The relative ease with which RVN and U.S. forces had succeeded on Cambodian soil derived partly from the enhanced morale of the RVNAF after the enemy defeat during 1968 and the fact that the terrain favored the use of mechanized forces, offering them excellent avenues of approach. Our success was also due partly to the declining morale of enemy troops after repeated defeats inside South Vietnam and the existence of a new Cambodian regime hostile to their encroachment. The enemy main force, therefore, avoided contact and withdrew deeper into Cambodia, probably because they learned of the limitation in time and space imposed by President Nixon on the Cambodian incursion.

From the Vietnamese point of view, we believe that the lessons learned from this incursion were especially important since this was our first significant cross-border operation:

1. The operational planning process was closely coordinated between ARVN and U.S. forces at corps and unit levels whether for separate or combined operations. The time spent for planning and preparations was also cut as short as possible to minimize security violations but no significant shortcomings arose because of limited planning and preparations. The area of operations was similar to those on the RVN side of the border and was well within range of effective support from existing logistic bases. Enemy reactions all occurred as expected. However, during the planning process, all the lessons learned from our major operations against War Zones C and D during the 1966-67 period were not properly considered. Had they been, our losses would have been less and our success in discovering weapons, supply caches and underground shelters would have been greater. The use of Rome plows with infantry or with armor "a certain time" after the operation had begun was a case in point. This combined arms tactic had already proved effective on South Vietnam territory in uncovering tunnels, shelters and booby-traps and in clearing the area for easier conduct of patrol.

2. The element of surprise was not possible. The enemy had correctly predicted what could happen after the overthrow of Sihanouk. He had already moved some supplies deeper into Cambodia but in view of the magnitude of the task he apparently did not have enough time to displace all of his supplies.



3. Cambodian terrain was ideal for the employment of ARVN armored units. Our M-113 APCs crisscrossed the entire area of operation unimpeded. The combined use of armor and infantry was somewhat uncoordinated initially but quickly improved. Some shortcomings of our armor capabilities were apparent: lack of organic mobile fire support, insufficient range and power of M-125 organic fire, and, lack of M-801 wreckers. On the other hand, M-548 cargo carriers proved to be very effective in cross-country supply missions, but their quantity was insufficient, which compelled the use of helicopters and airdrops.

4. The initial presence of advisory teams and liaison officers attached to ARVN task forces from U.S. support units enabled our units to make effective use of U.S. firepower. A major shortcoming seemed to be our unit commander's predilection for gunships or tactical air although their targets were within artillery range. The nature of targets was also seldom determined correctly by our units, which made use of firepower unselective and less than totally effective.

5. Despite progress during the previous two years, it seemed that the RVNAF were still very much dependent on U.S. forces in certain critical areas such as night medevac by helicopters, and tactical and strategic air support.

The Lower Laos Cross-Border Operation

The decision to strike into Laos to sever the enemy's vital lifeline that sustained his war in the south, in our judgment, was a strategic decision of prime importance which greatly influenced the course of the war in South Vietnam and Cambodia. Its importance was perhaps equal in magnitude to the strategic decision of bombing North Vietnam. The idea of interdicting the Ho Chi Minh Trail by ground forces, in fact, was not new. As early as 1965, we had advocated such a move during a special session of the National Leadership Committee. This concept had also been used for discussion at the National Defense College. This idea of ours was shared by General Westmoreland, COMUSMACV who advocated a similar move in 1966 as he later recounted in his biography "A Soldier Reports." It is regrettable that this strategic concept had not been

fostered and deliberately pursued or at least made an exercise for war gaming at the RVNAF Command and Staff College.

For best results as far as the conduct of the war was concerned, we believe that LAM SON 719 should have been attempted as early as mid-1967, the most appropriate time for such a move. If because of political constraints, the U.S. had felt that it could not commit its troops in such an operation, at least it should have encouraged and prepared the RVNAF for such an operation as we have suggested in the previous chapter. In mid-1967, the NVA would have reacted forcefully to such a cross-border venture but was certainly not capable of the extent and level demonstrated in 1971. To prepare for this operation in mid-1967 would have required three ARVN divisions but the RVNAF could have afforded such a commitment without endangering South Vietnam's security posture at that time. We believe that with this force, we would have been far more successful in strangling the enemy lifeline in Laos than in 1971. If successful this operation would have entailed a turnabout in the course of the war favorable to our side. It was regrettable that this idea perished in 1968 in the wake of the evacuation of Khe Sanh, a major staging area for crossing into Laos.

The decision to conduct the Laos cross-border operation in 1971 came rather unexpectedly as far as the RVNAF were concerned, but it was quickly welcomed without hesitation. Several questions, however, remained unanswered as to the speed and suddenness with which the decision had been made. Was President Nixon changing the U.S. anti-infiltration strategy or was it just a retaliatory action against the Communist "talk and fight" strategy? Perhaps the U.S. desired to test the progress made by the RVNAF under Vietnamization or perhaps the operation was intended to press North Vietnam into serious negotiations? In any event, no specific duration had been planned for LAM SON 719.

When LAM SON 719 was finally terminated, it created quite a controversy. Both the Communist and the RVN claimed victory. President Thieu did his best to represent the operation as a military success, but perhaps he recognized that LAM SON 719 had fallen short of expectations, tactically and strategically. In terms of achievements, it was



not as impressive as the Cambodian incursion. Perhaps the operation had preempted enemy offensive plans, but his only lifeline remained almost intact after our brief disruption. ARVN units were unable to maintain the initiative for the entire operation. No significant amounts of enemy supplies had been discovered and destroyed that could be comparable to the Cambodian caches. Also it appeared that most enemy casualties resulted from U.S. tactical air strikes and gunships.

The enemy was not surprised by LAM SON 719 and was fully prepared to meet our forces head-on. Most of his supplies had long been displaced further west beyond Tchepone. The NVA Rear Service forces had been ready to fight back from a system of mutually supporting "blocks" or sophisticated fortifications which were difficult to destroy. Route 9, the main avenue of approach to Tchepone had been closely interdicted. More importantly, the NVA had pre-planned artillery fire on most places susceptible of becoming landing zones and its observation posts had been pre-positioned on almost all dominating terrain features in the area of operation. The NVA 70B Corps had been activated since late 1970 to control and coordinate the 304th, 308th, and 320th Divisions; it displaced into the area of operations as soon as LAM SON 719 was launched. The enemy's reactions were swift and forceful because he was determined to protect his supply line to the South, utilizing almost all of his strategic reserves and accepting losses without hesitation. Obviously, the enemy had drawn on his experience with our familiar pattern of operational maneuvers in South Vietnam. He had taken full advantage of a familiar terrain to maneuver in close proximity to our forces, thereby neutralizing the effectiveness of our superior airpower.

On the friendly side the lessons learned from this difficult and complex operation were numerous. First we had underestimated the speed and determination of enemy reactions. There were no contingency plans to face extraordinary or unfavorable developments. Our superiority in tactical air and heliborne mobility was completely negated first by weather then by enemy air defense or artillery and mortar fire. Numerically, our infantry was overwhelmed by the enemy whose firepower was equally strong but from carefully prepared positions. Deployed in an

unfavorable terrain, our 300-vehicle armored force was impotent against enemy tanks and unable to assist the Airborne Division in breaking the enemy encirclement or regaining the initiative. By contrast, the enemy armor had proved aggressive and dangerous; it had taken advantage of a familiar though unfavorable terrain to lay ambushes or close in on our strongpoints and finally combine with infantry to assault and overrun them. Our infantry units shunned maneuvers when engaged and failed to use their organic fire to destroy the enemy, relying entirely on supporting firepower. The I Corps and the division commanders involved all had reserves, but they failed to use them to overcome difficulties and regain the initiative. Even our available firepower was not properly used especially during the first month of the operation because of poor coordination. This situation was remedied only when firepower coordination came under unified control by a special team headed by the commander of the U.S. 108th Artillery group and located at I Corps Forward CP. The breaking down of I Corps Headquarters into three echelons was something which should have been avoided because no echelon was adequately staffed to handle the work load properly. Finally the physical separation between I Corps Forward and the U.S. XXIV Corps Forward was not conducive to effective combat and support coordination. The working principle of co-locating headquarters during combined operations should have been respected even though U.S. forces only played a combat support role.

On the national level, there were also several significant lessons to be learned from LAM SON 719. First, the problem of leadership should have been reviewed especially at corps and division levels. The appointment of general officers to these key command jobs should have been devoid of political considerations and based entirely on military professionalism and competence. Hierarchy could have been respected only if seniority in rank had been taken into consideration in promotion and appointments. Military discipline should have been strictly enforced even with general officers especially when the conduct of a major and decisive operation was at stake.



Second, it was obvious that the RVNAF general reserves were totally inadequate. They were even inadequate for the limited objective of LAM SON 719. With the Airborne and Marine divisions both committed, the JGS had no flexibility to influence operations. It was a most serious shortcoming for the RVNAF under such circumstances when they were unable to reconstitute a similar reserve to throw into the operation or to meet another emergency. It had therefore become most pressing to release part if not all of our infantry divisions from their territorial responsibilities and place them in strategic reserve or mobile defense posture. The fact that President Thieu was unwilling to commit the 2d Infantry Division in LAM SON 719 as suggested by COMUSMACV reflected his concern that ARVN divisions were unprepared for a strategic task. Experience indicated that it took a certain time for preparation and exercise and a few challenges for an ARVN division to completely rid itself of the "territorial syndrome" and become fully effective as a mobile combat force. Lack of long-range planning in that direction and other constraints had deprived both the RVN and U.S. of a chance to win a big victory where it might have decided the outcome of the war.

Finally, if LAM SON 719 had been intended as a test of Vietnamization, it should have demonstrated that the RVNAF improvement and modernization program still had much to accomplish. Compared to the NVA, the ARVN was developing too slowly and inadequately especially in armor and artillery. Counterbattery capabilities was another area requiring attention, especially in view of the long-range NVA artillery. The VNAF modernization program should also have detected the rapidly developing and effective enemy anti-air defense. It was obvious to us that our heliborne mobility, tactical air support, and logistics were still dependent on U.S. forces. This included our naval transportation capability but to a lesser extent.

### *The 1972 Easter Offensive*

The Nguyen Hue campaign of early summer 1972 was the NVA's largest and probably most important offensive. For this all-out effort, Hanoi committed almost the entire NVA using 14 infantry divisions and 26

separate regiments, plus substantial armor and artillery forces. However, in the end, the NVA failed to achieve its major objectives politically and militarily.

Throughout this entire enemy offensive the RVNAF demonstrated a high degree of professionalism and determination. Consequently, no single provincial capital of the RVN was lost to enemy control. Only 10 out of 260 district towns had been permanently occupied, but they were all located in outlying areas. An Loc, which had been intended as a national capital for the PRG, held firmly and gallantly against concerted attacks by three NVA divisions. The RVNAF had not been crushed as anticipated by our enemy. The people of South Vietnam remained calm, undaunted; they also supported our units during the heaviest fighting. Exhausted by serious losses, the NVA no longer had any significant offensive capability left to achieve political gains during the last quarter of 1972; its units had to disperse to wait and prepare for the next round of low-key activities. More importantly, the morale of the VCI declined markedly. The enemy offensive also failed to disrupt our pacification program, except in the areas of heavy fighting. The Mekong Delta as an example, was not affected in any way; the enemy had been unable to achieve a single gain in population control. All of the surface communication in the Delta remained secure during this major enemy offensive despite the redeployment of almost one half of IV Corps forces to MR-3.

The enemy 1972 Easter Offensive failed for several reasons. Our enemy became complacent after our venture into Laos in LAM SON 719. He underestimated the RVNAF capabilities and the effectiveness and power of the USAF; he also could not predict President Nixon's firm and swift reaction to the invasion. Strategically and tactically, our enemy committed many errors. Two of his most serious mistakes in strategy had to do with priority of efforts and timing. The NVA had distributed its forces among three distant objective areas instead of concentrating them on one to achieve a quick and decisive victory. Consequently, it did not have the capability to win in any one area. By improper timing our enemy also lost the chance of exploiting his initial success and



gave the RVNAF enough time to regroup and consolidate their defenses. Two tactical errors added to the enemy's failure. The NVA proved inexperienced in the employment of armor and inefficient in coordinating armor and infantry. Instead of taking advantage of armor's shock effect to break through our defenses, he employed tanks hesitantly without cohesion or infantry support. His tanks, therefore, became easy targets for our LAWs and heliborne TOWs. Employing armor without air cover and infantry support, the enemy had sacrificed his tanks. The second error stemmed from the enemy's classic mass assault tactic, but the human waves were quickly destroyed by our mass firepower.

On our side, there were also several lessons we learned from our initial setback and subsequent victory. They were: Command and Leadership.

We obviously had not remembered the lessons of LAM SON 719. Our leadership was still weakened by personal animosity and political considerations. However, this problem was solved when the I Corps and the Marine Division commanders were replaced by combat-experienced and professional general officers. This timely change in command and leadership had a most favorable impact on our combat units and staffs. The new I Corps commander's frequent visits to his units in the field helped enhance troop morale tremendously at a most critical juncture; they also boosted confidence on the part of small-unit commanders and enabled the I Corps commander to stay on top of the situation at all times. Reports were never a substitute for field visits, and a staff was only as good as its commander. With the same personnel and resources the new I Corps commander quickly demonstrated what a professional and experienced leader could accomplish during an emergency.

