pendent upon and worried about Moscow's and Peking's present and future assistance. The balance of the contending forces, when factors of morale and organization as well as numbers of men and amounts of equipment are taken into consideration, is roughly even. A Communist member of the moribund International Commission of Control and Supervision commented recently, "One side is not strong enough to win, and the other is not weak enough to lose"—references to Hanoi and Saigon, respectively—which seemed to me as cogent a summation as any I have heard.

During the conversations that President Ford and Secretary of State Henry Kissinger had last month with the Russians in Vladivostok and that Kissinger had with the Chinese in Peking, the Communists were again asked to urge the North Vietnamese to return to the peace table to work out further steps toward a long-term settlement. The Americans held considerably less leverage this time, though, than when we were still fully engaged. There are now only seventy-four hundred Americans here, of whom sixteen hundred are official employees—just a hundred and forty-one of them military—and the rest are hired government contractors and miscellaneous civilians and their dependents. Besides, other issues—notably the Middle East, nuclear disarmament, oil, and international trade—are now higher on the agenda of matters to be discussed with the Communist powers. Even so, the competing objectives of the Russians and the Chinese—and, to a somewhat lesser extent, of the Americans—on the Asian continent are still a most vital matter, and Vietnam is still the key to the Asian equation. Whatever compromises may now have been reached by the big powers on the Vietnam question will go a long way toward determining what happens when peace talks resume, possibly early next year. At that time, President Thieu has hinted, he will go further than he has ever yet gone in offering the Provisional Revolutionary Government of South Vietnam, Hanoi's Southern arm, a chance to discuss seriously the political future of the country. Though the P.R.G. declared in a radio broadcast in October that it will not talk with Thieu as long as he remains in power, there is no reason to believe that the Communists mean it any more seriously now than they did before they negotiated in Paris, when they said the same thing. If whatever Thieu offers is good enough, they will certainly discuss it—even if, as before, they continue to talk and fight at the same time.

The substance of a Thieu offer would probably be as follows: The South Vietnamese will agree to the establishment of firm demarcation lines and what amount to buffer zones between the opposing parties—as has been done in Laos, where, so far, similar arrangements are working. The Saigon government will also finally agree to the setting up of a tripartite National Council of National Reconciliation and Concord, as outlined in the original Paris accord, giving equal voices to the Communists, the Thieu government, and a supposedly neutral element, whose members are to be approved by the two other factions. The P.R.G. will, in effect, be acknowledged as the pro-tem government of part of South Vietnam in its own right, with a recognized capital in Loc Ninh, near the Cambodian border—cessations that the Communists desperately want, along with recognition of the legal status of their own armed forces. The concept of holding general elections involving both Communist and non-Communist factions will be accepted by Saigon for the first time, looking toward the eventual selection of a new National Assembly, and also, perhaps, a Constituent Assembly, to write a new constitution.

So far, feelers sent out to the Communists suggesting a return to the peace table have elicited no response, so they have not yet had a chance to hear Thieu's new proposals, but Communist intraparty communications have indicated more of a willingness than previously to discuss concrete new peace arrangements. When the Paris agreement was signed, in January, 1973, it was almost immediately apparent that neither side was prepared to talk seriously about a permanent settlement. The fighting in Vietnam scarcely abated as each side violated the ceasefire in an attempt to grab as much contested territory as possible, and fighting has continued at a varying pace ever since, reaching a peak in August and September of this year. After slackening somewhat for two months, it picked up again in the first half of December, partly owing to the annual competition for portions of the new rice harvest. While the Communists have seized more land, notably in the southernmost parts of the Mekong Delta and in the northern tier of the country, they are privately admitting that at this time they control as little as seven per cent of South Vietnam's population of almost twenty million. A few months ago, they were privately claiming twelve per cent, while publicly asserting that they represented a majority of the people.
Their most recent plans, according to orders given to their troops, call for a further stepped-up series of attacks in the next two months, and neither Western nor Vietnamese intelligence sources in Saigon rule out the possibility of a general offensive, within the next twelve months, combining the strategy and tactics of the 1968 Tet offensive and the 1972 Easter offensive—the first of which concentrated on the cities and the second on the countryside. With around three hundred thousand soldiers in the South, about a quarter of them local Vietcong troops and the rest North Vietnamese regulars, and with ample supplies, including tanks and new antiaircraft weapons, the Communists are finally capable of another all-out offensive lasting two or three months, or, alternatively, of maintaining the present pace of fighting for four or five years. The level of military activity in the months ahead thus might well depend on the peace talks, if they start in earnest. If Hanoi, which has plenty of economic and morale problems of its own, can buy time by getting the P.R.G. legalized, and thus preparing the groundwork for a coalition government, it will probably do so; if the talks fail to get off the ground, the second option—another full-scale attack—will in all likelihood be chosen.

Despite the continued military threat, this is the first time since the Paris conference that the Thieu government, its local nationalist opposition, and the Communists all seem inclined to strike a bargain that could, in the immediate future, bring about a temporary peace and a legitimate, peaceful political contest in the South. It is interesting to note that while some degree of de facto accommodation between elements of the opposing sides has always existed in the Delta, a similar development is now taking place in the Central Highlands and in some of the coastal areas of central Vietnam. A softening of anti-Communist attitudes has derived from mounting resentment against Thieu and against official corruption, and from widespread economic distress, which has affected everyone from the civilian population to the men in Saigon’s armed forces, who have had to cope with shortage of everything from ammunition to helicopters; because of the fuel crisis and a lack of spare parts, the total number of helicopter missions throughout the country, for example, has dropped in the past few months from sixteen thousand a month to three thousand, while transport planes and fighter-bombers have also been flying far fewer missions. As the soldiers have become more apathetic, they and their families have privately come to terms with Communist forces in the hamlets and villages, agreeing not to fight, and even making deals for Vietcong cooperation in hunting deer and other animals for food or for sale in the cities. Communist officials have raised no objections to this low-level process of accommodation, and to me such inevitable developments have always seemed the best way to make progress toward peace.

As has been true of the opposition to President Park Chung Hee, in South Korea, and President Ferdinand E. Marcos, in the Philippines, the movement against Thieu has been led largely by militant Catholic clerics and laymen—at least, so far. This is truly remarkable in South Vietnam, for not only are the Catholics, a minority of two million (mostly refugees who fled North Vietnam after the end of the French Indo-China war, in 1954) but the national government has been dominated by Catholics for most of the last two decades—first in the regime of Ngo Dinh Diem, between 1955 and 1963, and since 1967 in that of Thieu. Last June, taking their cue from recent Vatican declarations emphasizing peace and deploving social evils, and from statements by South Vietnam’s fifteen-member Council of Bishops, which, in the fall of 1973 and early in 1974, warned that “this country may be led to ruin by corruption, particularly when corruption is carried out by those in power,” a group of priests, under the leadership of Father Tran Huu Thanh, a fifty-nine-year-old Redemptorist priest in Saigon, launched the People’s Anti-Corruption Movement. The movement was encouraged by several of the more militant bishops—especially Bishop Nguyen Van Nghi, of the Saigon diocese—who, in turn, had the support of the highest-ranking prelate in the country, Archbishop Nguyen Van Binh. In September, following a series of seminars and meetings at parishes in Saigon and Hue which enabled Father Thanh and his supporters to obtain the signatures of three hundred and one priests out of a total of seventeen hundred in the country upon a “Manifesto Against Corruption, Injustice, and Social Decadence”—in essence, a generalized attack on the Thieu regime—the movement issued a more specific manifesto, “Indictment Number One.”

