928</td>
<td>120,618</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>MR-2</td>
<td>31,200</td>
<td>18,500</td>
<td>11,017</td>
<td>60,717</td>
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<tr>
<td>MR-3</td>
<td>27,300</td>
<td>17,315</td>
<td>10,730</td>
<td>55,345</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>MR-4</td>
<td>29,050</td>
<td>14,065</td>
<td>13,325</td>
<td>56,440</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>TOTAL</strong></td>
<td><strong>167,000</strong></td>
<td><strong>85,120</strong></td>
<td><strong>41,000</strong></td>
<td><strong>293,120</strong></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Note: Information made available by RVNAF/J-2/JGS

At the time the standstill ceasefire was announced, military forces of both sides were supposed to stay where they were. The area under effective enemy control and the fuzzy contested zone in between ran from the DMZ, where is included the northern half of Quang Tri province, southward along the Truong Son mountain range to include almost all mountainous areas of MR-1 and MR-2 and northern MR-3. The remaining consisted of "dents" scattered throughout the GVN-controlled territory, which figuratively looked like spots on a leopard skin. Most important among these were the enemy major bases in MR-4 such as U Minh, Ca Mau, That Son, the
area where Chuong Thien, Kien Giang, and Phong Dinh provincial boundaries met, the boundary area between Vinh Long and Vinh Binh provinces, and the Tri Phap area (Plain of Reeds). Laos and Cambodia, meanwhile, remained the sanctuaries where the enemy enjoyed absolute freedom of action.

After 1972, enemy forces were in a state of utter exhaustion. His destroyed equipment and supplies were not replaced on time, and troop replacements hardly filled in the huge human losses. Most of his major units were at best barely capable of defensive actions. In Quang Nam province, troops from the NVA 711th Division who returned to our side before and after the cease-fire revealed that their units were in such a critical shortage of ammunition that each B-40 or B-41 (RPG) rocket launcher was left with three rounds, and several companies were reduced to a skeletal strength of ten cadres or even less.

To the enemy, the cease-fire was a much-needed rest and recuperation period which came just in time. The Communist precept being violence, he undoubtedly must have realized that to conquer a country with a million-strong armed force, political efforts alone, albeit violent politics, would not suffice. Hence, military effort was the only key to success. As a result, from the very first day the cease-fire went into effect, the enemy embarked on a program of force development that had never been or could ever be matched in the entire history of the Indochina war.

Foremost among the problems to be solved was logistics. The enemy was extremely concerned about logistics prior to launching a campaign, big or small. It had become an enemy basic tenet that logistics must be adequate in place before combat orders could be issued. Equipment, ammunition, and supplies of all kinds seemed not to pose any difficulties because of increased aid quantities provided by Russia and China. According to intelligence sources, during 1973 North Vietnam received a total of 2.8 million metric tons of goods from Communist bloc countries, up 50% from 1972 aid figures, and in 1974 total imported goods increased to 3.5 million tons. So the major problem for the enemy was to transport this materiel into the South and to store and distribute it to his units.
During the entire course of the US direct participation in the war, despite destructive US bombings, the enemy always managed to keep in motion an effective and well run logistics system to feed his battlefields in the South. Now that this fire had ceased, the enemy logistics effort became much easier. Group 559, under direct control of the General Directorate of Rear Services, NVA General Staff in Hanoi was in charge of supply and transportation support for South Vietnam battlefields. By the end of 1972, Group 559 had under its control a total of five Rear Services Divisions which were generally located along the Truong Son corridor. These were, from north to south:

1. Division 571, responsible for the area around Ban Karai and Mu Gia passes, down to Khe Sanh.
2. Division 472, responsible for Southern Laos.
3. Division 473, responsible for the area from south of Khe Sanh to north of A-Shau Valley.
4. Division 471, from A-Shau Valley southward to the Tri-border (Vietman - Laos - Cambodia).
5. Division 470, from the Tri-border southward and including Cambodia.

Each division had a number of subordinate "Binh Tram" (military stations, literally) or logistics units, which were self-contained organizations complete with administration, engineers, transportation, depot facilities, and protective forces such as infantry troops and anti-craft units. In December 1972, there was a total of 45 such units. Each of these units was made responsible for a well-defined area, but the units were highly mobile and could move back and forth depending on battlefield support requirements.

Throughout the period of US bombings against this infiltration corridor, the enemy had required more stations and way-stations in between. Trucks usually moved only at night with black-out lights or when the weather was bad and they were strictly used for cargos. Troops or personnel, meanwhile, had to march, and they needed rest stations where they ate and recuperated or received medical treatment. As soon as
bombings were suspended, trucks moved night and day and also carried troops and personnel. The number of stations was now reduced because distance became further in between. Truck movements took less time to reach destination. A new recruit, for example, before the ceasefire spent about 100 days on the road to move from Vinh (in North Vietnam) to the boundary of MR-3, a journey of 780 miles. After the ceasefire, it took him only 25 days for the same trip. By the end of 1973, when the road system greatly improved, this movement time was further reduced.

One of the Group 559 priority tasks was to extend and improve the new East-Truong Son highway and to build large logistics bases. During the post-ceasefire period, enemy engineers labored day and night to complete a new infiltration road which started from Khe Sanh base, ran along the Tabat - A Shau valley into west Quang Nam, and by 1974 connected with National Route QL-14 at Ben Giang. From that point on, the existing QL-14 took over and ran south to the north of Kontum. Obstructed by Dakto and Kontum, which were then under RVNAF control, the enemy new infiltration road veered westward near the border and ran along it southward inside MR-2. As work progressed, the enemy made a systematic effort to remove RVNAF surveillance outposts along the border, one by one. Le Minh base was overrun in late September 1973 and Dak Son, Bu Prang, Bu Bong were overrun in early November. Thus within the space of less than one year after the ceasefire, the enemy almost completed a second infiltration axis east of the Truong Son mountain range. His vehicles could now move faster from the 17th parallel to north of Tay Ninh province. In the initial phase of this road construction effort, enemy engineers built makeshift pontoon bridges which were gradually replaced by steel bridges. At the end of 1973, intelligence reports indicated that the enemy began to build a number of small concrete bridges and also hard-surface some stretches of road. In addition to this new axis, the enemy also opened lateral roads connecting it with the old Ho Chi Minh trail to the west and with coastal plain areas to the east. Almost every day our observation planes discovered a new stretch of road being built, its red clay color shining through the dark green jungle canopy.
All along this infiltration corridor, large rear-service areas mushroomed. New villages and farms dotted with twig-and-leaves buildings sprang up. The largest among the enemy newly built logistical bases were the Khe Sanh - Lao Bao area, north of MR-1, and Duc Co, west of Pleiku in MR-2. The ICCS installed an observation team in both bases, but the ICCS presence was a nuisance to the enemy. Therefore he sought ways to evict the ICCS representatives, first by shooting down their liaison helicopters at Khe Sanh, then by making life so miserable for them at Duc Co that they finally had to withdraw.

In conjunction with the building of new roads and new logistical bases along his infiltration corridor, the enemy also installed an extensive network of anti-aircraft positions to shield his traffic and logistical operation from aerial observation and bombings. The US bombing cessation allowed the enemy to bring into South VN his anti-aircraft assets from North VN to protect his new bases. In Quang Tri province alone, intelligence experts estimated, there were 10 enemy anti-aircraft regiments at the end of 1972. By the time of the ceasefire, this figure had increased to 12, then to 13 three months later. These AAA units were equipped with all types of weapons, from 12.7-mm and 14.5-mm heavy machineguns to 100-mm guns. Anti-aircraft guns larger than 57-mm were almost all controlled by radar. The enemy also employed Russian-made, shoulder-fired SA-7 "Strella" heat-seeking anti-aircraft missiles, including improved models. As of the beginning of 1973, Khe Sanh base was protected by the 263d SAM regiment. Aerial photos taken in April 1973 revealed 8 SAM-2 launching positions around the base. The increase in anti-aircraft muscle was equally extensive along the infiltration corridor. As a matter of fact, superfluous military stations were transformed into AAA or combat units.

With the new road system completed enemy truck convoys moved, unchecked, both by day and by night. VNAF observation planes sometimes spotted convoys of 200 to 300 trucks. Materiel and supplies poured into South VN in very large amounts. To the enemy, the movement of troop replacements and even entire combat units now hardly posed any problems. All losses that he incurred in the previous years were effectively
replaced during 1973. Intelligence reports indicated that during the first half of 1973 alone the enemy brought 65,000 new recruits into South VN, and the amount of supplies the enemy accumulated by July 1973 was enough to support a 13- to 18-month offensive campaign of the 1972 type. And for the first time in the war, the seriously wounded were evacuated to North Vietnam.

