

The Thiệu Regime Put to the Test 1973-1975



HANOI — 1975

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THE THIEU REGIME PUT TO THE TEST

(1973 -- 1975)

I — The war : as always American

March 1975. In great confusion Saigon troops precipitately evacuated the Central Highlands. Kissinger, somber and disillusioned — no longer the superman holding the magic keys — declared that, had he known what was going to happen, he would not have pressed for the signing of the Paris Agreement.

In January 1973, when the Paris Agreement was signed, Kissinger, and of course the White House and the Pentagon, had nursed other projects and were looking forward to a much more cheerful prospect than this debacle of the Thieu troops. The American negotiators had had to agree to clauses which compelled the USA to respect the independence, sovereignty, unity and territorial integrity of Viet Nam, to recognize the existence of the P.R.G. and of the third force in South Viet Nam. Nor could Washington have refused to withdraw American troops from Viet Nam :

neither American public opinion nor the US Congress would have tolerated the use of GIs for indefinite intervention in Indochina.

But this did not mean that Washington had renounced its former designs to annihilate the patriotic and revolutionary South Vietnamese forces and maintain a neo-colonial regime indefinitely in power in Saigon. In the eyes of the men in Washington, this was perfectly feasible. The massive intervention of US forces from 1965 to 1973 had been but an emergency operation to ward off an imminent disaster. The basic neo-colonialist policy remained that of setting up a puppet military and police machine capable of repressing the patriotic and revolutionary forces.

That military and police machine, carefully put together in 1954, had been considerably reinforced since 1969 in anticipation of the GIs' withdrawal. Under the protection of half a million American troops and thousands of American aircraft, the Saigon army, police and administration had seen their numbers more than doubled since 1965. They had been fully re-equipped and trained in new methods. Dozens of billions of dollars had been spent to that effect and the best experts from the American police, advisers with extensive experience in colonial wars such as the Briton Robert Thompson, all the resources of American science and technology including the social sciences — ethnology, sociology, psychology — had been used to set up the archetype of neo-colonial regimes in South Viet Nam.

On the other hand, in the same period, Washington had tried its best to weaken the Vietnamese patriotic

and revolutionary movement. Since 1968, the American high command, which had refused to grant Westmoreland 200,000 reinforcements, had given up trying to reconquer regions liberated by the NFL. Those classical military operations, in which enormous quantities of war material and troops were hurled at an elusive enemy who benefited from the support of the entire people, had proved too much of a drain on the American forces.

The USA could wage another kind of war by relying on its technology. Against general popular resistance it could oppose total warfare by making life impossible over vast areas, by simply destroying all life in the regions under NFL and PRG control. For years, thousands of aircraft, helicopters and heavy guns had poured millions of tons of bombs and shells on the free areas of South Viet Nam. Anything that moved was shot at; toxic chemicals were sprayed wherever food crops were grown. Villages and hamlets were razed, and even places where no traces of habitation could be found were strafed as soon as a thread of smoke was detected.

NFL-controlled zones had thus been made uninhabitable, turned into deserted areas dotted with millions of bomb craters in which water would stagnate and which would soon be teeming with mosquito larvae. It was impossible to find there the least bit of wood, the least brick to build a cottage; impossible to till a plot of ricefield or orchard. In this way millions of rural people in South Viet Nam were "urbanized". The struggle would end because of the lack of combatants, for the NFL would find no reserve from

which to replenish its militants and armed forces. The American command aimed to kill two birds with one stone : those people who lived in the free areas and fought under the banner of the NFL were driven into the towns and concentration camps and, deprived of all livelihood, had to enlist in Thieu's army and police in order to survive. Thus Thieu's army and police had been reinforced as the GIs left, their numbers reaching more than one million for the army and 150,000 for the police.

Washington had taken care to sow destruction also in North Viet Nam, the great rear area of the Vietnamese revolution. Bombing raids, from 1965 to 1968, then again in 1972, destroyed almost all industrial installations in North Viet Nam, many towns and cities, thousands of villages, all bridges, many dams, hundreds of schools, colleges and hospitals. In late 1972, while B.52s savagely attacked North Vietnamese cities, a last effort was made to massively introduce armaments into South Viet Nam for Thieu, who was eventually in possession of nearly 2,000 aircraft — the third air force in the world, topping those of France, Great Britain, Japan and West Germany — and the most up-to-date war equipment.

In the urban and rural areas under American control, already subjected to the most bloody repression, repeated "pacification" drives had ended in the murder of tens of thousands of people suspected of being NFL militants or sympathizers and in the arrest of hundreds of thousands of others. By blood and iron, Washington had tried to impose the Thieu regime on the population of South Viet Nam.

Thus, facing a PRG supposedly weakened by considerable destruction and the forced departure of millions of inhabitants, no longer able to get much aid from a North Viet Nam completely ruined by intensive bombings, stood a Saigon administration with a powerfully-equipped army and police, trained for years by qualified US experts. In the eyes of Washington, the situation looked more favourable than in 1954, after the signing of the Geneva agreements, when the Ngo Dinh Diem regime was still in its beginning and had but a small army and police, when the American hold on South Viet Nam was still incomplete and when the Saigon cadres and functionaries had but little experience.

Since 1954, tens of thousands of officers had been trained and indoctrinated by the Americans. Most of them were adventurers and outcasts thirsty for dollars who had built their fortunes and power thanks to American "aid" and the war. These officers gradually came to hold important political posts — president of the republic, vice-president, provincial governors. They amassed considerable wealth through plunder in the course of military operations, and through trafficking in goods, arms and drugs. They placed their parents and relatives in the most profitable businesses : import-export, hotels, prostitution. It was to this military caste, bureaucratized and trafficking, that Washington entrusted the direction of the Saigon neo-colonial State and society.

As to the agents for doing the dirty work -- torture, massacre, arson, murder — they were recruited by American services among the desperadoes and hooli-

gans of the towns. American experts taught them the latest methods of interrogation as well as physical and psychological torture. In addition, a huge machine for propaganda, for ideological and cultural poisoning, flooded the South Vietnamese population for years with slogans, films and pictures aimed at erasing in people's minds all traces of national, or even simply human, sentiment and creating conditions for turning them into mercenaries ready to execute any orders.

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To all appearances, the machine looked well put together and well run in. Now that the GIs had left, it would be enough to feed it with weapons, dollars and supply it with advisers. With much less expenditure than the American forces, it would carry out Washington's policy. Richard Nixon, then Gerald Ford, devoted their efforts to getting the few billion dollars each year necessary for its operation. What did two or three billion dollars mean for the American budget, for the American nation! American public opinion was convinced that after the GIs' retreat the USA was no longer involved in the Indochinese quagmire. To draw a few billions on the quiet without alerting either public opinion or Congress should not prove too difficult for the pros of the White House and the Pentagon.