The indictment, the full text of which was published by three Saigon newspapers (the day’s issues were swiftly confiscated), was directed primarily against corrupt practices that Thieu, members of his family, and his small, closely knit
entourage were alleged to have engaged in. It accused Theiu of making huge
profits from real-estate deals; of condoning speculative fertilizer deals engineered
by his wife's brother; of permitting his wife to make huge profits from a private
hospital in Saigon that she had ostensibly built to help the poor; of allowing some
of his closet military and civilian associates to profit from a vast heroin traffic—in
which, it was suggested, he may have had a share; and of closing his eyes to
corrupt rice trading in central Vietnam that was conducted in part by his aunt,
whose son Hoang Duc Nha, until recently Minister of Information, was one of
his top advisers.

So far, none of these charges have been proved, but Theiu who has himself
condemned the present widespread corruption as "a national calamity and
shame," has made no real effort to answer them. He has simply declared them to be
"smoke screens, fabricated charges entirely forged, and totally groundless slander," and though he is known to have stopped National Assembly committees from
investigating some of the allegations, he has said that "if my relatives or my
wife or children are corrupt or violate the law, let the law deal with them. I will
do not take up their defense or condone [their offenses]. In an effort to seize a
reformer's role in the campaign against corruption, he dismissed three hundred
and seventy-seven officers of the armed forces from their current jobs, but many
or most of them, including three corps commanders, have simply been transferred
to other posts.

The corps commanders were put in charge of training camps for newly in­
ducted soldiers, and some of the other officers, ironically, were assigned to the
Inspector General's Department, which investigates charges of corruption in
the armed forces. In addition, in an effort to satisfy the demands that he reor­
ganize and cleanse the government. Thieu forced the resignation of Nha and three
other top ministers—those in charge of trade and industry, of finance, and of
agriculture. As it happened, all four men, in fact, whatever their personal faults,
were among the more able in the government. Thieu and his Prime Minister
Tran Thien Khiem, offered the posts to members of the opposition, who refused
them, and at the end of November, after five weeks of maneuvering, and a partial
reorganization of Cabinet functions, the jobs were assigned to ranking civil ser­
vants—a move that did nothing to resolve the political situation and left things
much as they were. Moreover, the controversial Nha will probably continue to
advise Thieu.

All this has naturally pleased the Communists, and must make them ponder
further the question of whether to negotiate with Thieu now or wait until the
burgeoning nationalist third force grows stronger or until the possibility of Thieu's
leaving office becomes a probability. Thieu is alternating an attitude of defensive­
ness with one of toughness and bravado. In two recent speeches, he has spoken
of "my last year in office," asserted that it was "not important" whether he was
President any longer but only that the South remain "in the hands of the national­
ists"—i.e., anti-Communists—and said, "Please do not worry about me hence­
forth." Presidential elections are scheduled for next October, following elections
for the House of Representatives, and speculation about whether Thieu will run
again has consequently become a favorite pastime in Saigon's rumor-filled coffee
and noodle shops.

In his tougher moments, by contrast, Thieu has said that he will never give
up as long as he feels it his duty to continue leading the crusade against the
Communists. At the end of October, he ordered his plainclothes police to break
up an all-night vigil of Father Thanh's movement at the Tan Sa Chau parish
church on the outskirts of Saigon, and during the melee seventy-five people were
injured and Father Thanh was shoved to the ground. Two weeks later, Thieu,
addressing a group at the Information Ministry, warned Catholic demonstrators
to stay in their churches, Buddhists to stay in their pagodas, and opposition
assemblymen to stay in the House and in the Senate, where they enjoy immunity.
In an even tougher speech the same day to seventy-eight government deputies,
he said he would use tanks if he had to in order to force the assemblymen to
believe. He warned, as he has done repeatedly, of plots by the Communists and
the "colonialists"—by which he apparently means the French (although he was
once a French mercenary soldier himself) and, obliquely, the Americans, who
he feels have let him down—to take over Vietnam, and cited as an example
what happened in Chile. There is no doubt that in his efforts to discount the
opposition movements by calling them names Thieu is trying to conceal his fear
of them, and although this does not mean he won't run for reelection—dictators
seldom give up easily—my own hunch is that he is scanning all the probabilities and will retire gracefully if he can. If he does, he will want to go out a hero, and he could best do that by obtaining, or at least arranging for, a settlement that, while giving the Communists a minority voice in the government, would preserve the legality of the seven-year-old Second Republic.

Despite the violations of liberty in South Vietnam, including the mistreatment of prisoners and what at best amounts to limited freedom of the press, the regime prides itself on the legitimacy it derives from the constitution adopted, under American pressure, in 1967. The American diplomats now say, in a somewhat fateful defense of Thieu, that they are neither for nor against his running again—though he made such an eventuality possible only by forcing through the National Assembly last January an amendment to permit a third term. Still, the United States prides itself on having fostered that legitimacy, such as it is, and the American are therefore against Thieu's resigning before the next election—which is what the opposition is now demanding. The more practical members of the opposition, and some American officials, too, would prefer to see him clear the air by announcing straightforwardly that he won’t run in 1976, and that he will meanwhile devote himself to cleaning up the government as best he can and preparing the way for a proper and orderly succession, based on a well-run election.

Among the uncertainties of that election, in addition to the status of Thieu, of further peace negotiations, and of the military situation, is that of the new nationalist movement, which is still divided and amorphous. Though in many ways the nationalist movement is more reminiscent of that in 1945 and 1946, when everyone was against the French, than of that in 1963 and 1966, when the Buddhists were alone in fighting the government, it has so far shown only tentative signs of solidifying. Both Catholics and Buddhists are still debating their own problems of policy and organization, and, while maintaining some liaison, are still cautious and suspicious of each other’s motives. Some of the nonreligious leaders and the professional nationalists, such as Tran Quoc Buu, the head of Vietnam’s largest labor organization, are trying to act as conciliators, and as time goes on they are apt to play a more significant role. What is more important, however, is that a number of militant young Catholic priests, young Buddhists, and experienced nonreligious nationalists are working together behind the scenes to create the foundation for a true third force—one that would be dominated by neither the Communists nor the government and would hold a valid balance of power in any election. This sort of quiet and efficient cooperation, again reminiscent of the mid-forties, is something Vietnam could not develop during three decades of war of unrealistic experimentation with imposed Western-style democracy. Potentially, at least, it represents a search for a truly Vietnamese solution, without too much concern over what Americans or any other foreigners think.

Father Thanh, with whom I had several conversations, is an obviously sincere and well-meaning, if somewhat naive, man. One of six children of a mandarin family from central Vietnam, he began organizing youth movements against the Communist Vietminh in Hanoi two years after he was ordained there, in 1943, and fled the city just the day before Ho Chi Minh’s entry in August, 1945. In 1954, he worked with pro-Communist Vietnamese refugees in northeast Thailand and wrote three books, so far unpublished, dealing, respectively, with social justice, education, and psychological warfare. After Diem returned to Vietnam in 1954, Father Thanh was one of six Catholic leaders who helped Diem’s nefarious brother Ngo Dinh Nhu formulate his Vietnamese version of the humanist French social philosophy known as personalisme. Eventually, however, Father Thanh had become disillusioned with the Diem government and went to live and study in Brussels, returning to Vietnam in 1960. For a time, he taught in the national military academy and the defense college and thus has some influence among young Army officers, who, though the Army does not play the political role it once did, could in a crisis lend support to a political movement they felt could avert a Communist takeover.