The North Vietnamese forces now fighting on South Vietnam battlefields had become a modern, sophisticated army which no longer marched but was entirely mechanized, with substantial armor and artillery support. Its fuel requirements naturally increased manyfold and could no longer be met by vintage drum-rigged bicycles. So, along with the road building effort, the enemy also installed a fuel pipeline whose terminal was completed by 1972, in time to support the Thua Thien battlefields. Another pipeline ran from the Mu Gia pass in North Vietnam to near the DMZ; this supported NVA units in Quang Tri province. During the post-ceasefire period this pipeline system was extended farther south, reaching into the vicinity of Quang Duc province in MR-3. The fuel supply problem for NVA transportation and mechanized units was thus effectively solved.

To further improve his transportation system, the enemy also started rehabilitation or maintenance work on airfields in areas under his control. In total, the enemy now had 7 light and 8 medium airfields, and two among them could be easily improved to accommodate jet fighters. At the same time, North Vietnam also made a major effort to reorganize its forces and improve their combat effectiveness. Regular units were modernized, regional units were refitted and retrained, and militia units were upgraded and expanded.

During the month of January 1973 and immediately after cessation, North Vietnam took the greatest advantage of the US bombing cessation. Convoy upon convoy of tanks and artillery guns made their way into the South. The number of enemy tanks, which was estimated at about 100 of all types in the aftermath of the 1972 summer offensive, soared to nearly 500 by the end of April 1973. Several armored groups rolling along on the Ho Chi Minh trail were either visually observed or photographed. Most artillery pieces that the enemy brought into South VN were either 122-mm short-barrel or 122-mm and 130-mm long barrel guns. Also, by the end of April 1973, the enemy brought in an
additional 170 pieces of 122-mm and 130-mm artillery, raising their total number to 250. All these weapons entries were flagrant violations of the Paris Agreement. They were made possible by a blindfolded and crippled ICCS which completely ignored the RVN repeated protests.

The enemy increase in anti-aircraft capability was most visible through the grouping of lesser units into regiments and divisions, which were now equipped with an entire array of deadly anti-aircraft weapons, from heavy machine guns to radar-controlled 37-mm, 57-mm, and 100-mm guns and SAM-2 missiles. In particular, along the coast of the enemy MR-4 (North Vietnam), anti-aircraft units were equipped with the new Russian-supplied SAMLET. In the Hiep Duc area (Quang Tin province), combined armored-artillery regiment 572, which usually supported the NVA 711th Division, was upgraded after the ceasefire and split into three separate tank, artillery, and AAA regiments. SA-7 anti-aircraft missiles meanwhile proliferated among enemy infantry units. In 1972 this missile was used mostly in northern MR-1 (Quang Tri province), but a year later, after the ceasefire, reports indicated that it was widely employed throughout the country, even in the Mekong Delta. The improved SA-7[which had an effective range of feet] was further evidence of increased Russian military aid to North Vietnam.

Simultaneously with the modernization of weapons and equipment, enemy units were replenished, refitted, and retrained during the entire year of 1973. In particular, regional units and provincial mobile battalions took turns to undergo training in newly-established training centers. The militia was also upgraded, and more and more B-40 and -41 launchers and machine guns were used by guerrilla units.

Intelligence reports also indicated that, in early 1973, NVA divisions 312, 308, and 320, which had suffered great losses during 1972, were re-grouped to North Vietnam for a major refitting process. NVA Division 316 was also withdrawn from Laos, and the 341st Division, which had been disbanded for a long time, was now re-activated. These activities all pointed toward preparations of major proportions that the enemy was feverishly pushing ahead.
The Republic of Vietnam After the Ceasefire

The last US troop contingent departed Saigon on March 29, 1973, marking the end of US participation in the Vietnam war and the beginning of a new era during which the RVN was to take its destiny in its own hands. Since the Vietnamization process began, the RVN had met several challenges, the greatest of which was the enemy 1972 Summer Offensive. Pitting the majority of its regular forces against the RVN on three major fronts while US strength stood at a residual figure of 69,000 with few combat units remaining, North Vietnam undoubtedly gambled for big stakes. But the result the enemy achieved was really not worth the huge losses he had incurred. The RVNAF still stood firmly— with the support of US airpower.

The land and population grab frenzy that the enemy started in late January 1973, was another challenge. The fact that the Paris Agreement was signed, the enemy must have thought, was enough to disintegrate the nationalist fabric of South Vietnam. Political offensives conducted in concert with limited military efforts, he reasoned, would place him in an advantageous position when the Agreement was to be implemented. But the enemy had miscalculated, and his preparations availed to practically nothing. His decimated regular units could not bring enough force to bear on the campaign, and it finally failed miserably. It was obvious that he needed more time. It had taken him four years to make the big move in 1972. Now it was too soon to expect anything spectacular. The moral disintegration of the anti-Communist camp that the enemy had expected did not materialize. In full anticipation of the problems ahead, the RVN endeavored to mobilize all its strength and resources to continue the struggle.

Confident at first that the Agreement would be respected, and with the guarantee of US airpower deterrence, the South Vietnamese leadership had thought that a true ceasefire would come about and that an interim peace could be maintained. Then a real political contest would
take place as dictated by the Agreement. The standstill cease-fire was certainly not the best solution, but it was acceptable if both sides displayed a genuine concern for reconciliation and concord. Because RVN had staked its confidence on the Agreement, and although fully aware of its pitfalls and Communist treachery, the RVN adopted certain measures which hardly fitted post-cease-fire realities.

One problem was the maintenance of RVNAF border surveillance camps, outlying outposts and remote district towns that were within enemy-controlled territory. The Agreement required that forces of both sides were supposed to stay where they were at the time of the cease-fire, and control zones were to be determined later by mutual agreement. So it was perfectly sound to hold onto those bases and outposts. Besides, the RVNAF had been at these places for a long time, and their presence should be continued if only to demonstrate the extent of RVN control and suzerainty. However, so doing, the RVNAF became over extended, and a sizable force was thus committed that could have been better employed in other tasks. This force was largely lost along with its equipment when the enemy chose to remove border bases and outposts that lay in his way, as has been discussed earlier in this chapter. Taken together, the manpower thus lost could have filled a number of combat divisions. The extension of territorial forces needed to protect and defend hamlets and villages was also carried out by field commanders in keeping with total respect for the Agreement. The RVN, however, could well have done without some remote areas and gained additional mobile reserves in exchange.

The same elated confidence was also felt in the civilian sector. As a matter of fact, almost all government plans and programs were geared to post-war reconstruction and development. A case in point was a post-cease-fire plan to reduce the RVNAF strength by 100,000 and transfer this manpower to production activities. RVNAF actual strength was thus reduced to 996,000 men by the end of 1974 even while the military situation certainly required more troops. By the time the plan was cancelled in the face of stepped up enemy violations, the RVNAF had lost valuable time that was needed to bring their units up to strength.
again. This was a lesson well learned as to how devious the enemy was when he signed an agreement.

The Paris Agreement devised certain solutions that simply could not find their place in the South Vietnamese context. The standstill ceasefire was one. In this regard, the 1973 Agreement was much worse than the 1954 Geneva Accord, which at least provided two well-defined regrouping areas and a reasonable delay for troop withdrawals. This was not the case with the Paris Agreement, whose standstill modus vivendi was a fuzzy mess at best. How could the contending adversaries arrive at a satisfactory agreement as to where one's control was supposed to extend, if they both claimed the same areas? The standstill idea was the basis for the land grab that occurred before, during, and after the ceasefire, with both sides resorting to mutual denunciations. The territorial problem proved to be the thorniest of the problems and probably could never be settled. After two years of dickering and bickering, the two adversaries remained exactly where they had started. Neither would voluntarily yield an inch to the other, and all holiday truces during the war were marred by violations.

The conclusion was evident that a standstill ceasefire simply would not work in a war without frontlines, where troops of both sides could be everywhere and nowhere at any given time and where the adversaries had built up so great a hatred for each other. It was understandable that either side would want to settle for no less than a bigger piece of the pie than the other. Small enemy bases were usually imbricated among the RVN villages, and naturally the guerrillas never sat tight in their bases. Therefore when it came time to determine the extent of control for each side in those contested areas, no one would admit to the presence of the other because frequently no one was there. In certain villages and hamlets, both sides had their own governmental apparatus, one of them public, the other underground. Who in that case would be able to ascertain which belonged to whom and on what grounds? It was a known fact that, during the time of the ceasefire, the enemy hastily established several village and hamlet "Revolutionary Committees," the majority of which existed only on paper. But their nominal existence
would be a great obstruction when it came to settle the problem of zoning.

