

# What War Has Meant to Saigon

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By CHARLES MOHR

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SAIGON, South Vietnam, Jan. 30—What did more than a decade of war accomplish for South Vietnam?

North Vietnam's Le Duc Tho has already called the Paris "Agreement on Ending the War and Restoring Peace in Vietnam" a victory.

President Nixon called it peace with honor and asserted that "the people of South Vietnam

News Analysis South Vietnam have been guaranteed the right to determine their own future without outside interference."

Whatever the ultimate verdict of history, it seems evident that the prolonged conflict really changed very little in Vietnam.

The catalyst of war, of course, did bring many subtle changes and some major changes to South Vietnam and South Vietnamese society. It is easy to cite just a few.

Vast numbers of people moved into Saigon and other cities and towns. Large parts of rural Vietnam became sparsely populated and a largely peasant society became increasingly urban.

## Armed Forces Multiply

The South Vietnamese armed forces grew vastly in size until today about one in every 17 South Vietnamese carries a gun for the Government—a staggering mobilization of military manpower.

A whole generation of non-Communist members of the social élite entered public life or the army, were discredited and discarded. Vietnam seems to have more retired generals and politicians per capita than any other country.

The years also brought a degradation of the quality of the Vietcong opposition. Although directed by Hanoi and ideologically loyal to it, the early insurgents were almost wholly indigenous to the South. Although few in numbers, they were impressively motivated, well led and subtle.

Today the leadership is heavily Northern, more brutal and less effective politically, many here believe.

## Comparison of Assets

A scoreboard of tangible assets enjoyed by the competing Vietnamese factions is somewhat difficult to make—and, more important, tends to be misleading.

South Vietnam's armed forces now total about 1.1 million men, including 525,000 regular troops and 294,000 fairly well-trained Regional Force units. The United States estimates that 145,000 regular North Vietnamese troops are in the South, but Saigon says the number is about 300,000. There is a higher percentage of fighting riflemen among the Communist forces.

In any case, one lesson of the war was that numerical superiority meant little. Neither side has been able to achieve decisive results.

The Saigon army and paramilitary forces are much better equipped than in the past. This does not mean that they are significantly better led or better motivated. The collapse of

## Changes Are Many, but Achievements Seem to Be Few

some large units during last year's enemy offensive illustrated that old problems remain.

One thing that has seen astonishingly little change is the attitude of the South Vietnamese élite—the upper middle class that monopolizes power and privilege.

Before his death last year, an able American adviser, John Paul Vann, remarked to a friend, "The South Vietnamese are paying a price for years of stupidity. Some of them don't seem to learn."

## Bourgeoisie Unchanged

The bourgeoisie, after having lived through years of "revolutionary" or political warfare, gives virtually no sign that it has recognized the need to make, or will make, any significant social reforms.

A modest land-reform program has been pushed, but one reason for this is that urban economic opportunity, war-born corruption and other privileges have made land less important to the ruling élite.

Their attitudes toward education, authority and privilege seem unchanged. The old American advice to "win hearts and minds" is hardly even given lip service anymore. South Vietnam remains what it was in the late nineteen-fifties, an inequitable society that functions poorly.

One weakness of the Ngo Dinh Diem Government was that it had no coherent ideology except a Confucian attitude that authority should be respected and an impenetrably complex philosophy called "personalism," which the public did not understand.

## Ideology Still Lacking

All these years later, the Government still does not have, or even claim to have, any ideology, except anti-Communism.

This will be a matter of major importance in the political struggle that will follow the cease-fire.

It is widely believed that non-Communists and anti-Communists made up a large majority of the South Vietnamese a decade ago and that this is just as true today. However, this seems to grow out of Vietnamese attitudes toward property, toward the intrusion of coercive authority and a general peasant conservatism.

That such attitudes can be changed under the impact of political indoctrination has been shown in many Communist states, such as North Vietnam, and in parts of South Vietnam as well.

## Search for Security

One really major change in South Vietnam during the war has been the gravitation of a large majority of the population into areas of "relative security" under some measure of Government control.

If the terms of the cease-fire are honored, the Vietcong side will have a small population under its direct influence and will have to resort to clandestine

activity in areas preponderantly controlled by the Government to achieve political conversions.

There is a great question, however, whether the South Vietnamese Government will be able to exploit its advantages. It has never shown an ability—or a recognition of the need—to respond to popular aspirations.

Like the late President Diem, President Nguyen Van Thieu has placed a premium that amounts to a priority on loyalty to the presidential palace in selecting military and civil administrators. (Many of the provincial administrators are military anyway.) This has led to great attrition among officials but not to any notable improvement in the quality of government. The Vietcong political structure also does not seem to function well and has lost much of its old élan.

As an informed American said some years ago, "This is not a service Government—it doesn't see its role as doing things for people."

South Vietnam's enemies have not done well either in the last decade. The Communists won a great psychological victory in their 1968 offensive, seriously eroding American support for the war. But they have never won a single strategic military victory, and relatively few tactical ones. One of their worst failures was that they could not prevent the slow drift of population away from areas they held. That many people moved out of fear of allied bombs and firepower was true, but does not reduce the Communists' problem.

## Territorial Grip Varies

The amount of territory "held" by either side has gone up and down like a fever chart. Right now the amount of countryside not under Government control is quite large. All of this has a special relevance because of the cease-fire provisions, which essentially forbid further seizures of land.

The relevance of control is limited, however, because of factors that much of the world's public has never clearly understood.

