"What are the Americans up to?" could fail to take into consideration the possibility of an American pull-out. (Diem, p. 37)

Diem explains:

"An explanation is given by Mr. Hoang Duc Nha, cousin of Mr. Thieu and one of his closest aides... Mr. Thieu was suspicious of the Americans only as far as his own political future was concerned. During times of crisis...his suspicion was centered on the possibility of an American sponsored coup against him, but basically he held the belief that the Americans would never tolerate a take-over of South Vietnam by the Communists, at least not in the foreseeable future... (Diem 37).

In a way, several threads seem to come together here. Thieu, it was reported earlier, feared both a major communist offensive, and a vigorous communist infiltration with an eventual take-over. According to witnesses his conclusion was that the communists would choose the latter. It may well be that this--faulty--conclusion which of course must have greatly affected his conduct of civilian and military affairs, was based on his assumption, not that the enemy might not be tempted to mount a major attack, but that the Americans would not tolerate it; thereby inducing the enemy to select instead massive subversion and infiltration which would be harder to treat as an obvious violation of the Paris Agreements; harder to counter with B-52s which Thieu apparently expected would be forthcoming in case of a clear and unmistakable violation; and therefore harder to foil.

Not "Like The French"

Respondents emphasize that differences between the Vietnamese and the Americans were not like differences between them and the French, which were not just differences but profound conflicts over aims and objectives. Some respondents attribute the failures of fruitful cooperation with the U. S. primarily to American misperceptions of everything they found in Vietnam: the country, the people, the culture, the war, the enemy. For this they do not blame, as veterans of the American military or civilian bureaucracy often did, the absence of "institutional memory," which was the result of rotation of personnel. Rather, they see the chasm as deeper than that, and express no confidence that longer tours of duty would have helped. In fact, some respondents feel that on the level of the combat soldier, where ignorance was greatest, interaction was perhaps most effective:
"Throughout the whole hierarchy, it should be noted that the best and smoothest interaction existed at the lowest echelons, at company and battalion levels, where the personalities involved were younger, more innocent and devoid of scheming of any sort. There the cooperation was frank, the spirit of camaraderie was more instinctive, and the proximity of the physical dangers experienced together on the battlefields further deepened the closeness between the U. S. and Vietnam."

"At the middle echelons the difficulties in interaction were greatest, the personalities involved being no longer candid and disinterested, and yet not completely mature in judgements and attitudes."

"And finally at the higher echelons, including the JGS, I would certainly not envy the position of the Americans who were obligated to work with such incompetent counterparts, with naturally some rare exceptions." (Thi, pp. 43/44)

Another general, who also held high civilian office at times, summed up the matter by saying roundly: "We did not have the feeling of a common goal." (Don, p. 1 B) He felt, further, as did other respondents, that the Americans generally underestimated the dangers in the situation, never contemplating that the war might end with a complete communist victory. He conceded that most Vietnamese leaders never really contemplated such a possibility either, but for other reasons: they were confident that in case of need American help would ultimately materialize to prevent it. (Don, p. 2 B)

The Military Advisers System

The concept of military advisers was criticized by several of the respondents. One critic said that as long as the Vietnamese had American advisers on all levels, the Americans should have had, and heeded, Vietnamese advisers. Had such a system been practiced, he thought, events such as "My Lai" could not have occurred and fewer such incidents would have happened that fueled resistance to the war in the U.S. and around the world. (Don, p. 1 B) When asked for his opinion of one of the most senior and well-known U.S. advisers, one source said: "Well (laughter), he was overbearing. He did not understand the situation very well. He was not profound enough. He did not go to the root of the problem. And he thought he knew everything." (Tho, 3b)
Marshall Ky was even more explicit:

"After a few years, there is some sort of Mafia established between American advisers and the Vietnamese commanding officers because, you know, they need each other to get promotions, they need good records and recommendation. What is the best record for an American adviser? Serving one, two tours with a Vietnamese unit. If, after that, he came back and can show the American headquarters that here is a unit I advised for a year and now it is a Number One outfit, he shares that merit. Every American adviser when they left...to go back to the United States have all kinds of Vietnamese decorations [laughs], and vice versa...I know one general officer, the commanding officer of a corps, later on Thieu removed him, General Mu Dzu of II Corps. He's a coward; he's involved in all kind of smuggling and corruption, but still many Americans, when they come to me, they say, you know, Dzu is a "number one" type. Unbelievable." (Ky, p. 4)

Ky also suggested that Americans had the wool pulled over their eyes.

"When (an) American visitor came to Corps headquarters I don't think he really saw much except to spend time drinking, eating and girls with the Corps commander and after that, you know, for the American visitor, he's Number One." (Ky, p. 4)

Ky also accused Americans of having had an insatiable appetite for "yes-men" and added that "leadership cannot be built that way." (Ky, p. 30)

The Military was said to have resented the influence the Americans exerted on the promotion of high-ranking (and sometimes not so high-ranking) officers, not so much because of the interference itself, it seemed, as because of the criteria used by Americans to support a Vietnamese officer. The Americans, they said, judged a man too easily on whether he spoke decent English and drank some bourbon with them; and the Americans could be fooled into declaring some man a "tiger" when in fact he was nothing of the kind. For example, Marshal Ky said with unmistakable relish: "As long as they [the Americans] praise a military leader like Dzu [General Dzu, a former commander of II Corps] and call him 'number one tiger,' what do they know about Vietnamese officers? Most of the Americans I talked to think he's number one tiger [laughs loud], but I am eye
The Americans also failed to understand, according to one respondent, that age in an officer meant something else in ARVN than it meant in the U.S. army. In the U.S. army it could mean maturity and experience, whereas in ARVN it could mean a rigid clinging to outmoded tactics learned in school and, even worse, a history of involvement with the French and therefore a contamination that made him uninspiring as a leader in the current war. (Tho, p. 34)

The complaints about American interference in their affairs by the respondents are a mixture of there having been too much and at the same time too little, in the sense that according to them the Americans interfered but not always in the right way or places. Among themselves, Vietnamese called the U.S. Ambassador "the governor" even though, to their surprise, the "governor" occasionally sought their help in tasks they were clearly unable to do, such as inducing Thieu to do something the U.S. ambassador himself could not induce Thieu to do -- a grossly unrealistic appraisal of the situation on the part of the ambassador, in the view of these witnesses.

Bui Diem reports:

"I remember... in the early seventies, each time I had .... opportunities to talk to Ambassador Bunker, he urged me to take up the problem of the reforms with the Vietnamese President. 'You should mention to the President that reforms are badly needed both for the strengthening of your defense posture and for improving the atmosphere in Washington, a condition for the U.S. to continue its support.' Trying to convince Mr. Thieu about the necessity to reorganize his government I had done all along, but in terms of influence on him, there definitely was no comparison between my position as Ambassador and the position of the U.S. Ambassador in Saigon. If, with the tremendous bargaining power he had in his hands, the U.S. Ambassador could not do anything to influence Mr. Thieu, how could I?" (Diem, p. 49)

Yet, when the Americans left, this caused the Vietnamese some distress, too, in two ways: Many of the jobs that had been provided by the American presence, particularly in Saigon, disappeared. This
added to the misery experienced by many in that city. Secondly the men on the higher levels, especially in the military, found that they had come to rely on the American decision making and decision implementing machinery which now had disappeared.

Lt. General Ngo Quang Truong, Commander of I Corps, says:

"Command and Control from Saigon was weak, as was planning... When the Americans were in Vietnam, the GVN depended on the U. S. channel. In the absence of U. S. forces coordination became weak and was not appropriate to deal with the situation. (Truong, p. 16)

General Truong added that this shortcoming should have been improved while the U. S. forces were still in Vietnam.

An example of criticism in the area of American interference in the wrong way is the following excerpt from an interview with a high ranking staff officer.

Q. What mistakes do you think the Americans made in preparing South Vietnam to fight this war?

A. Two things. First, when American troops came to Vietnam, they try to do everything. And make the Vietnamese lose the initiative.

Q. This happened on all levels?

A. Yes, I think at all levels -- operations, training, logistics. So the Vietnamese don't rely on themselves. They rely on the Americans.

Q. The Americans were doing the planning?

A. Yes, but short planning, just for one year only. You didn't know how much you can get next year of American financial aid.

Q. We ran things. Is that the problem?

A. Yes. Sometimes the Americans try to get suggestions from the Vietnamese side, but we have no competent people to deal with
the American side. So the Americans think: we will do it for you because you don't know anything. And second, U. S. supports one man only -- Président Thieu.

Q. What should we have done?

A. Well, I think instead of total support you have to tell him if you don't open your arms, your hand, to have an overall contribution of good people, I can't support you.

Colonel Do Ngoc Nhan, a JGS officer, states that "the U. S. got involved in the war and assumed the leadership both politically and militarily. For this reason, the U. S. withdrawal from South Vietnam created a real leadership vacuum." (Nhan, p. 28). Yet, apparently, with regard to their presence and the resulting control, the Americans faced a Hobson's choice in Vietnam. When they asserted their leadership, it allegedly restricted the development of Vietnamese leadership and had other adverse effects; but when they did not exert their leadership, this is said to have created adverse consequences, too. Bui Diem comments.

"More than anything else, the South Vietnamese blamed the Americans for the many contradictions of the American policy... The South Vietnamese could not understand why the Americans tried to assert that there was no interference on their part in South Vietnamese politics, as if they could avoid it in practice after imposing the presence of five hundred thousand American troops on the country." (Diem, p. 43)

Such a presence, says Diem, had "its pros and cons and many Vietnamese were aware of it". The point was that on the one hand the American presence was a substantial help; on the other it diluted the "cause". Diem says:

"The Communists...boasted about the purity and legitimacy of their cause (fight for total independence of the country and against the presence of foreign troops), and the South Vietnamese did not want to carry this handicap (of relying on foreign troops) on their back. However, they accepted the presence of American troops as justified by the international circumstances and the rapidly deteriorating situation in
South Vietnam. There was, after all, a ferocious war going on and there was no substitute for victory even if the cost was to be some sort of foreign interference." (Diem, p. 43)

In other words, American support, even when it was militarily effective, was not an unmixed blessing, according to this observer. The enemy, of course, even though he was forced to maneuver between Moscow and Peking and therefore may have seemed to possess a modicum of independence, was solidly dependent on foreign support, too. However, he had the advantage of having no foreign troops in his ranks, and his allies, according to respondents, disguised their influence quite effectively, whereas the U. S. did not.