On a national scale, it was even more difficult. The RVN was admittedly in control of all populated plain areas, which amounted to only about 1/3 of the total national territory. The remaining 2/3 of the territory — unpopulated swamps, jungles, and mountains that no one ever controlled effectively — to which side did it belong? Either side could, at any moment, bring his troops in and stay there for a while, but could he really claim that as effective control? With only 300,000 troops, how could the enemy realistically lay any claim on this waste terrain? And those areas which were neither blue nor red on situation maps — to which side did they really belong? The problem, as a matter of fact, contained so many unknown factors and so many variables that it was entirely insoluble. It was impossible for the opposing sides to agree with each other. Also, what about those RVN outposts and bases that were located deep within the enemy-controlled territory? Each border camp, for example, a camp that was usually manned by a Ranger battalion, must at least have a security and patrol zone around it, and this could be tentatively determined by the coverage of its supporting fire. The question was, would the enemy accept such a thorn in his flank? Or even if the enemy accepted it at all but confined the base to its barbed wire, would the RVN consent to it? There was no way an agreement could be worked out. And how could we abstain from reactions or counteractions if confronted with penetrations, harassments, kidnappings, and the terrorist actions which were the common fare of the Communist political struggle? In such conditions, how could zoning ever be determined and how could there be ceasefire? As a result, on the part of the RVN, there never were any orders to unit commanders to meet with enemy counterparts to discuss ceasefire and zoning, for the simple reason that such meetings would solve nothing.

The second insoluble problem instituted by the Paris Agreement was the three-segment National Council of Reconciliation and Concord. The "third segment" was never clear to the RVN, nor to all the
anti-Communist Vietnamese. What exactly was this "third segment" which nobody had heard of during the entire course of the conflict? It was, as a matter of fact, an abstract concept advanced by Le Duc Tho during the summer of 1972. The Communist true design was to establish a coalition government or a coalition council with three equal segments, each wielding equal voting power, two of which would be Communist. Those people whom the Communists depicted as belonging to this "third segment" were in reality all opposed to the RVN government and were generally Communist sympathizers. The RVN, after all, was a free and democratic regime which allowed opposition, while Hanoi never condoned such concepts. If Hanoi and the NLF wanted to include in the Council those elements that sided with them and opposed the RVN regime, why would the RVN not be permitted to do likewise, i.e., introduce its own genuine opposition elements? The Communists, however, objected to this suggestion because, they argued, such an arrangement would amount to only an extended two-segment council.

So the key question was: who designated this third segment? Naturally the Communists would never accept those designated by the RVN. The Agreement made it clear that the Council would operate on the principle of unanimity. But this was a principle that paralyzed almost all institutions in which there was a conflict between Communists and Nationalists. As to work procedures and the organization and operation of lower-level councils, these were all thorny problems that never warranted a satisfactory solution. The Communist objective, when a coalition government was not attainable, was to attempt to transform the National Council of Reconciliation and Concord into a disguised form of coalition structure wielding enough power to become a government by itself in the long run. In the face of this prospect, it was understandable that the La Celle St. Cloud political talks never stood any chance of success.

The third thorny problem was the guarantee of freedom and democratic rights. This was nothing but a farce. How could the totalitarian Communists ask for the broadening of such rights when they themselves denied them to their own people? The RVN was just a nascent nation
plagued by a long subversive war. In such conditions, its government must of necessity take certain coercing measures such as mandatory military service, resource control, economic blockade, high taxes, and the limitation of certain freedoms. Basically, the Vietnamese people were not entirely familiar with democratic life and had not reached the level of political maturity needed to make a conscious choice. There were aspects in national activities and democratic institutions that the Communists could advantageously exploit. This was an issue on which the RVN could not easily agree.

Other problems, such as those concerning the release of political prisoners or the reduction of troop strength, were conducive to agreement after some bartering, but the problem which was likely to run into serious difficulty was general elections. Elections for what? And what kind of regime were the people supposed to elect? It was obvious that the enemy would like to dismantle everything and come up with a blueprint for a new regime and new institutions. But the RVN already had a popularly elected constitution and it was its duty to safeguard it unless it was decided otherwise by a congress elected by the people. The procedures and organization of elections and the powers to be enjoyed by the National Council of Reconciliation and Concord were all just as impossible of solution.

Besides impossible solutions, the Paris Agreement also gave the Communists tremendous advantages while it tightly bound the RVN hands. No longer bombed and mined, North Vietnam was now entirely free to construct and develop and at the same time support its war of conquest in the South. North Vietnam, which enjoyed a greater manpower than South Vietnam, could also devote a bigger proportion of it to the war effort. Nothing prevented North Vietnam from using the territory of Laos and Cambodia, which it actually did. Nevertheless, North Vietnam still claimed it respected the independence, unity, and territorial integrity of these countries.

In South Vietnam, meanwhile, the Communists now had a legal foothold. Not only did they have their own government; they were also entitled to a territory and an army of their own. In all respects, the NLF had become, by virtue of the Agreement, a partner on equal terms.
allied troops had to withdraw, but the NVA was allowed to stay behind. Which way the balance of forces was going to tilt was all too apparent. The new road system that the enemy was developing and improving would permit him to infiltrate more men in less time. And now that US airpower was no longer available, the RVN certainly could not handle the infiltration flow alone, much less contain an all-out offensive if it broke out.

The ceasefire was detrimental to the RVN in that it did not bring about peace. Guerrilla warfare was continuing, and the enemy was making preparations to renew his offensive. The RVNAF were overextended in a difficult defensive posture. Defense requirements continued to soar to higher and higher levels now that US forces had been withdrawn. Even if a satisfactory ceasefire had been achieved and a political struggle initiated, the tense situation imposed by security requirements still would not abate because of its dilemmas and its unconventional aspects.

The Communist leopard skin spots in South Vietnam were just so many knives thrust at the nation's back. And their methods of subversion, mass struggle, and propaganda would make the RVN a sure loser. Democratic freedoms would be exploited and could turn out to be the seeds of disorder. Political stability could hardly be maintained if military security was in jeopardy.

Prior to the Paris Agreement, the RVN considered the NLF as rebels and irreconcilable foes. The GVN under President Nguyen Van Thieu had always advocated a hard-line anti-Communist stand. Now that the NLF was permitted to fly its flag at its Saigon headquarters and sat at the Paris talks as an equal, GVN information and propaganda found it hard to explain. Selling to the public a new political future for South Vietnam was a tough job indeed. And the world at large also began to realize that there was no way the US could stage a comeback to help its ally combat the Communists. From such a disadvantageous political position, no amount of propaganda could do the RVN any good.

On the economic front, the RVN did not fare much better. After ten years of destructive war, the RVN had turned from exporter to importer of
rice. In 1968, rice imports totalled 765,000 tons. In 1973, the RVN still imported 271,000 tons while uncultivated farmland amounted to 700,000 hectares. 50% of rubber plantations were destroyed by the war. Economic life, heavily aid-dependent, needed about 700 million dollars worth of imported goods every year. Inflation was rampant and constantly on the rise; prohibitive costs of living surpassed the people's capacity for endurance; and, in particular, the servicemen and the civil servants, who constituted the pillars of the regime, were those who suffered the most. For at least five years now, salaries of servicemen and civil servants were just enough to meet one-third to one-half their minimum subsistence, depending on their social standing. All these facts adversely affected their morale. The official exchange rate of the dollar, which stood at 1:35 in 1964, skyrocketed to 1:685 ten years later. The dollar income of the GVN, which was earned through piaster exchange for US forces, dried up in the wake of US withdrawal. And the economy, ravaged by the 1972 offensive, not only had not recovered but also worsened as a result of the world-wide energy crisis and its chain-reaction impact.

Hopes for the discovery of oil in the national continental shelf, meanwhile, flared up like a mirage for some time but soon disappeared. Peace, on which people had staked their hopes to rebuild a shattered economy, was merely a delusion. All these things, plus the insecure feeling which was common among the population, made life even harsher. Some refugees living in camps began to move out into Communist-controlled areas, and since these areas were no longer harassed by the VNAF, certain families with Communist ties also elected to go over and live with the other side. The prospect was that if this twilight situation was allowed to perpetuate, even more people would choose to move, especially since living conditions of the dispossessed refugees in cities had become utterly miserable.

The RVN government ran into tremendous difficulties in explaining the Paris Agreement to civil servants, servicemen, and cadres. All units and agencies were directed to hold study sessions. The Ministry of Information strove hard to play up the advantages brought about by the
Agreement. For example it boasted that the RVN government was still in power, and the Communists were only allowed to participate in political life under democratic rules and as long as they renounced attacks, sabotages, killings, and terror. RVNAF troops, meanwhile, were instructed to stand ready for retaliation against enemy violations and to maintain morale.

The war in Vietnam had lasted too long. The middle-aged generation had lived with war since 1945, and the youths who went into the military service knew nothing but war. All of them lived face to face with death every minute. Out of an 18-million population, over one million took up arms and fought. On an average, each Vietnamese family counted at least one or two members on military duty. In contested areas, brothers of the same family occasionally fought each other from opposing sides. The war turned rice fields into wasteland and villages into charred ruins. Farmers quit their lands and came and lived in cities as refugees. Living under war conditions became increasingly miserable as social vices multiplied everyday. During the period of US participation, people somehow managed to get along by performing all kinds of services for US troops; now these services were no longer needed. The economic aid on which the RVN lived so far was also reduced. The total effect was that South Vietnamese society now displayed all the marks of a war that had lasted too long.