Military hierarchy functioned effectively only if rank and rank seniority were respected, especially for command and control purposes. This should have been the major consideration when we assigned someone to become part of a command system. The removal of the Marine Division commander was therefore timely and necessary for I Corps command to function effectively. The practice of bypassing a responsible and middle echelon in operational control should have been avoided at all

costs since it only created confusion and fostered animosity. Command and control, to be effective, should be kept as simple as possible. We believe that the span of control should never exceed five subordinate units especially in a complex, combat situation. Giving the 3d Division commander command and control over at least nine regimental level units was a serious violation of sound military doctrine, especially since it was our newest division and yet to be tested as an entire unit in combat. It is obvious why this division command was ineffective. Given the seriousness of the situation and the resources available, it was totally enacceptable for the I Corps commander not to assign any command and control responsibility to the Marine Division Headquarters when two out of three Marine brigades had been committed and to the Ranger Command when four ranger groups were being employed. Our initial command and control in the I Corps area caused confusion which was the primary reason why no unit carried out the Quang Trung counterattack plan as ordered and eventually led to the loss of Quang Tri and the rout of 3d Division forces.

The deployment of the 23d Division Headquarters to Kontum City and the replacement of the division commander was accomplished at the right moment. But the defense of Kontum could have faltered if the 23d Division organic forces had not replaced the heterogenous defense units in time. This gave the division commander unity of command, absolute discipline authority, and morale cohesiveness which were the very elements of success at Kontum.

In northern Binh Dinh Province, the fact that two out of the 22d Division's four regiments remained behind under operational control of the Binh Dinh province chief when the division headquarters relocated to Tan Canh, north of Kontum, caused numerous problems. The sector headquarters at that time was not even capable of controlling effectively all of the provincial forces much less two additional regular force regiments. Despite his rank, the sector commander was an engineer officer not as combat-experienced as the two regimental commanders. He simply did not have enough professional authority or experience to control these commanders effectively. A full-fledged tactical CP should have been



provided to control combat activities in this area, but the entire 22d Division Headquarters was needed to meet our challenge at Kontum.

Force Employment

Both the JGS and MACV knew in advance and in considerable detail about the 1972 enemy offensive, except for its exact timing and the place of the enemy's primary effort. It was clear to all of us that the enemy had concentrated his forces and had the capability in three different areas. Despite this knowledge, the RVNAF were unable to take any pre-emptive action or any course other than being alert and reinforcing their defenses and waiting. Only when the offensive had been launched and the enemy's efforts known were our commanders able to maneuver their forces in defense. The primary reason for this static or passive defense posture was that the RVNAF did not have adequate tactical and strategic reserves. Our defense strategy remained founded on the policy of "hold all and at all costs" despite the fact that for the last three years South Vietnam's defense capabilities had been greatly reduced as a result of the U.S. force redeployment. This policy caused our forces to be overextended and not capable of immediate success against a concentrated enemy attack.

Our infantry divisions meanwhile continued to bog down in their territorial security responsibilities. Accustomed as they were to small-unit operations in support of pacification, most ARVN divisions were not prepared, during the initial stage of this enemy offensive, to fight the kind of unconventional warfare for which they had been organized and equipped. Their defenses were not properly organized in depth with solid fortifications and alternate lines. There was a definite lack in firepower coordination with the VNAF and VNN. Divisional artillery forces were broken down into small elements at fixed fire bases which became good targets for concentrated enemy artillery and mortar fire. Our reactions in general took on a routine pattern as if to meet ordinary "high points." To counter this enemy offensive, our units were often thrown into combat piecemeal, a battalion here, a brigade there, instead of being committed as major tactical formations in order to

regain the initiative. This piecemeal employment of forces unwittingly made command and control more difficult and greatly reduced the effectiveness of our combat units.

Our mobile tactical and strategic reserves, a matter of utmost importance for South Vietnam, were woefully inadequate to counteract the enemy's offensive strategy of primary and secondary efforts ("point" and "face" respectively, in Communist jargon). Each corps had only one ranger group as a tactical reserve since all divisional forces had been extended in static defense. The RVNAF general reserves -- the Airborne and Marine Division -- were insufficient for three large fronts. Their employment was usually subjected to careful planning, but again we could not help deploying them by brigade to each needy area. Also, their mobility depended entirely on the USAF. Because of all this, our counterattacks could not be conducted as timely and forcefully as desired especially after enemy attacks had been stalled in Quang Tri and Kontum. This also explained why our field commanders could not afford to rotate their units between combat and rest.

Military Dependents and Refugees

Military dependents and the civilian population living in areas under attack disrupted our combat operations and were a dilemma for our field commanders. If military dependents were evacuated ahead of time to reassure our combat troops of their safety, the local population became anxious and sometimes panicky. And if a panicky population fled in mass, the morale of our troops was seriously affected.

Therefore, military dependents and the civilian population were left to fend for themselves. When fighting occurred, they usually fled in the direction of safety toward cities and refugee camps; the minute the fighting abated, they invariably returned to their homes. However there were also many who preferred not to evacuate. It was these people and the returning refugees who caused many problems for our units; this was especially true when several 3d Division units unexpectedly withdrew from Quang Tri along Route 1. In An Loc, the great number of military dependents and civilian refugees whose movement to the east



was blocked by the enemy became quite a supply burden for our forces. However, they also effectively assisted our troops in first aid or supply, and even served as replacements. In general, the calm attitude of the civilian population and their solidarity with our troops were significant contributions to our success in 1972. However each commander had to include them in the planning process and always be alert to the problems they could cause.

U.S. Support

The U.S. determination to fully support the RVNAF during the 1972 Easter Offensive not only stunned Hanoi but also reassured South Vietnamese of certain victory. It was a psychological fact that the South Vietnamese always believed that the RVN and U.S. could defeat the North Vietnamese as long as they worked together.

The tremendous firepower unleashed by the USAF, especially B-52 strikes, effectively blunted all enemy efforts on three fronts, disrupted enemy supply lines, and helped the RVNAF conserve their ground forces. It also gave the RVNAF a much-needed respite to recover from the initial enemy shock, consolidate their lines of defense, and regroup for counterattack.

The great and flexible mobility of the USAF fleet of C-130 Hercules enabled the RVNAF to move rapidly their combat units to every battle area, to deliver replacements and to bring supplies to frontline troops. Nearly 4,000 ARVN soldiers and 6,000 civilians, who resisted the enemy in the An Loc inferno, subsisted primarily on supplies dropped from C-130s. The USAF modern airdrop techniques were successful and helped to break the enemy siege on this city.

From Saigon and other supply areas in the south, the LST fleet of the U.S. Navy transported huge amounts of materiels and supplies to the port of Tan My in MR-1 for the critical Tri-Thien front. A major airlift with C-5s and C-141s also operated around the clock, bringing materiels, weapons, and ammunition from the U.S. or other bases to Saigon and even directly to Da Nang and Pleiku. Without this support, the RVNAF success in stalling the enemy invasion would have been impossible.

RVNAF Capabilities for Self-Support

The RVNAF scored a major success during the 1972 enemy invasion. After the initial setbacks, all ARVN combat units eventually regained their initiative especially with the determined support provided by the U.S. Combat support and service units also functioned effectively with the assistance of U.S. advisers. Assistance from U.S. forces was required only when it became absolutely necessary. The 549th QM Aerial Resupply Company was perhaps the only U.S. unit deployed to South Vietnam and it was required to assist with airdrops only.

The VNN also extended itself around the clock to bring personnel and supplies to ARVN units. However, its LST fleet was not enough to handle all missions; hence it was augmented by U.S. and South Korean vessels. In aerial medevac, the VNAF accomplished its mission admirably, relying very little on U.S. helicopters. Its C-119 and C-123 fleets, however, were capable for emergency resupply missions only during the initial stage. As the offensive progressed and in view of dense enemy anti-air fire and our increased supply requirements, the VNAF had to depend on USAF C-130s which had a higher speed and load capacity.

The 1972 Easter Offensive came indeed as a major challenge, a valuable test of RVNAF capabilities. We believe its outcome indicated that ARVN forces were fully capable of confronting the NVA if U.S. support was provided in three vital areas: tactical and strategic air to include troop transport; sea transport; and, the replacement of weapons, materiels, and supplies. In long-range artillery and armor capabilities, the ARVN was still inferior to the NVA. Obviously, at this time, Vietnamization still had a long way to go toward developing the self-supporting capabilities of the RVNAF.

*Peace Initiative and Negotiations*

For South Vietnam, the war was a legitimate self-defense effort against North Vietnam's aggression; it was a matter of national survival. From the beginning, the U.S. involvement had only a single purpose, that of helping South Vietnam to survive as a viable and free nation. Had



North Vietnam renounced its conquest and withdrawn its troops, the war would have ended and the U.S. would have also immediately redeployed its forces.

As far as national reconciliation was concerned in South Vietnam, our Open Arms policy was perhaps the best instrument. Local insurgents were always given the opportunity to reform themselves and participate in national activities. This does not imply that we rejected negotiations with the enemy, if negotiations were meant to end the war, to save human lives on both sides. In that sense, negotiations were necessary and applaudable. However we think that the initiative for peace should emanate from the aggressor, and not from us who were his victims.

We believe that the peace initiative advanced by the U.S could be justified by the U.S. position as a world power and to domestic pressure. To South Vietnam, however, this initiative was a damaging psychological setback, implying that even its future was negotiable. It also meant that even though Hanoi had failed to attain its goal through military operations, it could always gain the conditions leading to the attainment of that goal through negotiations. More importantly, it implied that the U.S. determination to help South Vietnam survive had wavered and could turn in any direction. North Vietnam's response to this U.S. peace initiative came as no surprise. Its 4-point program amounted to a virtually total victory in South Vietnam, to be presented on a plate. But most damaging to our common cause was the fact that the U.S. did not take any clear-cut position on North Vietnam's proposal. It even wooed Hanoi to the negotiation table by offering post-war reconstruction aid. But the enemy did not bite the carrot perhaps because the U.S. failed to use its big stick. The more the U.S. got impatient, the less Hanoi was willing to negotiate. By procrastinating, Hanoi seemed to feed more fuel to the U.S. anti-war movement and widen divisiveness among the U.S. leadership.

Finally at the conference table, the U.S. was negotiating from a position of weakness. Its unilateral troop withdrawal coupled with a retrogression to enclave defense strategy to reduce casualties offered the U.S. no bargaining power. In its own backyard, anti-war pressure

mounted, and urged on by "dove" politicians and other political dictates, the U.S. went from one concession to another, seeking impatiently to disengage from the war with honor even at the cost of South Vietnam's future.

That President Thieu had adamantly refused to submit to U.S. wishes in 1968 was understandable, even laudable. But he could not procrastinate for long because the U.S. was holding the key to South Vietnam's survival. In the end, only the U.S. and North Vietnam came away with what they wanted.

*Significant Lessons Learned*

1. Many major events of the Vietnam War seemed to have occurred during U.S. presidential election years. This was not a coincidence; the Communists usually chose these years to launch significant initiatives in order to influence U.S. public and political opinion to their advantage. The 1968 Tet offensive was a major turning point in South Vietnamese history similar to those that preceded it in 1960 and 1964. But unlike the previous years, this time the resolve of the U.S. concerning the pursuit of war had faltered. From a strategy of quick victory, the U.S. switched to negotiations and "Vietnamized" the war. This opened the way for the Communists to apply their strategy of "talk and fight" which lasted through the four years of the U.S. president's term and culminated in the fourth major turning point in 1972 leading to the Paris Agreement. The 1968 Tet Offensive provided the opportunity for the South Vietnamese people to learn more about Communist cruelty and deceit. Also the NVA's thrust across the DMZ in 1972 finally bared the aggressive face of North Vietnam which had never admitted the presence of its regular troops in South Vietnam. This gave a second opportunity for the South Vietnamese people to vote by their feet, and they chose freedom. Those who could not flee stayed with the RVNAF and fought.

2. The policy of "talk and fight" was not a technique used only by the Communist; it was also adapted by the RVN and the U.S. However, on our side this technique did not seem as effective because of the U.S. unilateral troop withdrawal and de-escalation and the fact that the



RVNAF were not strong enough to provide adequate bargaining power during peace talks.

3. By using the expression "Vietnamization" to explain its new policy to the U.S. Congress and public, the U.S. government had unwittingly disregarded the sacrifices of the South Vietnamese people and armed forces and negated the cause of freedom and survival for which they had been fighting. Therefore, President Thieu and the GVN never used this term. It was also regrettable that the GVN did not develop a comprehensive plan at that critical turning point of the war to adjust to this new U.S. program.

4. Developing and modernizing the RVNAF to enable them to assume the major combat role in the war was a correct policy. It was the very policy that successive GVNs had pursued since the war broke out through requests of increased military aid. Unfortunately, these requests were not approved at an appropriate level to allow the rapid development and modernization of the RVNAF. This stemmed partly from the fact that our political instability had prevented us from taking the strong measures required to procure the necessary manpower. It also seemed to be influenced by the U.S. policy of using its military might to shorten the war. First priority in resources was therefore given to U.S. combat forces and military assistance for the RVNAF became secondary. Not until the Vietnamization program was announced did improvement and modernization of the RVNAF resume at an accelerated pace. However, since the ultimate goal of Vietnamization was never clarified by any formal agreement, there was no long-range or medium-range plans developed by us for the RVNAF. Yearly plans for this process seemed to be predicated on U.S. domestic politics and the program of peace talks more than true war requirements. As a result our equipment modernization always lagged behind the enemy. Had it not been for the sudden turn of the peace talks in late 1972, the Enhance Plus program might never have materialized. Vietnamization remained an unfinished process and was defeated by the Paris Agreement.

5. South Vietnam's population of 18 million could not provide the manpower required for a 1-million military force fighting a long war.

After general mobilization was implemented in 1968, all personnel requirements for the RVNAF were fully met for four consecutive years. However, in 1972 manpower became a major problem again despite all the positive actions taken by the GVN to keep the RVNAF up to strength and replace losses. It was obvious that South Vietnam's draft-age resources were drying up and even the yearly emerging generation of 18-year olds was not adequate to replace losses.