"When South Vietnam scored a success, Americans took the credit. When the North scored a success it was always Ho Chi Minh or Giap or the NVA that got the credit." (Tho, p. 36)

Disagreements on Force Structure

The severest criticism on the part of military men with regard to U. S. - Vietnamese cooperation is that the American forces left the military forces of South Vietnam unprepared for fighting the war by themselves, that they in fact did in many respects the reverse of what would have been required. Rather than to adduce the large volume of individual comment (except for a few examples) on this subject, the following summary is believed to reflect their views:

1. The South Vietnamese soldier was "conditioned" by the U. S. presence in many wrong ways. He had become accustomed to vast air and artillery support, and he had forgotten how to walk, being used to motorized transportation.

2. ARVN was organized along the wrong pattern. ARVN, say some of the "young Turks" among the respondents, should have consisted of two distinctly separate parts with distinctly separate missions. It should have had a territorial force, entrusted with the defense of their territory; and a large and mobile strike force that could have been used wherever needed. Instead it did not even have any mobile reserve divisions, and it had far too big a "tail".
3. The armed forces of South Vietnam were not enabled to develop effective military leaders at the top. For this a great many direct and indirect reasons are given. The promotion process was determined to a large extent by corruption and the "crony" system. Prima donna's without formal training were entrusted with the most responsible positions, such as Corps commands, where they "improvised" like artists without having learned the fundamentals (Thi, p. 26). Commanders sent to U. S. school got very little benefit from it; there was too much, too fast. Moreover what little they did learn did not apply to the situation in Vietnam. Enemy and terrain required a different type of warfare than that taught at American defense colleges.

The worst feature of ARVN, according to Col. Nguyen Huy Loi, JGS staff officer, was that ARVN was not an independent entity and could not quickly become one after the American departure. Colonel Loi advocated a mobile force of 10 to 15 divisions of about 300,000 men.

"I don't know if you agree with me, but this is my opinion. The Vietnamese Armed Forces were totally integrated in the whole U. S. military machine and were just part of that structure. So when the whole U. S. Armed Forces got out, the Vietnamese forces could not really sustain themselves against a hard blow. We were integrated in the whole U. S. Armed Forces. When the (bigger) part of that integrated force leaves, the remaining Vietnam forces have lack of support, lack of leadership, lack of coordination. Their mission is ... to hold ground and they can counter some small action by the other side but (that is all). We cannot put together one division to do something. And if we can get one division together we cannot do anything because they don't have the support to do it. So the capability of the Vietnamese Forces (after the U. S. withdrawal) was just to hold ground and counter very small enemy activity." (Loi, pp. 9/10)
Did Colonel Loi talk to the Americans about this?

"Not officially. But during the time when I was chief of training Command, I had the opportunity to talk with a lot of American generals, a lot of American diplomats. I told them we cannot operate this way. The structure of ARVN is not operational when the Americans go. We have to do something. What I propose is this (the 10 to 15 mobile divisions). But it will take time to do it. We have to do this right, and should have started in 1966/67 to do this right."

(Loi p. 19)

When asked what kind of response he received, Colonel Loi stated:

"The Vietnamese said they did not want to hear anything about this because now the Americans were responsible for everything. But it was also very difficult to talk to the Americans. Because, as you know, the Americans have their own system and we are talking about something that is (outside) that system."

(Loi, p. 19)

As an afterthought, Loi added:

"Also, (the Americans were not sympathetic to his view) because they thought they can stay in Vietnam forever."

(Loi, p. 19)

But, according to Colonel Loi, nobody worried too much about this because it was generally expected that in case of need the Americans would come to the rescue. Without them, he thought, there was no chance, anyway. Loi like others, stated that even Thieu believed that.

Q. Thieu believed the Americans would bail out Vietnam in case of problems?

A. Yes. I think Thieu knew that once you made a withdrawal it was finished, with ...(what) the enemy had.

Q. You think Thieu believed it was finished when the Americans withdrew?
A. Yes. Because Thieu really is a shrewd man, he is intelligent and he is a military leader, he would know this." (Loi, p. 18)

Thus, here again, we see the ambivalent attitude toward the Americans that, according to the respondents, was so widespread among Vietnamese leaders: On the one hand the Americans were hard to deal with; on the other they could surely be counted on if things went wrong (as in fact they probably would eventually, on the basis of what the respondents say).

Overview

This brief and selective summary of Vietnamese views on their cooperation with the Americans may deserve the inclusion of the statements by one high-ranking fighting man who insisted on remaining anonymous. This respondent insists that South Vietnam, which in his view was viable politically and militarily and could have successfully fought the "enemy a hundred years" if it had been "permitted" to do so, had been traded away to Hanoi by the Americans in return for better relations with Moscow and Peking. He stated that the U. S. had actually pulled the strings to insure the quick defeat of South Vietnam. This respondent also insisted that he was not alone among exiled leaders in holding this view but that the others "are afraid to tell you."

One other factor that is mentioned by some respondents, though often only peripherally, or by insinuation, is that the all-pervading and all-corroding corruption was to some extent, at least indirectly, the fault of the Americans, in the sense that as long as the U. S. supported President Thieu in his place, and with him "Fat Quang" and all the others, there was no way of reducing it. Ky is most outspoken on this, and reports that he made the point so strongly in a conversation with President Nixon that Ambassador Bui Diem "kicked him under the table." But nothing came of this. (Ky, p. 7)

Despite the great hostility displayed by the one respondent who claims South Vietnam was betrayed; despite Nguyen Ba Can's statement that "Vietnamese officials called Vietnamization the U. S. dollar
and Vietnam blood sharing plan"; and despite much criticism of Americans ways and means, the Vietnamese leaders queried on U. S. - Vietnamese relations are on the whole not "angry men". Rather, they seem to feel that fate was against a more fruitful cooperation between their nation and the Americans. They do not seem to believe in the communist claim that the Americans were animated by the same imperialist desires as the French had been before them. On the contrary, they seem to feel that the Americans really wanted to help but did so very poorly, whereas the French (with whom, however, they now are reconciled and to whom they feel culturally closer) meant to exploit them and did quite well at that, for a long time. The respondents just stress, in their polite and seemingly dispassionate way, that U. S. - Vietnamese interaction was caught in many webs of misunderstanding from the beginning and never improved, eventually to dissolve altogether.
STRATEGY AND TACTICS

After the Americans had left, Thieu had promulgated his four No's, one of which was to deny the enemy any territory or outpost held by the Government of South Vietnam (the other three No's were: no coalition government, no negotiating with the enemy, no communist or neutralist activity in the country). This territorial No was the conceptual and practical backbone of South Vietnam's military posture from the day of the Paris Agreements until after the fall of Baomethuot, when it was radically revised, in fact entirely reversed.

Some respondents believe, as already mentioned earlier in this paper (p.31) that this passive defense (as some respondents call it) or holding strategy of Thieu's was primarily politically inspired. Thieu, they think, did not want to be more active as he did not want to violate the cease-fire, and thereby let the fully expected active violations of the cease-fire by the enemy emerge more clearly by contrast. Conversely, he did not want to sacrifice any territory, because, in the view of Bui Diem and others, this would have adverse political consequences in South Vietnam where the local population might worry about being sacrificed to the communists, and in the U. S. where aid might be further reduced if Saigon made a "poor showing."

As it turned out, the strategy was a miscalculation in all respects. Even though the expected cease-fire violations by the enemy did "stick out" by contrast, the U. S. did not do anything to punish the enemy, which, the respondents say, greatly discouraged them and encouraged the enemy to risk ever bigger violations.* Thus the relative observance of the cease-fire by the GVN went unrewarded. As for holding all territory to reassure the population, the strategy might have had some slender pay-offs, except that in the end -- as we have learned from Nguyen Ba Can and many others -- the population largely turned against the Thieu government in the final crisis and denied it the needed support. And as for propitiating the Americans and extracting more aid from them by showing the ability

*See footnote, page 19
to deny the enemy new territory, the record shows that their relative success on that score did not keep aid to South Vietnam from declining drastically.

Thus, none of the political objectives at which the Theiu strategy had aimed, was accomplished in the period between the Paris Agreements and the last enemy offensive.

Instead, according to some of the respondents, the strategic posture had weakened the military establishment and produced adverse military consequences. It had led to a firm commitment of all available forces to the defense of their respective areas, so that these forces had no strategic mobility and ARVN had no strategic reserve. These forces had no or little strategic mobility even technically, in that, according to the officers participating in this study, they lacked transport and fuel. But beyond that they were virtually nailed to their places, and any effort at dislodging them, like Thieu's last minute attempt to move the Airborne Division down to Saigon from I Corps, disrupted the entire defense posture from I Corps down. Moreover, the attempt to hold every one of thousands of remote outposts apparently ground up armed forces and the morale of officers who saw the virtual hopelessness of such an endeavor but were committed to it.

What seems to emerge quite clearly from the combined statements of the respondents is that the strategy of passive defense (its tactics were not entirely passive as both sides "fought viciously" over some territories, as one officer put it), coupled with a decline in U. S. military aid, led to increasing human losses. With ARVN's increasing need to conserve ammunition and POL, with maintenance problems and other technological adversities, the brunt of the enemy's forays had to be borne increasingly by the ARVN soldier. This required increasing sacrifices as the enemy's capabilities and the quality of his equipment kept improving.

However, the rigidity of Thieu's strategy was not just the result of his own desires, or of the necessity dictated by the situation, at least not according to the respondents. It was allegedly "imposed" on Thieu by the Americans. The last Secretary of Defense,
Tran Van Don, reports.

Q. What were the plans? How was South Vietnam going to survive militarily?

A. You ask me, personally?

Q. From the point of view of the government, the JGS, or whoever might have discussed this with you, did they have a plan or a strategy?