The endurance of the South Vietnamese people had outstretched its limits. The entire population was truly weary and exhausted. Service-men and civil servants were more concerned with making ends meet than with duties; they lived under a constant mental stress, fearful of immediate dangers, and anxious for their dubious future and that of the nation. North Vietnam was also in a state of exhaustion and its people only had the right to sacrifice, not to complain. News of the ceasefire came as a source of relief and joy, welcomed by everybody, troops and population alike, whether in North or South Vietnam. The South Vietnamese people were particularly elated by the prospect of true peace. But those who understood Communism knew that peace was impossible as long as the enemy was within us. Not only was fighting resumed, it grew worse.
with every passing day.

The South Vietnamese people did not like Communism; as long as the fighting went on, they had to accept war as a way of life. It was true that they were mentally worn out but still, as long as they lived, there was no way to escape fighting. The government, people, and armed forces of the RVN thus continued the fighting, confident in their belief that the US would come to their help if they ran into trouble.

_The New Balance of Forces_

While the RVN was struggling with its military, political, economic and social problems, Communist propaganda played up the victories won through the Agreement. To demonstrate its statehood and power, the NLF opened wide the gates of its "liberated" area to welcome people from surrounding provinces. These visitors were invited to tour farm cooperatives, new cities, and new roads. Communist units also took advantage of this opportunity to organize shows and display their modern, combat-ready weapons and tanks. And after these visitors returned home, whispered rumors began to spread.

By early 1974 enemy battlefield preparations seemed to have been completed. From the East-Truong Son strategic corridor, lateral roads now meandered into coastal plain areas, pointing toward important objectives or forming an arc enveloping advanced RVN district towns and bases. Enemy-initiated activities became increasingly bolder. During 1972, which was the year of the big Summer Offensive, enemy-initiated activities averaged 2072 incidents monthly; in 1973, the first year of the ceasefire, this average increased to 2980 incidents per month and by 1974 soared to 3330 incidents per month. Objectives of enemy attacks also grew in importance. In addition to remote outposts and hamlets, which were the usual targets for attacks, major population centers and district towns also began to feel heavy enemy pressure. Intelligence reports meanwhile hinted at attacks against provincial capitals and raids against important cities.
In late 1973 Phu Giao, a district town north of Bien Hoa province in MR-3, was attacked, but the enemy failed to take it. During the spring of 1974, while the US Congress was tightening its purse on aid to South Vietnam, the enemy started his 1974 offensive campaign in MR-3. His goal was to press on and isolate Tay Ninh and Hau Nghia provinces, and simultaneously drive against Saigon. In March 1974, the entire NVA CT-5 Division, augmented by artillery and sappers, began attacking the Duc Hue district town area and base 83, which was defended by an ARVN Ranger battalion and an artillery unit. To extend the RVN forces, another enemy regiment, the 101st, encircled RF outposts in the area where Hau Nghia, Tay Ninh, and Binh Duong provincial boundaries met. Two other enemy regiments, the 33d and 274th, attacked outposts in the Cam My and Courtenay plantation areas in Long Khanh province. The Ranger battalion which defended base 83 fought valiantly.

In the meantime, III Corps launched a timely counteraction effort and inflicted heavy losses on the enemy 5th Division and its artillery reinforcement. Outposts located on the outskirts of the enemy Ho Bo, Bôi Loi, and Cam My bases were also successively relieved of enemy pressure. Tong Le Chan base, however, was evacuated in mid-April 1974 after it had endured enemy encirclement and attacks for more than a year. In May 1974, the enemy deployed the CT-9 Division to attack the Ben Cat district town area in Binh Duong province. His CT-7 Division, meantime, attacked the Phuoc Vinh—Phu Giao area. While the CT-7 Division attack failed, the CT-9 succeeded in overrunning the outposts which defended western Ben Cat. An Diem and Rach Bap outposts and base 82 in this area were to become, in the course of the next two months, bloody areas of contest.

In MR-4, after the enemy had failed in his attack against Duc Hue, he turned his pressure onto district towns near the boundary of Kien Tuong province. However, he achieved no significant gains due to timely intervention by the ARVN 7th Infantry Division. The area around U Minh base, meanwhile, continued to feel enemy pressure after Hung Long district town in Chuong Thien province was overrun. This was the first MR-4 district town ever lost to the enemy. In general, the enemy effort in MR-4
was aimed at creating disorder in rural areas and taking his due of rice crops.

The situation in MR-2, in the meantime, was also astir with continued enemy pressure and attacks against border camps such as Dak Pek, Mang Buk, Plateau Gi and Tieu A Tar. These outlying outposts ran the risk of being overrun at any time. If one was lost, it was lost forever because II Corps was no longer able to take it back. The over extension of forces thus edged the RVNAF toward a precariously maintained defensive posture which saw their territory of responsibility gnawed away inexorably. This is what had happened to rural areas of MR-2 coastal provinces.

During this period of time, only MR-1 enjoyed relative quietness and stability. There were no major enemy attacks and rural security was excellent. Refugees began to return to their home villages and also resumed farming. But the silence here was the ominous vacuum which precedes a big storm. In the Truong Son mountain range to the west, enemy preparations were feverishly taking place; his new road network extended into the lowland areas of most provinces. The enemy scheme was all too apparent and intelligence reports increasingly confirmed this.

North of Saigon and in the Mekong Delta, the enemy activated four new divisions with his separate regiments: the 3d Division in MR-3, and the 4th, 6th and 8th Divisions in MR-4. His AAA regiments No.671, 673, 675, and 679 in MR-1 were greatly reinforced. Under direct control of COSVN additional units were created: the 26th Armor Brigade, the 75th Artillery Division, the 477th AAA Division, the 25th Engineer Division, and the 25th Sapper Division. Total NVA new recruits introduced into South Vietnam since the ceasefire now amounted to 200,000 men. Added to local recruits, this manpower was more than enough to replace losses and activate new units. Enemy armor strength numbered 655 tanks of all types, more than a sixfold increase over the ceasefire figure of 100. Artillery assets that the enemy now fielded increased to 430 pieces of all types, mostly 122-mm and 130-mm guns, which by far outranged the RVNAF common 105-mm and 155-mm howitzers. Twenty enemy AAA regiments now in place in South Vietnam were increasingly upgraded and reinforced. A newly introduced radar system also permitted the enemy to control the entire airspace.
of MR-1 and MR-3 and the greater part of MR-2 and MR-4. All this sophisticated equipment was infiltrated after the ceasefire. Thus, the enemy was not too boastful when he stated, during the 21st Party Congress, that never since 1954 had he been so strong.

Enemy logistics installations were also increasingly consolidated. His fuel pipeline system had been completed and the amount of his fuel storage in South Vietnam was estimated at 3.1 million gallons, whereas prior to the ceasefire he had only 268,000 gallons.

All these reinforcements and supply storage pointed toward a well defined goal. The enemy never planned to put his effort at rest with the Paris Agreement. Even while he signed an agreement designed to restore peace, the directions he gave to his units were to maintain a situation of "half war, half peace." Gradually, this concept changed into "war in peace," then as of October 1973, his guidance to the Party hierarchy became "offensive in peace" and finally "war to preserve peace." Although Communist jargon was always ambiguous and there were implied connotations and deductions, its evolution made it clear that while the enemy talked about peace, reconciliation, and concord, what he really advocated was a victory by military force.

The RVN Armed Forces, meanwhile, made every effort to confront the new situation. But their capabilities were constrained by three factors: respect for the Agreement, aid reduction, and a galloping inflation.

The obstacles and difficulties facing the RVN have been discussed earlier. Despite the fact that the enemy blatantly and openly violated the Agreement, the RVN and the US could hardly do otherwise than respect it. Every gesture and every act on our side was closely scrutinized by the ICCS, the foreign press, and world public opinion. Our openly democratic way of life and the presence of an army of foreign reporters and journalists — whether sympathetic or antipathetic to our cause — and our law-abiding concern, all contributed to gagging and tying us up.

The withdrawal of US troops created a huge void in its wake. While there was a substantial increase in the RVNAF force structure, the balance of forces was definitely tilting toward the enemy. In 1968 the aggregated
US, allied, and RVN strength stood at 1.5 million; now RVNAF strength hardly surpassed 1 million. The difference was most visible in the number of divisions. In 1969 Free World forces in South Vietnam totalled 22 divisions; now all the RVNAF could muster was 13 divisions, a huge loss of 9 divisions, in addition to loss of the tremendous US combat support resources. The enemy by contrast, who had 52 combat regiments in 1969, was now in command of 123 regiments, or in maneuver terms, 646 battalions as opposed to 352 in 1969. Such an imbalance was glaring: the enemy had doubled his forces while we had cut down ours by nearly one half.