On 20 February 1974, USAID gave Congresswoman Bella Abzug the following figures concerning military aid to Thieu :

1972	2,382,600,000 dollars
1973	2,270,500,000 —

Thus in 1973, in spite of the Paris Agreement, military aid had not decreased compared with 1972, the peak war year. The armaments supplied clearly surpassed in quantity and also in quality those which could be sent to replace used equipment on a one-for-one basis. Thus ultramodern F.5-E aircraft were given to Thieu to "replace" used F.5A's.

Various tricks were resorted to in order to intensify those arms shipments : stated prices were much lower than real prices ; arms were sent under the cloak of other budgetary chapters. On one occasion the discovery of an "accounting error" made available an "unused" sum of several dozen million dollars which was immediately made available to Thieu.

The salaries of Thieu's soldiers, officers and police were paid through American "economic" aid. The American ambassador in Saigon, Graham Martin, made every effort to ensure an average sum of 700 million dollars for Thieu for the years 1974-75, the same amount as that received by Saigon when half a million GIs were still in South Viet Nam and the war was raging. Although all arms and equipment were freely supplied by the USA, military expenditures still accounted for 60% of Thieu's budget.

Speaking before the Asia and Pacific Affairs Subcommittee of the US House of Representatives, Fred Branfman said :

"In fact, however, only 4% of the Indochina Aid that President Nixon proposed for FY 1974 was actually designated for "reconstruction and rehabili-

tation" or "development" (\$ 124.4 million out of \$ 2.9 billion). And only another 4⁰/₀ was even termed "humanitarian" (\$ 107.4 million out of 2.9 billion).

"Ninety-two percent of the Administration-requested funds for FY 1974 were meant to continue the war — both military funds, which were 72⁰/₀ of the total, and "economic" and "Food for Peace" funds, which were indirectly war-related."

Congressional Record, proceedings and
debates of the 93rd Congress, second
session

Misappropriations of "food for peace" destined for other countries, loans amounting to more than 100 million dollars, so-called multilateral aid through international bodies, were used to prop up the Saigon budget. The Saigon office of USAID confirmed that 83.6⁰/₀ of this budget was financed by American aid.

USAID, which managed this aid, kept its personnel numbering several hundred unchanged in Saigon, while American militarymen and technicians in civilian clothes took care of the maintenance, repair and operation of machines in Thieu's army (aircraft in particular) and took note of its needs as operations were undertaken. The so-called American diplomatic staff in Saigon was strengthened by several hundred agents who were distributed between the four consulates-general set up in the four military regions of South Viet Nam and numerous "consular offices" scattered throughout the country. The American ambassador had 145 assistants following military operations while

the Defense Attaché Office (DAO) was staffed by at least 50 officers. All that "diplomatic" personnel was but a camouflaged military staff which directed and commanded the Saigon armed forces, worked out operations plans, decided on strategy. Thieu's officers only carried out the plans and obeyed the directives of the American advisers. Nothing had changed with regard to both the nature and the conduct of the war. Before and after the Paris Agreement, the so-called Viet Nam war had been and remained an American war. This was noted by American journalists.

According to David Shieler, without reducing in the least its involvement in South Viet Nam, the US simply passed from a climax in the war to a level of aid which remained considerable, not only by supplying colossal quantities of armaments but also by sending a steady stream of American citizens indispensable for supply and intelligence work. (*N.Y. Times*, 25-2-74)

US News and World Report of 4 February 1974 wrote :

"The huge Pentagon East building, once the US military headquarters here, is as busy as ever. It is now occupied mainly by the American embassy's 'defense attaché office' which oversees US military aid and technical support for the South Vietnamese military. Deep inside the building, observers note, there is still a 'defense operations center' that looks a lot like a combat control post left over from the days when Americans were fighting and bombing all over the country. The Center is manned around the clock (...) There is speculation that the center (...) would quickly be expanded into an actual command

headquarters if American warplanes returned to action here."

The Paris Agreement stipulates national concord, the recognition of the existence of a third force, and of two administrations each with its own territory. Yet, well supplied with weapons and dollars and benefiting from Washington's unconditional support, Thieu reaffirmed his policy of the "four noes" : no to communism, no to neutralism, no to an understanding with the Communists, no to a division of the territory. Evidently, while the first three noes were affirmations of principles the fourth did not depend on the will of Thieu, nor even on that of Nixon and Kissinger. The reality of the PRG, of the territory under its control, of its armed forces, was expressed by facts and not only in the text of the Agreement signed. It could not be erased by a stroke of the pen or by a speech.

Even though the US-Saigon command had dotted the country with 250 military sub-sectors and 10,000 posts there remained innumerable localities where the PRG hold control and which — especially in the plains of Trung Bo and the Mekong delta, rich and populous regions — formed large patches on a map of the country, a veritable leopard's skin which prevented Thieu and his American masters from sleeping in peace.

This permanent presence of the PRG, its armed forces, its militants, its social and cultural organizations close to areas still under Thieu's control, was a mortal danger for the Saigon regime.

Immediately after the signing of the Paris Agreement, on 28 January 1973, Thieu declared : "The cease-fire does not at all mean the cessation of the war." And he started hurling his infantry, armour and aircraft at the liberated zones. As early as 29 January 1973 *US News and World Report* stressed that the Saigon forces were "to move into contested areas — even Communist-controlled regions — and reduce the number of people and territory dominated by Reds."

If the American forces were no longer there to give support to the Saigon troops, American air forces stationed in Thailand and the Pacific area (140,000 men) could always serve as a "deterrent", all the more so as American officials did not fail from time to time to threaten the Vietnamese people with renewed action by the American air force (declaration by Schlesinger, US Defense Secretary, on 18 June 1973).

After the signing of the Agreement, not only did Thieu refuse to announce this event to his troops, he also ordered numerous operations against the free areas. On 28 January, his troops attacked the port of Cua Viet and the districts of Hai Lang and Trieu Phong in Quang Tri province near the 17th parallel. Southwest of Hue, Saigon troops tried to recapture Highway 72 linking A Sau to the old capital. In the first quarter of 1973, Thieu troops attacked various regions in Quang Nam province, the port of Sa Huynh, in Quang Ngai province (February 1973), along Highway 4, in My Tho province, and in the early days of March, the area of Tong Le Chan, Rach Bap, in Thu Dau Mot province.

Those sudden attacks launched with considerable mechanized means in the weeks following the cease-fire allowed the Saigon army to recapture a few localities here and there. In a joint communiqué published in April 1973, Nixon and Thieu expressed gratification with the "proficiency" of Saigon armed forces and noted their "effective and courageous performances."

Those initial results encouraged Thieu to enlarge the scope of his operations which came to involve one division and more in a single operation. From June to September 1973, 70 battalions attacked Chuong Thien province; from May to November two divisions were in action in Ben Cat (Thu Dau Mot province) and one division southwest of Phu Bai (Thua Thien province). Those operations — large-scale encroachments or local nibbling actions — were accompanied by "pacification" operations in regions more or less controlled by Saigon, especially populous ones. 'Pacification', the major element of neo-colonialist strategy since the 'Vietnamization' of the war, was intensified after the signing of the Paris Agreement in order to consolidate the rear of the Saigon army and the bases of the regime.