A. I know, as chairman of the Defense Committee in the House before becoming a Vice-Premier in 1974... The military strategy at that time was to hold all of South Vietnam. I asked Thieu in 1975 why in Cam Ranh "you have changed your strategy?" He said, "now with open aggression from the North we cannot keep the same strategy demanded by the American side to hold the whole of South Vietnam."

Q. He said that was the American strategy? Americans had asked him to do this?

A. To keep, to hold all the whole South Vietnam. He was able to change (that) after the attack from the North.

Q. He said that was an American strategy, imposed on him by the U. S.?

A. Yes. Important to hold all South Vietnam and, if possible, all provinces. (Don, p. 38)

But even though Tran Van Don states that the strategy of holding on to all areas was dictated by the Americans, he by no means attributes to them all responsibility for what came later, nor does he think that the South Vietnamese did not have enough freedom of action to do things differently.

A. I knew the preparations from the other side -- pipeline, new highway, attacks against our districts, infiltration into the South -- even then we didn't prepare our troops, our army, to fight. We had no big operation to destroy the pipeline, to go in where... they occupied.

Q. No spoiling action?

A. That's right.

Q. Would you attribute that to inept leadership?
A. Yes, of course. We come back again to the same thing. I was surprised. We look (as though) we live in peacetime. Instead, we know about the infiltration, the attacks...I don't mean after the loss of Phuoc Long Province, but before that -- in 1974 -- the pipeline, the highway, infiltration. We knew that. Lack of command, incompetence on our military side. From the top to the division commander and province chief.

Q. You think you had the resources...to mount some spoiling operations?

A. We come back again to the same problem (of) Thieu. If they open real operations, it will require good commanders, good operations, it could have happened. But for Thieu, the danger was there would be a coup against him. (Don, p. 39)

What Don means in his last answer is that Thieu did not want good men in leading military positions because he was afraid they would make a coup against him. Therefore, he preferred to leave the incumbents in place, even if it meant incompetence. But there was more than that to the absence of more vigorous defense strategies.

Q. Your judgment is that there was a sort of peacetime attitude while this (enemy) build-up was taking place?

A. Yes, that is right. There is one thing I think these leaders believed -- the American government will never authorize a new aggression from the North after the Paris Agreements. Bombing will be resumed. (Don, p. 40)

But already long before, Don had been troubled by the strategies and tactics used in the war, not only by his own compatriots but by the Americans as well.

"When I used to drive through the pass from Danang to Hue, I could see American GIs playing the role of our Popular Forces, guarding all the bridges...Some bridges are important. (But) why didn't I see any Vietnamese with them? There was something wrong in the use of American troops during the war. I thought they were not very well employed. (Don, p. 62)

In general, there was no hope for any strategy to be successful, in General Tran Van Don's view, unless it effectively stopped the infiltration from the North. Don thought that could have been done,
but only as a result of a major mobilization of all forces available in the country. Instead, attempts were made that he dismissed as "not serious". He commented on the operation at Lam Son in 1971.

"Not very well conducted on the Vietnamese side. General Lam was the Corps Commander. He had his command post in Dong Ha, but every evening he flew back to Danang to play tennis. Every morning he came back to his CP... No coordination with the General Staff, no coordination with General Abrams. General Abrams was so nice... he didn't want to complain". (Don, p. 65)

Others also deplored the absence of efforts to stop the infiltration as critical. General Truong was asked what could have been done to have prevented the collapse in Vietnam. In hindsight, the most critical requirement was to stop the infiltration from the north. He said South Vietnam could have solved its internal problems if the infiltration could have been brought under control. Once that had been stopped, everything else would have been "easy." When asked how the infiltration might have been stopped, he had no answer. He said that the geography was not the same as in Korea and that it would have required "strong retaliation" to keep the enemy at bay. (Troung, p. 21)

But, if there were no serious efforts at stopping the infiltration, what was the overall strategy?

"You know, General Vien talked to me once in the beginning of 1969 when I was Chairman of the Defense Committee of the Senate and I led a delegation of Senators and members of the House to the General Staff headquarters, to Cao Van Vien's office. Our question was, "General, can you tell us [we are now members of the House and Senate in a very close meeting], can you tell us your military doctrine because we need to know. We are making war, but on the basis of what doctrine?" That question was very good. It was very sensible. It was not my question, it was the question of the other members. We agreed on that question. Do you know what the answer was from Cao Van Vien? He said, "We Vietnamese have no military doctrine because the command of all operations in Vietnam is in the hands, is the responsibility, of the American side. We follow the U. S. military doctrine. We cannot have a Vietnamese military doctrine. We can get it only on the day when we will be in charge, when we will be
responsible for the operations in South Vietnam." That is all. That means we follow. I have just told you about the Lam Son operation just to show you, to describe to you, the lack of coordination; I don't say "cooperation," but coordination between the U.S. and Vietnamese sides. And I must say to you that sometimes some of your generals were very happy to have a nice Vietnamese counterpart who never reacted against any decision made by the American side. It was easier for the American general not to review what he had decided already or else had planned by his staff. Sometimes he said, "Oh, this Vietnamese general is very fine." Of course, of course, he would say that. You know, if we are to be frank, we must be frank." (Don, p. 15)

However, from what the respondents say "on the day they were in charge", The Vietnamese JGS did not evolve a strategy either.

The respondents largely agree that the JGS was very weak, in concepts and personnel, and did not become any stronger when the Americans left. Cao Van Vien, variously described by respondents as a man who never went into the field, preferred to do Yoga to dealing with military matters, was married to a wife suspected of financial corruption, and was Thieu's ultimate yes-man, remained in place; the Corps commanders, directly responsible to Thieu, retained control over their fiefdoms while they tried to defend them, and no planning staff worth the name generated any doctrines or strategies for the conduct of the war. According to the observers, the only redeeming feature about General Vien was that he had tendered his resignation to Thieu on several occasions, as he did not want the job. But Thieu, it is said, was very happy with Vien who was accommodating and certainly never entertaining any ideas of mounting or participating in a coup. To give just one sample statement from one JGS officer who kept pressing for alternate force postures:

"General Vien did nothing, and it was very hard to reach him. And any time people asked him something, he said, go to the Corps commanders and get direct instructions from President Thieu. Our mission is not to mount big operations, so the Province chief and the Corps commander have responsibility for the security of their area. That is all. And General Vien did nothing...even to the last day in Saigon...That was because he didn't want the job. He wanted to quit for a
long time and no one would let him go. He submitted his resignation 7 times and they would not let him go. The reason? I think that General Vien was good for Thieu. I think that in Thieu's mind the Americans were responsible for everything and the Vietnamese did not need to do anything. And everyone just sit down and wait because they think the Americans have the responsibility for everything."

(Loi, p. 16/17)

This negative reaction by Loi -- in this particular case -- was produced by Vien's negative response to Loi's suggestion that ARVN forces be repostured so as to get out of the static defense positions and aim at a more active strategy.

Why No Strategic Planning?

In most conversations with the respondents it is clear that there was little strategic planning, that, in fact, Saigon, which had no strategy of its own when the Americans were in the country, failed to develop a real strategy after they had left. When asked about the reasons for this, considering the obviously precarious situation in which the South found itself, and in view of the ubiquitous conviction in all South Vietnamese circles that the enemy would never regard the Paris Agreements as anything but the proverbial scrap of paper, the respondents will talk here and there of their weak and ineffective General Staff, of poor and unimaginative leadership, or of unfortunate conditioning of their leaders by the Americans.

Some report that they had plans for different force structures and strategies but could never get a hearing, let alone authorization to act. But again and again, some of the respondents, especially on the more senior levels, insist that there was no real strategy because, first, they were persuaded that in case of real need the U. S. would come to their aid, and, second, that there was no strategy they could possibly design that would enable them to go it alone if a big enemy push should materialize.

Q. You say, each year you had a plan, first, you had a joint plan with MACV. After the Americans left you had
a Vietnamese plan. And that plan said that each Corps Commander was responsible...

A. To protect his area, protect the people and what they are to do about pacification, about the roads, etc. But this plan never mentions what to do if a full attack happens.

Q. So all the plan dealt with was how the people were to be protected, pacification, roads, this kind of thing. The plan did not contemplate or deal with what he should do in the event there was a large-scale attack. Did the Corps commanders have any plans of their own, as to what they were to do?

A. Based on this overall plan, each Corps commander made his own plan, but the plan was the same as the JGS plan, which means yes, we will deploy our troops like this to protect the people, but if there were really a full-scale attack, they need some support and help from the JGS, but they know that the JGS has nothing under his command. Not even one battalion. So all the force is divided into four Corps. And the Corps commanders are responsible for what they have on hand. That is the kind of structure after 1973.

Q. So the Corps commanders could say in their plan, if there is a large attack, we will get help from Saigon? Is that what they said? Even though they knew there wasn't any help?

A. Yes, they knew that. So what I mentioned is this: All the ARVN are spread out through the four Corps areas and had as their mission the protection of the people. And we (believed) that after the 1973 Agreement there would be no attack at all. But if the full attack happened the Americans would jump in. So you carry out the mission you did before with the Americans.

Q. Carry out the mission you had when the Americans were there—still carry that out. If a full attack takes place, the Americans would come to the rescue?

A. Yes.

Q. So it all came back again to the Americans?

A. I think so. Operating with the American forces—they (ARVN) cannot operate alone.

Q. Cannot operate alone?
A. Yes.

Q. So they didn't even plan to operate alone?  
(Loi, pp. 96/97)

Loi thinks that the Americans must have believed that after the Paris Agreements the enemy would not dare to launch a big-scale attack, and that therefore the Saigon leaders did not plan for such a contingency.

A. Because they think that the Americans have plans about this, and they still believe that after the Agreements they cannot have a full attack from the North.

Q. You think the Americans believed that?

A. In their plans for the ARVN. Because after the Peace Agreement it was impossible to have a full attack. And if the full attack happened, it was finished. And they knew about this.

Q. Now you are speaking from the Vietnamese point of view or the American point of view?

A. Both. The Americans knew about this.

Q. You mentioned, I have forgotten who it was, a senior person, who told you when you suggested the need to do something, he said don't worry about that, the Americans will still work something out at the very end. Who was it?