A few comparisons clearly illustrate the RVNAF shrinking combat capabilities. Strategic bombings by B-52s, for example, amounted to 20,000 sorties in 1972. In 1973 B-52 sorties plummeted to 1,700 and now, nothing. In 1972 total tactical air sorties were 90,000; in 1973 they were reduced to 46,500, then to 30,000 in 1974 as a result of aid cutback. In artillery, our side employed 2,350 pieces in 1970; now the RVNAF were left with 1,550 pieces whose firepower gradually declined because of greatly reduced ammunition supply rates.

These limitations in firepower and mobility certainly decreased overall combat effectiveness. No amount of effort or sacrifices could fill in this big void. As a matter of fact, sacrifices increased significantly without any increase in achievements. From 1970 to 1972, for example, thanks to lavish airpower and other support, every friendly killed-in-action accounted for 5 enemy killed. In 1973, the ratio was 1:2 and in 1974, when aid was further reduced, the efficiency was only 1:1.5.

During the summer of 1974, while the US Congress voted the biggest cut in FY-75 military aid for South Vietnam, the enemy began an offensive in MR-3 with a force of nearly two divisions. III Corps encountered no great difficulties in driving back this offensive, however, because while military aid was beginning to dwindle, supply reserves were still available. Nevertheless, the III Corps commander at that time, Lieutenant General Pham Quoc Thuan, complained: "In the last quarter of 1973, after I took command of III Corps, fuel and ammunition supply was cut 30% as
compared to the first quarter, or 60%, if compared to the same period of the previous year. This supply was further reduced 30% in the first quarter of 1974, and another 20% in the next quarter. All in all, within a period of only six months, the supply of fuel and ammunition was cut to 70% as compared to 1973. At the beginning of 1972, III Corps was allotted 200 tactical air sorties a day; by the end of 1973, only 80 sorties were made available, and during the first half year of 1974, the number of sorties allotted fluctuated between 30 and a maximum of 60. This huge reduction in air sorties stemmed not from a shortage of aircraft but from a shortage of fuel, bombs, and ammunition.\textsuperscript{1}

In the summer of 1974, while South Vietnam was still taken aback by the newly appropriated FY-75 military aid budget — 700 million, or less than 40% of the original request — the enemy-initiated "H-9" campaign broke out in MR-1. Up to that time, MR-1 had been relatively quiet save for a few landgrab contests of minor importance. Both sides had avoided major clashes since the Sa Huynh affair ended. During the one and a half years of intervening time, MR-1 made remarkable progress in pacification and had started its development programs. Security in rural areas was good enough to encourage most refugees to return to their home villages and begin to rebuild under RVNAF protection.

This lull did not last long. In early May 1974, while the enemy attack against Ben Cat in MR-3 was still raging, elements of the NVA NT-2 Division overran Ky Tra village, an important strongpoint southwest of Tam Ky, the Quang Tin provincial capital. Forces of the ARVN 2d Division and the provincial RF and PF failed to retake Ky Tra. They only succeeded in containing an enemy drive which threatened to cut QL-1 and was directed against Tam Ky city. Enemy units were well equipped and had superior firepower.

On July 18, 1974, the enemy attacked the Nong Son Ranger base in Quang Nam province, which formed part of the Da Nang defense belt. (Map 8) The base, which was defended by a Ranger battalion, was surrounded by a string of villages whose population of 14,000 lived under the protection

\textsuperscript{1}Interview with Lieutenant General Pham Quoc Thuan, former CG, III Corps.
of RF and PF units. Nong Son was the only coal mine of South Vietnam and although it was not exploited at the time, its economic potential was valuable in view of the world-wide energy crisis. It was overrun after two days of enemy attacks. According to its defenders, the enemy attack was purely conventional, an infantry assault preceded by a careful artillery preparation. Enemy artillery was powerful and accurate. His 37-mm anti-aircraft guns, which were installed on nearby hills, fired in direct support of the infantry and destroyed our combat positions. The ARVN Ranger battalion commander was killed by enemy artillery fire which destroyed his command post soon after the attack started. Enemy reinforcement troops were also brought to a staging area near Nong Son by trucks and armored vehicles.

The ARVN 3d Infantry Division immediately counteracted. One of its regiments clashed heavily with the enemy and both sides suffered heavy losses. It was the first time that enemy artillery was used in Quang Nam province to support his troops and to counterfire our artillery. While battles were raging in the vicinities of Nong Son, eleven mobile and sapper battalions of the enemy 44th Front penetrated the Quang Nam coastal plain, attacked our positions, shelled district towns and destroyed bridges. The second major confrontation in MR-1 had started.

On July 29 a third enemy effort was initiated with shellings and attacks against Thuong Duc district town, west of Quang Nam. Thuong Duc, which was defended by a border Ranger battalion and territorial forces, came under enemy siege. Field reports and aerial reconnaissance confirmed that enemy forces were supported by tanks and had been deployed to their staging area by trucks. The intensity of enemy artillery firepower came as a shock to friendly troops. Never before had they encountered such a powerful enemy fire. The Ranger artillery section was overwhelmed by it and ceased firing within a few hours. Enemy anti-aircraft fire, meanwhile, made VNAF observation and support ineffective.

Two days later, on July 31, the enemy initiated still another major effort by attacking our outposts in the Que Son valley, also in Quang Nam province. In this area, too, enemy artillery fire was used profusely.
According to captured enemy troops and especially an AAA company commander of Regiment 1, NVA NT-2 Division, who surrendered to our side, the enemy order of battle in the Nong Son and Que Son areas consisted of the NT-2 Division (with 3 regiments: 1, 31 and 38), augmented by the 36th Infantry Regiment, the 571st Armored Regiment, the 572d Artillery Regiment, and the 573d AAA Regiment. In charge of the Thuong Duc attack was the NVA 304th Division, reinforced by the 29th Infantry Regiment of Division 324B, several soldiers of which were captured. Thus in addition to 11 battalions of B-44 Front, the enemy deployed for his H-9 campaign in Quang Nam a concentrated force totaling over three divisions. His combat tactic was clearly a model of mobile conventional warfare. Enemy forces attacked only during daylight and with the support of artillery and armor. The deadly enemy artillery firepower, the increase in other types of fire, and in particular the use of AAA guns for direct ground support were factors that caused some concern to our troops. Enemy bodies displayed new equipment, modern first-aid kits, and modern combat rations.

While these battles were being fought, enemy supply and troop convoys moved incessantly on roads in rear areas. Aerial observation spotted truck convoys moving like ant columns, but the VNAF was no longer capable of stopping them. The enemy was now entirely free to move his troops, and it was fairly easy for him to concentrate and attack. On the friendly side, meanwhile, the greatly reduced military aid began to make its impact felt. The 3d Division was faced with further supply and support cuts while it fought these battles. Artillery ammunition supply rates were reduced to a heart-breaking level: 6 rounds per day for a 105-mm piece and 4 rounds for a 155-mm piece. The entire division supply in gasoline or diesel oil dwindled to approximately 100,000 liters per month, whereas in 1972 it amounted to 400,000 liters for each type of fuel. Even the division commander's command helicopter was allowed only 15 hours of flight per month, which amounted to a mere four hours of flight each week. And this happened while the 3d Division was fighting the enemy on two separate fronts. The reductions were so extensive that the division could no longer
These reductions were devastating to the troops' morale. Faced with an enemy whose firepower and resources were constantly upgraded, our troops had to make do with increasing austerity. They were taught single-shot firing while the enemy rained on them an outpour of deadly fire. Grenades were used sparingly because resupplies did not come in sufficient quantities. While the enemy moved his troops to combat by trucks, our troops were trained to march. And our air force, too, was no longer the effective support it had been. Its observation planes flew higher and higher and fewer and fewer sorties. Medical evacuation, meanwhile, was slow and ineffective.

After nine days of fierce enemy attacks, the Thuong Duc district town was overrun. Even if it had been reinforced, the 3d Division would have been unable to counterattack, for the balance of forces on the battlefield did not allow it. During September 1974, the enemy Tri-Thien Front threatened to cut highway QL-1 north of Hai Van Pass. In Quang Ngai province, the enemy 52d Brigade also attacked and overran the Gia Vuc Ranger border camp and the Minh Long district town. These actions kept the ARVN 1st and 2d Divisions busy counteracting. As of mid-August 1974, however, with the reinforcement of two airborne brigades, the 3d Division was able to stabilize the situation in Quang Nam province. But in Quang Nam or elsewhere in MR-1, there was no longer any question of reoccupying the lost areas. The airborne units were about the only reserve force left for the entire RVNAF.

By the end of 1974, the 3d Division alone had lost 3,500 troops after six months of heavy combat. These losses were not replaced in full. Its maneuver battalions now went into combat with a strength of 350 each, down from 550 prior to July. It seemed that the RVNAF manpower resources were drying up. To maintain a strength of 1.1 million, the RVNAF needed about 250,000 recruits per year, based on previous yearly losses. But the most that the recruiting and mobilization effort could muster usually amounted to only half of this requirement. Now that the losses mounted even faster and in greater quantities in the wake of intensive enemy attacks, the manpower problem became harder to solve. Combat
effectiveness of ARVN units, as a result, decreased markedly for lack of adequate replacements.