6. The cross-border operations into Cambodia and Laos and the 1972 Eastern Offensive were excellent opportunities for the RVNAF to improve their combat effectiveness and for our progress in Vietnamization to be tested. As a result of these experiences our forces became more self-confident and functioned effectively at every level. However, we realized again that U.S. assistance was still required in the areas of advisors and air, mobility, and logistic support. According to planners, the RVNAF should be able to confront future major enemy offensives of 1972 proportions with the support of U.S. strategic air and continued military aid.

7. Strategic reserves and strong leadership at corps and division level in the RVNAF were factors that often provided success in our engagements. Our strategic reserves were not sufficient for South Vietnam's extended defense posture in the face of an enemy who held the offensive initiative. The RVNAF force structure expansion and development programs failed to solve the problem of strategic reserves which became even more critical after the redeployment of eight U.S. combat divisions. Our plans to release ARVN infantry divisions from territorial responsibilities were not practically feasible, especially for MR-1, MR-2, and MR-3. The employment of the 21st Division as a mobile combat force during the 1972 offensive was a unique case. In particular, MR-1 appeared to need one or two additional divisions just to accomplish its defense requirements. The upgrading of ranger battalions into groups to become tactical reserves for ARVN corps was a remarkable effort. Another significant accomplishment was the reallocation of ranger groups among MRs during 1971-72 which made three groups available as additional strategic reserves for the JGS. Still, the lack of organic artillery and a control headquarters



made the employment of these ranger groups most difficult and not very responsive to major events. It was unfortunate that MACV did not approve our recommendation to form these separate groups into a division. There was no practical solution for us to extract one or two infantry divisions from MR-4 to serve as strategic reserves and replace the Marine and Airborne divisions which had already been committed to MR-1.

In view of all this, we believe that the most acceptable solution to solve the reserve problems for ARVN corps and the JGS was to improve the territorial command and control system, develop the RF into battalions and groups to serve both as sector security forces and tactical reserves, and integrate all ranger forces into the territorial system. This would have enabled us to designate selected ARVN divisions as a strategic reserve for the JGS.

The selection of command cadre should have been based on leadership qualities, dedication, and military professionalism; political considerations should have been avoided at all costs. Serious flaws in command and leadership, especially when they occurred during combat, should have been corrected immediately and resolutely to maintain military discipline and effectiveness of units.

8. The period from late 1968 to 1972 was the best period of achievement for our pacification program. This resulted from effective coordination between the GVN and CORDS, the participation of the people, the significant contributions of U.S. aid, and improved security in rural areas. The improvement of rural security was made possible by the development of the PSDF, the deployment of police forces to villages, the continued implementation of the Phung Hoang program, and the effective shield provided by ARVN divisions. Finally this was a period when most major enemy units had withdrawn into sanctuaries across the border and the USAF continued to strike enemy base areas both inside South Vietnam and in the lower Laotian panhandle.

## CHAPTER IV

## The Struggle For Survival: 1973-1975

### *The Paris Agreement*

The Paris Agreement of January 1973 served only the immediate purposes of the United States and North Vietnam. It enabled President Nixon to keep his promise to the American People. American prisoners of war were released and reunited with their families, and all U.S. troops left South Vietnam safely and honorably. The U.S. was pleased that it had brought a "just peace" to the people of South Vietnam and terminated a long and inconclusive war, a war that divided the American people.

The Paris Agreement also offered North Vietnam the favorable conditions to pursue its conquest of South Vietnam with success. No longer constrained by bombings and blockades, Hanoi devoted its efforts to reconstruction and development in order to better support its war efforts in South Vietnam. No obstacle now lay in the way of its continued infiltration through Laos and Cambodia. Hanoi simply ignored the restrictive provisions of the Paris Agreement that did not serve its purposes.

In South Vietnam, the NLF was given a legitimate national status. It now had an official government, an army, and a national territory of its own. In all respects, the NLF had become a political entity equal in power to the GVN. All the major obstructions that had prevented North Vietnam and its South Vietnamese lackeys from winning a military victory were now gone. U.S. and FWMA forces had all left while nearly 300,000 NVA troops still remained on South Vietnamese soil. Never since 1954 had the Communists enjoyed such a strong political and military posture.



All this had been achieved only at a great cost to South Vietnam, for the advantages gained by North Vietnam through the Paris Agreement were also the disadvantages imposed on South Vietnam. Politically, the GVN had been edged into such a position that it could not explain satisfactorily to its people and armed forces why the NLF, heretofore considered a rebel organization at the service of North Vietnamese Communists, suddenly become an equal partner in governmental politics. To many this was a coalition, which the GVN had vowed it would never accept. What was the Council of National Reconciliation and Concord other than a disguised form of coalition government concocted by the Communists? The "third element" was just a mythical concept devised by Le Duc Tho in the summer of 1972 to push for Communist predominance in such a coalition. Every South Vietnamese knew that during the entire conflict no nationalist politician had ever claimed or felt he belonged to that "third element." Who, in fact, made up that mystic element other than Communist sympathizers and agents who posed as members of the opposition? The provisions for a general election were also ambiguous and problematic. It was difficult to understand why we would need a general election while South Vietnam already had a constitution, a national assembly, and a president all popularly elected through free and secret ballot. Did this mean that we had to dismantle everything and build a new regime from scratch to suit the Communist interests? But nothing could be more ludicrous than the guarantee of democratic freedoms provided for by the agreement. Who were they to demand these freedoms for the South Vietnamese while their own people had been denied the same? Such a provision could only aid Communist agents to agitate the South Vietnamese people, who were learning to enjoy freedom and democracy, into opposing all restrictions imposed by national security requirements. Freedom without order simply meant chaos, and chaos could be exploited by the Communists to their advantage.

Militarily, South Vietnam fared much worse under the Paris Agreement than the 1954 Geneva Accords in that it was compelled to define boundaries for troop regroupement areas and a time frame for it. How could that be done satisfactorily in a war without frontlines when enemy

troops remained imbricated with ours throughout the country? Under such circumstances, how could a standstill cease-fire be strictly enforced since both sides could move their troops freely where and when they wanted, especially in view of Communist treachery and deceit? It was almost impossible to determine what area was under whose control; understandably enough, no side would want a smaller piece of the pie. This was especially true of contested areas to which both laid claim but in which neither side had a permanent military presence. The fact that the GVN effectively controlled a densely-populated one-third of South Vietnam's territory in no way implied that the remaining two-thirds of jungle and swampland were under Communist control. It was inacceptable to think that our border outposts were just controlling the premises of their immediate area even to the confines of their mortars' range. Likewise, the Communists also balked at the idea that their guerrilla activities were just bound within the mini-bases which lay in between villages and hamlets under GVN control. Therefore, the standstill cease-fire merely meant "grab as you can," which was exactly what had happened just before and after it went into effect, and this eventually led to bitter accusations from both sides. We think that for the cease-fire to be realistically enforceable, the agreement should have laid down the rules of natural boundary and defined each side's control accordingly.

*Cease-Fire and Violations*

The Paris Agreement never restored peace to South Vietnam. The reports of gunfire continued to echo throughout the country even after the cease-fire day had passed. Except for the withdrawal of U.S. troops, the exchange of prisoners, the cessation of all U.S. war activities in Vietnam and the de-mining of North Vietnam's ports, no other provision of the Paris Agreement could be implemented, especially the cease-fire. This was because of the very ambiguity and impracticability of the agreement and the fact that North Vietnam never renounced to aggression.

The cease-fire could not be implemented because of the Communist "land and population grab" campaign. Communist treacherousness compelled



the RVNAF to react vigorously to protect the territory and population under GVN control. War, therefore, continued in earnest at the small-unit level for a certain time then escalated to division and finally corps level. During this cease-fire period, the Communist progressed from pressures and seiges on outlying outposts, villages, and districts towns of the RVN, overrunning them wherever they could, to large-scale attacks first against the provincial city of Phuoc Long then against Ban Me Thuot. Their purpose was to occupy more land, control more population, and put pressure on our diminishing territory until the time was ripe for a final blow.

The ICCS had proved utterly impotent in the face of blatant and escalated violations by the Communists. This came as no surprise because from the beginning, the ICCS had been bogged down by its principle of unanimity and consultation and the clannish partiality of the Hungarian and Polish delegations. Therefore, save for the unique case of Sa Huynh, the ICCS was unable to arrive at any unanimous agreement on investigations and reports during the entire post cease-fire period. The frustrated withdrawal of the dedicated and impartial Canadian delegation partly testified to this impossible situation of the ICCS.

Another factor that contributed to the impotence of the ICCS was the uncooperativeness of NLF representatives and the collusion between them and the Hungarian and Polish delegates. From the beginning, the NLF had been unwilling to allow the presence of ICCS teams in those areas where they could verify violations. Therefore the NLF created all sorts of difficulties to obstruct ICCS activities, from firing on ICCS helicopters to refusing to provide basic amenities for ICCS teams. Also, the NLF never bothered to keep its JMC teams up to authorized strength. This deliberate withholding of personnel gave the NLF a pretext not to provide liaison officers to ICCS teams; hence there was no one to guarantee safety for these teams. Hungarian and Polish team members, meanwhile, were adamant; without NLF liaison officers and a guarantee of security they would not go into the field on investigative missions.

During their 60-day term of activity, therefore, the four-party JMC only succeeded in arranging and supervising the exchange of prisoners. It completely failed in its more important duties concerning the cease-fire. The two-party JMC which took over never arrived at any agreement on anything, from organization to deployment and operation. It was all too clear that the NLF was neither willing in providing personnel nor interested in carrying out its responsibilities as required. The NLF delegation chief constantly voiced groundless complaints and absurd protests in order not to provide personnel for the deployment of JMC teams. All of these protests related to housing, amenities, security, diplomatic immunity, freedom of movement, and relations with the press. Although the RVNAF and U.S. Embassy had done their best in providing comfortable quarters and modern amenities, the NLF delegation kept protesting. Our police and MPs had to keep a constant watch on where NLF members resided because the GVN did not want the population to cause them any trouble. NLF members were always free to move; the GVN never obstructed their movement provided they used official cars. Most of the limitations in movement, if any, were only self-imposed or dictated by the need to prevent violent actions from a hostile population. As for relations with the press, not only did the GVN authorize the NLF delegation to make free contacts, it also allowed it to hold press conferences. Initially, domestic and foreign reporters regularly attended these press conferences out of curiosity and a professional propensity for free discussions. Gradually, however, they became less interested and shunned attendance because all they were able to hear were tedious harangues and monologues. Complaints and protests, therefore, were just a screen for the NLF to conceal its sinister plots. At Tan Son Nhut, the NLF headquarters quickly developed into a propaganda hall and a listening post.

The arrangement for a political solution as provided by the Paris Agreement also quickly bogged down in a deadlock. After the 90-day deadline, both the GVN and NLF delegations had not even agreed on an agenda. While the GVN sincerely desired to negotiate in a brotherly spirit, the NLF was arrogant and not interested in serious talks. The gap that separated the two sides was too large. It centered on 6 major

issues: cease-fire, the National Reconciliation and Concord Council, guarantee of democratic freedoms, political prisoners, reduction of forces, and elections. More than a year passed without any agreement in sight. Finally, the GVN was compelled to suspend the futile talks in April 1974 in view of Communist violations which were being escalated both in intensity and in level.

The replacement of war materiels lost or worn out after the cease-fire had been implemented by the RVN and the U.S. in a most correct way. All losses and shipments were entered in separate books complete with detailed justifications and always ready to be audited by the ICCS and JMC. The U.S. proved even more conscientious when it assigned DOD teams to verify every major item of equipment and cross-checked losses against deliveries. The USDAO was no less conscientious; it did not allow the unloading of any quantity of ammunition that exceeded consumption. The amount of war materials and ammunition received by the RVNAF for replacement purposes was therefore always below reported losses.

The Communists, meanwhile, totally disregarded the provisions of the agreement. They continued to move personnel and war materials into South Vietnam to replace not only post cease-fire losses but also those incurred during the 1972 Offensive. At the same time, they accelerated the modernization of their units with a view to tilt the balance of forces in their favor. Just three months after the cease-fire, their armor forces had been augmented by 400 tanks, which brought the total to 500, and their 122-mm and 130-mm guns also increased to 250 pieces compared to 80 in 1972. By that time, NVA air-defense units were being upgraded into regiments and divisions equipped with radar-controlled 37-mm, 57-mm, and 100-mm guns and even SAM-2's. Infantry units also received improved SA-7's which had an effective range of 15,000 ft. The NVA strategic communication system was modernized and expanded, which made vehicle traffic possible from the 17th parallel to the boundaries of Tay Ninh in MR-3. Our air reconnaissance had detected important convoys rolling on this route, sometimes as many as 300 vehicles at one time. Along this route, new logistic bases were built; the most important among them were Khe Sanh and Duc Co. A fuel pipeline ran from the DMZ to near Quang Duc Province in MR-3. The Communists

were thus overtly building up logistics to prepare for a big offensive without any obstruction. The ICCS, meanwhile, reduced further its activities, withdrawing its teams from Khe Sanh and Duc Co after the Canadians had departed. All U.S. diplomatic protests against Communist violations practically ceased with the resignation of President Nixon.

## *South Vietnam's Strategic Alternatives*

### The Anti-Communist Policy

Continuing to fight against the Communists was perhaps the only way for South Vietnam to ensure its survival; there was no other alternative. The long war years had debunked the Communists' myth of national liberation and laid bare their true aggressive, cruel nature. The great majority of South Vietnamese in cities or in rural areas loathed the Communists; they fled before the Communists came. This was much different from the days immediately following the 1954 Geneva Accords. Our enemy was fully aware of this; he refused to hold elections in mid-1973 as suggested by the GVN. He knew he had no chance to win in any election. The holding of general elections as provided by the Paris Agreement, therefore, was not an objective that the Communists contemplated; this was not 1954. What they really wanted was to replace the current government of South Vietnam with a coalition that they dominated. This was the one thing that the South Vietnamese people could not accept; they had voted for the RVN constitution which denied the Communists protection under national laws. The GVN could not act against this popular will. Defending the constitution, therefore, was the ultimate responsibility of all free South Vietnamese.