A. Most of the people believed this, when I talked with all the generals, the responsible people. For example, when I got back from Paris, I went to see Khiem, the Prime Minister and Minister of Defense, and reported to him. He asked me about the situation. I told him. He said "yes, I already think that. In (case of a major attack), we cannot do anything. The Americans will have to decide what we have to do." This was from Khiem." (Loi, p. 98)

To Fight Like the Enemy?

Throughout the war in Vietnam, some critics of existing strategies expressed their view that it was necessary to adopt the enemy's ways of fighting. Respondents who commented on this proposition dismissed it as unrealistic. General Truong remarked that a criticism frequently leveled against the ARVN was that it should adopt more of the enemy's tactics. He felt this criticism was unwarranted in that
ARVN "faced a different situation and could not employ the enemy's mode of operation". When he had commanded the 1st Division, he had in fact adopted some of the enemy's tactics in certain areas. General Truong said he was "very familiar" with Communist tactics but that these could be used only to "some extent". ARVN requirements were quite different from those of the Communists and only a limited amount of modification was possible in their operations. (Truong, p. 16)

To Go North?

The more venturesome among the respondents, especially Marshal Ky, felt that a considerable shortcoming of South Vietnam strategy was that it did not contemplate attacks on the North. Apparently, none of the respondents contemplated a full conquest of the North, and "to go North" meant different things to different observers. Primarily, the idea was to make landings north of the DMZ that would have destroyed forces assembled there and pinned down other forces instead of permitting them to infiltrate south. It also would have offered Saigon an opportunity to foster resistance against Hanoi.*

Some of those who thought there should have been incursions into the North added that such operations would "of course" only have been possible with massive U.S. support. Ky, on the other hand, seems to feel that ARVN could have done some probing of this kind on its own.

*Thus, from what some of these respondents consider would have been possible (some forays against the North), the enemy's fighting methods might have been used by ARVN up there. In a word, guerrilla tactics can hardly be used, it seems, inside one's own territory and in defense of the established order. They could be used by the enemy in the South, but ARVN could have used them only in the North.
The Wrong Expectations

Tied in with the wrong expectations so widely held as to what the U.S. would do in case of a massive enemy attack, wrong expectations as to what the enemy would do further contributed to the strategic vacuum in which Saigon operated. These faulty expectations, which would have made effective strategic planning most unlikely even if other factors had not also interfered, were present at the highest level: in President Thieu's own mind.

Buu Vien reports that Thieu thought that "subversion would probably be the main tool the communists would use to seize control of the country." (Buu Vien, p. 38).

"In a Ministers' Council meeting, President Thieu laid down his theories as follows: He predicted two possibilities, two courses of action which might be taken by the communists. One would be a major military offensive on the 1972 model. The enemy would try to capture as much of our territory as possible, then negotiate another in-place cease-fire. If the offensive ever occurred, it would involve entire divisions, and a combination of armor, artillery and ground forces. The fighting would be violent, but it wouldn't last long. The communists would make every effort to gain as much as possible before the U.S. could have any significant reaction. Then, facing a fait accompli, the only way out would be more negotiations. Negotiations would end up in stalemate and in the meantime, the communists would consolidate their positions in newly occupied areas, build up strength, and get prepared for the next offensive. If this ever happened, we would expect that the U.S., a co-signatory of the cease-fire agreement, wouldn't sit on their hands but would certainly intervene. The most important thing for us would be our capability to hold out firmly and destroy as much of the enemy as possible while waiting for U.S. intervention. So the Armed Forces should be vigilant, leadership should be strengthened to keep troop morale high and improvement of soldiers' living conditions should be attained.

The other possible course of action of the communists was the real main concern of the government (our underlining). That was the seizure of power through subversive tactics in which the communists excel..." (Buu Vieu, p. 38)
Thieu then continued his prognosis as follows:

"The infiltration of the communists at the infrastructure level would lead to the loss of control of villages by local authorities, to the sabotage and failure of government programs and eventually leave the central government isolated in cities, surrounded by a hostile countryside. Gradually, the cities would be undermined as well, aided directly or indirectly by troubles and unrest caused by opposition elements to the government. The government then might no longer effectively govern and the eventual establishment of a procommunist government at the instigation of the communists and their allies would no longer be a remote possibility.

"While we could rely on U. S. intervention to thwart off a major communist offensive, and the U. S. would have enough reason to intervene in case of a flagrant communist violation of the cease-fire agreement, we couldn't rely on anybody but ourselves to save the country from a political collapse, which was considered to be totally an internal affair." (Buu Vien, p. 50)

Needless to say, if those were Thieu's basic assumptions regarding the future, effective strategies were not likely to result.

The "Conditio Sine Qua Non"

Buu Vien places the entire discussion about possible alternative strategies into a broader context than some of his colleagues. First, he reminds us of the magnitude of the task:

"It all began with the realistic expectation that without adequate American support, the country could not survive the North Vietnamese communist aggression that was fully supported by the communist world. For the NVN communists, there was no substitute for complete domination of the whole country. For ideological and economic reasons, they always considered South Vietnam to be an integral part of their communist nation, and they vowed to fight if necessary for two, three or more decades to accomplish their goal. Any compromise reached by any kind of agreement would be only a pause in their long march toward ultimate conquest." (Buu Vien, p. 57)

Therefore, says Buu Vien, no strategy could succeed that was not responsive to the global situation - this was the "conditio
"It was not a question of requesting American aid to fight against the communists by themselves but rather of countering the flow of aid from the Soviet Union and Communist China to the North Vietnamese communists to help them conquer South Vietnam. Thus, if NVN was provided with more weapons and ammunition from their allies, SVN should also be provided with more weapons and ammunition from their allies. One of two things would have had to be done: either SVN had to get sufficient aid to match the communist aid to NVN, or international arrangements had to be made to have the Soviet Union and the People's Republic of China discontinue their aid to NVN, leaving NVN and SVN alone. No country in the Free World could do either of those two things except the United States. Thus, when the U. S. deemed it not in their interest to get involved again in Vietnam, or when the U. S. found it too heavy a burden to engage in an aid race with the Soviet Union and Communist China, SVN's collapse was inevitable." (Buu Viet, p. 57)

The Unmentionable Subject

As long as the Vietnamese leaders were convinced that there was no way for them to counter a major enemy offensive without decisive U. S. help, or even to hold on rigidly to all their territory without being ground up, there was just one more possibility, in theory: to surrender some territories, assume a more flexible stance, in other words to "tighten the ship at the top" as President Thieu, later is said to have called his planned surrender of parts of I Corps.

Despite Thieu's stern rejection over the years of yielding a single outpost voluntarily to the enemy, the subject was apparently discussed at times, especially in the beginning of 1975, but never too seriously, it seems. According to Colonel Loi of the JGS, a committee was set up in January of 1975.

"We had a committee right in the JGS, to make a study of (strategic withdrawals). I was invited to participate. But the committee during three months of work did nothing...just talking, and we came up with nothing." (Loi, p. 105)

Even then, the Committee could not level with Thieu.
"If Thieu hears something like this you would get into big trouble. ..For example, we said that in Kontum-Pleiku, try to hold with light forces and move the big forces to the coast, try to have a mobile defense in that area. Give up all this jungle area...but no, don't talk about this, we could get into lots of trouble with Thieu. Even then (before the offensive) all the hamlets around Kontum were under Communist control, but we have to say it is under our control. So we cannot move out. ..no one dared to tell the truth." (Loi, p. 108)

In any event, to surrender large segments of territory before the big enemy attack was apparently virtually unthinkable. This may partly account for the fact that, when the big offensive came, no preparations had been made for the evacuation of civilians or even the withdrawal of troops. It was perhaps not just inadvertence and lack of professionalism that had led to the neglect of these vital preparations, but a strong inhibition on the part of military leaders even to think in such "defeatist" terms. "Having had the opportunity to attend most of the meetings concerning SVN policy toward the Paris Agreements," writes one former member of the JGS, "My impression was that the cabinet members did not have the courage to offer objective observations on the situation. An extreme anti-communist attitude was then the 'fashion', to prove one's loyalty to one's government. All frank and outspoken opinions would have been called 'pacificist or pro-communist.'" (Nhan, p. 34)

Also, a strategy of strategic withdrawals was easier discussed than executed. When the offensive began, the enemy strained from the first to cut all usable roads, not only to prevent reinforcements from being brought up, but also to prevent precisely such a strategy for ARVN of first withdrawing and then creating a redoubt consisting of Saigon and the Delta. Thus, in order to even attempt it, Saigon would have had to withdraw its forces from the northern provinces and surrender all that land and all the inhabitants there before the enemy attacked in earnest--an almost impossible and also unacceptable course of action, particularly in view of the always lingering thought, apparently in the minds of most military and civilian leader including Thieu's, that such drastic regrouping
would not be necessary because either the enemy would not dare to attack or in a true emergency the U. S. would come in and help, either with military intervention or diplomatic pressure, or both. This again closed the vicious circle of thinking about the subject.

The Bottom Line

Thus, Saigon's strategic planners, to the extent that there were any and that they were active, seem really to have been in a box. According to what they say, they did not have the mobility or fire power or strategic reserves for an effective defense against strong attacks, let alone for large spoiling operations. They could not surrender territory, as that meant to surrender populations to the enemy, disturb the rest of the population, act against perceived American wishes and perhaps provoke further reductions in aid. They could not hold on to all the territories because the enemy had the initiative and could strike at will, whereas, their manpower and supplies were limited and decreasing. And they could not go North.

The only thing they could possible do was to extract from the enemy in every engagement as high a price as possible, and some respondents feel that ARVN should have bent every effort to do precisely that, partly for their own honor and the maintenance of their own morale, partly in order to put up a good show, slow up the enemy and perhaps reap some harvest in receiving additional aid as a reward. Actually -- even though this can hardly be called a strategy -- they did just that in many places over the years, at great sacrifice. But there was a limit to this, and it apparently was reached when the big offensive came and the soldiers' concern over the lives of their families was added to the concern over their own.