It was in these circumstances that intelligence reports forewarned of bigger storms in the immediate future. To push his modernization and improvement effort further ahead, the enemy activated three new corps commands: Corps 1 north of Hai Van Pass, Corps 2 south of Hai Van Pass, and Corps 301 north of Saigon. The enemy Group 559, in the meantime, pushed its four rear-service divisions further inside South Vietnam. By all indications, the enemy logistics system seemed to be well in place. The majority of the enemy 16 regular divisions and his sapper division were all capable of mobile combat while it had become almost impossible for our 13 divisions to be redeployed from their areas of responsibility. Furthermore, seven divisions of the NVA general reserve, whose mobility was now increased many fold with the new infiltration road and logistics system, were an ominous threat for the future of South Vietnam.
CHAPTER VII

Summary and Conclusions

The Vietnam war was the longest war ever fought by the United States. Its genesis was in the aftermath of the 1954 French defeat, after eight years of an anachronic war waged in Vietnam by the French to preserve their colonial interests. After the 1954 Geneva Accords, in keeping with its policy of containing Communism, the United States came to the assistance of South Vietnam in order to provide it with the material aid necessary to successfully defend itself against Communist aggression. American material aid alone, however, proved to be insufficient, and the US was compelled to bring in combat troops in 1965. From 1965 to 1968, although the US aid was substantially increased, a successful conclusion of the war was not achieved. Then in 1969 increasing US public objection to the war, compounded by world constraints, resulted in a change in American policy. Instead of containment and confrontation, the US now was inclined toward negotiation and dialogue. The US no longer wanted to be an international fire brigade. It began to turn over the responsibility of fighting national wars to the nations involved. This is how Vietnamization came about.

From its initial involvement in support of South Vietnam, the US objective had always been to help South Vietnam acquire the capabilities to stand on its own. As a result, the Republic of Vietnam Armed Forces had gradually improved. American economic and technical aid, while initially not profuse, were enough to infuse additional vitality to this nascent nation, which was a target for Communist aggression. The US-supported force structure for the RVNAF, which surpassed the half-million mark in 1965, increased to over 700,000 in 1968 and continued to build up
to a peak of 1,100,000 during fiscal-year 1973. The force structure increase, however, was not significant during the period from 1955 to 1964 and was progressing quite slowly even in the difficult years from 1965 to early 1968. During 1965 to 1968 priority was given to support by US combat troops in South Vietnam, rather than to the building of the RVNAF. Then, in the wake of the 1968 enemy Tet offensive, there was a marked change in effort. The 1968 Tet offensive can fairly be said to have generated the Vietnamization program. More concern was then given to the development of the RVNAF, and by the time President Nixon announced it in June 1969, the task of Vietnamization had become an accelerated process. Within the space of four years, from 1968 to late 1972, the RVNAF had increased by nearly 400,000, from approximately 700,000 to approximately 1,100,000. The regular Army of the RVN, however, did not increase substantially in strength; from 360,000 in 1968, it augmented to only 450,000 when the overall peak was reached. The RVN Navy and Air Force, by contrast, developed quite rapidly during 1969 and 1970. The Navy more than doubled its size during those two years, increasing from 19,000 in 1968 to 40,000 in 1970. During the same period, the Air Force size increased from 19,000 to 45,000, then shot up to 64,000 in 1973, a greater than threefold increase. To provide more support for the pacification effort, the Regional Forces were boosted from 180,000 to 320,000, and the Popular Forces, from 170,000 to nearly 210,000, also during this period of time. With US assistance, this force structure increase was pushed vigorously ahead, in addition to other improvement and modernization programs.

An immediate impact of the post-1968 force structure increase was that pacification had progressed with remarkable results during each of the three following years. While rural security increased because the enemy infrastructure was on the decline, major enemy units had been driven across the border. The situation was so encouraging that some people talked about the war fading away. Economic and social improvements, meanwhile, promised a bright future. At last the increased production in rural areas had begun to alleviate the country-wide inflation. For some time the Vietnamization program brought about excellent results and created
favorable conditions for the gradual withdrawal of US and allied troops. The strengthening of the RVN, as a matter of fact, came as a surprise to the enemy. He felt that he must do something to redress the situation to his advantage. The 1972 summer offensive which followed demonstrated that the RVN was still plagued by many difficulties and troubles. It was apparent that Vietnamization had not solved every problem, not even in military terms.

One problem was the decrease in total force structure. At the beginning of 1969, the aggregated strength on our side was more than 1.5 million. After all US and allied forces had withdrawn, the RVNAF was left with a strength of a little over 1 million, a reduction of one-third. The reduction in combat units was even greater, decreasing by 40% from 22 divisions to 13 divisions. In firepower and other support resources, the reduction was even greater. The RVNAF assets were no match for the pre-Vietnamization abundance. The enemy, by contrast, continued to grow after 1968. From 1969 to 1972 the enemy increased from 52 to 123 combat regiments, or 352 to 646 maneuver battalions. His armor, artillery and other combat support assets likewise increased in quantity. Furthermore there was a pronounced increase in quality. While enemy combat units doubled in number, our combat units were nearly halved.

During the years of US build-up, 1965 through 1968, the Communist bloc responded by escalating military aid to North Vietnam. Battles fought with modern arms also gave the enemy valuable combat experience and increased effectiveness in modern warfare. The increasingly unfavorable balance of forces between 1969 and 1972, in combination with the RVN strategy of holding territory and population, resulted in an over-extension of RVN regular forces. Mobile combat capability, as a consequence, decreased markedly. And gradually, search-and-destroy operations against enemy bases or infiltration routes became increasingly out of the RVNAF reach. As a matter of fact, by the time the 1972 summer offensive ended, the RVNAF had committed their last reserve division. The RVNAF were thus caught between two contradictory responsibilities: to conduct mobile operations and to be committed to static defense. In other words, they were faced with a dilemma of strategic alternatives.
The Vietnamization program was implemented in haste. In the first place, efforts at strengthening the RVNAF began rather belatedly. In the initial phase of direct participation, 1965 through 1968, the US tended to do everything by itself since it strived for a quick victory. But when it became impossible to end the war rapidly and particularly when President Nixon proclaimed his new foreign policy, the US began to rush the Vietnamization process. Increments of US troop withdrawal followed each other in rapid succession, apparently dictated by domestic political needs. And when the timetable had been set, US military authorities were really racing and even tried to beat it. South Vietnam could do little but try to keep pace with that race by overextending its forces and hope for the best. The replacement of combat units simply could not be implemented on a one-to-one basis. To really effectively develop its forces, the RVN certainly would have required more time. It was fairly easy to beef up the Army, but not easy to build up the Navy and the Air Force. The training of specialists, operators, and repairmen to handle and maintain sophisticated equipment and armament, the education and training of pilots, ship captains, etc., all required time. Of necessity, the activation of Air Force and Naval units must focus on quantity. With less time available for training and qualification, the efficiency of these services suffered accordingly.

The strengthening of the RVNAF in some respects was not tailored to true requirements and the actual situation. The RVN found itself always lagging behind the enemy in armament modernization. Most typical was the story of the AK-47 assault rifle and the M-16. Only after three years of being the underdog in firepower, did the RVN infantry units, in mid-1968, catch up with the enemy. This occurred when they were equipped with the M-16, which was the equal of the AK-47 in performance. The same lag occurred with other weapons. The RVN received M-48 tanks and self-propelled 175-mm artillery pieces only after the enemy had effectively deployed his T-54 tanks and 130-mm guns. Our troops were equipped with the TOW anti-tank missile only after enemy tanks had roamed the battlefields. The enemy, therefore, always caught us by surprise as a result of this lagging modernization.
It was the US leadership's declared policy not to annihilate North VN. Offensive actions against Hanoi consequently were under severe constraints. The RVN Air Force and Navy correspondingly were never equipped with weapons which could substantially enhance its offensive capability. For example, the VNAF did not have fighters or bombers with enough range to operate deep into North Vietnam. The VNN was also limited in capabilities. Its WHEC and DER were primarily coastal patrol ships not armed for offensive action. The JGS proposal to activate additional Army divisions was turned down by the US. Enemy regular forces, by contrast, were fully equipped for offensive attacks. His divisions were entirely mobile and effectively supported by armor and artillery of all types. Although not impressive, the enemy air force included the modern MIG-21 and Illuyshin-28; his navy was of modest size but equipped with fast, powerfully-armed, offensive-type boats. The final result, on balance, was that the RVNAF were a giant chained in place, armed for defense but not for offense. The enemy, entirely unafraid of retaliation, just concentrated on the offensive, and thereby enjoyed a great advantage.