The hard line "four-no's" anti-Communist policy espoused by President Thieu represented the wishes of the great majority of South Vietnamese. This policy provided for the protection of the constitution and democratic institutions; it sought to defend that part of South Vietnam's territory which the people and the RVNAF had shed blood to build and to preserve. It also reassured South Vietnamese and stimulated them in the face of the dark prospects provided by the Paris Agreement,



including those of an American sell-out and rumors of further partition.

However, President Thieu was unable to provide the coalescing force required to hold the South Vietnamese together during a major political and military showdown with the Communists. His leadership failed to foster and strengthen national solidarity. The people and politicians in particular suspected him of having dictatorial tendencies. Suspicion was further reinforced by some of the measures President Thieu kept pushing to strengthen his political base. The Press Law that he enacted in August 1972 to make the press healthy and encourage it to serve the nation during a period of struggle for survival, in which information played an important role, was unfortunately accused of strangling freedom of speech. The closing down of 24 papers which failed to meet requirements eventually led to street demonstrations in Saigon. The same adverse reaction greated the GVN law of political parties. We think that this law was exactly what South Vietnam needed to coalesce all its political groups into a democratic bi-partisan system and muster enough political strength to struggle against the Communists. Unfortunately, the opposition accused him of paving the way for a monolithic system dominated by his Democratic Party.

The amendment of the RVN constitution in January 1974 which allowed President Thieu to run for a third term led to a political crisis in which anti-government demonstrators accused him of corruption and clamored for his resignation. The opposition consisted mostly of anti-Communist elements who cared for the future of the nation and sincerely wanted a change in leadership in order to create a favorable condition for national unity. However, it was joined by a small number of Communist agents and sympathizers who were bent on sowing disorder and aggravating divisiveness among nationalist ranks.

In spite of his efforts, President Thieu did not have much success in stabilizing the political situation. By the end of 1974, he had reshuffled his cabinet four times and replaced a large number of province chiefs, and division and corps commanders with a view to strengthening his administration. Opposition groups alleged that he was not sincere in correcting the flaws of the regime, pointing to several corrupt and incompetent henchmen who still made up his entourage. Some of the better

personnel changes, they said, were not of his choice but dictated by political and public pressures. His lofty procrastination failed to dispirit the opposition. Finally, his use of police power to crack down on the opposition ushered the situation into a political impasse.

How much political dissent could the GVN or its leader tolerate when the nation was beset by insurgency and threatened by outright aggression? It was difficult to determine the exact extent. All of the demands voiced by President Thieu's opposition were just a cover. The core of the problem was a matter of confidence. Therefore, if in the interests of seeking support for his government, President Thieu had given in to all of these demands, he would still have had a most difficult time stabilizing the situation. It was really an impossible situation because if he had earned a good standing with one group, he would have attracted the criticism of another. In the state of political divisiveness that beset South Vietnam in the fall of 1974, we believe that there were only two acceptable courses of action. President Thieu could have brought up the issue of confidence and let the people decide whether they still wanted him as their leader through a popular referendum. Or he could have proved his disinterest in personal power by resigning in goodwill and given the nation a chance to experiment with fresh and perhaps better leadership.

"Hold All and At All Costs"

President Thieu's policy of holding on to every inch of national territory at all costs was consistent with South Vietnam's anti-Communist policy and entirely responsive to the situation created by a standstill cease-fire. Since our enemy could lay claim to any area where our military presence was inexistent, it had become imperative to hold on to all outposts, hamlets, and district towns, especially those located in sparsely populated, outlying corners or even in the heart of enemy base areas. All of these symbolized the RVN national authority, and they concretely demonstrated to an inquisitive foreign observer, especially the ICCS, that our control extended to these areas.



This policy was founded on the premise or belief that the Paris Agreement would be seriously implemented by both sides and that every violation by either side would be duly investigated, reported, and subjected to international arbitration. President Thieu had reasons to believe that the cease-fire would be respected and that South Vietnam would be able to handle it. President Nixon had personally promised him that the U.S. would "react appropriately" to blatant, major Communist violations and continue to support South Vietnam with military aid as required.

This policy had forced the enemy to disperse his forces in order to contain us; it also required him to devote most of his efforts on outlying areas, thus sparing our populous centers and causing less losses to our people. By carrying out this policy, the RVNAF were able to counter successfully the enemy's tactic of "land and population grab" during 1973. However, to achieve this, the RVNAF and RF had to overextend themselves and became vulnerable in almost every place. Lacking adequate tactical and strategic reserves, they were unable to contain selective attacks by NVA forces.

As enemy violations escalated in intensity and because of the impotence of the ICCS, this policy was eventually no longer responsive to South Vietnam's requirements especially as of FY-1973 when the U.S. began to reduce military aid.

"Hold As You Can" or The Enclave Strategy

The enclave strategy had been advocated by several South Vietnam and foreign military authorities immediately after the Paris Agreement went into effect. It was based on the RVNAF's limited capabilities in tactical air, the state of South Vietnam's economy and politics, the prospects of reduced U.S. military aid, and the fact that North Vietnam was always bent on conquering the south by force. As advocated, this strategy envisioned the reduction of South Vietnam into realistically defensible areas or enclaves which would be more consistent with RVNAF capabilities. This would enable the RVNAF to make more economical and effective use of our resources and perhaps permit us to reconstitute

adequate tactical and strategic reserves. Hence, we would be capable of counteracting quickly and decisively in most areas where the NVA might attack.

The merit of this strategy was that it would help South Vietnam sustain a protracted war with its own resources and those provided by U.S. military aid. However, it required comprehensive planning and preparations, especially in psychological terms, to reassure the people of the viability of the enclaves. Therefore it should be implemented at a most opportune moment in order to minimize repercussions.

However sound it might be tactically, the enclave strategy was apt to affect the morale of the RVNAF and the civilian population, especially during the transitory period between war and peace. It might weaken the GVN political posture, instill defeatism among the combatants, and sow confusion among the population by giving credence to widespread rumors of American sell-out and further territorial concessions. By confining our defenses to enclaves, we also gave the enemy absolute control of a large area from which he could easily dominate the lowlands.

The GVN therefore could not afford to apply this strategy immediately after the cease-fire. However, the GVN might have found it expedient and even desirable as a realistic alternative when the ICCS had proved impotent to enforce the cease-fire, when world powers were indifferent toward Communist violations, when President Nixon, the principal architect of the Paris Agreement and guarantor of South Vietnam's survival was no longer in office, and especially when the U.S. Congress rejected additional military aid for FY-74. The most appropriate time frame for the GVN to switch to this strategy would have been during the period from early spring to early summer of 1974.

For this strategy to succeed, the GVN should have carefully developed plans with the participation of U.S. associates. These plans should have had the approval of the U.S. government since their implementation depended primarily on the U.S. capacity to provide the necessary material and financial support. The GVN could have contributed only initiative, determination, and the manpower.



*The Final Collapse*

The rapid collapse of South Vietnam stunned almost everybody to include every segment of South Vietnamese society. No one, even our enemy, could imagine that the one million-man RVNAF could have disintegrated so tragically in only 45 days. This resulted from a near-total morale collapse which engulfed the population and armed forces of South Vietnam beginning in mid-March 1975.

President Thieu's decision to switch strategy, from "hold all at all costs" to "hold as you can" was inevitable; he had no other alternative. The unfortunate thing was that this alternative was implemented too late and without appropriate planning and preparations. Therefore, this sudden decision came as a hard psychological blow with all the undertones of defeat. It made the implementation task extremely difficult and confusing for field commanders involved, and it instilled anxiety and apprenhension among the military and civilian population whose morale had steadily declined as a result of American and world inaction in the face of blatant Communist violations.

Despite the tardiness of its implementation, this strategy was viable and would have been applicable in several areas across the country if President Thieu and the JGS had planned for it ahead of time. The JGS would then have been able to coordinate its plans with USDAO and corps commanders and implement them step by step. Redeploying troops in the face of the enemy was an extremely difficult military action. In the context of South Vietnam, it was even more difficult because the enemy was interspersed among us and because there was the problem of military dependents and the civilian population who lived in the areas to be evacuated. As a result, redeployment plans should take into account every possible obstruction and be comprehensive and clear enough to have a chance of success.

That President Thieu analyzed the problem and made the decision all by himself without informing the U.S. Ambassador or the USDAO Chief was incomprehensible in view of the importance and implications of this decision. No doubt, he was fully aware that South Vietnam was not capable of defending itself without assistance. He also knew that U.S.

military aid was indispensable for South Vietnam's survival. Therefore, surprising the U.S. with a *fait accompli* was totally detrimental to South Vietnam's future because it gave U.S. authorities no time to plan and prepare for assistance, especially in emergency situations such as the evacuation of Hue and Da Nang. It was this failure in solving the refugee evacuation problem in time that caused the paralysis and morale disintegration of our I Corps forces.

The implementation of the "hold as you can" policy began with the evacuation of Kontum and Pleiku, an area so far considered strategically important for the defense of the coastal plains. As a beginning action, this move was too risky, erroneous and rudimentary. It startled the population and RVNAF units in the area, creating panic among them. Hasty execution coupled with complete GVN silence gave credence to rumors that this part of the country had been conceded to the Communists through secret agreements. Believing that they were being made victims and hostages of the Communists, the local population fled toward the coast along with the troop convoys of II Corps.

The President's official order to "redeploy regular forces from Kontum and Pleiku to Nha Trang in order to reoccupy Ban Me Thuot" was an impossible mission. Even if this redeployment had succeeded, the reoccupation of Ban Me Thuot would not have been possible with redeployed units alone. It would have taken the commitment of general reserves to accomplish this mission, but the Airborne and Marine Divisions were already deployed in MR-1. The second impossible thing was to leave province chiefs and RF and PF troops behind to fend for themselves. This amounted to abandoning these troops to the mercy of NVA units, a sacrifice too big to accept which might seriously affect the morale of RF and PF troops elsewhere and other para-military forces as well. The subsequent disintegration of the police, PF, RF, and territorial commands which occurred well ahead of events during the final weeks of South Vietnam was perhaps a tragic consequence of this thoughtless act.

The commander of II Corps/MR-2 was not forthright and sincere when he accepted the mission, apparently to please the President. President Thieu had asked him if he felt he could reoccupy Ban Me Thuot, which implied that he was given some time to think about it. As Chief of the



JGS, I also suggested that II Corps could not expect any reinforcements from the JGS, which meant that he had to rely upon his own forces for this difficult task. I further insinuated the riskiness of the mission by reminding him of past French failures in such attempts. All this amounted to an excellent opportunity for General Phu to ask the President for some time to study the mission in detail. Had General Phu been forthright and courageous enough to do this, he would have had the opportunity to appreciate the impossibility of his mission and answer the President accordingly. Then perhaps President Thieu would have restudied his redeployment concept because of its far-reaching psychological and political impact and considered other solutions. We believe that since his immediate goal was to reoccupy Ban Me Thuot, he should have used forces other than those in Kontum and Pleiku for this mission. This was necessary to maintain the morale of troops and the civilian population in MR-2. The next step should have been to plan carefully for the evacuation of Kontum and Pleiku in such a way that its implementation would not create any adverse psychological impact.

The fact that President Thieu had personally given direct orders and guidance to General Phu to carry out what he called a "top secret" mission had placed the JGS in a difficult position. Therefore the JGS had to wait for General Phu's plans in order to provide the necessary support. Unfortunately, General Phu did not contact or submit any plans to the JGS before initiating his withdrawal action.

Convinced that he must have the element of surprise to succeed, General Phu did not properly plan his operation. Given the unknown conditions and the length of Route LTL-7B which he had selected, the least he should have done was to plan for diversionary actions and road trafficability and protection. Subsequently, as II Corps convoys moved east they were delayed by the lack of river-crossing facilities. This provided the enemy with enough time to overtake and attack the withdrawing column of troops and refugees. General Phu's orders for the sectors of Phu Bon and Tuy Hoa to provide security for Route 7B were an act of irresponsibility. Not only were there not enough RF troops for a task of such magnitude (160 miles), nearly 100 miles of this road had

not been explored for a long time. To ensure road security, he should have deployed ranger units to occupy dominating terrain features along this road, thereby reinforcing the sector troops and enabling engineer units to reestablish road trafficability in time. If General Phu had done this and taken diversionary measures in Pleiku and Kontum, we believe that the redeployment of his forces would have been successful.

The element of secrecy that Genral Phu had desired and expected to achieve did not last very long. When the first convoy left Pleiku the people were alerted to a possible evacuation. This was inevitable in the context of the Vietnam war. For years, our people had depended on army units for their security. Therefore, they monitored the activities of military dependents and units; if troops and their dependents left because of enemy action so did they. As for the enemy, he was indeed surprised by this sudden redeployment. However, he immediately threw his units into the pursuit. Once again, NVA troops had turned Route 7B into another "Boulevard of Terror."

Sacrificing the people and territorial forces of Pleiku and Kontum in order to extract II Corps forces safely for a big task was useless. Most of these forces were destroyed or disintegrated before they reached the coast. The enemy took control of these two provinces without having to fire a shot. Ban Me Thuot remained in enemy hands, and the morale of RVNAF troops and the South Vietnamese people reached its lowest ebb.