One of the difficulties that Father Thanh faces is that he is more of a theorist than either a strategist or a tactician. He has surrounded himself with a motley group of clerical and lay advisers who represent every hue of the political spectrum, and include a number of certifiable opportunists—among them former members of the Can Lao, a semi-secret organization that was the backbone of the Diem regime. Also supporting him are members of the old-line nationalist parties, most
notably the secretive Dai Viet, to which one of Thieu's two brothers (and some say Thieu himself) has belonged. After Thieu tried to preempt the corruption issue, Father Thanh decided to come out against the President personally and, instead of merely advocating the reform of the regime, to demand the President's resignation. Though he says that he, too, believes in maintaining the government's legitimacy and its constitutional framework, he has called for the creation of a transitional political council pending new elections, and this council would presumably take the place of a legal succession either by Vice-President Tran Van Huong, who is in fragile health, or, if Huong quit, by Senate President Tran Van Lam (a Catholic), who is not especially popular. None of these solutions would appear to be workable, and they would probably make it easier for the Communists to infiltrate and divide the opposition ranks. In the next few months, Father Thanh told me, he and his group will try to organize support in the provinces, holding meetings in local parishes, particularly in the southern Delta. More demonstrations will also be held in Saigon, in the hope of obtaining greater support from a public that has so far remained both skeptical and scared by Thieu's warnings of a stiffer crackdown on dissenters. One confrontation took place at the end of November and resulted in a fresh outburst of street violence. The Americans, while disavowing allegations that they have secretly backed Father Thanh and other opposition elements, have counselled the President to maintain a strong hand but to be judicious in the use of force and, above all, not to employ American weapons against civilian protesters—something that the opposition has condemned Thieu for doing.

The Buddhists of the An Quang faction, who backed the 1963 overthrow of Diem (only to see his regime ultimately replaced by another Catholic-led one), have been content this time to let the Catholics take the lead in the opposition movement, although Buddhist lay groups have played a major part in the formation of an organization called the National Reconciliation Force, headed by Senator Vu Van Mau. The N.R.F.—whose members have openly designated themselves "the new third force"—is, as its name implies, more directly in favor of reaching an agreement with the Communists according to the terms of the Paris pact. It has held some meetings at the An Quang pagoda and has the personal support there of Thich Tri Quang, the leader of the 1963 revolt. Tri Quang, in fact, helped sponsor the creation of the N.R.F. last August, when his longtime colleague and antagonist, Thich Thien Minh (they have been at odds since their student days, thirty years ago), was in Europe attending a world church conference. Upon his return, Thich Thien Minh was furious. The High Secular Council of the An Quang Unified Buddhist Association is composed of eighteen Buddhist priests, some of whom claim that efforts to heal the breach between the two monks are progressing, yet in numerous talks I had with Buddhist clerical and lay leaders I gathered that the division within An Quang remains deep. Partly for this reason, the Buddhist priests and the Catholic priests have not yet got together. However, Father Thanh and his group have held several friendly discussions with some of the bonzes—notably with Thich Giac Duc, who supervises six Buddhist youth groups—and a new and healthy development has been the presence of several hundred Buddhists at Catholic meetings and a number of Catholics at Buddhist rallies.

Senator Mau and Vo Dinh Cuong, a particularly militant lay leader, who heads the Buddhist Family Organization, the largest of the lay groups, have been travelling around central Vietnam trying to establish provincial branches of the N.R.F., and, like the Catholics, they are now trying to organize in the Delta. For the Buddhists, whose leaders are practically all from central Vietnam, this presents an especially difficult problem, because the bonzes in the south are members of the traditionally apolitical Theravada sect, whereas Buddhists of the central and northern sections of the country belong to the far more numerous and politically militant Mahayana group. The N.R.F. demanded Thieu's resignation before the Catholics did, and want a new constitution written before the next election. Though the N.R.F. plans to hold a national convention by next June, it has a lot of organizational work to do before it can be taken seriously. The present looseness of the group, together with the leftist bent of some of its more vocal and active members, leaves it more open to Communist penetration than Father Thanh's ranks are—a danger of which its leaders profess to be aware and to be guarding against. What both of these overt movements so far lack is a clear policy line, and this is precisely what those more experienced nationalists and younger clerical elements of both religions who are working behind the scenes are trying to formulate. The labor leader Tran Quoc Bun, for his part, is trying
to achieve this objective through the Social Democratic Alliance, in which his Farmer-Worker Party, the Cong Nong, is the most vocal and best organized of seven member groups. Buu, who for the past two years had sought to cooperate with Thieu and to persuade him to adopt social and political reforms, recently made a strong speech to his labor groups denouncing the corruption and social and economic evils that have racked the country under the Thieu regime. He told me the other day he would do his best to consolidate the opposition but would not be a candidate for President, yet there are many observers in Vietnam, including a number of Americans, who regard him as a logical choice to head a ticket next October.

As the political scramble intensifies, there is increasing talk of the possibility of a combined Catholic-Buddhist Presidential ticket next fall. One name being mentioned is that of Justice Tran Minh Tiet, of the Supreme Court, a moderate Catholic, who conceivably might run with Senator Man, though neither of the two is a particularly forceful man. General Duong Van Minh, the nominal leader of the 1963 coup, who was Chief of State and has strong Buddhist support, is still a potential candidate, as he was in 1971, and so is Air Vice-Marshall Nguyen Cao Ky, the former Prime Minister, who has been carefully trying to mend his political fences, particularly with the Buddhists, whom he brutally repressed in 1966. If Thieu does withdraw from the race, Khiem, the present Prime Minister, who has maintained a long-time political marriage of convenience with Thieu, though they are not personally close, would probably run with the approval of both Thieu and the Americans, even though Khiem's family, like Thieu's, has been widely accused of corruption. Not to be discounted, especially if the military and political situations should disintegrate, is a tacit alliance among Khiem: General Cao Van Vien, the Chief of the Joint General Staff; and Marshal Ky. In a crisis, this triumvirate could conceivably take temporary control of the government. Ky is by far the most dynamic personality of the three, and, though a North Vietnamese by birth, he has acquired considerable popularity during his long years in the South. Moreover, he is willing to meet the Communists halfway in tough negotiations.

Although the political situation in South Vietnam shows signs of vitality again for the first time in many years, the economic and social picture is disheartening. The country, like most of the rest of the world, is in a serious recession, and there seems little hope of any real recovery in the near future. Inflation, which increased at a rate of sixty-five per cent in 1973, is running at about forty per cent this year. Purchasing power and consumption have continued to drop, and no one except the very rich has the money to buy anything beyond the bare necessities. There are at least half a million unemployed in a population of twenty million, though their lot is being somewhat improved by a government-sponsored program to put a hundred thousand men to work rehabilitating the cities of Saigon and Danang and constructing irrigation projects nearby. Manufacturing activity has continued to decline in major industries, including textiles, cigarettes, and sugar refining; nevertheless, the country is now self-sufficient in sugar, thanks to increased crops. The production of other crops, including corn, tobacco, and vegetables, has also increased, and the rice harvest, which was up substantially last year, is expected to equal that level, with a crop of seven million tons of paddy predicted for 1974; this would make the country, formerly a rice exporter, almost self-sufficient once more.

The domestic prices of all these products have continued to soar, however. Export earnings have increased, but not as much as expected, owing chiefly to a declining demand for fishery products, especially shrimp, and for lumber and rubber. As a result of harsh austerity measures introduced by former Commerce and Industry Minister Nguyen Duc Cuong, which eliminated virtually all luxury imports and cut back on fuel imports—the local price of petroleum quadrupled during the year—Vietnam's balance-of-payments situation is relatively sound, and its foreign reserves went up from seventy million dollars last April to a hundred and sixty million in November. But, aside from offshore oil exploration, there is virtually no new investment, and inventories are piling up. In the year since I was last here, the shops and restaurants in the downtown Saigon area have become almost empty, and the number of beggars on the streets has increased noticeably. Even in Cholon, the relatively prosperous Chinese section of the capital, the volume of business has declined. The Vietnamese have had one recent stroke of luck: Early in November, one of the American-backed exploration teams struck oil in the South China Sea, with a promised output of fifteen hundred barrels of oil a day, plus a large
amount of natural gas. It will take perhaps another year to determine whether the general area being explored is big enough for a hoped-for production of fifty thousand barrels of oil a day within five years. This and other factors could eventually produce an upturn, but in the meantime the atmosphere of stagnation is pervasive.