The Vietnamization program brought about a force development which went in opposite direction from the NVA modernization effort. The RVN Army, as a matter of fact, increased very little in terms of regular forces. Most of the force structure increase was earmarked for the territorial forces whose companies and platoons were only capable of maintaining local security. By contrast, as of 1972 Communist forces had become an increasingly modern army which was highly mechanized and effectively supported by adequate armor and artillery. Its engineers could build bridges and roads, and its fuel was supplied by pipelines.

The passive character of its defense plus the natural disadvantage of its terrain edged the RVN into a state of strategic immobility from which it could hardly budge. The more the situation aggravated, the more its reserves were extended to fill in weak spots. A dozen enemy divisions, meanwhile, were constantly on the move and could choose to attack almost anywhere at will across a thousand miles of densely jungled, open border. When the fighting abated, pacification could progress easily with adequate support forces but the result achieved could also be undone when the enemy passed onto the offensive. For the RVN, initiative was lost forever.
since it lacked reserve forces and adequate mobility. During 1972, the RVNAF fought well because some US support units were still in the country. The counteractions of ARVN corps commands seemed to be primarily reliant upon US tactical air and B-52 strikes. The experience of 1972 was obvious: the RVNAF still required US air and naval firepower to counteract a major enemy offensive.

The RVNAF were totally dependent on US military aid. The RVN had to maintain a military force which outgrew the resources and capabilities of a small, undeveloped, low population country exhausted by nearly thirty years of internecine war. When the US participated in the ground war, the support it provided to the RVNAF was profuse. The RVNAF were thus organized and trained to fight the war the American way. In time, they became accustomed to using firepower and materiel as substitutes for human endeavor and ingenuity. In addition to military aid, RVNAF units which operated alongside US units were able to share their supply wealth. During the Vietnamization period, American aid to the RVNAF was increased substantially. In those circumstances, the RVN could not possibly think of tightening its belt for the simple reason that military aid was forced into its hands and no one could foresee a day when this aid would be reduced. Certain South Vietnamese personalities for some time advocated a people's defense structure, but this idea was hard to implement in the face of internal and external constraining conditions. So when aid was suddenly reduced, the RVN was really in trouble. American aid chiefly depended on the power of the US executive branch and on the varying attitude of the US Congress. For South Vietnam, it was hard to adjust to the shift from extreme wealth to extreme poverty within a short time. There was also the mental reverse of a person who felt he was abandoned and found himself unexpectedly deprived of means. The enemy, meanwhile, basked in the confident posture of a successful man approaching wealth and position. This was another instance of inverse progress. Uncertainty about aid necessarily resulted in a state of insecurity. Doubts about the future became greater and finally edged away the belief in final victory.

Turning over combat responsibility to South Vietnam was not enough for the US. It also wanted to end the war and recover its prisoners. This was
what President Nixon had promised when he ran for office and in due time, his promise had to be honored. The American quest for a peaceful solution to the war through negotiations was conspicuous enough, particularly in the wake of the enemy 1968 Tet offensive. Its promises of aid, its declarations that the US position was flexible, and the generosity and negotiability of the US proposals, all pointed to a desire to compromise and a haste to bring an end to the war. In addition, the voracious anti-war cries raised by demonstrations, the divisiveness in opinion among American politicians in and out of government, the vocality of "dove" congressmen whose number increased every day, and the accelerated and irreversible withdrawal of US troops, all contributed toward denying the US the chance to negotiate through strength. The enemy knew this, and the South Vietnamese people were also aware of the realities. The American way of giving aid could be sincere and enthusiastic but was so clamorous and conspicuous that the US appeared as if it trampled, manipulated, and constrained the recipient nation.

The way the US conducted peace negotiations also hurt the RVN prestige a great deal. The unilateral cessation of bombings, the initiatives on flexibility or concessions in the negotiating process, followed by secret talks, were major sources of concern and anxiety for the South Vietnamese people. Each US concession at the negotiating table resulted in a fever in South Vietnam and in those circumstances how could anyone explain the whole truth to a perplexed population? The initiative displayed by the US effectively blurred the cause of the RVN and worked to the advantage of Communist propaganda. The South Vietnamese people fully backed President Thieu's opposition to the US in late 1968 and again in October 1972, but they also knew he could not hold out any longer. The great majority of the South Vietnamese population did not like Communism, but at the same time, they felt heart-broken when realizing that the nationalist cause was not strong enough to instill the confidence which was necessary for continued sacrifices and continued struggling. And so, on the political and psychological front, the RVN found itself in a precarious and disadvantageous position.

When the Paris Agreement finally materialized, what gains did each
warring party get out of it? And what did the RVN gain or lose? To the US, the war had ended. Whatever forces it still maintained in South Vietnam, to include US advisers, would be brought home. Its prisoners would be released and reunited with their families. President Nixon kept his promise. Those were the good things. Internal opposition movements would abate, and the US could also cut down on its expenditures and acquire additional capabilities to perform its duties elsewhere. The US felt it had brought about "just peace" and the conditions required for the South Vietnamese people to determine its own future.

North Vietnam, meanwhile, would enjoy peace and no longer had to worry about bombings and minings. From now on, it could devote its entire energy to reconstruction and development. It was hard for the US to stage a comeback to thwart North Vietnam's conspiracies in South Vietnam in the future. Thus, North Vietnamese manpower and resources could be easily mobilized to prosecute the war in the South. Infiltrations into South Vietnam were no longer as difficult as when US Air Force bombings were a daily routine. So after rest, recuperation, and force preparations, North Vietnam was able to resume war with less difficulties than before the Paris Agreement. Victory, in these conditions, had more of a chance of being achieved.

In South Vietnam, the PRG became the equal of the legal RVN government. This achievement, which had been earned through the negotiation process, was now legalized. The enemy political posture was also enhanced by other realities, a separate territory, a separate population, and a separate army. The PRG superficial independence with regard to North Vietnam would be maintained for as long as it was necessary to promote its cause and to appropriate a maximum share of advantages. And if the ceasefire were to be enforced, then the PRG infrastructure and its bases would be the staging areas, which offered tremendous advantages for the harassment of the RVN and their struggle for political power. North Vietnam, which was always the big rear, would be in a much more advantageous position to support the frontline. Now that the adversary's allies had withdrawn their troops, their intervention could not be easily renewed.

The ceasefire could not be implemented. In a war without frontlines which had been dragging on inconclusively for so long between two irreconcilable
adversaries, standstill ceasefire stood no chance of success. The RVN
had hoped for a respite to organize and develop its forces. Despite US
and allied troop withdrawal, the RVN still believed in US aid and especially
the US promise to react vigorously in case of blatant violation. There
was after all no reason why the US should renege on its promise after
sacrificing more than 50,000 troops and spending over 150 billion dollars
throughout the long years of commitment and involvement. So the RVN was
somewhat confident when it signed the Paris Agreement, although it knew
it was impossible to arrive at a genuine agreement with the Communists
and sooner or later, war would be resumed. After the ceasefire, the RVN
was prepared to confront the Communists in a correct political struggle.
And regardless of deficiencies and disadvantages, the RVN believed that the
majority of its population did not like a Communist regime. This fact had
been proved in many instances during the past. In the absence of US
troops, perhaps the need to self-sustain in combat and the dangers of
Communist domination could well be the factors that brought about soli-
darity, endeavor, and overall improvement for South Vietnam. The new vigilance,
was hoped, would inspire civil servants, cadres, and the police to
make a greater effort and the Armed Forces, still more sacrifices. Weak-
nesses in command and leadership could be gradually corrected; this was
an area which required time. The population, already accustomed
to living in war conditions, could endure more privations and more hard-
ships to struggle for freedom. With such a total effort to overcome dif-
ficulties and with the continued material and spiritual assistance of the
US — which was even more vital during the post-ceasefire period — the
RVN believed it could cope with the struggle for peace.

But it was impossible to enforce the ceasefire because both sides
competed to grab more land and more population. The war continued at
a low-key level for some time and then escalated. Among the many pro-
visions of the Paris Agreement, only three had been implemented with
relatively good results: first, the withdrawal of US and allied forces;
second, the exchange of prisoners; and third, the cessation of all
military activities and the de-mining of North Vietnam harbors. For their
part, the US and the RVN discharged their obligations correctly. What
still marred the good results achieved was the Communist lack of goodwill, for they still detained about 25,000 prisoners of the RVN. As to other provisions, there was practically no firm grounds for any agreement, whether it was the defining of ceasefire zones, the establishment of the National Council of Reconciliation and Concord, or the discussions on a political future for South Vietnam. True to the spirit of compromise in negotiations, the RVN had hoped to arrive at some basic agreements in order to buy time and strengthen. But the Communists did not have a spirit of compromise. So, yielding to their demands would only mean surrender or suicide. The institutions created to control the implementation of the Agreement, meanwhile, died a premature death because of the principle of unanimity and consultations. The result was that ICCS operation was confined to RVN-controlled areas and its control exercised only with regard to the RVN and its allies. The world at large, in the meantime, seemed to be oblivious to the fact that the Communists still kept up their infiltrations and reinforcements in preparation for another general offensive.