By contrast -- and the contrast could hardly have been starker -- the enemy's overall strategy was a model of simplicity and clarity, especially after the enemy in the wake of the failed 1968 and 1972 offensives had freed himself of the delusion that he could combine a big push with a "popular uprising" in the South, and thereafter relied solely on purely military means, and on his clear goal of termination through victory by conquest.
MANPOWER AND MORALE

Even though problems of manpower and problems of morale are different in many ways they are related and were, it seems, particularly so in the Vietnam war. Due to the limitations on what firepower and technology could achieve during much of the war, the demands on the manpower of the contestants and the individual soldier -- both enemy and friendly -- were proportionately high.

Manpower

Perhaps the most knowledgeable of the respondents in the area of military manpower was Buu Vien, Assistant Secretary of Defense for manpower from 1972 until 1973. Somewhat tartly, Buu Vien says:

"Because of the cease-fire agreement, foreign supporters (sic) believed there was no reason why the Republic of Vietnam still had to maintain the 1.1 million men strength authorized in wartime. Even though they might realize that the communist threat was still there and RVN might have reason to maintain its military strength, they were more interested in restoring economic stability than in the possibility of a renewed attack by the North Vietnamese Communists. Goals were set (in 1973) at bringing down ARVN strength to 800,000 by 1976, reducing it by 100,000 each year beginning in 1974. One of the problems encountered was how troop reduction would affect the respective strength of the three branches of the armed forces... Doing away with all the Popular Forces would still not be enough, and thus a reduction in the Regional Forces and Regular Forces was also contemplated." (Buu Vien, p. 4)

This created many problems. Buu Vien reports:

"On the occasion of President Thieu's visit to the U. S. in 1973, I had the opportunity to brief Secretary Richardson about the plan... but when [Richardson] queried Thieu as to when the plan would go into effect, President Thieu replied that it all depended on the communist side..." (Buu Vien, p. 5)

In further discussions with Pentagon officers, no solution could be found as to how the projected reduction should be apportioned among the services. Back in Saigon, Buu Vien -- in one of those
instances where the Vietnamese sometimes appear to have received different signals from different Americans—was told by the Defense Attache's Office:

"Since requests for Military Assistance for the 1974 fiscal year had been calculated and submitted on the basis of the 1.1 million strength level, it would be appropriate to maintain that level of strength for the time being; any reduction in strength would be followed by a reduction in material and equipment. As a result, the plan was not put into effect."

But, in what appears to have been a bit of fiscal legerdemain, "the idea of strength reduction was nevertheless sold by the government to try to attract foreign economic assistance," (Buu Vien, p. 5)

More importantly, Buu Vien says that

"Even though the RVN government well understood that the war against the Communists might...last for decades, no long-range policy was adopted...as far as use of manpower was concerned.... The general Mobilization Law enacted...in 1968 was merely a device to...draft younger males to serve.... The number of 18-year-olds drafted under the law...rarely exceeded the 100,000 per year mark while the desertion rate usually ran much higher than that. The law was presented as a progressive piece of legislation aiming at providing everybody with an opportunity to serve the country. In reality, it was a discriminatory law whose enforcement...due to several clauses on draft deferments, created two categories of citizens; those who were forced into the army and those fortunate enough to stay out."

"The most important shortcoming of the draft law was that it had no provision for a limited term of service (tour of duty). Lawmakers wanted to emphasize the pressing needs of the country, and a set term of service would, they thought, appear incompatible with the 'general mobilization' spirit. The only discharge from the military permitted under the law was retirement because of age. Thus, once drafted a youngster had to stay in the army until he was killed or became too old to fight. The only alternative was desertion. Draft dodging was therefore widespread, and it is obvious what happened to the morale of the draftees who saw no hope for returning to
civilian life. Many youngsters even resorted to self-mutilation to escape military service.

"The other flaw in the law was its provision for too many cases of draft deferment. Besides the normal deferment on grounds of poor health, deferment could also be obtained for religious reasons, for education purposes, or because of essential jobs in the public or private sector. The deferment system helped develop new corruption practices and the trade in draft deferment certificates flourished. Many youngsters shaved their heads to become fake monks, and students paid large sums of money to buy their high school diplomas or be admitted to universities." (Buu Vien, p. 59)

Buu Vien reports that he discussed these matter on several occasions with Prime Minister Khiem, but Thiéu would not agree to a limited tour of duty or other manpower reforms.

Corruption, draft dodging, and desertion were a result and led to further problems of inducting young men into the army. But even when in the army, the army could not be certain that they were actually in the ranks: the aforementioned "ghost soldiers" on the one hand and "roll-call soldiers" on the other kept manpower at low and uncertain levels. Later in the war, an investigation into these practices was conducted.

Q. In IV Corps, you are talking about 30,000 phantom soldiers out of how many total?
A. I don't remember the figure exactly, out of about 150,000 Regional Forces.

Q. Where the other 120,000 in fact there?
A. No. Even out of the 120,000 remaining, not at all. But we didn't have time to investigate everything.

Q. When did you conduct this investigation?
A. This was about the end of 1974 and beginning of 1975.

Q. You said that these 30,000 phantom soldiers were worth 7 to 9 million piasters a month, down in IV Corps. Do you think the IV Corps commander was getting part of this?
A. Yes.
Q. And everybody is getting paid off up and down the line?

A. Yes. And everybody knew about this in 1973-1974. (Loi, p. 26)

After the investigation Loi proposed to General Dong Van Khuyen, the chief of staff, to "deactivate all these low strength battalion and fire all those battalion commanders and just form strong companies, but instead they put them together to become regiments. So they further weakened the units." (Loi, p. 27)

According to Loi, the problem of the ghost soldiers was unsolvable for the following reasons.

Q. Why was this (the ghost soldier problem)?

A. Very simple. First, the Province Chief will not talk back to the national leadership. Thieu only wants his own man to be Province Chief. The Province Chief, he has the political responsibility, the military responsibility, everything...And they divide the money among everyone. But we could not replace the Province Chief, that would come up to Thieu.

Q. You could not do anything about this?

A. You couldn't do anything about this. Just forget it.

Q. Thieu protected them?

A. Yes. And all the big bosses were protected and if you touch them you would be fired. (Loi, p. 23)

Thus, according to BuuVien, manpower policies were not well suited to bring about maximum mobilization; the high desertion rate (over 100,000 a year) often more than negated the number of new draftees; and the problem of "ghost soldiers" and "pay-roll soldiers" further diminished effective strength and created uncertainty as to how many effectives there really were.

*Lt. General Thinh, Commanding General of the Artillery Command complained the same counterproductive move was made with the artillery units, against his recommendations.
Morale

According to most respondents, the morale of the ARVN soldier was adversely affected by so many factors that one has reason to wonder at times how he was able to fight at all. This holds particularly true for the period when most of the American forces had left, and U. S. military aid was declining in volume. Combat conditions, according to several aforementioned factors, had become much more severe because not only had the umbrella of U. S. air power and artillery support disappeared, but ARVN's own artillery and mortar units were now very severely restricted with regard to the expenditure of ammunition. This led to an increase in combat losses. And, as mentioned earlier, the decline in POL and spares decreased the Med-Evac capabilities to the point where, as General Lam Quang Thi put it, "many soldiers died unnecessarily."

Then, as Buu Vien pointed out above, due to the mobilization system, "a youngster, once drafted, had to stay in the army until he was killed or became too old to fight". Besides, according to Buu Vien, the draft laws were discriminatory. And the war itself certainly gave no promise of early termination.

But there was more. A high-ranking Marine officer who refuses to be quoted said with bitterness:

"Yeah, you are a soldier, you are a squad leader with your squad, and you get the order to defend a hill to the death. You cannot defend to the death, when every week you hear from your family that they don't have enough food to eat. And you look back to Saigon, the rich had food, liquor, they made money, they relax, have a good time. Why fight to the death? For whom?"

According to General Thinh, Commanding General of ARVN artillery, the morale of soldiers was put to a severe test by another factor:

"The principal weakness of the South Vietnamese artillery was the extreme vulnerability of its fire bases. A single enemy mortar shell was enough to set an entire ammunition dump on fire and if the dump exploded the entire position was out of action. ... And frequently the fall of the artillery
positions led to the defeat of the units which they supported." (Thinh, p. 8)

The Remote Commanders

Also, one of the more important factors in maintaining the morale of soldiers, the proximity and direct leadership of competent and courageous commanders, was often absent, according to General Lam Quang Tho.

"Having at their disposition the most modern means of communication and transportation, signal equipment and helicopters, the field commanders, while being able to control a larger operational zone, did not have to stay constantly with their troops. They therefore failed to identify with their units, and the 'esprit de corps' suffered greatly. The commanders lost the feeling for the battlefield and for their own troops, mentally and physically. (Lam Quang Tho, p. 17)

Aside from having adverse consequences on the conduct of the war in general ("This phenomenon of leaders being so distant] clearly explains the failure of these field commanders to react soundly when facing critical situations, and their reluctance to share dangers and hardships with their troops during the communists offensives in 1972 and 1975") the practice depressed morale:

"It was common usage that in case of heavy fighting the commanders took off in their helicopters, leaving the fighting to the troops on the ground. This had a very negative effect on troop morale. In such situations, the physical presence of the commander is greatly needed, yet the troops rarely saw their commander, they only saw his helicopter high above them, or heard only his voice through the highly sophisticated communications system. Thus the image of the commander became something very remote and very unreal to the troops. The performance of units greatly suffered from this. ...Especially in an Oriental society where the prestige, the bravery and the wisdom of the leader are of the highest importance, these negative characteristics of leadership were very detrimental." (Lam Quang Tho, p. 18)
Finally, there are questions as to the proficiency of the soldiers in combat on the basis of the training they had received. From what respondents report, the various military schools were uneven in quality, and disadvantaged by inter-service rivalries. These rivalries are said to have had the effect that soldiers were rarely trained for interservice operations, whereas most actual operations were precisely of such a nature. Corruption, too, was said to have played a part in schools not being as good as they should have been. And yet another factor seems to have played a negative role: Both General Thi and General Lam Quang Tho report that the leadership of service schools in South Vietnam was a sort of elegant exile for unwanted commanders of often limited competence.