This increasingly serious social-economic situation is undoubtedly one reason that the Communists are carefully weighing their options. If they press their military attacks now, while they negotiate, or prior to accepting another ceasefire, they will be in a more advantageous position later, as negotiations come to fruition. In the northern half of South Vietnam, the Communists have almost finished building a new series of connecting roads, which, given their current disposition of forces, all but cut the country in two from the Laotian border to the Central Highlands and then diagonally northward to the coast of Quang Nam Province. They have finished paving the old Ho Chi Minh Trail, using limestone and packed dirt, and have built an oil pipeline that runs all the way from North Vietnam to Quang Duc Province, northeast of Saigon, with refueling stations along the way. Except in really wet weather, they can now bring in fresh supplies and men from North Vietnam to the III Corps area, just north of Saigon, in three to four weeks instead of the two and a half months it used to take them when the trail was a web of dirt roads subject to constant American bombardment. In recent weeks, they have made a heavy buildup of supplies to be moved South. In the northern and central parts of South Vietnam, the Communists are effectively interdicting the lateral network of government highways; threatening the government's pacification program, which has been made more difficult by the forcing of some two hundred thousand new refugees from the areas they had been resettled in following the 1972 Communist offensive; recapturing most of the lightly populated territory they lost after the 1973 ceasefire; and forcing the government to surrender many of its lightly manned outposts.

Particularly in the northernmost tier of the country, where the best Communist forces have tied down the best government troops, the North Vietnamese have consolidated their hold. In the crucial III Corps region, the Communists are opening up new infiltration routes, and they are doing the same thing in the Delta while consolidating their substantial hold on the five southernmost provinces and disrupting pacification efforts there. Thus, despite the decrease over the past year in the figures for population under their control, they are obviously prepared to regain control not only over more people—perhaps more than ever before—but over more land. In the past year or so, they have colonized areas in the northern part of the country, sending in sixty thousand men, women, and children from the North, including both Southern families who went North in 1954 and new Northern ones, and their aim is to send down several hundred thousand such colonists in the next few years. At the same time, they have directed selective artillery barrages against government-controlled village areas to create more refugees, and have stepped up their kidnappings of peasants, of whom eighty-five hundred have been forcibly removed to Communist areas since the ceasefire.

The Communist regular forces of two hundred and twenty-five thousand, which comprise fourteen divisions and numerous autonomous regiments, backed up by six additional divisions in North Vietnam, are confronted by three hundred and seventy-two thousand regular South Vietnamese Army men, plus four hundred and fifty thousand territorial forces of the Regional and Popular Forces, and four hundred thousand armed People's Self-Defense Forces in the villages and hamlets. However, as many as a quarter of the regular Army men and about that fraction of the territorials are either so-called "phantom soldiers" (who do not in fact exist and are simply carried on the lists to pad officers' payrolls) or "flower soldiers" (who are given permission by their superiors to work on their family farms and whose pay is split between them and their commanders). Then, a hundred and fifty thousand of the over-all total are deserters, are wounded or sick, are serving terms for breaking discipline, or are undergoing training courses. Still others are doing odd jobs for province chiefs, who make deals with battalion commanders for these men, known as "ornamental soldiers." Moreover, at least half the Regional Forces are immobilized in outposts, and many regulars are serving in rear areas or holding down desk jobs. Fresh recruitment targets have not been met. On any given day, accordingly, the actual number of Communist and government forces confronting each other in battle is about even, and if the government holds a slight edge, that is minimized by the declining morale of
its troops. The decline is reflected in the ratio of weapons lost, especially where outposts have been surrendered or abandoned. Before the Americans came in force to Vietnam in 1965, the government was losing about two weapons—mostly guns—for every one that the Communists lost. During the period of the American war, the ratio swung way around, with the Communists losing many weapons in captured supply bunkers. Now it is back where it was in the pre-1965 period.

Counterbalancing such statistics is an equally dark analysis of conditions in North Vietnam. Through intelligence reports, and also through some of the most direct public self-criticism in which the North Vietnamese leaders have ever engaged, there emerges a picture of a country at odds with itself, uncertain about its future commitments to the South in the face of the need of economic reconstruction at home, and confronting the greatest social unrest since the upheavals that accompanied the dracon land-reform program of the mid-fifties. The fact that the Hanoi regime is not attempting to gloss over its difficulties shows both its perception of the problems and its awareness that it must do something to mollify a population that, with the war against the Americans over, expected an easier life and a lot more concessions than it is receiving. A speech by Prime Minister Pham Van Dong on September 1st, celebrating the anniversary of the August, 1945 revolution, called for unity within the Laodong (Workers') Party, rather than, as in the past "unity of the people"—a change that reveals the scope of the problems in North Vietnam.

Editorials and official proclamations constantly stress the need for better "management" in order to improve the slackening agricultural cooperative movement, which is still given top priority, and it is evident that the farms are in serious difficulties. Difficulties that were increased by a recent bad crop resulting from a midyear drought followed by late-season typhoons and floods; the word "famine" was used in descriptions of conditions six months ago. "We are facing a situation filled with difficult and complicated tasks... We must not waste even a single day or minute," Premier Dong said. In the spate of criticism about poor labor output and low productivity, Dong and other high Party officials have been unrelenting in attacking "indiscriminate" comments on Party policies and singling out people who have not been sufficiently punished for stealing state property, engaging in illegal business, or disturbing order and security. Last summer, seventeen people were shot in Hanoi for corruption, and a hundred and fifty were arrested in Haiphong for charges ranging from draft dodging to black marketeering. There may soon be a full-fledged Party purge—already heralded by the creation of what may be a Chinese-type Red Guard militia. Both Dong and Le Duan, the First Secretary of the Party, who is generally regarded as North Vietnam's top leader, have regularly called for "a mass revolutionary movement to rehabilitate and develop the economy." A new five-year plan, the first in ten years, is supposed to begin in 1976; it was announced partly at the urging of the Soviets, and has not yet been clearly formulated—a state of affairs suggesting that differences prevail within Party ranks.

Official self-criticism reached a peak in an editorial in the September issue of Hoc Tap, Hanoi's leading theoretical monthly, which deplored "upheavals and hostile tendencies" and "a current of evil thoughts." The "vile deeds" of "dishonest opportunists," the editorial added, as well as "thoughts of the petty bourgeoisie and bourgeoisie and of the imperialists and their henchmen... were the manifestation of the energy's psychological warfare and of the lack of vigilance over the secret, fishy moves of bad elements." Nothing as tough as this had been printed in North Vietnam in many years, and it is interesting to note that there has been similar criticism of the behavior of the population and the cadres in Communist areas in the South by the top Communist command there.

Through the peculiar mixture of strengths and weaknesses revealed by the opposing sides, the major powers loom larger than ever over the stricken battlefield. Together, the Soviet Union and China are still sending an estimated one and a third billion dollars' worth of aid to North Vietnam, at least half of it now consisting of economic assistance, mostly in the form of food and grain. The United States, while waiting for Congress to pass a new economic-aid-appropriations bill for Saigon, is operating under a resolution continuing last year's terms, by which the Vietnamese received three hundred and fifty million in economic aid, but the money has yet to be appropriated. (The 1975 military-aid appropriation stands at seven hundred million dollars, down from eight hundred and twenty-three million last year.)