The RVN had to endure Communist pressure and attacks, which were escalating with time. Admittedly, the Vietnamization program helped the RVN gain considerable strength. American materiel, coupled with American advisory efforts to help organize, equip, train, and improve the RVN was tremendous. On its part, the RVN also tried to do its best to take over the entire war burden, enabling the US to withdraw its troops. The achievements obtained from 1969 to 1972 eloquently spoke for themselves. Even during the one and one-half years which followed the ceasefire, the RVN proved to be capable of handling the struggle alone and, despite all difficulties, still made progress in every aspect. The enemy effort to grab land and his political offensive to disintegrate the RVN ranks both failed miserably.

By far the widest loophole of the Vietnamization program was its failure to provide the RVN with enough time for an overall improvement. The program was initiated out of American domestic political considerations, and it was implemented with too much haste. While the increase in troop strength could be achieved fairly rapidly, it was almost impossible
to improve the quality and technical capabilities of a one-million strong military force within the space of a few years. Besides, what was required to counteract successfully a war of subversion coupled with overt aggression was total strength. The RVN certainly needed more time to build its political and economical strength in order to become truly self-reliant. But the advent of the Paris Agreement left these endeavors unachieved.

While the Paris Agreement served the immediate purposes of the US, it did not help South Vietnam solve any of its problems. On the contrary, it practically bound the RVN hands by one-way legalistic constraints and by severing the life-sustaining line with the US while enhancing enemy prestige and allowing him to strengthen his forces in complete freedom.

The increase in Communist strength, in time, became a most serious threat. To intelligence experts on our side, this force strengthening was glaring, even blatant: new weapons, missiles, armor, artillery, road building, bridges, truck convoys, modern logistics facilities, etc. By the end of 1974, total enemy regular forces had been built up to more than 20 divisions, and all of them were capable of mobile warfare. The balance of forces, therefore, tilted dangerously toward the enemy, and the more this balance tilted, the more the RVN posture deteriorated.

In every other aspect, the RVN encountered the same deteriorating situation. The withdrawal of US forces from South Vietnam created in its wake unemployment for one third of the labor force. Imported goods decreased in quantities as a result of reduced economic aid and world-wide inflation. The government had to impose more taxes, and this meant more hardships for the population, already plagued by rampant inflation. The price of gasoline in early 1974, for instance, was $1.62 per gallon, one of the highest retail prices in the world. Diesel oil also became so expensive that most motorized fishing boats had to cease operation. And tilling machines that were previously imported in quantities with a view to mechanize agricultural work, now became less and less operative. In the face of all this, the RVN initiated an economic development plan to achieve self-sufficiency within five years, hoping that the US would support it by increasing aid during the first few years but phasing it out toward the end. The RVN requested, accordingly, 750 million for FY 75, but only 250 million was approved by the US Congress. This amounted to only 1/3 of FY 74 aid budget.
Military aid, meanwhile, met with a more tragic fate. From 3.3 billion in 1973, it plummeted to 941 million in 1974. The result was the RVN had to use up most of its reserves in ammunition and fuel to fight the battles during 1974. All reserves now stood at below the emergency level. The JGS, as a result, had to cancel all modernization programs, especially the replacement of F-5As by the improved F-5E models, and the one-for-one replacement of war-damaged materiel. Ammunition supply rates and fuel allowances for all units were at a minimum. But the FY 75 aid budget imposed still more hardships: out of the 700 million appropriated, the RVNAF could only effectively use about 500 million, the rest being earmarked to cover US Defense Attache Office operation and to pay outstanding debts. This amount of aid barely met half of the minimum basic requirements. Therefore, limitations had to be imposed immediately. The Air Force had to inactivate 10 squadrons and mothball over 200 aircraft. The Navy suspended operation of 21 river groups. 55% of trucks lay idle for lack of gasoline. Nearly 200 aircraft and 60 naval ships and boats, which had been damaged since the ceasefire, could not be replaced.

After nearly 30 years of war, South Vietnam was exhausted materially and, worn out spiritually. Its inherent weaknesses and difficulties were still not overcome, but its means to carry on the fight were reduced drastically. The enemy, in contrast, had never been so strong. So, whether the Republic of Vietnam, which had been supported by a long US commitment, survived or perished almost entirely depended on American will.
### Glossary

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<tr>
<th>Abbreviation</th>
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<tr>
<td>AAA</td>
<td>Anti-Aircraft Artillery</td>
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<td>ABN</td>
<td>Airborne</td>
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<td>ACTOV</td>
<td>Accelerated Turnover of Assets</td>
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<td>ACTOVLOG</td>
<td>Accelerated Turnover of Logistics</td>
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<td>APC</td>
<td>Armored personnel carrier</td>
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<td>ARVN</td>
<td>Army of the Republic of Vietnam</td>
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<td>ASEAN</td>
<td>Association of South East Asia Nations</td>
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<td>BBC</td>
<td>British Broadcasting Corporation</td>
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<td>CETSP</td>
<td>Contract engineering technical service personnel</td>
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<td>CIDG</td>
<td>Civilian Irregular Defense Group</td>
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<tr>
<td>CINCPAC</td>
<td>Commander in Chief, Pacific (US Joint Theater Command)</td>
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<td>CLC</td>
<td>Central Logistical Command</td>
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<td>CMD</td>
<td>Capital Military District</td>
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<td>COSVN</td>
<td>Central Office for South Vietnam</td>
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<td>CTZ</td>
<td>Corps Tactical Zone</td>
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<td>DMZ</td>
<td>Demilitarized Zone</td>
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<td>FAC</td>
<td>Forward Air Controller</td>
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<td>FP</td>
<td>Field Police</td>
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<td>FSB</td>
<td>Fire Support Base</td>
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<td>FWMAF</td>
<td>Free World Military Assistance Forces</td>
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<td>HES</td>
<td>Hamlet Evaluation System</td>
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<td>ICC</td>
<td>International Control Commission</td>
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<td>ICCS</td>
<td>International Commission of Control and Supervision</td>
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<tr>
<td>IOCC</td>
<td>Intelligence Operation Coordination Center</td>
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<td>JGS</td>
<td>Joint General Staff</td>
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<td>JMC</td>
<td>Joint Military Commission</td>
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<td>KIA</td>
<td>Killed in Action</td>
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<td>LDPC</td>
<td>Logistical Data Processing Center</td>
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<td>LOC</td>
<td>Lines of Communications</td>
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<td>MAAGV</td>
<td>Military Assistance Advisory Group, Vietnam</td>
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<td>MACV</td>
<td>Military Assistance Command, Vietnam</td>
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<td>MALT</td>
<td>Mobile Advisory Logistics Team</td>
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<td>MAT</td>
<td>Mobile Advisory Team</td>
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<td>MIA</td>
<td>Missing in Action</td>
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<td>MR</td>
<td>Military Region</td>
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<td>MTT</td>
<td>Mobile Training Team</td>
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<td>NLF</td>
<td>National Liberation Front of South Vietnam</td>
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<td>NP</td>
<td>National Police</td>
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<td>NVA</td>
<td>North Vietnam Army</td>
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<td>NVN</td>
<td>North Vietnam</td>
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<td>OJT</td>
<td>On the Job Training</td>
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<td>PAE</td>
<td>Pacific Architects and Engineers</td>
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<td>PF</td>
<td>Popular Force</td>
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<td>PHILCAG</td>
<td>Philippines Civic Action Group</td>
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<td>PRG</td>
<td>Provisional Revolutionary Government</td>
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<td>PRU</td>
<td>Provincial Reconnaissance Unit</td>
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<td>PSDF</td>
<td>People's Self-Defense Force</td>
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<tr>
<td>RAG</td>
<td>River Assault Group</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>RAID</td>
<td>River Assault and Interdiction Division</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>RD</td>
<td>Rural Development - Revolutionary Development</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>RF</td>
<td>Regional Forces</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>RID</td>
<td>River Interdiction Division</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>RPD</td>
<td>River Patrol Division</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>RVN</td>
<td>Republic of Vietnam</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

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RVNAF    Republic of Vietnam Armed Forces
SEATO   South East Asia Treaty Organization
SP      Special Police
SVN     South Vietnam
TERM    Temporary Equipment Recovery Mission
TRAC    Third Regional Assistance Command
TRIM    Training Relations and Instruction Mission
US      United States
USA     United States Army
USAF    United States Air Force
USDAO   United States Defense Attache Office
USN     United States Navy
VAT     Value Added Tax
VN      Vietnam
VNAF    Vietnam Air Force
VNMC    Vietnam Marine Corps
VNN     Vietnam Navy

Navy Terms:
DER     Destroyer Escort Radar Picket
LCU     Landing Craft Utility
LSM     Landing Ship Medium
LST     Landing Ship Tank
PC      Patrol Craft
PCE     Patrol Craft Escort
PCF     Patrol Craft Fast
WHCE    High Endurance Cutter
WP      Patrol Boat