All localities, including the newly-reconquered ones, were immediately put in the vice of a coercive system which includes:

- A network of posts and military sectors with regular garrisons;
- local security forces, civil guards;

- regular and special police forces;
 - a puppet administration;
 - police informers;
 - reactionary political organizations;
- not mentioning a whole series of "humanitarian", "cultural", "religious", "mutual-aid" and other organizations which enmeshed every inhabitant. Twenty years of experience and the mobilization of many experts made it possible for American neo-colonialism to improve its methods of coercion. After assassinating and putting in jail militants and sympathizers of the patriotic movement, or even mere suspects, after cataloguing, putting in police files and terrorizing the people, the Thieu administration sought to forcibly enrol a great part of the population in para-military formations and so-called civilian self-defence, which they used against the patriotic forces. For the Saigon army, this served as a shield during its operations and a reserve from which to draw recruits.

In places where this forcible enlistment could not be done, the population was penned up in concentration camps or sectors. More than 1.5 million people were thus concentrated in 1973-74. Bombing and commando raids were launched against PRG-controlled areas. Washington's neocolonial policy could be imposed only through war; the Thieu regime could only be maintained through war. The strict implementation of the Paris Agreement would ruin that policy and toll the death knell of the regime.

II — Ruin and decay

The Thiệu regime and American neo-colonial policy faced not only a PRG solidly entrenched in the free areas but also growing popular opposition in the urban and rural areas more or less under Saigon control. The signing of the Paris Agreement, the withdrawal of American forces, the policy of national concord clearly defined by the PRG, the official recognition of the third force by the Agreement, all those factors gave a new impetus to the great movement for peace, independence, democratic freedoms, and the protection of national culture and good morals, which had long existed among the urban masses.

Thieu and his American masters had anticipated all that. In the months preceding the armistice, Thieu had taken a series of measures to reinforce the coercive system already weighing heavily on the population. Successive decrees kept reducing the bits of freedom still surviving in the regime.

In August 1972 a decree abolished the election of village and hamlet chiefs who were now appointed by the administration. Seven thousand army officers were named to those posts and 10,000 others took over security in the villages. Also in August 1972 press decree 007 imposed such draconian conditions that only 18 out of 40 existing journals were able to continue in existence, most of them being in fact financed and controlled by the administration. In September 1972, newspaper editors were ordered to

deposit 20 million piastres each as security money to pay for eventual fines, and any action that displeased the authorities, especially the publication of any piece of information unfavourable to the regime — there was no dearth of that — was punishable by five years' imprisonment and a fine of five million piastres. This was tantamount to ordering the closure of all journals of some honesty. Frequent seizures put press publications in a situation in which they could no longer cover their expenditures unless they resorted to government subsidies.

A decree on local security banned all strikes and demonstrations and authorized the police to open fire on all rallies; decree 090 authorized it to arrest all suspects. Barely a month before the signing of the Agreement, a decree imposed such conditions on the political parties that only four out of 28 survived.

The strict implementation of the Paris Agreement, which stipulated the putting into effect of democratic liberties, would have been deadly for the regime. As early as 28 January 1973, Thieu declared in a televised broadcast: "The ceasefire in place means that the status quo will be maintained. Wherever our administration, army and people are, we are kings. Everything depends on us. We will maintain our laws and administration. Everything will go on as before. Nothing is changed." Neither reconciliation nor national concord; neither understanding with the Communists nor with the neutralists. The "constitution", with anticommunism as its basic principle, and all fascist legislation would remain in force. Washington took care to increase financial and technical

aid to beef up the police force from 120,000 to 150,000. The *Washington Post* of 1 March 1973 observed that the regime had grown even more rigorous since the signing of the Agreement. David Shieler, in the *New York Times* of 19 August 1974 remarked : "...It's much better to release nine or ten suspects instead of condemning one innocent man. But that's the opposite of the present policy." He added that the military courts and the national police were but two sides of the same coin, two elements of the same war effort.

The Paris Agreement stipulated explicitly that all political prisoners should be freed. The first measure taken by Thieu was to kill a number of them before the cease-fire, then to turn the others into common offenders so as to affirm cynically that there were no political prisoners in his jails. In spite of the evidence coming from all quarters — American journalists and representatives, religious people of all nationalities, eminent personalities in the world — which pointed to the existence of about 200,000 political prisoners in Saigon jails and camps, Thieu continued to deny the fact with the support of Washington.

Worse still, he continued to order arrests and tortures not only against PRG partisans but also more and more against the third force. Students, intellectuals, priests and bonzes were savagely clubbed in the streets, arrested in large numbers, deported, tortured. To all comers Thieu declared bluntly : "Anyone with enough courage to proclaim himself a neutralist or pro-communist will not survive five minutes." (12 October 1973).

To serve his purposes, Thieu took new measures to concentrate all power in his hands. As early as 1971, he had done everything to eliminate his only competitor to the presidential elections, Nguyen Cao Ky, the then vice-president, who bitterly complained to an American journalist : "The only voice one can hear in South Viet Nam is that of Nguyen Van Thieu."

The elections to the Saigon "Senate" of August 1973 were the occasion for Thiệu to eliminate his opponents there and to put one of his own men, Tran Van Lam, at the top of a double ticket presented by the "Democratic Party", the "party of the President". The introduction of his agents into both houses of "parliament" made it possible for Thiệu to propose amendments to the "constitution" which allowed him to run for president in 1975 for a term of office of five, instead of four years ; appoint the justices of the Supreme Court (the parliament could only propose names) ; and appoint chiefs of provinces, cities and districts.

In face of that manoeuvre, on 19 January 1974, Nguyen Van Huyền, president of the Senate, declared : "This constitutional amendment kills all hopes for a truly democratic regime. So I formally resign from the Senate to become an ordinary citizen." He was replaced by Tran Van Lam.

In October 1974, Thieu reshuffled his government, created a series of "commissions" under the presidency and a "directorate" presided over by himself. That directorate and those commissions, placed above the Cabinet ministers and even the prime minister who became the puppet's puppets, decided all

important matters in both internal and external policies. "Prime Minister" Tran Thien Khiem could not hide his bitterness. A series of demotions (affecting in particular 17 generals) and promotions (39 officers became generals) allowed Thieu to eliminate all those suspected of opposing his policy and to appoint his most faithful agents to senior posts in the army, the police and the administration. The partisans of Nguyen Cao Ky, and all those who had more or less come under French influence, were cast aside and replaced by men wholly trained in the United States.

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Besides military aid, the men in Washington strove to support Thieu with substantial economic aid so that he could play his role. The question was to provide him with a sum equivalent to what he had received during the war years including the revenues coming from the spending of the US expeditionary forces in South Viet Nam. It is estimated that 250,000 jobs had been created as a result of the stationing of the US troops whose expenditures provided the Thieu regime with about half of its foreign-exchange revenues (*UPI*, 27 January 1974). On an average 700-800 million dollars had to be given to the Thieu administration each year, according to the estimate of US ambassador Graham Martin, who tried hard to win the US congress over to his views.