Our Ambassador, Graham A. Martin—though about ten years ago, when he was
Ambassador to Thailand, he opposed sending half a million Americans to fight in Vietnam—believes strongly in our obligation to help the South Vietnamese survive. Accordingly, he originally sought a billion six hundred million dollars and eight hundred and fifty million dollars for military and economic assistance, respectively, this year, and is doing all he can to persuade Congress to restore at least some of the cuts it has made. Unless Congress acts, he maintains, it will be impossible to resupply Vietnam on the basis of the one-for-one agreement reached with the Communists in Paris—that is, to replace each piece of military equipment lost—and it will be impossible for South Vietnam to overcome its economic problems. After another year or two of comparable or slightly reduced economic help, he argues, the country should be in a position to take advantage of its agricultural and other resources and be ready to “take off,” provided peace can be achieved.

What with the corruption that obtains in Vietnam today, and Congress’s disinclination to pour more money down the Vietnamese drain, Martin may have a hard time persuading the American legislators—and particularly the ones just elected—to change their minds. He remains convinced that Vietnam has been made a victim of the congressional campaign to slice the Pentagon’s over-all budget, and he feels that the economic cuts that have been made are especially shortsighted in view of the current inflation. Aside from the actual sums of money, which do not amount to much compared to the total of approximately a hundred and fifty billion we have spent so far for the war in Indo-China, there are difficult political and moral equations involved.

Most Americans here feel that the North Vietnamese will be encouraged to attack rather than negotiate if the aid cuts stand and the economic situation in the South deteriorates further. On the other hand, a minority of Americans here believe that if the cuts stand Thieu will be more inclined to negotiate, and that he would do better politically to negotiate now, given the government’s numerically widespread, if tenuous, control over the country, than he would after another Communist offensive, in which he stands a good chance of losing a lot of ground. The emerging third force elements, even though anxious to be independent of the Americans, favor continued aid, but they would prefer to see it given on a bilateral basis to both North and South Vietnam after a satisfactory peace is obtained.

For Russia, China, and the United States to impose a collective limit on their aid would afford the best hope of forestalling the continuing slaughter, which otherwise may go on indefinitely. The Sino-Soviet conflict, let alone the revolutionary dynamics and obligations of the Communist brotherhood of nations, assuredly makes any such limitation on the part of Russia and China difficult. As for our own assistance to South Vietnam, Ambassador Martin argues, if it can be sustained at last year’s level for two more years at most, this should give the various non-Communist factions a last chance to get together and maintain that country’s independence.

[From the Christian Science Monitor, Jan. 23, 1975]

WHAT PRIORITY VIETNAM?

(By Charles W. Yost)

WASHINGTON.—There is no reason to doubt the will and capacity of the United States to cope with an array of extremely serious new domestic and foreign problems—at least sufficiently to ward off immediate disaster and to lay the groundwork for longer-range solutions. What is open to serious question is whether even the U.S. has the resources, and its leaders the time and the stamina, to bear all these new burdens and still carry the accumulated baggage of coldwar involvements undertaken in quite different circumstances.

Certainly some such involvements, such as the strategic arms race with the Soviet Union or commitments to our allies in Europe and Japan, are inescapable in any near future, though the absurdly extravagant level and cost of the arms race requires rigorous review. Other such involvements, however, can no longer claim to match in significance the new wave of predicaments the U.S. now confronts.

It is in this broader context that the U.S. should weigh the demands now being addressed to Congress for more aid to Vietnam and Cambodia, and the threats now being leveled at Hanoi which imply that increased belligerency on its part will evoke some unspecified but presumably belligerent U.S. response.

There is no point in going over for the thousandth time the arguments for and
against the U.S. presence in Indo-China. The question in 1975 is where, in America's present scale of priorities, military and economic aid to the Thieu and Lon Nol governments should properly fall.

Secretary of Defense James Schlesinger said in a recent press conference: "It would be a serious error on the part of the U.S., and I believe a serious moral lapse, for us to contemplate the semiabandonment of an ally by failure to provide them with the appropriate financial resources."

This statement begs the question by its use of the word "appropriate." What is an appropriate contribution for this purpose at this time? The U.S. has been providing substantial assistance to South Vietnam for more than 20 years. For about seven it had a military force of several hundred thousand men in the country and spent billions of dollars for its defense.

Finally the U.S. decided that southern Indo-China was not all that vital; that its anxiety that China intended to move in and take over had not been well-founded; that North Vietnam itself hardly constituted a threat to American security. The U.S. moved out its forces and proclaimed the Nixon doctrine of disengagement from mainland Asia.

Of course the U.S. also announced its intention to continue to supply "appropriate" assistance. Indeed, at a time when much of the "third world" desperately needs help, America continues to give the lion's share of its none-too-generous foreign aid to Vietnam and Cambodia.

But what was appropriate in the affluence and relative tranquility of January, 1973, may not be at all appropriate in the economic depression and unsettled international climate of January, 1975. It is high time for Indo-China to be moved close to the bottom of America's list of national priorities.

This is particularly the case since neither the Thieu nor Lon Nol governments has during the last two years shown any real disposition to seek a political settlement and end of the fighting. Until they do, the war will go on indefinitely.

It may not be impertinent, therefore, to wonder whether it is not in fact the administration which is guilty both of a "moral lapse" and of a political anachronism in maintaining our involvement in Southeast Asia at the expense of more adequate response to much graver and more immediate dangers.

Events of the past two weeks have shown once again the hazards of America's failure to withdraw from this long-standing overcommitment. Hanoi has only to launch an offensive to take a city and the U.S. instinctively reverts to the rhetoric of the '60's.

America must at last make up its mind. Either it decides once and for all that what happens in Vietnam and Cambodia is not a matter of vital interest, and tailor its policy and its aid accordingly. Or the U.S. continues to maintain Thieu and Lon Nol at whatever cost is necessary, risk renewed involvement, and pretend nothing has happened in the world since 1965.

[Evening Star—D.C.—Sept. 20, 1974]

CUT U.S. AID HELD SUFFICIENT FOR SAIGON FORCES

(By Tammy Arbuckle)

SAIGON.—The $700 million in American military aid to South Vietnam is sufficient for the South Vietnamese army to stop the Communists, and indeed this reduction in U.S. military aid may, in the long run, make the South Vietnam army more effective, informed military sources say. Some middle level South Vietnam military agree.

The sources base their view on a combination of two circumstances. These are a new look at, and reshuffle of, logistic priorities by the United States, and a change in South Vietnam army tactics with a drift to less conventional warfare. Informed military sources qualify their assessment that $700 million is sufficient with the condition that these two things should continue to go ahead successfully.

This assessment would seem to run counter to other reports from Saigon that proposed congressional military aid cuts will put the South Vietnamese in deep trouble. Many of these reports are based on U.S. embassy reports to newsmen that fuel already is cut by 50 percent, planes are not flying, shells are insufficient and so forth.

It seems, however, all those public complaints by U.S. officials in Saigon are a final attempt to stave off congressional cuts. But underneath the furor, U.S. officials expect these reductions and are revamping logistics to suit the funds they expect to be available, informed sources say. Americans privately confirm this.
The sources point to the record of U.S. Gen. Homer Smith, the new Saigon defense attaché. Smith's background is logistics from lieutenant on up. Experts consider him the right man for the job ahead.

Describing what is ahead, sources said the cuts in fuel and other supplies recently made public by U.S. officials is a reaction to American overspending in South Vietnam in the first quarter of fiscal 1975. The U.S. Embassy was basing its expenditures on hoped-for military funds of up to $1 billion.

They anticipated going ahead with the war on a continuing resolution basis.

Sources said there is no doubt there is sufficient ammunition and fuel in South Vietnam to prosecute the war but conservation is the U.S. order of the day while logistics are reconsidered and overhauled.