We believe at that time South Vietnam no longer had the capability to save its people from the trauma of defeat or restore their confidence. President Thieu's vows to "hold at all costs" had no effect on our people or even on RVNAF troops. The fact was the RVNAF no longer had any significant reserves left to help II Corps establish an effective line of defense or to launch a few successful counterattacks to restore popular and troop confidence. Although the JGS had a contingency plan to extract one infantry division from MR-4 in case of emergency, this plan could not be implemented because of heavy enemy pressure in the Mekong Delta and the hopeless state of the nation's morale. The RVNAF could no longer expect to receive the same level of U.S. support as they had during 1972 in order to refit units, reorganize defenses and counterattack. A few victories such as those achieved by IV Corps in Long An



and Can Tho, the effective use of incendiary and CBU bombs and even "daisy-cutters" by the VNAF, and the gallant battles fought by the 18th Infantry Division against three NVA divisions in Xuan Loc no longer sufficed to stop the rapidly decaying morale of troops and civilians alike. All were expecting some forceful action by the U.S. to stop the onslaught of NVA divisions. But hopes were all gone after the visit of General Weyand and the U.S. Congress rejected additional military assistance for South Vietnam.

The negative attitude of the U.S. government toward Communist violations, the U.S. Congress rejection of additional military aid, and the evacuation of personnel from U.S. consulates in MR-1 and MR-2 and from the U.S. Embassy in Saigon, all contributed to the collapse of morale throughout South Vietnam.

### *Significant Lessons Learned*

1. The Paris Agreement did not end the war and restore peace for the people of South Vietnam because the Communists continued to launch attacks across the country. These attacks escalated in level and in intensity and progressed from outlying areas to populated centers, culminating in multi-division size attacks against two provincial capitals in early 1975. North Vietnam was not genuinely inclined to implement the Paris Agreement; it regarded the agreement as an instrument to upgrade and modernize its army, build up logistics, and escalate the war to conquer South Vietnam by military force.

The standstill cease-fire could not be implemented in a war without frontlines and on a battlefield where troops of both sides were interspersed with each other. In order to enforce the cease-fire and minimize violations, troops of both sides should have been regrouped into well-defined areas. This requirement and a time frame for regrouping should have been clearly provided for by the agreement.

"National reconciliation and concord" was a fine principle but it could not be applied at once to two adversaries who had been fighting each other out of hatred for too long and whose ideological gap was so

wide. Negotiations for South Vietnam's political future and the enforcement of cease-fire between two sides progressed like a conversation between two deafs. Therefore, we believe that there was no other solution when dealing with North Vietnam than continuing the fight until ultimate victory.

The principle of "unanimity and consultation" could not work for the ICCS or the two-party JMC whose components were aligned with two antagonistic camps. During the entire period of its existence, the ICCS never arrived at an unanimous agreement on the investigation of violations. The Hungarian and Polish delegations were both unmistakably taking sides with the NLF; they prevailed on all kinds of pretext to refuse joining forces with the Iranians and Indonesians in the conduct of investigations. To function effectively, the ICCS should have had a permanent chairman; this chairman should have been a man of integrity, goodwill, fortitude, and authority.

2. The attitude of the U.S. greatly influenced the enforcement of the cease-fire. Among four signatory parties of the Paris Agreement, only the U.S. had the genuine authority and resources to make others respect the agreement. Therefore, after President Nixon, the principal architect and guarantor of peace, had resigned, the attitude and actions of the U.S. government toward blatant Communist violations as well as military aid for South Vietnam practically enhanced North Vietnam's confidence in pursuing the conquest of South Vietnam with impunity. However, although North Vietnam did not believe that the U.S. would intervene again, it always took this assumption into account in its conduct of the war. The way Communist violations escalated step by step and progressed from covert to overt actions clearly indicated that North Vietnam was probing the American attitude. In view of its prestige as a leading world power, its moral obligation toward a long-standing ally, and its responsibility toward the Paris Agreement in enforcing and making other parties enforce it, we think that the U.S. government should have adopted a resolute stance toward and acted vigorously against Communist cease-fire violations. If this had been done, we believe that these violations would not have reached the level and intensity they did and perhaps South Vietnam's tragic fate could have been averted.



3. Fighting against Communism was the only course of action that South Vietnam could take to ensure its continued survival in freedom and democracy. There was no other way, and no solution could ever replace victory. Political solidarity and military strength were the two factors that we required to achieve this victory for South Vietnam.

President Thieu did not have the courage and capability to create the favorable conditions for national unity. His political prestige diminished greatly after his "solo performance" in 1971, an event that should have never occurred in a democratic nation. It declined even further after he consented to participate in the peace talks as an equal to the NLF, signed an agreement which legalized the existence of two governments and two armies in South Vietnam, approved a constitution amendment to let him run for a third term, and never sincerely or enthusiastically removed the corrupt and incompetent elements in his government. President Thieu's political prestige was completely gone after President Nixon resigned. If he had had the wisdom then to step down and let the people select a national leader more suited to the circumstances, he would have been acclaimed as a true patriot who sincerely cared about the nation's future. But his procrastination led to political instability which seriously affected national unity and morale.

In the Vietnam conflict, both the RVNAF and the NVA depended on foreign military aid. It was a fact that neither South nor North Vietnam was able to provide much for their military forces except manpower. If both had continued to receive aid infusion at an appropriate level, neither side would have been able to prevail militarily, and the war would have drawn out inconclusively. However, the U.S. quit too early, even before the Vietnamization program was completed, while the Communist bloc continued to provide North Vietnam with increasing aid. U.S. drastic aid cutbacks at a time when the Communists were escalating their war of conquest compelled the RVNAF to fight without adequate supplies of fuel and ammunition despite their belt-tightening efforts. It was a fact that U.S. FY-75 military aid appropriations only satisfied about one half of the RVNAF minimum true requirements. War losses could

not be replaced as provided for by the Paris Agreement which included about 200 aircraft and 60 ships. Ten air squadrons of about 200 aircraft, twenty-one river patrol groups, and over half the RVNAF truck fleet had been grounded because there were no operational funds. The balance of forces had clearly tilted to the enemy's favor. Thirteen ARVN divisions could not possibly confront 23 NVA divisions (16 of which operated in South Vietnam) without adequate supplies especially when only the Airborne and Marine Divisions had true mobile combat capabilities. The remaining 11 ARVN divisions were practically pinned down in static defense by their territorial security responsibilities. This inhibitive shortcoming continued to seriously affect the capabilities of ARVN infantry divisions as mobile combat forces.

This shortcoming could have been remedied had South Vietnam's territorial security control organization been reorganized and strengthened through the addition of MR commands and the upgrading of the RF into separate battalions and mobile tactical groups. The defenses of South Vietnam would have been greatly strengthened if they had been confined to populated areas and not overextended. The problems caused by the loss of Ban Me Thuot and certain other areas could have been overcome satisfactorily if selected ARVN divisions had been available and trained as mobile strategic reserves.

4. The U.S. made a complete turn-about in its containment policy in Southeast Asia and ambiguously granted South Vietnam a "decent interval" to fend for its own survival. By overrelying on the U.S. promise of continued support and assistance, the GVN had become complacent and too shortsighted to develop an acceptable strategy for defending South Vietnam in the long term. As a result, when it came to grip with realities, it was already too late.

5. The sudden switch in South Vietnam's defense strategy resulted in a hasty decision to abandon Pleiku and Kontum on 16 March 1975. The tragic results of this decision shattered the morale of the RVNAF and the South Vietnamese people which was already swayed by the apparent U.S. indifferent attitude toward stepped-up Communist aggression and the painful aid cutbacks. Half of South Vietnam quickly fell into enemy hands not as a result of the force and fierceness of the enemy offensive



but primarily because of morale disintegration and the evacuation of regular forces. As it rushed southward, the tide of refugees also caused complete disintegration of some of our military units.

In the final analysis, this was the ultimate outcome of a long nation-building process. The strength of South Vietnam and its armed forces had been built primarily on foreign aid, not on its national resources. The fate of South Vietnam, therefore, depended on its American friends.

# CHAPTER V

## Conclusions

The war that Communist North Vietnam waged in the South five years after the 1954 Geneva Armistice sought to achieve two objectives: to reunify Vietnam by force and to defeat "American imperialism." North Vietnam had achieved its first objective after long and determined war efforts which culminated in the ignominious surrender of the RVNAF on 30 April 1975. Despite its claims, however, North Vietnam had failed to attain its second goal because the U.S. had cunningly terminated its inconclusive war efforts with the 1973 Paris Agreement.

Whether called "revolutionary" or "people's", the Vietnam war was an insurgency similar to those the Communists had waged in some parts of the world to seize control from existing governments. The only difference lay in the fact that this insurgency was essentially an invasion in disguise. It had always been sustained by a system of sanctuaries in adjacent countries and reinforced by the increasing commitment of NVA regular forces. Of historical interest, it is also worth noting that the building of a Communist underground infrastructure -- the preparatory phase -- had begun as early as the 1930s and developed during the 1946-1954 First Indochina War under the Viet Minh movement. This organization continued its underground existence in South Vietnam after the 1954 Geneva Accords, and along with guerrillas, had re-emerged and rapidly developed since 1959.

Insurgency depends primarily on two things: an underground political structure and guerrilla forces. In South Vietnam, this structure -- the VCI -- was imbricated among the population almost everywhere even in areas under our control. But guerrilla forces lived among the population only in areas under Communist control; elsewhere they subsisted by themselves



in outlying places organized into "war zones" or base areas. These base areas provided facilities for rest, training, supply, and recuperation not only for local guerrillas but also for North Vietnam's regular forces. The VCI, guerrilla forces, and base areas were linked together by a communication and logistic system which functioned inside South Vietnam and connected with the North. VCI and guerrilla activities were directed by a command and control system consisting of committee-type organizations at every level from village to COSVN which was controlled by Hanoi. The National Liberation Front (NLF) did not have an organization of its own; it was established merely as a front to cover North Vietnam's involvement and mislead world opinion.

The Communists launched insurgency warfare under two forms of offensive: political and military. In their political efforts, the Communists cunningly exploited the emotional causes of the conflict -- patriotism or nationalism, -- political and social problems faced by the RVN, and actions of the GVN. Nationalism was initially exploited under the subterfuge "national reunification," which in 1965 changed into "fight Americans to save the country" and finally ended with "coalition government". South Vietnam's political and social problems served as subjects of Communist propaganda while actions of the GVN and the RVNAF were exploited to alienate the people from the regime. In military efforts, Communist guerrilla forces applied primarily Mao Tse-Tung's strategy and tactics which could be summarily described by his own aphorism: "The strategy of guerrilla warfare is to pit one man against ten, but the tactics are to pit ten men against one."

Communist insurgency in South Vietnam was sustained by infiltration from the North. This infiltration provided not only supplies and materiels and manpower replacements but also entire NVA units to reinforce local insurgents. Because North Vietnamese were indistinguishable from their southern compatriots, Hanoi never admitted the presence of its troops in the South. The levels of infiltration depended on war requirements and seasonal changes, the dry season being the most appropriate time. An infiltration journey, which took from 2 to 3 months initially was reduced to about 1 week during the final years of the war as a result of improved

roads along the infiltration route. During this infiltration journey, North Vietnamese replacements and units were fed and supported by a system of "rear service" stations and bases located on the other side of the border on Laotian and Cambodian soil. Once inside South Vietnam, NVA units depended on the system of base areas for subsistence and support. Both South Vietnam's western borders and eastern coastline provided for easy infiltration because of their length, rugged terrain, and the availability of swampy river mouths. All this made anti-infiltration efforts extremely difficult. In addition, the weakness of the Royal Laotian Army and the pro-Communist inclination of the Sihanouk government made North Vietnam's infiltration activities much easier. As long as these activities were not stopped, the insurgency war in South Vietnam would continue.

Insurgency in South Vietnam was also supported by raid and invasion activities conducted by NVA elements. Most of these raids occurred in the DMZ and the western border areas which because of their proximity to sanctuaries over the border facilitated troop movements and logistic support. During the initial stage of the war, 1960-1964, raids were few perhaps because Hanoi did not want to antagonize world opinion. But after the U.S. participation and buildup in 1965 and as the war escalated, raids conducted by NVA units became more frequent in the border areas of the Central Highlands and MR-1 and in the DMZ where the population was sparse. NVA raid efforts attracted a great number of U.S. and ARVN units into these areas. Most typical of North Vietnam's invasions were the 1972 Easter Offensive and the 1975 Spring Offensive in which nearly all NVA divisions were committed.

The Vietnam conflict, in a certain sense, was a contest between force of will and military strength. Knowing that they could not defeat the RVN and U.S. by military strength, the Communists prevailed on perseverence and determination to outlast us. North Vietnam's resolve to conquer South Vietnam and defeat "U.S. imperialism" was consistent throughout the conflict, from active war to peace negotiations. By comparison, U.S. determination was less strong and gradually evaporated with time. The U.S. resolve to contain the expansion of Communism



in Southeast Asia climaxed in its participation in 1965 and remained unchanged until late 1967 despite growing American anti-war sentiments. But after 3 years of intense fighting with half a million troops and selected bombings against North Vietnam, the U.S. began to waver when military victory was nowhere in sight. In the wake of the 1968 Tet Offensive, U.S. determination declined further when from war commitments, the U.S. switched to peace negotiations and ceased bombing unilaterally, going from one concession to another in order to disengage from the war. The U.S. finally gave up when it drastically reduced military aid for South Vietnam and remained indifferent toward escalated Communist war efforts, completely oblivious of its commitment toward the RVN and obligations towards the Paris Agreement. This turnabout in attitude encouraged the Communists and made their resolve even stronger. At the same time it also seriously affected South Vietnam's determination to continue the fight alone.