Thus, the ARVN soldier, from what some of the witnesses say, did not generally have the confidence of his being well trained which is one of the strongest underpinnings of high morale. One respondent reports that Prime Minister Khiem once told him "sadly": "Every time the Vietnamese soldier leaves the highway he seems to get lost." But field commanders sometimes tend to disagree with this assessment and state that the ARVN soldier was in fact reasonably well trained.

Psywar

"Indoctrination" which apparently played such a big part in the strong performance of the enemy soldiers, was another problem. There was a small Psywar school which was expanded in 1967 into the Political Warfare College.

"But until the end of the war this college was still trying to find a logical doctrine... In the Republic of China where the single party system prevails...the single party system would expand its control within the armed forces organizations through the Political Warfare Officers...But Vietnam was different...While the regime in Vietnam was hardly ideally democratic, it was far from being totalitarian. And the Political Warfare Command's Organization was not affiliated with any political part....Therefore the 'raison d'etre' of the whole organization could not really be seen."

(Tho, p. 6)

From statements by Bui Diem and others it sometimes appears as though there was a certain confusion in South Vietnam as to what
psywar really meant; whether it meant psychological operations against the enemy or indoctrination of friendly troops for the purpose of raising morale.* Some commanders apparently took it upon themselves to introduce special efforts to answer at least some of the troops' questions. Colonel Truong Tan Thuc, deputy commander of the elite First Infantry Division in I Corps reports on such activities, also shedding an interesting light on the concerns of the combat soldiers.

"I conducted a class called, Personal Problems and Questions and Answers. I was enthusiastic but also apprehensive because some of the soldiers' questions related to the "Corruption Chain" from the Central Government to the units in the field. The soldiers knew for sure that I knew more than they did. (Thuc, p. 7)

Thuc then relates that at the time he was conducting these classes, a local newspaper had accused the commanding general of the 1st Division of serious corruption. When Thuc held the next session, the soldiers asked:

1. We, as soldiers in the field, know that you are not involved. But what do you think of this affair?

2. If the general was not involved...why did he not sue the newspaper for insult to his person?

3. We, soldiers in the field, are supposed to receive 15 days of free C rations per month. Why was this recently cut down to 7 or 8 days per month?

4. A certain number of wounded soldiers in the field lost their lives because they were not evacuated to the hospital in time. Why was that?

I could answer only questions 3 and 4, according to staff information. Questions 1 and 2, I invited my superior answer the next day. (With regard to question 3) I said the stocks have dwindled that were left behind by the U. S. Forces. (Since one year before the fall of Vietnam, the C rations were 'money in hand' for the commander. When the commander needed something -- for his unit or his private purpose -- his headquarters company used the C rations). (With regard to question 4) I said I don't know exactly the percentage of wounded soldiers who died because of lack of

*Both were also under the same command.
medical evacuation. I don't have any statistics, but I'm sure there were many." (Thuc, p. 9)

General Thuc says he then made valiant efforts to give cogent explanations for this circumstance, primarily on the grounds of technical and terrain problems. He then reports what the principal complaints of the soldiers voiced during his sessions were: "The first related to clothing, salary and drugs. The second related to complaints by soldiers who had not received any annual leave after 12 months in the field, including emergency leave. The third related to spoiled C rations." (Thuc, p. 10). This summation should not create the impression, however, that the soldiers were not also very interested in the military situation and the operations they were called upon to conduct. Colonel Thuc reports that he discussed impending operations with his soldiers in detail, and that subsequently they took pride in executing what they "had planned with their Boss. It is known that the enemy made extensive use of this practice (Sandbox), apparently with good success. To what extent other commanders followed Colonel Thuc's practice as a morale booster does not emerge from what the respondents say.

Apparently the South Vietnamese Army, unlike their enemy, the NVA, did not have morale redressing and maintaining systems such as the 3 men cell or the Khien Tao (Criticism-Self criticism) which were practiced across the board by the NVA, seemingly with considerable success. It may be added here that respondents have little to say on the subject of enemy morale. Some consider it good, but other add their version of: "The enemy was not ten feet tall". One prominent division commander says that the enemy soldiers, once captured, were just bedraggled and underage boys. "But while in the system they were different and very effective". (Minh, p. 5)

Despite the grave impediments on the ARVN soldiers morale, including -- and this has not been mentioned so far -- his catastrophic financial situation due to galloping inflation which forced him to hustle and moonlight to feed his family, the ARVN soldier's morale
was reported to be remarkably high in some places, at some time periods, and in some units. This seems confirmed by the fighting he did during the enemy offensive in 1972 and during the fighting in 1973 and 1974 which was quite bloody. He is said to have fought heroically at An Loc in 1972 and, in ARVN's last battle, at Xuan Loc in 1975. Respondents report that during inspection tours, in 1974 many soldiers evinced very high morale, and that in 1975 many soldiers were ready to fight and were bitterly disappointed that they did not get an opportunity to confront the enemy. Some, according to Colonel Duong Tai Dong, "pleaded with tears in their eyes for a chance to fight".

The Collapse of Morale

Yet, like all else in Vietnam under the impact of the last enemy offensive in 1975, the soldier's morale also collapsed.

In brief, from what the respondents report, three factors were primarily responsible for that.

First, there was what the last Prime Minister Nguyen Ba Can called the complete "psychological collapse" that hit everyone, from Thieu on down to the last soldier and civilian, because "the war had lasted too long, had been too costly, and had offered too few prospects of favorable termination."

Then there was the fact, stressed particularly by Marshal Ky but also by others, that the commanders, whether on Thieu's order or on their own, had refused to fight and in fact abandoned their units in many cases.
Finally there was the circumstance that the advancing enemy had begun to swamp the areas where the soldiers' families lived. At that point most soldiers apparently deserted, not so much to save their own lives as to save the lives of their families that were now endangered by the enemy who was only too well remembered for what he had done at Hue during the Tet offensive in 1968.*

One observer summarized the eventual collapse of morale by recalling that it had been undermined by South Vietnam's history of political instability, coups and the frustrations of war, and that inflation in particular had affected the morale of the officers, NCOs and soldiers, many of whom were living at bare subsistence levels; and he concluded by saying "the war had gone on too long and there had been too many deaths -- every Vietnamese family had lost someone." Therefore, he said, the collapse was "really not all that sudden". (Hinh, p. 1) What had perhaps been most demoralizing of all was everyone's conviction that "the enemy would never give up."

*These desertions illustrate perhaps what was said by some Vietnamese respondents: that the American way of seeing and conducting the war, and of training ARVN in their image, was not well suited for the war in Vietnam. But it was not so much that Americans were thinking in terms of conventional war that clashed with the realities of the situation. Rather, U. S. fighting doctrines and methods were designed to fight wars abroad, not at home amidst one's own civilian population. Just as the intense use of firepower in-country apparently proved to be counterproductive, in the opinion of some, the presence of soldiers' families in contested areas proved to be a fatal morale hazard for ARVN troops. U. S. concern for the morale of the fighting man centers around treatment, weapons, rotation, support, R & R and similar considerations, but not his family, which is assumed to be living safely at home while he fights abroad. This was not the situation of the ARVN soldiers, however. And the enemy was presumably fully cognizant of the hazards for ARVN (and opportunities for himself), of fighting in-country.
BALANCE OF FORCES BEFORE THE 1975 OFFENSIVE

In the minds of most of the South Vietnamese respondents, the balance of military forces was much to their disadvantage in the beginning of 1975. Buu Vien says:

"When the Communists decided on waging their final war against the Republic of Vietnam in the Spring of 1975, they knew, and the rest of the world knew, that their military forces were by far stronger than those of the RVN." (Buu Vien, p. 24)

Armed Forces Strength

On paper, ARVN had eleven infantry divisions, one Marine and one Airborne division, some Ranger Forces and armored units, and a considerable number of Regional and Popular Forces. All this added up, on paper, to 1.1 million men under arms. The enemy had an estimated 13 divisions and special units (Engineers, AA) in and around South Vietnam, and estimated 7 reserve divisions in the North. Buu Vien comments:

"At the time the cease-fire was signed in 1973, there was an estimated force of 300,000 North Vietnamese troops in South Vietnam, besides the local troops belonging to the National Liberation Front...the 300,000 never went back to North Vietnam. On the contrary, by systematically violating the cease-fire agreement, the (enemy) quietly infiltrated more of their troops into South Vietnam. The exact figure is not known, but it could not have been under the 100,000 mark. By the time of South Vietnam's final collapse, Saigon alone was surrounded by 17 NVA divisions." (Buu Vien, p. 25)

Even though there may not be too great a discrepancy between the respective forces on the simple basis of numbers (even with such massive infiltration and invasion, the enemy had fewer troops in South Vietnam than ARVN), the balance was in favor of the enemy when we consider that, presumably, the enemy's troops had a very high ratio of actual combat soldiers among them, whereas ARVN not only had a very considerable "tail," but its effective strength also was far below the official strength figure due to the "ghost soldiers" and the continuing heavy desertion rate. When asked what the actual effective combat strength of ARVN was
at the time, General Tran Van Don replied:

A. "It will surprise you to learn exactly how many fighters (ARVN actually had). One hundred thousand. I don't call them fighters when they belong to the logistical units."

Q. "You had a one million man army but only one hundred thousand fighters?"

A. "Yes." (Don, p. 60)

The comparative weakness of ARVN becomes even more apparent when it is considered that its mission was radically different from that of the enemy: Whereas ARVN was spread extremely thin in accordance with the defensive strategy still prevailing on the eve of the big offensive, the enemy was free to concentrate his forces and attack at will. He was doubly free to do so, as ARVN did not have the capability to interfere with his massive staging activities along South Vietnam's western borders.

General Thi reports that a communist document captured in 1972 stated that "Saigon's infantry + American Fire Power = National Liberation Front's Army." Thi, agreeing with this formula, adds, "In this rough equation, if one were to take out the American fire power, we can immediately see the results." (Thi, pp. 3/4) Subsequently, when discussing the battle of An Loc in 1972, where valiant fighting by ARVN, supported by American B-52s, defeated the enemy, Thi established his own formula: "Saigon's infantry + American Fire Power > NLF's Army." (Thi, p. 10) What Thi tries to emphasize here is what virtually all respondents emphasized, that in their estimation it was mainly due to the B-52s that the 1972 enemy offensive could be contained; and most respondents seemed to think that the 1975 offensive could also have been contained had B-52s been available.