Military experts described the nature of the problem facing the United States in this way. In Vietnam there is a great deal of expensive ammunition including bombs which cost $1,500 each and helicopters which need expensive fuel to fly. But when those expensive items are used they are also expensive to replace. Sources suggest what might happen is, rather than spend money on bombs the United States will opt to spend the money on very large numbers of mortar shells which are cheap and many military men consider them more effective than big bombs. The South Vietnamese air force may have to mothball most of its 500 helicopters, but this would effectively force Vietnamese commanders to spend more time in the field with their troops instead of passing their time in expensive restaurants in the cities.

Unless there is a changeover to less expense engines of war, sources warn, the South Vietnamese may find themselves with the costly items they now need less and a shortage of bread-and-butter items such as bullets and mortar shells. U.S. Officials here say no decisions have been made on these matters pending definite information on funds but that the matter is being closely considered. The reductions of jets and fuel are seen, however, as the start of a trend to avoid costly items. The South Vietnamese army for tactical reasons has already been moving to less conventional forms of fighting. It has been little publicized, but South Vietnamese long-range Special Forces teams have already been creating havoc in Communist areas of control in South Vietnam. A few months ago these small special groups ripped up part of the North Vietnamese oil pipelines near the Laos border. Several North Vietnam supply depots in Communist territory in South Vietnam have been hit successfully. In bigger actions, some of the better South Vietnam units are adapting to night infantry attacks. Airborne troops, for example, at Thung Duc Valley are gaining 100 yards each night toward the recapture of that district capital near Da Nang. By this method it's argued that the move towards the essential cheaper infantry weapons will reinforce the newborn tendency of the South Vietnamese to, as they put it, use Vietnamese tactics. Yet there should still be sufficient funds, it is estimated, to pay for the artillery and armor still necessary for likely major conventional actions against the even more conventional terrain-grabbing North Vietnamese forces.

It is said by Military sources here that artillery shells were fired much too frequently and uselessly by both U.S. and South Vietnamese forces and that reductions in money will force the South Vietnamese to save their shells and use them only when they are really needed. The greater use of infantry rather than massive and expensive bombing and shelling undoubtedly will lead to a considerable increase in South Vietnamese casualties. The massive bombing and shelling policies were left over from the unwillingness of previous U.S. administrations to risk a political outcry in the United States which would have resulted from any high U.S. casualties. The Americans listed 46,000 killed in nine years of combat in Vietnam.

The South Vietnamese combat formula for coming months if the military aid figure rests at $700 million—as is almost certain since U.S. Senate-House conference have approved the relevant defense appropriations bill—is therefore likely to be larger use of infantry, more night fighting, and some guerrilla pressure on North Vietnamese and Viet Cong held areas.

For big actions which are seen likely to occur against an increasingly conventional Communist force, armor and artillery with the A37 Dragonfly aircraft for air strikes, a less expensive and more accurate aircraft, will be available. Military sources see the Communists as fighting for terrain now, tying down some of their own forces in defense, and therefore becoming vulnerable to higher South Vietnamese forces except in the big battles.
DETENTE UNKNOWN IN SAIGON; TRUCE MACHINERY STILLBORN

(By Arnold R. Isaacs)

SAIGON.—The continuing bloodshed in Vietnam has swept away most of the 9 chapters and 23 articles of the Paris peace agreement, but a few traces remain.

One is the Provisional Revolutionary Government delegation, which still sits, like a bit of alien flotsam washed up on a hostile beach, in its quarters deep inside Saigon’s huge Tan Son Nhut Air Base.

The delegation is housed in a compound of barracks and offices that is still customarily referred to as Camp Davis—the name it was given when the Americans were serving here. (It is named after the first American soldier officially listed as killed in Vietnam.)

Now that it is the Communist headquarters, the South Vietnamese treat it, not surprisingly, as if it contained some particularly deadly infection.

Barbed-wire barriers circle the compound and it is heavily guarded by South Vietnamese military police. No ordinary Vietnamese civilian can approach it, and only the senior officers of the delegation are allowed to leave, on official business. For the lower-ranking Communist soldiers, serving on the delegation must be somewhat like being in a better-than-average prison camp.

Journalists are allowed into the compound once a week, and a recent visit there showed that it had not changed much in more than a year.

“ACTS OF WAR”

The same photos of National Liberation Front leaders still hung on the walls of the converted barracks that serves as a briefing room. The same packages of harsh North Vietnamese cigarettes and the same bottles of watery orangeade were set out on the tables. The eyes of the Provisional Revolutionary Government soldiers watched with the same wary remoteness.

The press conference also was unchanged, a litany of alleged cease-fire violations by the Saigon government that was a perfect mirror image of the daily press briefings given by the South Vietnamese spokesmen downtown.

“The Nguyen Van Thieu administration continues to step up its acts of war,” intoned Col. Vo Dong Giang, the chief PRG representative.

“It has carried out indiscriminate bombings against populated areas inside the areas controlled by the PRG... in two days more than 300 civilians have been killed or injured... their actions expose their bellicose and counter-revolutionary nature... in defense of the property and lives of the population, and to preserve the Paris agreement, the liberation armed forces of South Vietnam and the people have dealt new punishing blows to the Nguyen Van Thieu armed forces.”

Richard M. Nixon had resigned two days earlier as President of the United States, so a few more journalists than usual had made the trip to Camp Davis to hear the Vietnamese Communist reaction to the change in Washington.

When it came, there was no echo of the worldwide mood of detente, no whisper of the hopes that had surfaced nearly everywhere else on the globe for a healthier phase of American life. Colonel Giang’s comments seemed a frozen echo of the past.

Mr. Nixon’s fall, he said, had been caused not just by Watergate but by his “barbarous and criminal doctrines” in Vietnam and elsewhere. “It does not matter if there is a change of one figure in the presidency of the U.S. ... the question of peace or war in South Vietnam depends on whether or not U.S. policies will change.”

There was “no indication,” he added, that the new American President would shift ground. “On the contrary, Mr. Ford has appeared to be fairly faithful to the policy of U.S. administrations. most recently the Nixon administration... the South Vietnamese people will wage their struggle not because Mr. Nixon is in or out of the White House, but because of the necessity to preserve the Paris agreement.”

Colonel Giang heads a delegation that arrived in Saigon a year and a half ago to represent the Communist side on the two-party Joint Military Commission, which was set up under the Paris agreement to administer the cease-fire.
ITS ONLY ACCOMPLISHMENT

Its only accomplishment since then has been to carry out an exchange of Vietnamese war prisoners—an exchange marred by claims on both sides that not all prisoners were returned.

It has not even begun any of the other tasks assigned to it by the Paris pact, which included the all-important mapping of zones of military control.

Under the initial agreement, the South Vietnamese and the Provisional Revolutionary Government were to have joint military teams in 7 regional headquarters and 25 local sites across Vietnam to supervise the truce. But the deployment never took place.

Communist delegations did go briefly to some, though not all, of the regional posts, but after series of demonstrations against them by local civilians, some of which had the apparent sanction of the South Vietnamese authorities, the PRG withdrew all its delegates to Saigon.

There the commission has lapsed into fruitless bickering, most recently over the PRG demand for a written guarantee of diplomatic privileges and immunities for its delegates. For weeks on end, the Communist and South Vietnamese sides have not met at all.

[From the New York Times, Aug. 21, 1974]

70,000 REFUGEES FLEE NEW VIETNAM CLASHES

(By David K. Shipler)

Da Nang, South Vietnam, Aug. 16—At 5 o'clock this morning, Mrs. Le Thi Ba finally gave up. She and her husband had held out for 20 days, living in their own sandbagged bunker, subsisting on meager rations of rice, trying with every ounce of strength to stay in their tiny village of Son Phuc despite incessant shelling by North Vietnamese gunners.