From the beginning to the end, the RVN leadership had always been determined to fight against the Communists and refuse to accept them into the South Vietnamese community through coalition. Despite war weariness, the majority of the South Vietnamese people had always wanted to maintain their country as a separate and free nation and supported an anti-Communist stance. Even the militant Buddhists who strongly opposed the GVN in 1966 did not want Communist and neutralist elements in the RVN constitutional assembly. The South Vietnamese people also voted for their new constitution in 1967 which declared the Communists lawless elements. Anti-Communist feelings reached their apogee when masses of South Vietnamese youths volunteered for military service after the 1968 Tet Offensive, which enabled the RVNAF to expand rapidly to the 1-million level well ahead of plans. Thus, despite accumulated losses, political disturbances, social malaise, and war weariness, the people of South Vietnam continued to fight against the Communists in order to live in freedom. And although they might have opposed or disliked their government, the majority always preferred nationalism over Communism. This fact was obvious and indisputable. Over the war years, the South Vietnamese people always fled toward GVN-controlled areas when Communist

troops approached. No referendum could have told more about their choice than this vote by feet.

Some may argue that the flight of refugees stemmed from concern for safety, not from dislike of Communists. This might be partially true during the period of intense war, 1965-1972. But this argument could not explain why the people left en masse from MR-1 and MR-2 in late March 1975, leaving behind all their lands and belongings. Perhaps few people could refute the fact that save for a tiny minority, RVNAF troops never went over to insurgent ranks. When they deserted, as an analysis had shown, it was primarily because of family or economic reasons. But statistics could also be misleading as to the true number of deserters because many eventually reenlisted in other forces. Never in the war had collective desertion or unit disintegration even at the squad level ever occurred, except perhaps as a result of total morale collapse in March 1975.

The combat spirit of South Vietnamese troops was greatly enhanced by the participation of U.S and FWMA forces. It remained unchanged even when U.S. troops began to leave under the Vietnamization process. The RVNAF even felt more proud of their primary combat role fighting against their main opponent, the NVA. This fervent combat spirit declined only beginning in 1974 when the U.S. reduced military aid and virtually ignored Communist violations.

The Communists, therefore, used all kinds of subterfuge and tricky propaganda to break the will of South Vietnamese soldiers. Although this proselyting effort eventually became a major Communist strategic goal, it failed completely to sway our soldiers. It was the collapse of American will that finally shattered South Vietnamese morale and led to Communist victory. To win in a contest of will, one must either have a stronger will or persevere long enough to dispirit the opponent.

The U.S. military and material might was not used at an appropriate level and in the right place to attain the major objective of shattering North Vietnam's determination to pursue its conquest and the secondary goal of stopping the infiltration of men and materiels into the South. The American strategy of gradual response which was applied to the air war against North Vietnam did not succeed with an enemy who was



resourceful and resilient though of small size. No quick victory was ever possible with the way the U.S. approached bombing and selected targets. On the contrary, this strategy eventually worked against the U.S. for several reasons. First, protracted bombing on a small scale and a familiar pattern could only increase U.S. losses. Second, it gave North Vietnam time to modernize and beef up its air defense with Russian and Chinese aid while adjusting itself psychologically. Third, as U.S. losses mounted they also increased the psychological shock among the American people and fueled anti-war feelings.

We believe that the determination of Hanoi's leaders would have been shattered and the war could have ended within a few years after 1965 if the bombings had been carried out on a total scale and in a resolute manner against North Vietnam's most vulnerable points: Its ports, which were taking deliveries of war materiels, and its dike system which protected North Vietnam's rice bowl. The level and targets of U.S. bombings and mining in late 1972 gave us an indication of what could have been achieved if more drastic measures had been taken. But if for political and humanitarian reasons the U.S. could not bring itself to do that, we think it would have been wiser not to expand the air war to North Vietnam. In that case, the U.S. should have the determination to accept a longer war in South Vietnam until Hanoi's leaders became dispirited and renounced their aggression.

The U.S. failure to disrupt North Vietnam's infiltration system in the Laotian panhandle was an indication that airpower alone was perhaps not suited to the nature of this task despite advanced technology. To control enemy infiltration through this area effectively, we think that airpower should have been applied in conjunction with the use of infantry forces. The expansion of the ground war into lower Laos, therefore, was a justified and most convenient necessity. Since North Vietnam was using Laotian territory for military purposes in complete disregard of this country's neutrality, the RVN should have the legitimate right of self-defense by taking military counteractions to stop infiltration. If this enemy windpipe had been effectively strangled by our infantry forces, we believe that the sanctuary system would have been asphyxiated in due time.

Eventually guerrilla and main force activities in South Vietnam would have been reduced drastically because of the lack of resupplies and replacements. In line with this thought, we believe that the ARVN cross-border operation into lower Laos in 1971 was a necessary move, but it should have been planned and prepared more adequately and conducted at a much earlier time in order to be successful. Such an operation should have been attempted as soon as we realized that bombings were not productive enough and while we were holding the military initiative in South Vietnam during the U.S. force buildup. But since we failed to take appropriate actions to stop North Vietnam's infiltration, it was inevitable that the war would continue until one side collapsed because of physical and mental exhaustion.

From the beginning to the end, the Vietnam war had always been an insurgency war sustained by infiltration and supported by offensive attacks from North Vietnam. Because of its ultimate goal -- overthrowing the RVN government -- insurgency was the most important element of the war with main force units playing the supporting role. It was insurgent or subversive activities that affected the people's security and their attitude toward the government more than fierce battles fought in the DMZ or border areas. As a result, anti-insurgency should have been the foundation and priority of the RVN war efforts. In the context of South Vietnam, we believe that the following areas had a great impact on the conduct of anti-insurgency war.

National Laws

Law was an effective weapon against Communist insurgency because it helped the government control the population and national resources and maintain security and order. Ever since it became a separate nation, South Vietnam had made considerable efforts in revising and updating obsolescent laws with U.S. assistance. The RVN military code was also improved to help the RVNAF maintain discipline. Decree-law was one form of legislation that the GVN used consistently to meet important challenges of the war. All RVN laws and legal procedures were comprehensive enough to concentrate national efforts on combating insurgency and meeting the threat of aggression.



However, the enforcement of law in South Vietnam proved to be a difficult proposition in view of limited resources, economic and social constraints, and the propensity for materialistic living among the urban leadership. Despite the GVN efforts in extending the police and judiciary system in order to bring the due process of law to the rural people, there were still many difficulties. The incorrect and unjust exercise of national laws by GVN officials from the President to lower echelons of the police and the judiciary system had made laws less effective and fostered disregard and distrust in them among the people. It was really incomprehensible and shocking when those who committed actions detrimental to the nation were not punished appropriately or remained immune. It was also disheartening when public servants, to include military authorities, abused their authority and the law for personal benefits without being subjected to investigation and prosecution. How could national laws be properly enforced when the law enforcers themselves disregarded them?

No matter how comprehensive, laws always have loopholes. The Communists took advantage of these loopholes to cover and protect their subversive activity and at the same time foment social disorder and political dissent. But the inquisitive eyes of the press, especially the western press which functioned in stabilized and peaceful societies, hardly made the task of combating Communist subversion in South Vietnam through law enforcement any easier.

The guarantee of individual rights and safety and provision of the due process of law were the basis of an organized society. Only when laws were properly enforced through an impartial, forthright, and courageous judiciary system and respected by all public servants were the people encouraged to cooperate with the government and support it, the key to success in combating insurgency.

Combined Campaign Plans

It was truly detrimental to the war effort that at the beginning we did not have any comprehensive plans that set forth the basis for a common strategy and the establishment of a war control apparatus. Not

until 1967 did the JGS and MACV come up with the annual Combined Campaign Plan (CCP), which though not ideal was a laudable progress in the common war effort. The CCP was not ideal in that it had not been placed in its due context and because the war control machinery had not been properly adjusted for effective coordination and integration of U.S. and RVN efforts. For example, the MACV commander did not have complete control of all U.S. agencies involved in pacification support although he was responsible for it. Likewise, the Chief, JGS had no authority over GVN agencies involved in pacification despite the fact that several aspects of the CCP required the dedicated performance of these agencies. Despite some of its shortcomings, the CCP would have produced better results if it had been instituted a few years earlier, for instance as soon as MACV was activated. Then military actions would have produced more lasting results in pacification because they were supported and continued by civil operations which in turn would have taken less time and expenditures with the support of military efforts and a permanent security protection system. The concept of "one war" instead of three separate ones -- development, pacification, and military efforts -- would also have been developed much earlier as a result.

This initial lack of a joint, comprehensive war plan had placed us in a defensive posture, and our initiative was regained only with the advent of the CCP. This seemed to derive from the fact that there was no formal military or defense agreement between the RVN and U.S. governments which defined the obligations and responsibilities of each and how the war should be conducted.

There was no reason why a formal defense agreement could not have been reached between the RVN and the U.S. Despite its provisions, the Geneva Accords could hardly have bound the RVN and U.S., both non-signatories, since the Communists had completely disregarded them by launching aggressive activities in South Vietnam. If such an agreement had existed, we believe that it would have been the best deterrent against North Vietnam, leaving no doubt as to the U.S. determination to protect and defend South Vietnam. The South Vietnamese people found it regrettable and hard to believe when the U.S. rejected President Diem's proposal for



such an agreement in 1961. They could not understand the U.S. motives in adhering to the obsolescent Pentalateral Agreement of 1950 when Vietnam was still under French control.

The lack of a combined organization to conduct the war was another shortcoming. Because of the common goal of both governments and combined war efforts, at least some form of "Allied War Council" would have been desirable. This council would be co-chaired by the RVN President and the U.S. Ambassador, including as members all the cabinet ministers and the Chief, JGS on the RVN side and all the heads of U.S. agencies and the MACV commander on the U.S. side. The U.S. Ambassador in particular would be the sole authority responsible for the conduct of the war in coordination with the RVN President and in full control of all U.S. military and civilian agencies in South Vietnam. All plans and policies of the council, the highest war control organization, would be bilingual and signed by the co-chairmen in order to achieve unity in strategy and totality of war efforts.

Militarily, unity of command over all participating forces should be the key to success. The failure to activate a combined command to achieve this unity was militarily deplorable. Politically and psychologically, however, it enhanced South Vietnam's national cause, helped the GVN exercise its newly recovered sovereignty in full, and gave credence to American anti-colonialist tradition.

Therefore, the principle of cooperation and coordination prevailed throughout the war as an alternative to combined command. It had proved effective for the conduct of the war, causing no significant constraints to combined military efforts between RVN and U.S. forces. This success was partly due to the willingness to listen to reason on the part of RVN commanders and their staffs and the effectiveness of an extensive U.S. advisory system. However, the results achieved would have been better if the JGS and MACV had developed a set of directives providing guidelines on how to achieve unity of action such as the co-location of headquarters, the establishment of combined agencies providing management information concerning all RVN, U.S. and FWMA forces, the formation of combined staff committees for the study of important problems, provision

for daily or periodical contacts between counterparts, co-conducted field visits, etc.

In addition to its political disadvantage, the establishment of a combined command inevitably posed the problem of personnel security concerning RVNAF staff members whose clearance and loyalty could be problematic in view of stringent U.S. security regulations. But even if such a command had been created, we think that it would not have improved cooperation and coordination among participating forces in any significant way. However, the course of the war would have been different and perhaps more beneficial for South Vietnam in the long run if a combined command had been activated. After all, with a U.S. general in overall command, the war would then be unmistakenly a U.S. responsibility, involving the U.S. more deeply. Therefore, even in the case of inconclusive fighting, the U.S. could not disengage from the war easily because its honor and credibility as a leading world power were at stake. Then maybe its resolve to win the war would have been firmer and more consistent.

Politically and psychologically, we believe that no country with a sense of national self-consciousness would want to place its armed forces under the command of a foreign general, even if that general was American and enjoyed indisputable popularity and respect. It was a hard decision for any country to make even when its survival was at stake. However, we think that this problem could have been overcome if the timing and conditions had been right. Perhaps the most appropriate time for activating a combined command would have been in late 1964 or early 1965 when South Vietnam was on the brink of military disaster and had to appeal to the U.S. for help. If before committing its forces to respond to this appeal the U.S. had squarely posed the condition of a combined command under U.S. leadership, perhaps the GVN would have been amenable to it because national survival should take precedence over national self-consciousness. No other time frame would have induced the GVN to accept such a condition even if unity of command was indispensable to achieve success. Some thought that 1966 was also an appropriate time because of the arrival of FWMA forces. While it was true that this



international presence could have alleviated the political and psychological impact of an allied command, we think that the GVN would have hardly been amenable to it once South Vietnam had regained stability and confidence. We believe that the traditionally proud people of South Vietnam would have never accepted U.S. dominance willingly except in case of extreme national distress.

Security for National Priority Areas and Protection for the People

Ensuring security for vital areas should be a national priority, a task that should take precedence over any other concern in a counter-insurgency war. Security should encompass not only important cities or urban centers and major ports and airfields, it should also cover developing rural areas where the population was dense and national resources indispensable for the pursuit of war efforts. This delineation of national priority areas helped limit the extent of conflict and the consequences of war. It also enabled the GVN to devote all resources to those areas on which national survival and ultimate victory depended; hence it reduced the costs of war in terms of manpower, material, and morale drain.

Maintaining security for these limited areas should have been a primary concern when the nation-building efforts began and when Communist insurgency was still in the embryonic stage and confined to outlying areas. The primary reason for South Vietnam's military predicament in late 1964 was none other than our failure to do just this, which enabled Communist insurgents to subvert a major proportion of our rural areas and isolate our cities. As a result, insurgency had been given a chance to grow and prosper.

The protection of national priority areas should be a consistent effort; the GVN and RVNAF could not afford to let up on it for the sake of large-unit operations in outlying areas. Activities conducted by the enemy main force there were primarily designed to support insurgency since they drew our forces away from national priority areas, causing security there to be more relaxed. Therefore, efforts to fight both the big and the small war should be equally distributed and conducted in such a manner that they did not affect the security of national priority

areas. Pacification, which was a strategy at once defensive and offensive, was entirely responsive to insurgency warfare; it should be our primary effort. Victories against the NVA main force were temporal and partial. Only victory against insurgency in our national priority areas could guarantee a lasting, total success.