It is not clear, however, what precisely could have alleviated ARVN's manpower shortage which manifested itself most clearly in the lack of mobile reserves, whereas the enemy had at least five reserve divisions and perhaps as many as seven. General Truong reports that ARVN had tried to activate more divisions after the Paris Agreements, but that the Americans had vetoed this, partly—according to the respondents—
because the U.S. did not want to equip such new divisions. On the other hand, according to manpower expert Buu Vien, it did not seem possible to draft even more men than ARVN already had, or, under prevailing manpower policies, to stem the large desertions. Presumably, the ARVN force posture could have been drastically changed as some of the more imaginative colonels suggested (see above), so that a large mobile striking force could have been created. That, however, clashed with Thieu's policies of defending all territories which tied down more men than would have been available if such mobile strike forces had been created. Thieu's policy, in turn, was not regarded as mere obstinacy by some staff officer by who, as we have seen, said they could see the political necessity for it. One possible alternative for redressing the unfavorable manpower balance, at least in theory, was Tran Van Don's view that a "people's army" would have had to be created, which in his opinion would have been possible only if the people, as a result of widespread social reforms, would have been truly drawn into this war. But such reforms, as he saw them, would not have been a few changes in the government as were often demanded of Thieu by Vietnamese and Americans, but practically a reordering of the entire government and its domestic policies.

Whether or not any of the above would have been possible, it did not take place, and as a result ARVN was clearly inferior in "foxhole strength" when the big push came, according to the respondents.

Even assuming that the regular infantry divisions were not understrength, their defensive missions were in the view of the respondents far too large for them. This seemed to be especially true of II Corps which had only two infantry divisions for its defense, the 22nd and 23rd, thereby making the strategically vital Central Highlands a most inviting target for the enemy who did in fact launch his offensive there. But the five divisions defending I Corps, in the view of its commander, General Truong, were also spread too thin. This had prompted Truong to design an emergency strategy whereby in case of need he would withdraw into three enclaves (Danang, Hue, and Chu Lai), as he felt he could not hold the entire area in case of attack (Dang, p. 3). As it turned out later, he did not even have the manpower or logistics to follow this plan of rather radical surgery (see below, Part II).
The Enemy Build-Up

If ARVN, according to the respondents, was facing big manpower problems in its final battles with the enemy, its logistic problems were, if anything, even greater. The reason given was that two obverse trends had taken place since the Paris Agreements: the enemy's logistical position had greatly improved while ARVN's had greatly deteriorated.

Colonel Do Ngoc Nhan, JGS officer and the last Chief of Staff in April 1975, says:

"Let's read the report from the South Vietnam Central Intelligence Organization to the South Vietnamese military delegation in late 1974: 'While the U.S. has reduced its aid to SVN, the Soviet Union had doubled its assistance to NVN to 1.5 billion dollars. The Communists have used 30,000 prisoners released by SVN to reinforce their units. At the same time, about 100,000 cadres and soldiers have infiltrated SVN using the Ho Chi Minh trail and the DMZ. With regard to heavy weapons, the Communists have sent to SVN about 600 tanks, 500 heavy cannons, 200 anti-aircraft SA-2s in addition to what they had. The Communist force has been re-organized on a large scale, now comprising 17 combat divisions, excluding 40,000 NVN troops in Cambodia and 50,000 troops in Laos. Every week, on the expanded Ho Chi Minh trail, 1500 trucks were moved day and night. Their pipeline system constructed to supply gas is now only 80 kilometers from Saigon.'" (Nhan, p. 16)

General Lam Quang Thi makes these observations:

"Air photos also showed unusual activities in Dong Ha which had become the NVN main logistical center, where supplies were brought in from Hanoi by trucks moving down on Highway 1 and also by navy and commercial ships through the strategic port of Cua Viet that we failed to secure. The supply by sea, in fact, had become more important after the Paris agreement. Air reconnaissance had detected a daily average of 10 Hong Ky (Red flag) ships of Red China going through Cua Viet." (Thi, p. 17)

Clearly, one of the most important parts of the build-up were the road-building and pipeline-laying activities by the enemy. To bring down the increased supplies the old Ho Chi Minh trail was apparently no longer adequate, so the enemy constructed what came to be known among ARVN
officers as "Ho Chi Minh East," a modern network of roads that was built at the same time that supplies were being brought south. This new road, according to some of the respondents, not only multiplied the amount of traffic compared to what the old trails could handle but—perhaps even more importantly—dramatically cut the time required to bring men and materiel down, from several months to a matter of days.

General Thi says:

"The Communists (after Paris) began to build a sophisticated net of routes across mountains and creeks to bring supplies all the way to MR III around Saigon. Their engineer units worked feverishly day and night to cut roads through forests and hills. Every day one could hear echoes of detonations beyond the range of mountains to the west of Highway 1. In fact, to build more roads and to speed up the flow of supplies to the south, 3 engineer and transportation divisions were activated. These divisions were under direct control of NVA High Command and were comprised of 4 engineer and 4 transportation regiments each. Not content with the old Ho Chi Minh trail on the Laotian border, they had built a new road east of the Anamite Mountains, running parallel to our Highway 1. This new road, sometimes called 'Ho-Chi-Minh East', permitted the supplies to be brought directly to their troops in the front line. Besides these two roads running southward, they had also built or repaired a sophisticated system of lateral roads which permitted them to bypass and to envelop everyone of our big cities. These included in MR I, just to name a few, the important road which ran from Ashaw valley to the strategic area of Truoi, south of Hue, and all the way south of Hai Van Pass through the Col de Bay; and also the road which linked the Ho Chi Minh trail to Bengiang and Thượng Duc district town, southwest of Danang and to the already mentioned Que Son Valley." (Thi, pp. 15/16)

But the Communist build-up included much more. General Thi continues:

"A system of pipelines was also installed along these roads to provide POL for their mechanized units operating in the south. Dong Ha and Khe Sanh airfields were repaired, and in order to provide protection to these strategic bases, they established around them an interlocking system of antiaircraft weapons. It is significant to note that in Quang Tri province alone, the NVA had 8 antiaircraft regiments whose armaments ranged all the way from 12.7-mm machine guns to SAM missiles. In the last months of 1974, the Communists dramatically increased their logistical activities. Our air
reconnaissances detected convoys of hundreds of Molotovka trucks moving south, day and night, in the area northwest of Pleiku and southwest of Danang. Despite heavy losses inflicted by our airstrikes, they kept moving. In the region northwest of Kontum, in February 1975, VNAF armed reconnaissance detected a convoy of around 400 trucks and reportedly destroyed over 200. These figures might have been inflated, nonetheless they can give an idea of the dramatic improvement in NVA logistical capabilities. It was estimated that in MR I alone, in 1974, over 10,000 tons of supplies (mostly ammunition and food) were infiltrated every month. The Communists had brought into SVN from the moment the Paris Agreement went into effect until the end of 1975 a large quantity of heavy equipment consisting of 1,000 tanks of all types, and more than 600 field artillery pieces. The new weapons and military supplies included improved SA7 rockets, T34 tanks with launchable bridges, 152-mm cannons, and M2 personal carrier towing artillery."

(Thi, p. 16)

The ARVN "Build-Down"

Thus, the enemy effected a build-up after the Paris Agreements that was not only vast in extent but impressive in its multi-faceted nature and in the efficiency and integration of its utilization. In the first place, aid from the Soviet Union, according to the sources, increased greatly in quantity and improved greatly in quality. Second, the enemy dramatically improved his ability to move the supplies and the soldiers where they were needed. Third, he greatly increased his mobility for the battles to come by his new roads and pipeline system. Fourth he strengthened his air defenses to a point where the entire system became virtually invulnerable. Besides, as all respondents talking on the subject agree, he had greatly improved his proficiency in using his equipment, especially armor. ARVN, by contrast, had been faced with a drastic reduction of supplies of every kind, due to the decline in American aid.

There were two types of logistical problems emerging from the study that are quite different. One is insufficient or inadequate hardware. The other is poor administration of that hardware. We have learned little about the latter factor, except that the Chief of the Central Logistics Command, who was simultaneously Chief of Staff, General Dong Van Khuyen, does not receive good marks from the
few of the respondents who talked about him.

The primary source of information on the subject of the supplies themselves was Colonel Pham Ky Loan, deputy commander of the Central Logistics Command.

Colonel Loan began by saying:

"After the Paris Agreement we realized that supplies were going to decline. In the first year, aid was still 1.4 billion. But starting with the next fiscal year it was cut down to half. So at CLC* we tried to submit our recommendations and suggestions to all branches about savings, to try to have everybody make better use of what we had. Our principal emphasis was on ammunition, because from 70 to 80 percent of the funds were used for that.

"Ammunition was running short. As you know, in our situation, beginning '74, the rate of incidents everywhere in the country rose sharply, even—and you may not be aware of that—in the Delta area, so that the need for ammunition was very great. These outposts, when attacked, needed lots of artillery support.

"The second shortage, right after the ammunition shortage in importance, was the shortage of fuel. For the choppers, the fighters, everything. It cut the flying hours in half. Also the C-130s—their flying time had to be cut down in half. This did not happen right after the American withdrawal. It declined gradually, until it was down to half in 1974.

"I discussed this at every one of our weekly meetings with the Americans and General Khuyen. They were all aware of it. The Americans said they would try their best, but on their side they were limited by the available funds. I recognize their efforts, but they had their ceiling and there was nothing they could do about it.

Colonel Loan continued:

"One big trouble we had was spare parts. Mostly for planes. For example, the C-130 we had was the old C-130A. The

*Central Logistics Command
Americans had used them for a long time, but now they no longer use the 130-As. So it was really hard to get all the spare parts for the older model. We had thirty C-130s, but the average daily number we could actually use—and I know this very well because I controlled them—was five. Five planes out of two squadrons of thirty! The spare parts would eventually be supplied, but as they were not in manufacture anymore it took a long time to make them. So here we did not just have problems because of money, but technical problems too. So, most of the C-130s were grounded most of the time.