In order to get those aid projects accepted, Washington and Saigon had made a lot of noise about fanciful reconstruction plans. Martin recalled the

Marshall Plan which had made it possible for Europe to recover from the ruins of the Second World War and achieve an economic take-off. For his part Thieu put forward a plan for reconstruction and restoration in six months, then went to Washington to beg for the dollars. Upon his return to Saigon in May 1973, he advertised a plan for post-war reconstruction and economic development in seven years (1973-1980) with three major aims: reconstruction and settlement of displaced persons; intensive exploitation of natural resources, in particular the restoration of agriculture; investment in industries and services, for which especially advantageous conditions would attract foreign capital.

In March 1973, on the occasion of "Peasants' Day", Thiêu called for the implementation of a five-year agricultural plan, which aimed in particular at putting under cultivation half a million hectares of land left idle because of the war, supplying three million cubic metres of timber for internal consumption and export, and catching a million tons of fish, i.e. double the figure of 1973. The development of agriculture, forestry and fishing would, in his view, provide annual exports to the amount of 400 million dollars, which would cover all the foreign-exchange needs of the country.

Thieu also held out the possibility of convening an international conference which would work out modalities of aid to Saigon for economic development. In the first weeks following the signing of the Paris Agreement, a large number of businessmen - American, British, French, Japanese - visited Saigon. It is true

that South Viet Nam's natural resources are many and varied (rice, rubber timber, fishing products, prospects of oil), that abundant and skilled manpower was available, which, besides, was twice as cheap as in Hongkong or Singapore — a great attraction for foreign capital. The docility of the Saigon regime was also a good guarantee. The infrastructure — roads, ports and docks — was adequate.

One could easily imagine the economic development that would take place in a South Viet Nam to which more economic aid was coming than to any other place in the world. Yet right in the first months of 1973 there were growing signs of economic deterioration. On 21 August 1973 Thieu himself admitted that "it is difficult to find a solution to the economic and social problem." Many symptoms pointed to economic decline :

- a drop in industrial and agricultural production ;
- rapidly rising prices and runaway inflation ;
- worsening unemployment ;
- shortage of rice, fuel and goods.

Up to that time Saigon industry had stagnated, stifled by imported foreign goods, especially American and Japanese. Industrial production accounted for only 10% of total production and many enterprises turned out semi-finished products from imported raw materials. Many of these industries were in French or Taiwanese hands. As early as the first quarter of 1973, the textile mills showed a drop in output of 2,000 tons compared with the same period in the previous year. The same situation prevailed in other sectors : sugar, cigarettes, soft drinks... Local industries, crushed by

the rise in the prices of fuel and imported raw materials and hamstrung by the drop in purchasing power, saw many enterprises driven out of business. By April 1974, about 50% of the enterprises had closed down.

With devaluation adding to the price rises the situation worsened from month to month. In 1973, the Saigon piastre was devalued ten times ; from an exchange rate of 35 to the dollar in 1955, it sank to 560 to the dollar by 5 January 1974. In 1973, prices rose by 100–200%, often more for necessities. On 5 August 1973, the Saigon administration decreed a simultaneous rise for three essential products : 55% for rice, 60% for sugar, and 76% for petrol. On 20 November, the petrol price was hiked another 50%. On 23 November the Saigon paper *Doc Lap* wrote : "So as not to lag behind the price of petrol those of other goods, particularly those of primary necessities, have skyrocketed. That of rice, now rare and expensive and the major worry for Saigon folk, is shooting up fast. Close on the heels of petrol, rice now sees its price hiked to 34,000 piastres a quintal (7,600 piastres in late 1972). Price rises affect 900 other items."

The budget was blown up to fantastic figures, the deficit of 116 billion for 1973 having increased by another 78 billion by the end of the financial year. For 1974, revenues amounted to 453 billion and expenditures to 630, resulting in a deficit of 177 billion. The volume of money in circulation, 51,000 million in January 1966, reached more than 202,800 million in January 1973 while foreign exchange reserves, from about 200 million dollars in 1972 dropped to 100 million in 1973. The official rate of inflation, 65% for

the whole of 1973, was already 16⁰/₀ by the end of February 1974. It must have risen to 96⁰/₀ by the end of that year. The official exchange rate was 685 piastres to the dollar in 1974, much more on the black market.

Thieu left no stone unturned in order to extract the greatest possible amount of dollars from Washington. But Nixon, enmeshed in the Watergate affair and in American economic difficulties, was able to extract only 322 million dollars from Congress in the fiscal year 1973-74, as against 500 million in 1972. Thieu made a tour of the Western capitals but to no avail. He sought to sell off the country's resources by offering most advantageous conditions to oil and other companies. From American, French, Japanese and Canadian oil companies he got a mere 51 million dollars and but a few million for other investments.

In order to get revenues, Thieu resorted to taxes. The Saigon paper *Tin Sang* of 21 April 1973 wrote: "Since early 1973, all taxes have increased: licences for stalls and shops and income taxes have trebled. Taxes on transport have increased fifteen times; others have doubled or quadrupled, like those on printing offices." On 1 July 1973, Thieu decreed a new tax, VAT (value-added tax), which hit all products. According to the Saigon press, within a mere 40 days, 5.2 billion piastres were squeezed from the population. Vehement protests by people of all walks of life compelled the Saigon administration to give up collecting that tax in certain sectors. On 22 November 1973, Thieu increased the equalizing tax on more than 200 imported products. In early 1973, a litre of petrol cost 40 piastres with a special tax of 20 piastres. A year later the price rose

to 240 piastres and the tax to 100 piastres. Sugar, with a 10⁰/₀ tax, cost 200 piastres a kilogram in early 1973, 600 piastres a year later. The same escalation happened with tobacco, beer, cigarettes. Land tax increased by 20⁰/₀; that on small traders doubled. For 1974, Thieu planned to collect more from the rural regions which until then had supplied but 10⁰/₀ of the budget.

Severe measures were enacted against any delay in payment or any failure to register. An intelligence service and commando squads for tax-collecting purposes were created which launched veritable "military-fiscal" operations and large-scale house to house searches, in which tax collectors were given a free rein to extort money from firms and individuals. Popular protests were recorded in the Saigon press. The *Dien Tin* of 24 June 1974 wrote, "From time to time a new tax is conjured up by the State. Whatever he does, wherever he goes, the citizen runs into the tax-collector. The latter will call on you even if you shut yourself up at home. Ordinary folk work hard from morning to night without earning enough to feed their children, while idle bigwigs in air-conditioned rooms with a cigar between their lips rack their brains to invent new taxes."

It is easy to understand the nefarious consequences of such an economic situation on the life of the people. By late 1974 official figures showed 2.5 million unemployed — 3.5 million according to other estimates. In Trung Bo — Da Nang, Quang Tin, Quang Ngai, Qui Nhon — about 50⁰/₀ of the working population were out of jobs. Hundreds of thousands of waifs and strays roamed the towns where beggary, prostitu-

tion and drug-addiction were more than ever on the rampage. More and more people committed suicide, often by whole families. Saigon society was in full decay.