But the rice had run out, and so before dawn Mrs. Ba gathered her 2-year-old son into her arms and began the long walk out, becoming the newest of the estimated 70,000 new refugees created by the recent weeks of heavy fighting in the northern provinces of South Vietnam.

The number has doubled in just the last 10 days, officials here say. Many of the refugees are hugging Route 1, the major strip of security in Government areas here. They are jammed into schoolhouses and crowded into shacks made of ammunition crates, and they are running out of food. Although some have received emergency supplies of rice from the Government, many others say they have been given nothing.

GRIMY AND WEARY

Mrs. Ba, traveling by foot and by bus, found her way this morning to a school at the edge of Da Nang, 25 miles northeast of her village. She stood in the schoolyard, her face grimy and weary. Her son played listlessly with an empty rice bowl.

Just down the road, like a haunting symbol of an era South Vietnam has tried to put behind, stood one of the country's biggest refugee camps—empty. Its corrugated tin buildings, as vast as warehouses, rattled and crashed in the wind like the hulks of wrecked ships. The Government had succeeded there, and in most other parts of the country, in emptying the squalid refugee camps and moving the uprooted people onto farmland or back to villages.

The new wave of refugees now represents a serious setback to that effort. And the effort itself, some say, was partly responsible for the outbreak of fighting.

CONTROL OF RICE LANDS

To secure land for resettlement, the South Vietnamese Army has tried to consolidate control over fertile rice lands, sometimes sweeping through contested areas sometimes through Vietcong-held villages.

One foreign diplomat who watches the situation said that he thought one reason for the recent Communist attacks was to regain land they believed was rightfully theirs at the time of the cease-fire in January, 1973.

Last spring, he explained, the Communists lost considerable ground in Military Region I to a South Vietnamese offensive in the coastal areas of Quang Ngai Province, especially Duc Pho and Mo Duc Districts, and in other lowland rice-growing regions.
GOVERNMENT BLOCKADE

“They’re strong in the western hills and not in the lowlands,” he said of the Communist forces. “That’s why they’re pressed so hard for implementation of the Paris accords—that gives them freedom of movement—they were supposed to have corridors of supply. But the Government has set up a blockade openly and attempted to isolate pockets of Communist control, cut them off from sources of supply.”

Another view of the Communist strategy was put forth by a refugee, Nguyen Tanh, the elected chief of the village council of Loc Son, about 25 miles southeast of Da Nang.

“The main thing in the Paris agreement is general elections,” Mr. Tanh explained, “and the Communists cannot accept a general election with this side because they have no people and with no people they have no votes. That’s why they have kept violating the cease-fire—not to get land, but to get people.”

Mr. Tanh and his fellow villagers, who left Loc Son in 1965, finally went back last December. They had a lot of work to do on their neglected rice fields.

But now the rice is tall and lush. In a month, it will be ready to harvest. But they will probably not be there.

“HAD TO FLEE AGAIN”

“Now we were about to get the first good harvest and we had to flee again.” Mr. Tanh said in disgust. “If the Government doesn’t do anything quickly, our crops will fall into Communist hands and we all will die here of starvation.”

What he would like the Government to do is to retake his village, but the South Vietnamese Army has its hands full at the moment just trying to hold the North Vietnamese troops where they are and prevent the fall of Duc Duc and Dai Loc district towns, which have been shelled daily.

The strategy of the refugees has become challenging and risky. Some go to their fields by day, returning to safe havens at night. Others climb into the hills to gather firewood to sell along the major highways. It is an existence that takes as much military instinct as a general’s, for a miscalculation of the safety of a road, a misreading of an armed unit’s position or of the likelihood of an attack can be fatal.

Some refugees feel they have annoyed the Government by being overly cautious, by fleeing before fighting reached their villages.

“These people here don’t want to live with the Communists,” explained one refugee from the Quy Son valley south of Da Nang. “That’s why they fled to the nationalist side. And now if the nationalists don’t look into their situation and help them, where do they go?”

[From the New York Times, Oct. 1, 1974]

NORTHERNERS, PROSPEROUS BUT UNEASY IN SOUTH VIETNAM, SLIDING INTO OPPOSITION

“When you rally to the national Government, you will enjoy a freedom that not only suits you, but be re-established both physically and morally in a new life of peace and security.”


(By James M. Markham)

SAIGON, SOUTH VIETNAM, September 30.—Twenty years ago a great exodus of modern Asian history dislocated Vietnam. A torrent of political and religious refugees—928,152, by one count—fled from the North to the South.

The stunning defeat of the French expeditionary corps at Dien Bien Phu and the conclusion of the Geneva agreements catapulted Ho Chi Minh to power in the North. Driven by fear, experiences of Communist control and no small amount of propaganda, many northern Vietnamese clambered into American and French airplanes and warships and came to the South.

About 4,000 refugees went from the South to the North, which then had a population of 17 million. In addition, 130,000 guerrillas, party functionaries and their dependents “regrouped” under the provisions of the Geneva accords and went North.

Now, two decades later, the promise of the fledgling Government of the late Ngo Dinh Diem, Premier and later President, has been redeemed in part.
In the main northern refugees have prospered here; indeed, they dominate many professions and occupy the critical second ranks of others, including the army.

Despite material success, a strain of unease, disenchantment and even fear runs through northern refugee circles, for Mr. Diem's promise of freedom has been fulfilled only by comparison with North Vietnam, and peace and security are distant hopes.

Half-wittingly, educated Northerners, particularly Roman Catholic priests, have now moved into the unaccustomed role of opponents of their Government. Some are uneasy, knowing that their limited campaign against official corruption could explode into something much more significant or even benefit the Communists. Others have become dedicated opponents of President Nguyen Van Thieu, arguing that the anti-Communist cause will be lost by default if he stays.

By their own accounts the Northerners feel at home in the South, where life is much easier than in the harsh Tonkin of their memories. "Suppose Vietnam ever gets unified," said Au Ngoc Ho, a prosperous business consultant and former Economics Minister. "Will the North Vietnamese ever go back? Oh no! Only for a visit—to show off what they got in the South."

Many refugees from the North emphasize that the history of Vietnam is marked by migration southward—not unlike the American's push westward in the 19th century—and that many authentic Southerners are removed from the North by only a few generations.

"Every Southerner has a Northerner in his genealogical tree," observed Dang Van Sunz, publisher of South Vietnam's most respected newspaper, Chinh Luan, "so I am a Southerner of the first generation."

A deep strain of nostalgia colors the pioneering spirit. Virtually all Northerners left relatives behind; most came south hoping to return in 1956, when the country was to have somehow been reunited under the Geneva accords.

Hanoi people retain a deep love for the city they have not seen in 20 years. Many were anguished when American planes bombed it.

"Hanoi is a cultural city," said Nguyen Tuong Bu, a successful lawyer who is organizing a new association of Hanoi high-school graduates.

"The degree of traditional culture is higher. The food is better. The women are more beautiful—and better singers."

Whatever the delights of the past, Northerners proudly describe the positive impact they have had on the South, which they often regard with mixed sentiments—a lush land of opportunity whose inhabitants, in their view, tend to be unenterprising, flabby, too easy-going. Invariably, Northerners recall that Hanoi women of the exodus set the style of the appealing ao dal, now the national dress; Southerners devour pho, a noodle soup, and rau muong, a kind of watercress—both once northern dishes.

Capt. Nguyen Ngoc Phach, an articulate officer of the Joint General Staff, maintains that the South was commercially "tame" until 1954. "The economy was run by the Chinese, the French, the Indians, not the Vietnamese," he explained.

The Northerners, who had the advantage of easier access to the university the French built at Hanoi and brought with them a far more vibrant literary and cultural tradition than existed in the South, continue to be dominant in the arts and, to a lesser extent, in the universities. It is no accident that a book entitled "The Best Stories of Our Country: 20 Years of Literature in the South, 1954—1973," contains works by 29 authors born north of the 17th Parallel and 16 born south of it.