There has always been a necessity during the war for troops to pull into tight defensive perimeters at night. They cannot occupy a "line" as in wars with fronts. There has also been a need in many insecure areas to patrol or move in large units. The result is that in large areas "control" has a limited definition.

If the cease-fire provision prohibiting all armed patrolling is honored, it will make it difficult to detect, much less deter, clandestine movements.

The most significant part of the agreement is the provision that the two South Vietnamese parties should agree to general elections to be conducted by a National Council for National Reconciliation and Concord.

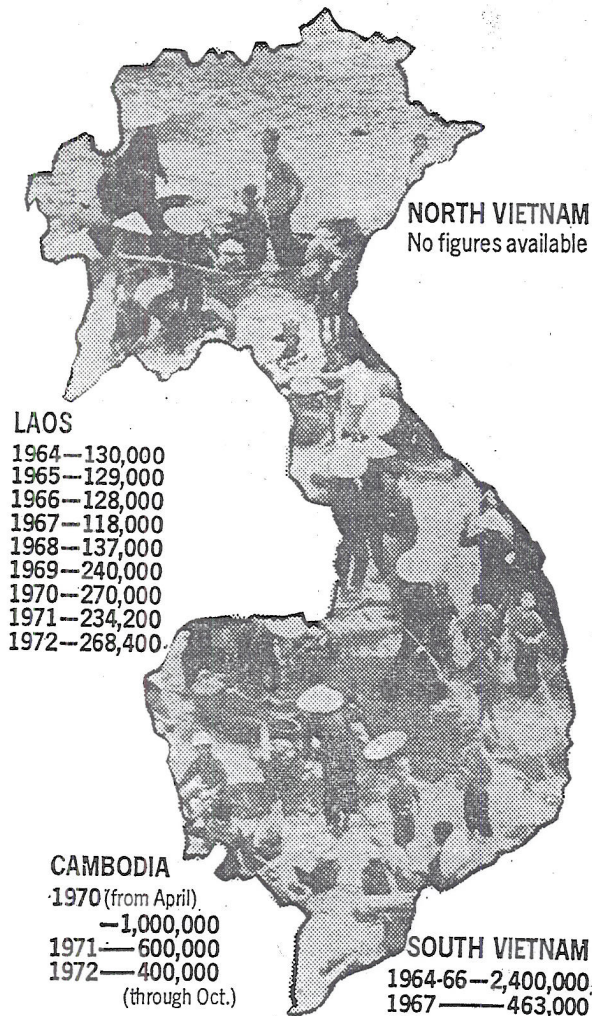
## Agreement Unlikely

There are so many dangers in this procedure for both sides that it seems difficult to believe that such an agreement will ever be reached.

As long as the elections can be delayed, the Government's police forces may well be strong enough to prevent serious politi-

## REFUGEES FROM INDOCHINA WAR

(Sources: U.S. Agency for International Development, for figures on South Vietnam and Laos; Cambodian Government, for Cambodian figures.)



**LAOS**  
 1964—130,000  
 1965—129,000  
 1966—128,000  
 1967—118,000  
 1968—137,000  
 1969—240,000  
 1970—270,000  
 1971—234,200  
 1972—268,400

**CAMBODIA**  
 1970 (from April)  
 —1,000,000  
 1971—600,000  
 1972—400,000  
 (through Oct.)

**SOUTH VIETNAM**  
 1964-66—2,400,000  
 1967—463,000  
 1968—2,144,000  
 1969—590,000  
 1970—410,000  
 1971—136,000  
 1972—1,288,800  
 In camps as 1973  
 began—641,000

### Cumulative Totals:

**South Vietnam**—More than 6.5 million officially listed by U. S. Agency for International Development since 1964. U. S. Subcommittee on Refugees and Escapees says 2 million more should be added to this.

**Cambodia**—More than 2 million (a "very conservative" figure, says Senate subcommittee)

**Laos**—More than 1 million.

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ical gains and subversion by the Communists. But the Government's position seems to political observers less strong if the elections are scheduled. Presumably, no agreement would be made by the Vietcong unless the agreement abolished those restrictions written into South Vietnamese election laws that tightly limit competition among South Vietnamese factions.

In a free atmosphere, the Communists would stand united and the non-Communists would probably split into many relatively weak parties. And, if the elections are intolerably delayed or evaded, the North Vietnamese and Vietcong would have an excuse to resort to war again.

After a long war, South Vietnam is in some ways stronger than it was in late 1961 when American advisers and helicopters began arriving. Despite great losses and a resulting loss in the quality of personnel, the Vietcong have been heavily reinforced by North Vietnam, and are also strong.

The second Indochina war, therefore, cost much blood and suffering but settled almost nothing.

## SIHANOUK IS VISITING HANOI TO MARK TET

HANOI, North Vietnam, Jan. 30 (Agence France-Presse) — Prince Norodom Sihanouk the exiled Cambodian head of state, flew in here today from Peking for a week-long visit.

Greeted by Premier Pham Van Dong and the defense Minister, Gen. Vo Nguyen Giap, he congratulated them on their "great victory."

After his visit here to celebrate Tet, the Lunar New Year, the Prince is to pay an official visit to Kwangtung Province in southern China.

There are indications that Prince Sihanouk may go to Cambodia—he was deposed in 1970 and the monarchy was abolished — briefly during his visit to North Vietnam. But there was no confirmation of this today, and he replied evasively when asked about such a trip.

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