No great insight was needed to grasp the cause of that ruin and decay. The GIs' withdrawal created a big gap in the regime's revenues, but the pursuit of the war had been and remained the main cause of economic and social deterioration, of the general crisis shaking Saigon society. In South Viet Nam, which formerly had had such abundant reserves of rice, one saw, for the first time, people starving to death. How could one put half a million hectares of land under cultivation, expand forestry, attract foreign investments, develop local industry if Thiêu, at the instigation of Nixon-Kissinger-Ford, persisted in operations aimed at encroachment, "pacification", and concentration of the population? The war was as always American but the burden, both human and financial, now that it had been "Vietnamized", was weighing ever more on the South Vietnamese population.

III. The beginning of the end

Cease-fire, liberation of the political prisoners, freedom to circulate between the two zones, democratic liberties, national reconciliation and concord, recognition of the third force, and of course recognition of the existence of the PRG and the liberated areas —

none of these was admitted by Thieu. As for Nixon, on the very day following the signing of the Paris Agreement, he clamoured that he recognized the Thieu administration as the "only legitimate government of South Viet Nam". With an interval of more than twenty years, these words by Nixon echoed in a sinister fashion similar ones uttered by Eisenhower following the signing of the Geneva agreements on Indochina in 1954.

For Nixon, Ford, Kissinger, the only acceptable solution was that the PRG should be crushed, or at least stifled, and a neo-colonial regime subservient to the US perpetuated in Saigon. One might have been tempted to believe that after the Paris Agreement of 1973 things would move the same way as after the Geneva conference of 1954. But history does not repeat itself. It is true that, in twenty years, Washington had had time to set up a colossal military and police machine in South Viet Nam, but the American leaders were grossly mistaken when they calculated that the destruction, ravages and mourning they had sown on Viet Nam had so exhausted and weakened the Vietnamese people as to render them totally powerless.

In 1954, the Vietnamese resistance had had to evacuate South Viet Nam entirely and regroup its armed forces and cadres in the North, leaving a population without any arms and cadres to confront the imperialist enemy. In 1973, the PRG was there with its own territory and armed forces. The difference with 1954 was a fundamental one. The people in South Viet Nam, as in North Viet Nam, had become battle-

hardened. The threat of American weapons and troops no longer intimidated anybody.

In the months that followed the signing of the Agreement, Saigon troops equipped with modern weapons were able to launch a few surprise attacks and reap some successes which gave rise to illusions. But it was evident that the PRG, the liberation armed forces and the South Vietnamese population would not sit with folded arms in face of those repeated violations of the Paris Agreement which seriously threatened the peace and security of all.

The police control and fascist measures that became worse and worse after January 1973 could not prevent the people in the areas under Thieu's control from waging a political and social struggle whose strength and scope surpassed those of previous movements. The signing of the Paris Agreement, the withdrawal of the GIs, the presence of the PRG and its armed forces, the policy of national reconciliation and concord—these were so many factors which speeded up the struggle of the urban populations who had terribly suffered from the state of war and Thieu's fascist dictatorship. The sad state of the economy sharpened the combativeness of the masses, who were vigorously stimulated by the defeats sustained by Thieu troops. In defiance of arrests and tortures, demonstrations and strikes succeeded one another, in which all social strata participated. Thieu's functionaries and militarymen often joined in those actions or showed open sympathy with his opponents.

Immediately after the signing of the Agreement and in spite of efforts by the Americans and Thieu to

hinder the diffusion of the text of the accord, a vast movement was launched to demand the release of political prisoners. Who in South Viet Nam had not a relative, a friend, a brother kept in one of the numerous prisons built in all provinces? While the struggle was essentially waged by the working people under the guidance of the NFL, gradually all other social strata, especially the students, intellectuals, believers and priests of various religions, whose political consciousness and combativeness had grown with the events, participated more and more actively in the fight. The scope of US military, economic, and ideological intervention over the years had caused various elements to fall away temporarily from the national bloc and take refuge in abstentionism, but little by little those people had grown conscious of the need to fight in order to save the nation, its traditions, its good morals, the whole society, from total destruction. The "third force" thus came into being and manifested itself more and more frequently. Its militants went to prison together with those of the revolutionary movement, a most favourable soil for the policy of national concord. The same thing happened among Vietnamese residents abroad—especially in France where PRG partisans and other groups, including openly pro-American ones, joined forces to demand a strict implementation of the Paris Agreement and condemn the machinations of Washington and Saigon.

The growing opposition of the masses forced Thieu to reshuffle his Cabinet on several occasions and to stop imposing VAT on many goods. In June 1974 he had to forbid members of his administration, army

and police to join political groups. The opposition even spread to the "Lower House of Parliament". In July, 58 of its members signed a motion demanding explanations from the "government" on the execution of the Paris Agreement, corruption, smuggling, and other social evils. Committees and organizations were set up to demand the implementation of the Paris Agreement, and the release of political prisoners.

In July, 300 Catholic priests held a meeting in Can Tho to condemn the corruption prevalent in the Thieu administration. The movement against corruption grew in scope while Buddhist leaders stigmatized the administration's persecution of Buddhists on the pattern of the policy pursued by the late Ngo Dinh Diem and issued a call for the safeguarding of peace and the Paris Agreement. A Catholic-led popular committee against corruption held big rallies in Huê; other cities — Saigon, Bien Hoa, Can Tho — followed suit. In September in Huê, 30,000 people took to the streets to demand that Thieu renounce the use of force as a system of government and answer the corruption charges brought against his wife and himself.

It is significant that the Church, which had always extended vigorous support to Ngo Dinh Diem then Nguyen Van Thieu, should now keep its distance from the latter. The mass of the Catholic faithful had gradually awakened under the impact of events and no longer blindly obeyed the hierarchy. Young priests openly stood for national independence and social progress and went to prison together with revolutionary militants.

Boycotting of news diffused by the administration, marches by journalists, a declaration of opposition by barristers, a demonstration in the outskirts of Saigon by 5,000 Catholics, a protest meeting in Quang Ngai town by 17,000 people, an appeal issued by 40 "deputies" castigating the repression of Buddhist monks — the anger of the masses was rising. Washington was worried. While Thieu clung to his personal power and sought to eliminate one by one those who failed to agree with him, the American leaders were set on gathering together as many of the reactionary forces as possible behind Thieu. Pressure was put on Thieu to dismiss those of his agents with the worst reputation. Under the twofold pressure of popular opposition and the American services, Thieu had to dismiss in October four of his closest ministers, among them Hoang Duc Nha, his nephew and Minister of Information, hated by the press. Public opinion was far from being placated. In late 1974, the trial of three newspapers charged with having published the indictment of Thieu for corruption gave the alarm to the whole population. In order to prevent the holding of demonstrations the day of the trial — which was in fact to be postponed — 40,000 police were mobilized and a state of siege decreed. In a demonstration staged by tens of thousands of people against the trial, violent clashes took place with the police and many well-known personalities were wounded. In spite of seizures and interdictions, newspapers continued to publish accusations against members of the government. At Christmas students demonstrated against the government's cultural policy and in January they again

took to the streets to demand an end to repression and press-ganging. For their part, the trade unions held an extraordinary conference against dismissals and for the right to strike, and put forward economic demands which had become extremely urgent because of runaway inflation and unemployment.

