

Saigon Controls People, VC Has Land

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SAIGON, Jan. 24—As the cease-fire takes effect, the Vietnamese Communists can claim control over perhaps as much as half the land area of South Vietnam, but it is the Saigon government that has day-to-day authority over most of the people.

President Thieu's administration, through the army, militia and police, is everywhere that there are people except for narrow strips on the country's fringes and a few long-time Communist strongholds in the heartland. The North Vietnamese and Vietcong roam virtually unchallenged through vast

areas of jungle that rim the country's mountainous western reaches.

Yet, with end of the shooting at 8 a.m. Sunday, Saigon time the all-important question of who really controls what in South Vietnam will remain almost as much a matter of dispute as it was when the land was being fought over.

In simpler wars, the victor was determined by territorial gains. But this is a war without winners, just as it was largely a war without front lines. Now, by the dictates of a laboriously achieved agreement, the enemies are to decide in discussion the very same issues

they could not resolve with guns.

In the broad sweep of the documents negotiated in Paris, there is no solution to the complex political conflict that started the fighting in the first place.

The ability of military forces to secure land was not enough to give either side the undisputed upper hand in war, and the physical presence of soldiers will probably not determine who emerges on top in the peace. It is the political struggle that will ultimately decide who is, in fact, in control.

Meanwhile, the armies are to remain in place, from the country's sandy northern

boundary, where they face each other in conventional array, to the marshes and swamps of the south, where small guerrilla bands are harbored in the mangroves, from the mountainous western border, where even the hardy native tribesmen have fled, to the coastal plains abutting the deep blue waters of the South China Sea, where so many people live.

The agreement directs representatives of the Saigon government to meet with representatives of the Provisional Revolutionary Government "and determine

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the areas controlled by each party and the modalities of stationing." But there are no specified criteria for such decisions, no guidance and most important, perhaps, no binding arbiter.

The difficulty will not be in deciding who has the big cities or the jungles, but who has dominance in the hundreds, perhaps thousands, of hamlets across the country where the two opposing sides are basically equal.

These are the shaded areas, generally, but not always adjoining the Communist controlled "leopard spots."

No Sleeping

By the United States' own figures, about a third of the 12,000 hamlets in the country are contested to one degree or another, meaning that the Communists are present in some way. These are hamlets where local officials spend the day, but dare not sleep at night.

Only about 800 hamlets, at least count, are classified as completely Vietcong-run. They are clustered in coastal Quangtri Province behind the phalanx of North Vietnamese regulars there, in Quangtin around the provincial town of Tamky, in Quangngai close to the region of the Mylai massacre, in northern Binh Dinh where Communist sympathies go deepest, in Kontum and Pleiku, where inhabited areas are small and far apart.

Further south, the largest concentration is in Binhlong Province around the government-held shattered provincial town of Anloc and then stretching through a narrow corridor of western Binhduong Province only 30 miles or so from Saigon.

In the Mekong Delta,

where the population density is highest, the province of Chuongthien is laced with Communist Hamlets, and to the south and west there are the pockets of Vietcong in the Uminh Forest.

With all the people from these hamlets, plus those partly under Vietcong control around them and scattered elsewhere, the Communists control about 10 percent of South Vietnam's population, according to the most recent U.S. estimates. That would mean fewer than 2 million civilians.

Resettling Refugees

There are another 400,000 people from Communist-held areas who are living in squalid refugee camps. President Thieu has made it clear that he will not permit them to return to their villages and will gradually resettle them in villages under Saigon's administration.

The presence of North Vietnamese troops, said to number about 145,000, by no means exactly parallels the location of the Communist hamlets.

The largest number is in Quangtri Province, where elements of six divisions are in place. Intelligence reports show other divisions in western Thuathien, Quangnam, Binh Dinh, Kontum, Pleiku, Binhlong, Binhduong, western Dinhtuong, Kientuong, Chaudoc and Kiengiang provinces.

Generally speaking, South Vietnamese forces are massed in opposition to the Communists, but range over virtually all of the country's 44 provinces.

Besides the North Vietnamese troops, there are 80,000 Vietcong guerrillas in small detachments around the country, particularly in the Mekong Delta. Until the start of last spring's offensive, the delta had been free

of North Vietnamese soldiers.

The total government strength of army regulars and militia is about 1.1 million, giving the government roughly a 5 to 1 ratio over the Communists.

[Pentagon sources put the Saigon-Communist combat forces ratio at closer to 2 to 1. Elimination police, logistics, maintenance and support personnel, Saigon fields 190 regular marine ranger and army "maneuver" battalions (perhaps 76,000 front-line troops), plus 400,000 Regional and Popular Forces militia, mostly assigned to guarding roads, bridges, and hamlets.]

The sheer size of the government force will play a part in the months ahead if control is eventually determined by simple occupation of any given place. The more troops there are, the more space they take and can be said to control.

According to the agreement, wherever forces from the two sides are in direct proximity, it is up to the local commanders to draw the line between them. Whether that will actually happen remains to be seen. Its applicability to Vietcong squads and local militia companies is doubtful.

These problems would all have been simpler a year ago, when Communist holdings in populated sections of the country were almost nil. Before the start of the big spring offensive, the United States credited them with only seven hamlets.

But even with the improvement, the Communists have no sizable town or small city that they can use as a showpiece of their political administration. Lochinh in Binhlong is a functioning district town with a population of about 9,000. The Vietcong flag flies high

there, but it would make a modest capital at best.

Even if a capital is designated, the people who live in Communist areas and the soldiers there are cut off from the rest of the country by Thieu's explicit orders to his officials to contain and even to shoot his opponents wherever they appear. Despite provisions in the agreement for free movement back and forth from government and Communist areas there seems to be no disposition on Thieu's part to permit such an interchange.

All such questions, Thieu's spokesman Hoang Duc Nha said on Thursday, must be decided in talks with the Vietcong after the cease-fire.

But Nha made his own view clear: "As long as there is one North Vietnamese troop in South Vietnam," he said, "we cannot guarantee that the people of South Vietnam will exercise their freedom, their right of self-determination in a free manner."

Obviously, he added, the Vietcong cannot exercise their rights until then either.