Protecting the people should be the primary objective of security measures. Only when the people were safe could there be security. The true significance of village and hamlet security did not imply only that villages and hamlets should be kept immune from enemy attacks. Security also meant that individual villages could live in safety and trust one another without having to fear disruptive actions of the VCI or mischievous acts of local officials. Village protection was effective only when individual safety was guaranteed. In that sense, we think that occasional insurgent attacks or terrorist actions were less damaging to rural security than the misconduct of local government officials and troops. It was their mischiefs that affected popular confidence in the GVN ability and willingness to provide protection. They were the primary cause for the people's fence-sitting attitude and reluctance to cooperate, their sole concern being to be left alone. While enemy attacks against villages and hamlets might cause physical damage or losses and embarrassment for the GVN, in a psychological sense they worked to our advantage because the people had the chance to appreciate the benefits of pacification and become more solidary with the GVN against Communist disruptive actions.

Security had to go hand in hand with safety. Safety for the people should be the primary concern of military commanders conducting security activities wherever the area of operation might be because the enemy was hard to identify. Even in enemy-controlled areas, not all people were pro-Communist. Our enemy depended on the people to subsist; hence he always tried to induce popular animosity toward our side, resorting frequently to creating situations that tempted destruction by our firepower. Therefore, security operations that destroyed the enemy but also caused extensive damage and casualties to the people were counterproductive in an anti-insurgency war. Because of difficulties in separating the people from the enemy, military commanders should be very cautious in the use of firepower in order to minimize damage to the local people.



The Communist Infrastructure - Intelligence

Destroying the Communist political infrastructure, the VCI, should have been a priority strategic task during the initial stage of nation-building. It was the VCI, not the guerrillas or local forces, which was the foundation of insurgency. As long as the VCI existed, there was no chance to eliminate the guerrillas whose subsistence, support, and growth depended on it. Evidently, when the VCI was isolated, neutralized, and eliminated, sabotage and terrorist activities would gradually disappear because guerrillas could not exist without replacements, supplies, and intelligence. They would be compelled to move to other areas and became extremely vulnerable to our security activities. Death of the VCI, therefore, was the primary condition of security for national priority areas.

Of all offensive activities launched against the VCI, intelligence should be the primary effort. Only intelligence could break through the VCI line of defense. Our intelligence organization should be given the mission to collect information, identify, and monitor the activity of every individual VCI member living among the population. Only when positive identification was available could elimination be possible. The building up of an extensive, all-encompassing intelligence organization at the grass roots level was a time-consuming and continuous task, but without it we had no chance of eliminating the VCI effectively. Because of the nature and extent of this task, only the national police had the resources to assume it. The military intelligence organization was definitely not suited for this task but it could provide technological assistance and support. The responsibility for monitoring the VCI should not be distributed among several agencies since this would dilute efforts and create rivalries. Abundance of unreliable information was worse than having no information at all. The national police should be made the backbone of this territorial intelligence system on which the RVNAF could depend for complementary information on the enemy. Therefore, the expansion and improvement of the national police should have been the GVN's primary concern from the beginning. Because of this delicate mission, the activities and conduct of policemen should be subjected to stringent control. Only when they behaved and acted correctly could they gain the

trust and cooperation of the people who were traditionally hostile to police activities in general.

Another primordial offensive effort against Communist insurgency was the disruption of its organization. This could be achieved by isolating the VCI, which was imbricated among the population, from the guerrillas who lived elsewhere. A major characteristic of the insurgent machinery was the constant liaison and movement of personnel and supplies within populous centers, in areas adjacent to them, and between these areas and bases. All this depended on a system of liaison and communication with couriers, messengers and guides and routes. If these routes were interdicted or severed, the enemy's control and coordination system would be upset because mutual support between the VCI and the guerrillas no longer existed. The most effective approach to this offensive task was "round-the-clock ambushes." Within populous centers and in their close proximity, this task should be the responsibility of the police and PSDF. In between these centers and outlying areas, the responsibility should be assigned to territorial and regular forces. This was a demanding small-unit task. Therefore, all regular, territorial, and para-military forces should be trained for separate small-unit actions in all types of terrain day and night.

If we combined offensive efforts against both the VCI and the insurgent communication system, which should be an objective of pacification, enemy guerrillas and main force units would be compelled to counteract, by moving into areas under our control. This would give our tactical and strategic reserve forces a chance to destroy them. In such a situation, the overall enemy posture would be edged into defensive, and if our initiative was sustained long enough, we had all the chances of attaining our goal of ensuring the security for all of our national priority areas.

Counterinsurgency Forces and the Territorial System

Counterinsurgency forces should consist of two components: a GVN component and a popular component. To be successful, counterinsurgency efforts required the participation of the people, the sharing of responsibilities and sacrifices by the people. The people would participate



wholeheartedly and support the GVN in counterinsurgency efforts only if they were properly motivated. They had to be convinced of the reasons why they should fight and for whom. They should be made aware of national objectives and policies and given the chance to appreciate GVN programs designed to provide security and protection for the people, to improve their living, and to build democracy. They should also be kept informed of the successes and especially failures of these programs and given the chance to suggest and contribute to remedial actions.

But all this was not enough to motivate the people if they continued to live individual lives far removed from the mainstream of national activities. The people should be encouraged and assisted to coalesce into organizations, associations, and political parties. Only the full development of these organizations could guarantee lasting results for GVN efforts of mobilizing the people because it played a major role in motivation. Therefore, the organization of the people and collective activity were indispensable instruments to motivate the people's participation in counterinsurgency efforts and developing the nation. But success in this undertaking depended a great deal on the GVN leadership and its cadre.

The GVN component of counterinsurgency included the police and military forces. The police was the primary force used to maintain law and order and ensure security at the grass roots level. It should be expanded and improved appropriately to assume this encompassing task. The police should have the direct support of people's self-defense forces (PSDF).

The PSDF were an excellent form of organizing the people for counterinsurgency efforts. This organization should have unity of command, a separate status, and a streamlined structure to economize manpower resources and provide better activity coordination. The concept of "citizen in peace, soldier in war" should be the foundation of the PSDF organization. Therefore, there should be two PSDF components: permanent or full time and temporary or part-time. The temporary component served in a reserve capacity in that they augmented full-time elements only in case of necessity and for a short time; otherwise they were just ordinary citizens. The full-time component should be removed from their normal

business and supported by GVN pay. It was used to assist the police in security activities within the village or hamlet. Both components should be organized into appropriate units (squad, platoons, companies) like the army in order to be prepared to do military service as individuals. Moral armament or motivation was primordial for the PSDF, weapons secondary. Weapons could be supplied by the GVN as required and complemented by local resources. Permanent PSDF members should be trained carefully for their duties, especially sentry, search, patrol, and ambush. Part-time members needed only to know how to use weapons and fight as a soldier in case of emergency; but they should be made aware of their role as informants. The PSDF were a primary source of manpower for the RVNAF; they helped stop the pilferation of manpower to the other side. As a people's organization armed by the GVN to assist the police in maintaining security at the grass roots level, the PSDF should be administered by the Ministry of the Interior and supervised by the national police.

Security outside the confines of villages and hamlets should be the responsibility of the ARVN. To perform this role effectively, the ARVN should be organized into two mutually supporting components: territorial forces and strategic reserves. Territorial forces were used as a shield to protect the outer rim of national priority areas against approaches and penetrations by enemy local forces and guerrillas. They should be organized into separate infantry battalions to facilitate administration, logistic support, and effective command and control. These battalions could be assembled into larger tactical formations if required.

Two major shortcomings to be avoided in the employment of territorial forces were: overextension and the lack of tactical reserves. These could be overcome only if our defenses were limited to national priority areas. It made no sense to hold on to outlying areas that we could not defend effectively. This self-imposed restraint would help solve shortages in combat units and reduce losses.

Territorial battalions should be rotated between area security or static defense and tactical reserve duties. This would enable them to rest and train and alleviate the "territorial syndrome" caused by long static defense duties. Rotation was perhaps the only way to avoid physical

and mental exhaustion in the long term. In order to perform both roles effectively, territorial battalions should be trained to fight both conventional and unconventional warfare, as separate small units as well as in coordination with other combat arms in large-unit operations. The ideal ratio between area security and tactical reserve forces at any moment should be 2:1, and rotation time could be from one to one year and a half in static defense and from six months to one year in mobile combat duties.

As mobile self-supporting combat units, ARVN infantry divisions were perfectly adapted to the role of strategic reserves; we must never lose sight of this. The Airborne and Marine Divisions were used as the RVNAF general reserves more because of their availability and excellent combat tradition than because of tactical requirements. Evidently, the advent of the helicopter no longer made airborne operations the exclusivity of paratroopers. Likewise, our marines never conducted a major amphibious operation in the entire war. Both divisions were therefore employed basically as infantry forces. Despite their splendid exploits, their employment also caused some complications in terms of tactical coordination and control. As to infantry divisions they should fight as separate forces and be placed under corps control only when required. This does not imply that we should not have corps headquarters, but since corps should be purely tactical formations, they should not be assigned any permanent territorial control responsibility. In the framework of our elaboration on a separate territorial system with MR and sector headquarters, the role of corps should be strategic in nature. Therefore one corps headquarters could be assigned to the JGS, and another one or two deployed where needed for specific missions of limited duration. The RVNAF needed to have no more than three such corps headquarters.

As deterrent forces, ARVN infantry divisions should be used only to deliver the decisive blow against major NVA units whenever they were detected or pinned down by our territorial units. The most important thing, therefore, was never to assign any territorial responsiblity to infantry divisions or long security missions which could be detrimental to their combat mobility and morale. Using them in a tactical and

strategic reserve posture does not imply that they should stay idle and wait for assignment. In the context of counterinsurgency warfare, infantry divisions should be employed as strike forces, assisting territorial units in crushing enemy local force and guerrilla units and to isolate them from the VCI by destroying the enemy communication and liaison system. This could be done by assigning them temporary missions and areas of operation outside the realm of national priority territory. Because of their flexible missions, infantry divisions should be capable of large-unit and small-unit operations and employing both conventional and unconventional tactics. They should be rotated among themselves to have time for rest and training like territorial forces, in order to maintain their strength and endurance in a protracted war and be ready for big actions on short notice. They should also be given the opportunity to change areas of operation across the country in order to familiarize themselves with all types of terrain and be ready to fight in any. Only in this way could they become truly effective mobile combat forces.

In addition to making infantry divisions combat ready for strategic defense purposes, we should also make sure that we had adequate strategic mobility assets to move them rapidly. These requirements could be kept at a minimum by pre-positioning some divisions at critical areas but at least we should be able to move one division within two or three days from the staging area to the battlefield. Given our experience during the war, we think that C-130s were best suited for this task in view of their load capacity, speed, and adaptability to field airstrips.

In general, strategic reserve divisions should be deployed as whole units to achieve maximum effectiveness. As such they were capable of replacing tactical reserve units to rapidly turn around a difficult tactical situation. At all costs we should avoid deploying them piecemeal and too early when the enemy intention was not yet clear. Whenever a mission had been accomplished, they should be extracted immediately to turn over the area of operation to territorial units.

We think that only with the availability of combat-ready strategic reserve divisions that could be moved rapidly and by employing them flexibly in mutual support missions with territorial forces could we



successfully stall and defeat major enemy main force campaigns designed to support insurgency in our national priority areas. Not until we had that capability could we effectively support pacification, guarantee lasting results for that program, and reinforce the people's trust in the GVN and RVNAF.

Whether counterinsurgency activities conducted by GVN and people's forces as described above could succeed or not depended on the basic national command and control system known as the "territorial machinery." This machinery should be modified and improved in keeping with administrative and military requirements and the security situation. When the situation was secure, the administrative system (region, province, district, village, hamlet) and the military system (military regions, sectors) functioned hand in hand in a mutually supportive manner. But when insurgent activities reached a high level, the military system should be extended to the subsector (district) level but both systems should be placed under unified command, i.e., under one head (province chiefs serving as sector commanders, for example). This unity of command, we believe, was indispensable for the conduct of a total war in which all activities should be mutually supportive for better coordination and results. In the South Vietnamese context, it was inevitable that military officers should perform the double role as province chiefs and sector commanders because this was dictated by the nature of the war and the fact the nation's elite class mostly served in the military. The only shortcoming of this practice was that military province and district chiefs were not all experienced or knowledgeable about administrative matters. But this was a shortcoming that could be overcome with time and training and the appointment of competent and dedicated civilian deputies for administration. The abolition of the position of government delegate at the military region level without appointing an administrative assistant or political counselor for the MR commander was not helping the total war effort. The RVN military territorial organization with sectors as basic operational units was sound, but organizing too many sectors into one MR only weakened command and control. For that reason, there should have been more than four MRs. Operational control should have been better with from five to seven MRs.

The territorial system was of primodial importance in a counter-insurgency war. In addition to coordinating and controlling military activities, it also played a vital role in administration and logistics and in implementing GVN programs. It was the indispensable backbone that supported RVNAF strategic strike forces in fighting the big war.

Development Policies

In terms of nation-building and development, the RVN was like an inversed pyramid. Its base, or the political, military, and economic infrastructure at the grass roots level was weak and poor in every respect from resources to leadership. By contrast, the summit was powerful and wealthy.

Villages and hamlets are the solid foundation of the nation. The majority of the South Vietnamese population lived in rural areas which were also the principal ground of contest between Nationalist and Communists. The nation-building process, therefore, should begin in rural areas and should be founded on them, and all national efforts should be devoted to strengthening this foundation. Such efforts as improving the PF and RF in 1961, concentrating pacification and development on national priority areas as of 1967, developing the PSDF in 1968, and expanding the national police to villages in 1970 were all excellent moves in the right direction but they were too late. If all national efforts and U.S. assistance had been devoted to the grass roots level during the initial stage, 1955-1956, the situation would have been different.