Two years after the Paris Agreement, Thieu was more isolated politically than ever. The movement for the implementation of the Paris Agreement, peace, and national concord was irresistible. The watchword : "Overthrow Thieu ; set up a Saigon government ready for a scrupulous implementation of the Paris Agreement" was adopted by almost all social strata and political and religious tendencies. More than ever, the policy pursued by Washington and its agents was going counter to and clashing with the deepest aspirations of the Vietnamese people.

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The strict implementation of the Agreement would lead to a political confrontation between a coalition of the various national forces and the pro-American forces. This was what Nixon-Kissinger, then Ford, as well as Thieu and the caste of war profiteers in Saigon sought to avoid at all costs. They chose to carry on with the military confrontation, still believing that the technical and financial power of the US would compensate for political and ideological weaknesses. The moderation shown by the PRG during the first months might have given them illusions, being interpreted by Washington and Thieu as a sign of feebleness.

For its part, the PRG had carried out a wide diffusion of the text of the Agreement among the population, hoping that its adversary, drawing the necessary lessons from the past, would adopt a policy of peace and national reconciliation. PRG negotiators on several occasions advanced concrete proposals aimed at bringing about a cease-fire, the release of the political prisoners, the putting into effect of democratic liberties, the setting up of a National Council of National Reconciliation and Concord made up of three segments, a solution to the problem of general elections and the demobilisation of the armed forces of the two parties.

At Washington's instigation, Thieu had always turned a deaf ear, while continuing the encroachment operations against PRG-controlled areas. The Le Duc Tho — Kissinger meeting in Paris in May 1973 and the signing of a joint communiqué in which both parties pledged to take concrete measures for a complete execution of the Agreement brought no change in the aggressiveness of the Saigon forces and the American leaders. On June 18, US Defense Secretary Schlesinger considered the possibility of resuming bombing operations against North Viet Nam.

In July 1973, while reaffirming its determination to strictly implement the Paris Agreement the People's Liberation Armed Forces (PLAF) command at Kontum had to give a warning : if the Saigon troops were to use aircraft, artillery and large infantry units against liberated areas, they would meet with appropriate counter-blows. Thieu went on with encroachment operations in Chuong Thien province, in eastern Nam Bo, and multiplied raids and "pacification" operations in

areas under his control. US reconnaissance aircraft flew over North Viet Nam.

In Tay Ninh province, in the Central Highlands, in the Mekong delta and in the plains of Trung Bo, Thieu launched division-size operations while his aircraft bombed many localities in the liberated areas. Washington even sent an aircraft-carrier to cruise off North Vietnamese shores. Also during that period, the American command intensified its bombing raids on the free areas of Cambodia.

In face of this stubborn continuation of the war by the other side, on 14 October 1973, the PLAF command issued an order to its troops and to the population: hit back vigorously at every war act of the Saigon forces in order to safeguard the lives and property of the population and guarantee the execution of the Paris Agreement. It was made clear that the liberation forces would not merely fight back wherever the enemy attacked but would pick the targets of their counter-blows.

Thieu by no means stopped his operations. He sent his bombers deep into the liberated areas and took advantage of the typhoons to intensify "pacification" operations. On November 6, PLAF artillery gave a severe warning by pounding the Bien Hoa airfield from which those bombers were taking off. Also in November seven Saigon aircraft were shot down in Quang Duc province. In December, while Saigon bombing raids over the free areas were stepped up, the liberation forces did not remain inactive. They set afire fuel depots in Saigon itself and destroyed ammunition depots near Pleiku.

The year 1974 began with warlike declarations by Thieu and Schlesinger. While the Pentagon sent Thieu ultra-modern F-5E aircraft Nixon asked the US Congress to give Thieu twice as much military aid. Saigon planes even strafed seats of the International Control Commission and localities chosen for the return of captured personnel. But the liberation forces and the population delivered ever more vigorous counter-blows.

In February the patriotic forces attacked Quang Ngai airfield. In March they inflicted very serious losses (half its numbers) on the 62nd Rangers Battalion in Kontum province. In April the Tong Le Chan base, the springboard of many encroachment operations, was besieged and heavily shelled, and was later abandoned by its garrison. Thieu sent his bombers to attack Loc Ninh and other localities for several days and broke off *sine die* the negotiations at La Celle Saint Cloud. Nixon and Kissinger were pressing the US Congress for a substantial increase in military and economic aid to Thieu, arguing that the US had a "moral" commitment to the Saigon puppets. Since the Paris Agreement this commitment had manifested itself in the shipment of a million tons of bombs and shells, 1,100 tanks and armoured cars, 800 heavy guns, 700 aircraft, 200 naval and river vessels: American dollars and equipment had made it possible for Thieu to launch, within the space of a little more than a year, hundreds of thousands of encroachment operations, artillery poundings, and air bombings.

In May a vast operation was under way in Ben Cat with three divisions supported by American-man-

ned F.5E aircraft. But in three months from May to July, PLAF counter-blows cost Saigon 8,000 soldiers, 182 tanks and armoured cars and 34 aircraft. To a *Newsweek* correspondent a Saigon officer declared that the troops' low morale was the greatest obstacle for the command, not any lack of material (13 May 1974). By the end of the first half of 1974, Saigon had lost 175,000 men, killed, wounded or run away. Desertions were increasing. In such conditions, the more Thiệu persisted in hurling his troops at the liberated areas, the more defeats they suffered, and the more rapidly they disintegrated. Even a massive influx of dollars and armaments could not reverse the situation. In July and August, in the coastal plains of Trung Bo, Saigon forces lost 160 posts and military positions from which attacks had been launched against the liberated areas. Da Nang and Bien Hoa airfields were pounded. The people of 16 villages, two districts, and 16 concentration sectors rose up and liberated themselves. The situation grew worse and worse for the Saigon forces everywhere, in the Central Highlands, in Trung Bo, in the Mekong delta. One by one the posts illegally set up by Thieu forces in the months following the Paris Agreement were eliminated.

The American general John Murray, who headed DAO in Saigon, confessed that the losses suffered by Saigon in 1973, as well as 1974, surpassed the 100,000 mark, while Thiệu himself admitted that he had lost "many villages and districts and even a town" (AP, 29 January 1975). The figure given by the PRG for those losses suffered by the Saigon side was 255,000 men killed, wounded or deserted. While Ford and

Kissinger were striving to get more aid for Thieu from the US Congress, the *Times* reported on 17 January 1975 that according to Western military sources, the morale of the Saigon army, more than any shortage of military equipment, was to be the decisive factor in the months to come.