"Anyway, we tried to stretch what we had and spend it as wisely as we could. As you know, all our requests had to go through the Defense Attache's Office for screening. Most of the time he okayed our requests. But even if he okayed the request, we often did not get it. The request would go to Okinawa or some other place.

"To repeat: In the beginning the trouble was with spare parts, ammunition, POL. I personally headed a lecture team that went to every Corps command in 1974. The lectures were to be attended by the Corps commander and his deputy and all high-ranking officers, to tell them how tight the situation was and what to do to save ammunition, etc. But whatever system we advocated, it created big problems for the field commanders. As for their ASR (average supply rate), we generally gave them half of what they asked for—the created big problems for them. Of course, it really created two problems: a tactical problem, and a morale problem for the troops who don't like to fight with insufficient ammunition. This was aggravated by the lack of fuel which cut down the flying hours of the planes so that the field units relied even more heavily on artillery support.

*According to General Lam Quang Thi, Deputy Commander of I Corps, this was the situation in his area:

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<tr>
<th>Caliber</th>
<th>Average ASR in 1972</th>
<th>Average ASR in 1975</th>
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<tr>
<td>105</td>
<td>180</td>
<td>10</td>
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<tr>
<td>155</td>
<td>150</td>
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<td>175</td>
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"What was particularly aggravating was that with supplies being given out monthly, things were often in particularly short supply—or totally lacking—after around the 25th of the month. And the enemy knew this, of course, and took advantage of it.... Take the M-16. Soldiers going into combat regularly receive 400 rounds. But with the ammo shortage this had to be cut down to 200. That reduced his fighting capability and his morale. Particularly because we had trained our soldiers to conduct the war American style. As a result, every soldier confronted with the enemy requested air support and/or artillery support. In addition, our helilift became increasingly restricted. So soldiers had to walk—it was the only way. And they didn't like that, for sure. Meanwhile, the other side was used to all this.

Colonel Loan continued his catalogue of problems:

"In order to preserve ammunition, and money, we eliminated in '74 everything except HE. (We didn't use flares, illuminating shells, etc. They cost too much money. We could no longer afford to shoot illuminating flares. The POL shortage was mostly of GB4, the stuff used by choppers and fighter planes. With regard to spare parts, the hardest hit, aside from the C-130s, were the choppers, the Chinooks. Then there was a bad shortage of artillery tubes. APCs, also. There was a shortage of M16 barrels. We had to use the old 235 rocket launcher and the M76 as an antitank weapon. Those were WW-II weapons, you should be aware of that. You can see it there in all the movies [laughs].

The enemy, according to Loan, knew what was going on:

"The NVA were definitely aware of our strapped situation. They knew about the troubles we had with military aid. We were not able to repair the APCs or the M48 tank. We had to send them to the states to rebuild them. But the Americans asked us to send along the BIIL—the Basic Issues Items List—that means all the damaged equipment that comes with the main item, such as radio equipment or gun mounts. We tried our best to send back all this equipment with all these BIILs; but most of the time the pieces had been lost in combat, and when they rebuilt the (tanks) they sent (them) back to us without these special items. Because that was then an unsolicited piece of equipment, so we didn't get it. Also, it took a very long time to ship the equipment to the U. S. and get it back. Months and months. There were not enough ships coming to Vietnam.
Loan then mentioned Navy Supplies

"I was in charge of supplies for the Navy, too. The Navy was also in bad shape from the point of view of supplies. The worst was that they lost the mobility of their small craft that had been very useful to patrol on the rivers. They were short of fuel, but short of spare parts, too. Ammunition was okay, because their needs were limited. But POL and spare parts were bad.

Besides, says Loan much of the American equipment was too sophisticated.

"The M48 tank, for example. The firing devices. You could count on your fingers the men who could really operate and especially repair them. Mostly these tanks had to be sent back to the U.S. for repair. We had some U.S. advisors and Filipino repairmen, but even so it was just too complicated. Even the M16 rifle. Do you know that you had to use three different types of oil to grease them? If you compare that with the AK47! Much simpler to maintain, and very good for firing. And then there was some equipment that we really did not need. For example, the 8-inch gun. We had three battalions of these. They were much too big. That gun could fire 30 kilometers, but we never knew whether it hit the target or not. Just "flying blind." Maybe the Americans just left it in VN because they did not want to move such heavy equipment back to the U.S. Then the TOW missile. Too expensive--one cost $3000. And it did not do much for us.

But did not the enemy have some quite sophisticated equipment, too?

"Well, the SAM-7 was quite simple. And their heat-seeking devices were very simple. The TOW just wasn't right for our troops. The best was the M72, one of your best weapons, and that we ran out of. They were good antitank weapons. The 105 and 155 were very good weapons. The enemy had still better weapons, though. One weapon our troops were most scared of were the 130s. They can fire further than the 105s and they are devastating in the impact area.

Loan then made some several general remarks

"U.S. aid should have been consistent. Supporting a one-million army and having to fight the enemy, we had to worry all the time about money. We were never sure what we would get or how much--how could we plan? I think President Thieu made the point to President Nixon when he saw him at San Clemente, to have a three-year military aid
program amount to 3 or 4 billion, a long-term commitment. But you could not give such a commitment because of your internal laws, the Congress. Consistency would also have helped our morale.* And one more thing: [you] should have been more patient. The enemy is very patient. One more thing. Most of our available military transportation was needed for resupply. But we couldn't use it that way. We had to use it to carry troops, and we used up POL in the process. Also, the M60 is a good truck, but we did not have enough of them for both purposes.

Colonel Loan then concluded with some striking figures.

"I have some figures here. The U. S. spent $150 billion on the war. But look at it this way: it spent only about one and a half million dollars a day on ARVN after 1972. That is very little if you consider that you were supporting a force of one million men. It is hardly more than one dollar a day per man. Not enough. Especially if that force is equipped just like the U. S., as far as weapons and materiel is concerned. It is hard to support that one and a half million a day. In 1974, when aid went down by 50 percent, incidents went up, they almost doubled. At that time over 50 percent of the aid went for ammo. But the decline in the dollar amount for ammo did not reflect the actual decline. The actual decline was much greater, because in '74 the price of brass went up by about 20 percent.** (Loan, pp. 3-12)

Artillery

ARVN artillery on the whole receives good marks from witnesses. The morale and schooling of its soldiers was described as higher on the average than in other services, and the men were described as battle-hardened and able, at least by their own commanders.

*In this connection, General Thi pointed to the imbalance in military aid. Thi says "...for the fiscal year South Vietnam got 300 million dollars in military aid, out of 700 million which had been appropriated by Congress. It is significant ...that Israel got 2.1 billion in military aid during the three week Middle East War in 1973; in other words, South Vietnam in one year got 1/7th of what Israel got in 3 weeks." (Thi, p. 6) By contrast, says Colonel Loan, "Russian aid for North Vietnam in 1975 was over one billion dollars." How does he know? "It's just a guess." (Loan, p. 9)

**The worst blow, however, was the enormous increase in the price of oil, according to several respondents.
Basically, after the Paris Agreements, ARVN artillery was greatly plagued by being pulled in two opposite directions. On the one hand, ARVN, spoiled by lavish American fire support even when confronted with only a few snipers, was now left without it and expected ARVN artillery to take up the slack. But at the same time ammunition stocks declined and orders were given to preserve ammunition. In fact, quota systems were established, which President Thieu—at least in some official meetings—personally opposed "angrily", on the ground that the soldiers should get their ammunition according to need, not quota. However, in the field, the quota system was observed to some extent, allegedly with adverse consequences on the effectiveness of the artillery, the morale of artillery soldiers and also the soldiers of infantry units the artillery was to protect.

"While in 1972 we could shoot an unlimited number of artillery rounds (provided that the rate of fire was not too fast to damage the bore of the tube)," writes one commander, "in 1975 the average available supply rate (ASR) was less than 10 percent of what we fired in 1972." (Thi, p. 6)

General Thinh, Commanding General of the Artillery Command in the JGS, says there always were complaints by ground commanders about reduction of support missions by the Air Force, and the conclusion generally was that artillery should be used instead. But even when sufficient shells were available to step up artillery activity, this was against JGS directives. In order to relieve insufficient artillery support, some infantry units then tried using their mortars more than before, only to discover that mortar shells were even more restricted. (Thinh, p. 8)

(It is well known that vast stocks of ammunition eventually fell into enemy hands in 1975. Respondents see no contradiction between this and their claim that ammunition was insufficient. Their

*Actually, some other witness report that the reductions, though drastic, were not quite that severe.
explanation is that these stocks were reserves which could not be used up as long as the war was expected to go on. In fact, conflicts arose toward the end between some field commanders who wanted to use all available ammunition in "go-for-broke" fashion, and logistics personnel who wanted to keep observing the quota system and to hold stocks in reserve.)

At the same time, the enemy artillery was said to have been very effective, especially the Russian 130-mm piece. Though its range was, at 27 km, 5 km less than the big American 175-mm, it was simpler and more manageable, and was used to good advantage by the enemy. However, according to witnesses, the enemy artillerists were no supermen and not necessarily better than their ARVN counterparts. The reasons for the tremendous difference in effect was due to the nature of the war: ARVN had very few lucrative targets (only enemy positions), and great difficulty in acquiring them, but for the enemy, SVN was just a mass of lucrative targets—almost everything from buildings to depots, from storage tanks to airfields, from headquarters to civilian installations. Finally, under JGS pressure, ARVN artillery was to some extent reorganized in 1974 to the detriment of efficiency, according to its commander. (Thinh, p. 10) General Thinh was opposed to the change and thought that it was wasteful and ill-conceived.

As regards specific operations, Colonel Duong Thai Dong, the deputy chief of ARVN artillery, reported that sensors did not appreciably enhance ARVN capabilities on the contrary.

"Thanks to captured enemy soldiers, we learned that the enemy was well aware of our (use of sensors). Every time enemy troops found our sensors dropped to the ground by air, they picked them up, but instead of destroying them they left them in open fields with branches and trees...around them. At night, strong winds blowing through the open fields would rattle the leaves of those branches...and produce effects upon the sensors which would be picked up in the central station as information, and thus caused us to waste our ammunition." (Dong, p. 18)