This national imbalance existed in all areas. Since the Vietnam conflict was basically an insurgency war, the national police and the people's organization for self-defense should be the primary counter-insurgency forces; their organization and development should have been a first priority task. It was truly unfortunate that by 1968, the national police had only 70,000 members, a size that met perhaps peacetime requirements. Lack of care and a sound organization also plagued the people's self-defense forces. Evidently, the priority given to developing a too large military force was the primary cause for perennial



imbalance. As a matter of fact, this military force had attracted almost all the nation's elite manpower. But in a protracted and total war which required fighting and building at the same time, balancing the distribution of manpower among all areas of endeavor was a necessity. Expedient measures designed to overcome this imbalance such as transferring servicemen to the civilian sector and allowing deferments and exemptions from military service only partly helped. We think that balance could have been achieved only if we had limited the RVNAF to a size that the nation could support effectively in the long run. Protracted war also demanded that we mobilized all manpower resources, male and female, to meet national requirements. It was obvious that South Vietnam's manpower resources could not support a one million-man military force, although we had sacrificed balance in other areas of activity. The size of a military force fighting a protracted war, we think, should be based on the nation's capacity to sustain it with the annual draft-age resources (18 to 20 years of age). We think that 600,000 or 700,000 was about all South Vietnam could afford, and our military force should be built on quality rather than quantity. We could achieve quality for this reduced-size force by better leadership and discipline. An average-sized but soundly organized, carefully trained, well disciplined, and well led force, to our thinking, was much more effective than a large one plagued by all kinds of shortcomings. The manageable size of a military force also helped determine the term of mandatory service and allow normal discharges, thereby reducing mental tension caused by indefinite service, which was the cause of indiscipline and lethargy. If the RVNAF had been reduced in size, we believe that this would have helped reinforcing our counter-insurgency forces at the grass roots level and restored balance to other efforts.

In addition to manpower, a military force also depends on the nation's financial capability for equipment and operation. Lacking this capability, South Vietnam had to rely on U.S. aid which depended on U.S. policies. There were two major shortcomings that we think had plagued the U.S. military aid program in South Vietnam. First, this program had taught and encouraged the RVNAF to operate as if they were

a military force sustained by immense national resources. Second, the U.S. never let South Vietnam know to what extent and for how long it could continue providing aid for the war and development efforts. This ignorance coupled with constant American promises of continued support caused the RVN leadership to be too dependent on the U.S. and ignore the element of cost and effectiveness when making tactical or strategic decisions. The idea of putting a limit to the extent and duration of U.S. aid for South Vietnam, as recommended by some U.S. officials and congressmen, especially Senator Nunn, in early 1975 perhaps would have helped our national leadership come to grips with stark reality if it had been suggested earlier. Then President Thieu could have devoted his efforts to developing a defense strategy better suited to South Vietnam's capabilities and the limitations of U.S. aid. If this had occurred, we believe that the force structure organization of South Vietnam's defense forces would have been drastically changed.

Leadership and Cadres

Steering the course of the nation is the responsibility of the national leadership, and implementing the policies charted for this course is the responsibility of cadres, political and military, at all levels. The national leadership should be clairvoyant and foresighted; it should set the example for the cadres. The cadres are the vanguard combatants of the regime; they should know how to organize, motivate and guide the people and armed forces in carrying out national policies. As such, they are a mirror that reflects the example set by the national leadership.

South Vietnam's national course from the day it became a nation until it no longer existed was not entirely shaped by the national leadership but to a great extent, we have to admit it, by U.S. policies toward Vietnam and this part of the world. Consequently, the survival of South Vietnam in its long struggle against the Communists depended on our leadership's "knowledge about the U.S." and its "ability for compromise," because our policies had to comply with the interests of both nations. Ignoring this reality or deviating from this course only led to disaster.



The tragic thing for South Vietnam was that there had been too many turnovers in leadership, both in country and in the U.S. This lack of continuity in leadership greatly affected the common war effort. The deaths of President Diem and President Kennedy and the resignation of President Nixon were all tragedies for South Vietnam. For a change in leadership usually entailed a change in policies and the cadres in charge of implementing these policies.

The South Vietnamese ship lacked a talented and capable captain to guide it through the Communist storm, especially after the death of President Diem. This serious deficiency stemmed primarily from the fact that the majority of outstanding nationalist leaders had perished at the hands of French Colonialists and Vietnamese Communists and during the long war against both of them. A small number of our nationalist leaders who had gone into exile to work for the nation's big time eventually found their ardor and energy gone with senility. Infighting among nationalist ranks also dispirited some and tarnished the reputation of others. This scarcity of leadership talent could be largely attributed to the lack of popular base that beset nationalist political parties. It made the choice of a leader who truly enjoyed popular esteem and support almost a hopeless proposition.

It was important to know that in that choice, the majority of the Vietnamese people always seemed to trust only those who had proven records in the anti-French struggle and preferred them over the modern intellectual elite. This was understandable enough given the trauma our people had gone through under the long French domination. A revolutionary background was therefore indispensable for a leader to enjoy popular trust and support. South Vietnam's short history demonstrated that all those personalities with a pro-French background never had any political success. If the people did not oppose them publicly, they always loathed them in private. Young, foreign-educated talents also did not attract the people, chiefly because of political inexperience and the fact that they never fought for their country. Perhaps they would have had some chance of success after proving their talent and dedication for the national cause.

Another interesting thing to learn was that very few among those who had a revolutionary background were educated. Placing them in a leadership position was therefore risky if they did not have the charisma to attract the people. The factor of regionalism was also to be taken into account; it was a reality about which most South Vietnamese were conscious. Regionalism was the cumulative result of French colonialist policies, differences in geography and customs, and difficulties in interregional communication. The migration of nearly one million North Vietnamese helped the amalgamation process but could not erase regionalism. Overlooking this factor in the choice of national leadership would be an inadequacy. In view of all these factors, we think that the formula to solve the problem of national leadership in South Vietnam should be: cooperation and compromise and time. Cooperation was necessary between the veteran revolutionaries and the intellectual elite; the formers provided the struggle force and the latters the know-how. Compromise was required to reconcile age discrepancies, regionalism, and differences in RVN and U.S. national interests. Time helped foster perseverance and resolution, but unfortunately South Vietnam did not have enough of it. Twenty years is long for a man but too short for a nation.

Military leadership was in the same condition as political leadership during South Vietnam's formative years. Although the National Army of Vietnam was created only a few years after the Viet Minh army, it did not enjoy the favorable circumstances required to develop indigenous leadership, being led by the French. A great void of leadership, therefore, occurred after the French departed. This void was eventually filled by the presence of the U.S. military advisory assistance mission and the development of the RVNAF. Time and combat helped the emerging leaders to acquire experience and stature, but politics and war also attrited their ranks.

Born under favorable conditions and having to face the Communist threat immediately, the RVNAF had to rely on U.S. advisers and U.S. financial and material assistance to build their strength. U.S. advisers enjoyed the respect and admiration of South Vietnam's military leaders because of their experience, maturity, and professionalism and also



because their powerful leverage greatly influenced important decisions. South Vietnam's defense strategy, therefore, was essentially a compromise between indigenous and U.S. concepts. It was largely influenced by U.S. strategy because it had to function within the framework of U.S. global policies. Even if South Vietnamese military leaders had had the vision and desire to develop an independent strategy more suited to their nation, they would not have succeeded because of this constraint.

The successful implementation of national policies, plans, and programs depend on good and loyal cadres. Under French rule, the Vietnamese people were not given a chance to learn politics; the intellectual elite was trained only to become servants. As a result, when the French departed, the new nation of South Vietnam suffered from a critical shortage of executive cadres. This shortage could only be overcome with time through reform programs intended to improve the old bureaucracy and systematic training, both in country and overseas, to form a new executive class. Under the First Republic, the GVN had made serious efforts in this direction by indoctrinating civil servants and encouraging them to participate in political activities. The spirit of the cadre, therefore, gradually took roots and developed. It was unfortunate that these efforts were neglected during the transitory period preceding the Second Republic. However laudable the efforts of the First Republic might have been, emphasis seemed to have been placed more on the top and middle than on the lower level.

Not until 1966 were there any efforts to improve the executive ranks at the village and hamlet level, the major ground of political contest with the Communists. Although the objective of these efforts was sound, the approach to them was wrong. The GVN seemed to have focused on training new cadres and neglected the existing ones. Also, by activating the RD cadres, it had wasted national resources and created confusion, duplication, and rivalry. But this error was recognized in time and the RD cadre organization dissolved. The GVN approached the problem of the cadre correctly when during 1972-1973 it conducted training courses for village and hamlet officials.

Training able cadres for the execution of national policies and programs was already a difficult and time-consuming task. But fostering moral integrity, a sense of duty, and discipline among the cadres proved even more difficult in the context of protracted war and social divisiveness. To achieve this, it was necessary to give these cadres the opportunity to be in close touch with their superiors, to control and supervise their actions closely, and to be fair in rewards and punishments. Most important, however, was the example set by the local and national leadership. Experience indicated that cadres usually did not act in line with the leader's words but with his attitude. The leadership, therefore, had to prove their integrity, fairness, and moral rectitude if they wanted the cadres to follow suit.

Within the RVNAF, the cadre ranks of officers and NCOs were heterogenous in background and not uniform in competence. This was because the RVNAF had been built from various armed organizations and beset by politics. The lack of uniformity was most obvious in education, military training, and combat experience. Those who were combat experienced were usually uneducated or lacking in formal training, and those who were educated and formally trained were invariably combat-inexperienced. The lack of uniformity among RVNAF cadres affected personnel utilization policies, making rotation of duties or career management extremely difficult. Some became "desk specialists ", staff officers, or support technicians during their entire careers while others seemed to be condemned to continuous combat duties. This shortcoming was gradually overcome only with efforts in training and personnel management.

The rapid expansion of their force structure and their considerable war casualties placed the RVNAF in a constant dilemma of having to weigh between quality and quantity requirements. The sound development of a training base and the process of systematic training designed for all levels helped solve the problem of quantity but failed to improve quality significantly. The problem of quality could have been solved if commanders at all levels had devoted their attention to remedying bad practices in the selection of instructors and students. Effective utilization of manpower also should contribute to the improvement of quality. The major



shortcoming that beset our utilization of manpower was the lack of rotation in duties and in assignments; hence the development of quality was not possible.

Promotion was an instrument which helped solve both the problems of quantity and quality. After several improvements in procedures over time, the annual promotion of officers (except general officers) and NCOs had become fair and judicious. But the quality to be achieved through promotion could have improved much more if there had been fairness in efficiency rating and efforts to educate our cadres continuously. The abolition of discharges after general mobilization did help the RVNAF maintain numerical strength, but it also affected military discipline in general.

The RVN had made serious efforts in improving its national institutions and leadership and maintaining national and military discipline. In these areas, it had received substantial assistance from the U.S. In spite of their shortcomings, it had to be admitted that the RVNAF had made significant progress and proved capable and confident enough to successfully meet the major challenges of the war. Our commanders and troops had learned valuable experiences from friends and foes alike. They had matured in war, fought gallantly and accomplished their increasingly difficult mission in a laudable manner. It was a real tragedy that our military leadership could not have done better in the face of rushing events in early 1975.

# Glossary

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| APC | Armored Personnel Carrier |
| ARVN | Army of the Republic of Vietnam |
| CDEC | Combined Document Exploitation Center |
| CG | Civil Guard |
| CICV | Combined Intelligence Center, Vietnam |
| CIDG | Civilian Irregular Defense Group |
| CMEC | Combined Materiel Exploitation Center |
| CMIC | Combined Military Interrogation Center |
| CORDS | Civil Operations and Rural Development Support |
| CRDC | Central Rural Development Council |
| CTC | Central Training Command |
| CTZ | Corps Tactical Zone |
| DIOCC | District Intelligence and Operations Coordination Center |
| DMZ | Demilitarized Zone |
| DTA | Division Tactical Area |
| FFV | Field Force, Vietnam (U.S.) |
| FWMA | Free World Military Assistance |
| FY | Fiscal Year |
| GVN | Government of (the Republic of) Vietnam |
| ICCS | International Commission for Control and Supervision |
| JGS | Joint General Staff |
| JMC | Joint Military Commission |
| LAW | Light Antitank Weapon |
| LST | Landing Ship, Troops |
| LZ | Landing Zone |



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|---|---|
| MAAG-V | Military Assistance Advisory Group, Vietnam |
| MACV | Military Assistance Command, Vietnam |
| MAP | Military Assistance Program |
| MR | Military Region |
| MSS | Military Security Service |
| NLF | National Liberation Front (VC) |
| NVA | North Vietnam Army |
| OJT | On-the-Job Training |
| PF | Popular Forces |
| PIOCC | Province Intelligence and Operations Coordination Center |
| PRD | Pacification and Rural Development |
| PSDF | People's Self-Defense Forces |
| PSOD | Permanent Secretariat of Defense |
| RF | Regional Forces |
| RVN | Republic of Vietnam |
| RVNAF | Republic of Vietnam Armed Forces |
| SDC | Self Defense Corps |
| SEATO | Southeast Asia Treaty Organization |
| TAOR | Tactical Area Of Responsibility |
| TOW | Tube-launched, Optically-tracked, Wire-guided (Missile) |
| TRIM | Training Relations and Instruction Mission |
| USDAO | United States Defense Attache Office |
| VC | Viet Cong |
| VCI | Viet Cong Infrastructure |
| VNAF | Vietnam Air Force |
| VNN | Vietnam Navy |
| VNQDD | Viet Nam Quoc Dan Dang (Vietnam Nationalist Party) |