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Instead of implementing the Paris Agreement, Nixon, Ford, Kissinger and Thiệu had chosen to use force, to take the military path. Who sows the wind... It was on the military plane that they were to suffer the worst setbacks. The defeats Thiệu sustained in 1974 had not blunted his aggressiveness but the PLAF, fired by their successes, started to attack in late 1974 and especially from early 1975 the military sectors and posts from which encroachment and pacification operations were launched.

In December, the liberation forces began offensives in several provinces, especially in Phuoc Long (capital : Phuoc Binh) northeast of Saigon, along the road to the Highlands, in the western part of the Mekong delta, in Rach Gia, Can Tho and Binh Tuy. (The reader is advised to find the names of provinces on the map, page 54, before getting into the detail of military operations in the pages that follow.) Their regular forces using powerful means did away with the posts and fortifications while the guerillas took on the administrative and para-military organizations. On 6 January the capital of Phuoc Long province was liberated, 3,000 Saigon troops put out of action and 650

others taken prisoner, 12 heavy guns captured and 10 aircraft brought down. For the first time a whole province with its capital was liberated. This had repercussions in public opinion at home and abroad, which Thiêu and Washington sought to exploit through a noisy propaganda, but to no avail.

In early March, the attacks were mostly aimed at Tay Nguyen (Central Highlands) and the northern provinces of Quang Tri, Thua Thiên, Quang Nam, Quang Tin, Quang Ngai, Quang Duc. From 5 to 9 March the PLAF cut the strategic highways leading to the major towns of Tay Nguyen : Highway 4, the north-south artery ; Highway 19, the major transversal road linking Qui Nhon with Pleiku ; Highway 21 running from Ninh Hoa to Buôn Mê Thuôt. The military sub-sectors and important posts controlling the access to Buôn Mê Thuôt were eliminated.

On 10 March, after a violent artillery barrage, the liberation forces made a direct thrust into the central part of the town where the command posts were, not even caring to attack the outer defences. The radio and command posts were quickly neutralized and the defence thus paralyzed. The capture of the airfield and the ammunition depot completed the demoralization of the Saigon troops, who disbanded. On 11 March, the town was liberated ; 2,000 men had been captured and 25 heavy guns and 200 vehicles seized. Helicopters had come from Saigon to take away the American advisers but two of the latter had been captured. The Saigon general Le Trung Tuong had been wounded ; his deputy, Colonel Vu The Quang, killed. The 23rd Infantry Division had been liquidated. The Saigon air forces

had shown themselves completely powerless. A counter-offensive was attempted by Saigon troops assembled at Phuoc An, northeast of Buôn Mê Thuôt, but this locality was quickly taken by the liberation forces. With Buôn Mê Thuôt, the whole province of Darlac was liberated. The routed Saigon troops had not had time to destroy the immense ammunition depot (1.5 kilometres long, nearly one kilometre wide), which proved that they had by no means run short of armaments.

The rapid fall of Buôn Mê Thuôt was a painful surprise for Thiêu and his American masters. The best Saigon units had quickly disbanded, leaving behind their equipment. The population of many villages had risen up, resulting in the provincial capitals being completely isolated, and complete freedom left to the liberation forces to launch direct attacks on the major centres.

It had now been proved that the liberation forces were capable of attacking the important centres of the Tay Nguyen highlands, now isolated. The only solution left to Saigon was to order a general retreat of its forces stationed in Kontum, Pleiku, Hau Bon (Cheo Reo). This retreat was carried out in an atmosphere of panic in the direction of Tuy Hoa, over Highway 7, by a jumble of regular forces, armoured forces, administrative services, para-military forces and members of their families. Saigon soldiers and police forced part of the population to follow them in their withdrawal, destroyed their houses and even their cooking utensils, and spread the rumour that the "Viet cong" would massacre those remaining

behind. The civilian people thus forced to join the exodus would serve as a shield to the Saigon armed forces for the Saigon command knew that the PLAF would never fire on the population. Seven thousand soldiers were captured by the patriotic forces together with 700 vehicles and 91 artillery pieces.

By 19 March, the whole of Tây Nguyên could be considered liberated. The posts of Kien Duc and An Khê on the periphery were to be seized on 22 and 23 March. In less than three weeks Saigon had lost an area of 48,000sq. kilometres with 800,000 inhabitants belonging to 30 different nationalities and important natural resources. The Tay Nguyên highlands stretched without an interruption over 800 kilometres, from the 17th parallel to about 100 kilometres north of Saigon, and border the liberated regions of Cambodia, as well as Lower Laos. This is a strategic region of the utmost importance not only for South Viet Nam but also for the whole of Indochina. Ever since 1954 Washington had always hoped to turn it into a strategic base, a political bastion (by sowing discord among the various ethnic groups) and an economic base of great importance.

Four provinces — Kontum, Gia Lai, Darlac, Phu Bon — had been liberated. Saigon had lost 40,000 regulars, 80,000 auxiliary and para-military troops, 1,250 military vehicles, 110 heavy artillery pieces and large quantities of ammunition. A very hard blow had thus been dealt not only to the Saigon army but also to the whole of the neo-colonial system.

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In Quang Tri province, guerrilla actions combined with uprisings by the populations of the villages started on 8 March, and ended in the rapid liquidation of many military posts, the liberation of many villages and the isolation of the provincial capital, which was liberated on 19 March. Six hundred and fifty Saigon troops were put out of action while many functionaries and members of the Thiệu army and police surrendered and offered their services to the PRG.

In the same period, the people of Thua Thiên province, together with the regular liberation forces, freed the six districts surrounding the ancient capital, Huê, which was now isolated, for the road southward to Da Nang had been cut, especially at the Hai Van pass (Pass of the Clouds.) On 19 March, the PLAF attacked the HQ of the First Infantry Division which defended the capital, and the military sector of Mang Ca and the Tay Loc airfield inside the Huê citadel. On the 22 and 23, the posts on the periphery of the city came under attack ; on the 24 the Phu Bai airfield was violently pounded. On the 25, the PLAF penetrated into the city, and the Saigon forces made a precipitate withdrawal to the sandy stretch along the coast near the Thuan An estuary. The PRG flag fluttered on Huê, the old capital of the Nguyễn kings. On the 26 the city was completely liberated : the houses, public services and monuments were almost intact. In their hasty withdrawal the men of Saigon, who met with resistance from the population and part of their own soldiers and functionaries, had been unable to carry out the planned destruction. On the

27 and 28, the Saigon forces regrouped at the seashore were unable to get on board their ships which were fired at by PLAF artillery. Exhausted, many of them surrendered.

The battle of Thua Thiên and Huê cost the Saigon administration its First Infantry Division : 15,000 men were taken prisoner, among them about a hundred senior officers, 1,000 vehicles and 300 artillery pieces.

Thua Thiên province, with an area of 5,670 square kilometres and 600,000 inhabitants, together with its capital Huê, a political, cultural and historical centre of major importance, and Quang Tri hold a key strategic position. During the first Indochina war, the Huê-Da Nang sector had always been firmly held by the French. The Americans had transformed Huê into a military bastion and an important political and cultural centre because of its proximity to the North. In 1968, the population and the patriotic forces had liberated the city but the Americans had done their utmost to retake it. In 1972 the American command had also spared no effort to defend it.