Although the southern-born children of refugees are graduating from universities, continued northern prominence in the liberal professions is hinted by examination results. A sampling of medical examinations for 1961 showed that 16 of 29 new doctors in the South had been born in the North; in 1973 a similar sampling showed that 48 of 100 were born in the North.

While statistics are not available, it is generally agreed that a disproportionate number of Northerners are lawyers, judges and prosecutors.

South Vietnam's increasingly outspoken press is another profession where Northerners have left their mark. Northern journalists and publishers are at least as numerous as their southern counterparts.

Northern-born people can be found throughout the southern civil service. The Foreign Ministry is a traditional northern preserve and northern Buddhists hold key positions in the Ministry of Information and Open Arms.
While Northerners have done well in business, Southerners still control banking, the profitable and highly politicized pharmaceutical industry and large-scale agriculture.

Northerners argue with considerable persuasiveness that it is not clannishness that has advanced them across the professional spectrum but, rather, the challenge of being refugees and the rugged life many of them had led in the North. Some say their southern-born children are getting lazy.

When it comes to the army—the fulcrum of power in South Vietnam—some Northerners maintain that southern clannishness has cut them out of the topmost positions. Even so, Northerners can be found throughout the army in the ranks of colonels and majors; two of South Vietnam's top divisions, the marines and the airborne, have a northern cast; and Gen. Cao Van Vien, Chief of the Joint General Staff, is a Northerner.

It is not altogether clear what "Northerner" means in political terms. For example, the commander of the vital Third Military Region, Lieut. Gen. Pham Quoc Thuan, is a Northerner who has placed Northerners in key positions. But he is also a reputedly loyal protege of President Thieu, a Southerner.

In the political arena the distinction begins to break down. One study of South Mr. Diem suggests that schooling and other associations are more influential than region in cabinet-making. (Interestingly, a striking proportion of the Communist leaders of North Vietnam were born in what is now South Vietnam.)

Mr. Diem used the Catholic refugees—the overwhelming percentage of the exodus—to buttress his Government. So the 1963 coup that cost him his life took on an antinorthern tone that, as a refugee put it, "gave us a guilt complex for some time."

A PERIOD OF TRANSITION

The northern Catholics did not abandon anti-Communism, however, nor were they conspicuous in their opposition to the succession of military governments that followed Mr. Diem. For a while opposition was in the hands of northern and central Buddhists.

A sea change is under way in some sections of the northern Catholic community here, which is increasingly committed to an anticorruption campaign aimed at Mr. Thieu. The movement began three months ago with a strongly worded proclamation signed by 301 priests, a third migrants from the North.

Hoa Binh, a Saigon newspaper run by northern Catholics, has helped spearhead the campaign. After repeated seizures, it closed down; then it defiantly reopened and resumed its attacks on the Government.

It is clear that not all the Catholics activists want to overthrow Mr. Thieu. "If we do it right, it will help the Government, it will make it stronger," said the Rev. Pham Duc Su, who led 26,000 Catholics out of Hung Yen Province 20 years ago. "There is still no alternative to Mr. Thieu."

Others feel that the President, who converted to Catholicism relatively late in life, must go. "I have always feared that with the governments we have we will lose the war," said the Rev. Hoang Quynh, a principal organizer of the 1954 exodus. "If Mr. Thieu remains there, the country will be lost."

OLD FEARS ARE REVIVED

The combination of a deteriorating economic situation, constant Communist military pressure and the new opposition stance seems to have generated profound unease in some Catholic quarters.

"There is one similarity with the situation of 1954," said Father Quynh. "We live almost the same fear of a Vietnam take-over as in 1954."

Mr. Sung, publisher of Chinh Luan and a Buddhist, is less despairing but is modest in his hopes. "When I came from the North in 1954, all I wanted was to go back to a free Hanoi," he recalled. "A little later, in 1965, at the height of the war, I wanted to keep South Vietnam free from Quang Tri to Ca Mau"—from the 1954 cease-fire line north of Hue to the southernmost tip. "Now," he said, "I want to keep Vietnam free, even if it is a little diminished."
SOUTH VIETNAM: NEW MARTYRS, NEW PAUPERS AND NEW FRIENDS
THE TALK OF SAIGON

(By James M. Markham)

Saigon, South Vietnam, Sept. 13—On the surface, it looks like fiery 1963, the last year of President Ngo Dinh Diem. With disquieting regularity, desperate men are dousing themselves with gasoline and burning to death on the streets of Saigon. In the last four months, six men—three of them war veterans—have immolated themselves in public. A seventh, a monk, was saved by the police on Sept. 2 as he burned in front of Saigon's rococo city hall.

Yet the public's reaction to this carnage is silence, even cynicism. For most of the suicides, instead of raging against the Government, have been protesting "Communist aggression" in South Vietnam. Or so the Government says.

Most of the deaths have followed a rather set pattern. Soon after the human blaze peaks, the police and the Government television crews arrive. The police scoop up letters left behind by the suicide victim.

Immediately, the Government propaganda machinery swings into action. Radio and television spread the news of another "sacred torch of peace." In three cases, posters and banners featuring the martyrs' names, photographs and last, anti-Communist words have been draped and pasted around town.

After a 20-year old disabled veteran, Le Quang Do, burned himself in front of the presidential palace, the Government spokesman, Pham Quoc Cuong, observed: "The sacrifice of combatant Le Quang Do should serve as a bright example to those who have been calling for peace while sitting in their air-conditioned rooms."

But except in the cases of two or possibly three of the suicides, few Saigon people believe that the spate of self immolations has been altogether spontaneous.

"I cannot say firmly that there is or is not prearrangement for these deaths," said Dinh Trung Thu, the secretary general of South Vietnam's main veterans' group. But Mr. Thu said flatly that the Government had excerpted the suicide letters to give them an exclusively anti-Communist cast.

Tran Tam, a former presidential candidate, said after the suicide of Phan Van Lua on Aug. 15: "The police were around all morning. The man took so much time to pour the gasoline on himself—and no one raised a hand. This is monstrous. Everyone knows they are victims."

In a subtle rebuke to the Government's propaganda campaign, some newspapers have taken to publishing the news of the suicides in the section usually devoted to traffic accidents and such things.

In a statement over the national radio on Sept. 9, President Nguyen Van Thieu called on "all people who are burning with ideas of sacrifice to refrain from now on from this act of self-destruction, even though it be for a high purpose."

Though still bustling in appearance, Saigon sinks deeper into economic misery. Reduced to a subsistence level, many civil servants, officers and other middle-class people have begun, painfully, to pull their children out of school. Either they cannot afford school fees or they need to send the children to work.

At the Son Ha elementary and secondary school, Lu Ho, the superintendent, said that since May the number of students has plummeted from 1,500 to 800.

"And of the 800 remaining," Mr. Ho said, "I am paying the fees of 300, giving them clothes, shoes, books."

The superintendent said that "even colonels" had withdrawn their children.

"If they don't steal they can't afford the fees," he said.

Mr. Ho, who also teaches philosophy at the private school, said that several times girls had fainted in classes. Their families could not afford to give them breakfast.

In another, grimy quarter of Saigon, Le Hoang Than, who is 15, almost wept when he was asked if he missed school.

He dropped out of the seventh grade recently and now makes a little over 15 cents a day picking scrap paper and dirty plastic bags off the streets. "There's no money at home," he said, simply.

The boy is one of 100 people who daily deliver the stinking waste material to a depot run by the Young Catholic Workers. Another 40 people—many of them students who have either dropped out of school or are trying to stay in—sort and bundle the material. It is then sold to Chinese merchants, who recycle it.