Meanwhile the liberation forces in other provinces had not remained inactive. On 20 March, An Loc, 70 kilometres northwest of Saigon, was liberated. The whole of Binh Long province, which includes An Loc, came under PRG control, and Tay Ninh province as well as its capital was seriously threatened. On the 24, Tam Ky, capital of Quang Tin province, was liberated. On the 25, the whole of Quang Ngai province and its capital came under PRG control. On the 26, the town of Tam Quan in Binh Dinh province was freed. On the 27, the notorious base of Chu Lai, one of the

largest military bases set up by the Americans in South Viet Nam, fell into the hands of the liberation forces. In the provinces of Binh Dinh, Phu Yên, Khanh Hoa, that is all along the coast of Trung Bo, everywhere the rural population, in concert with the patriotic regular forces, rose up and posed a grave risk to the Saigon administration and army. On the 28, Bao Loc was liberated, which left Dalat city completely isolated.

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The fall of Huê in the north, that of Quang Ngai in the south, and the liberation of the surrounding rural areas completely isolated Da Nang, a particularly important city and port for the whole of South Viet Nam from both the military and political angles. It was in Da Nang that the Americans landed their first Marines ; it was there that they set up port and military installations which commanded and supplied the northern provinces of South Viet Nam and an important part of the Tay Nguyen Highlands. It was to Da Nang that the retreating Saigon troops withdrew in the hope of either holding out there or being taken by ship to Saigon. They had forced part of the population of the countryside and of Huê city to follow them to Da Nang. In the last days of March, Da Nang was a beleaguered city where the most complete disorder reigned. Saigon units refused to obey orders ; soldiers looted shops and private homes ; those seeking to get away assailed the airfields. An American aircraft-carrier, the Hancock, was sent to some dis-

tance off the coast of Da Nang while Philippine and Taiwanese vessels berthed to take refugees.

On 25 March, liberation forces pounded the military positions of Da Nang. On the 28, they penetrated into the city and on the 29 occupied the airfield. Saigon units mutinied, crossed over to the PLAF's side. The people rose up, defended their quarters against Saigon soldiers and hunted down Thieu agents. The Saigon command and the puppet administration were unable to cope with the situation which was moving too fast for them. At 15.30 hours on the 29, the People's Revolutionary Committee set up headquarters at the City Hall. By the 30, the city, the port as well as the whole province of Quang Nam were liberated. Within a matter of hours, the city, which had been the scene of the most complete chaos, recovered calm and order. The whole population joined in the enthusiastic effort to reorganize life on a new basis.

IV. An impossible dream

The liberation of the whole of Tay Nguyen, the cities of Huê and Da Nang, and almost all the coastal provinces of Trung Bo was a real disaster for the Saigon army and regime and for Washington. Had the American leaders and strategists foreseen it? Certainly not. On 29 January 1973, two days after the signing of the Paris Agreement, US Defense Secretary Melvin Laird declared before the Armed Forces Commission

of the House of Representatives that the "Vietnamization program", which had cost 5.3 billion dollars, would allow the Thieu regime to stand on its own feet (*US News and World Report*). With such a support to be renewed each year — 5.3 billion dollars is twice the country's national income — Thieu would be able to hold on indefinitely. What other prospects could take shape in the minds of Nixon, Kissinger and other hawks who were used to reckon everything in terms of dollars, tanks, aircraft, bombs and shells? How could they imagine that an army of more than a million men, equipped with ultra-modern weapons, carefully trained by American advisers, would give way before an adversary who was of course battle-seasoned but was much less well-equipped and was thought to have been considerably weakened by the immense destruction caused by American weapons? What was the use of the 1,800 aircraft, 2,000 tanks and armoured cars, 1,600 heavy guns and 1,600 naval and river vessels which Washington had so generously given to Saigon and which had made the latter, at least in terms of the number of aircraft, into the third military power in the world?

The men in Washington were wrong when they thought that the Paris Agreement was a mere scrap of paper that they could tear up and get away with it. They failed to realize the important historical turning-point represented by the signing of such an agreement and the modification in the correlation of forces that resulted from it, both in Viet Nam and elsewhere. For the Vietnamese people, it represented a decisive step in their long march towards independence and free-

dom, in the fierce struggle opposing them for decades to imperialism, Yankee imperialism in particular. The signing of the Agreement had breathed new vigour into the national struggle waged both by the forces rallied behind the banner of the NFL and the PRG and by forces of other tendencies. It speeded up the process of disintegration within the Saigon army and administration, aggravated the isolation of those who stubbornly opposed the trend toward national reconciliation and concord, toward independence and peace. North Viet Nam, which was rapidly healing its wounds of war and building socialism in new conditions, was more than ever the great rear base of the liberation struggle, while the liberated areas in the South, which were being gradually rebuilt, were solid bases and a pole of attraction for the entire population of South Viet Nam.

The USA, after the Paris Agreement, was not the same as before. To speak of defending the security of the USA in Viet Nam would provoke, if not indignation at least scepticism. The American people had other worries : Watergate, oil, the Middle East, Latin America, Europe, inflation, pollution, crime. Urged by public opinion, the US Congress no longer granted as much generous aid to the Saigon puppets as it had done previously. To send American boys to faraway Indochina to get killed was something few American leaders dared to recommend.

Besides, Viet Nam was not the only problem. In Cambodia neither the bombing raids carried out not long before by American aircraft nor the abundant supply of arms and dollars had prevented the Phnom Penh puppets from visibly losing ground. Phnom

Penh, supplied by an American airlift, was but an islet in the midst of an almost wholly liberated Cambodia. A few more hundred million dollars would bring no great change to the situation. In Laos, the American attempts to regain control over the country, which was irresistibly heading for national union, independence, and neutrality, were to no avail. Thailand, until now completely subservient to Washington, was stirring and the Bangkok government under popular pressure had to declare that it was asking Washington to remove the American bases from the country.

The American leaders seem to have been completely ignorant of that important change in the correlation of forces, both in Indochina and in the world at large. In 1973, they had persisted, as they had twenty years before, in their dream of setting up an indigenous military and police machine, a neo-colonial apparatus capable of crushing the national and revolutionary movement. They had also apparently forgotten this lesson : the Saigon army and police had been unable to perform that task and more than half a million GIs had been needed to come and rescue them. For anyone who has at all followed the history of Viet Nam it is unbelievable that the Saigon army and police would be able, without the GIs' support, to hold their own let alone win militarily over the forces of liberation.

And yet, the men in Washington, intelligent and clever men, have harboured such a dream and tried to execute their scheme. The imperialist policy and neo-colonial strategy that inspire them and their belief in the decisive power of armaments have blinded them.

Intoxicated by their own propaganda they have not seen that on the Vietnamese side it is a veritable struggle for liberation that has been going on for decades. The latest successes of the NFL and the PRG have had the character of a national liberation more than that of pure military victories; in most cases, the rising up of the populations, combined with attacks by regulars or guerillas and the desertions and mutinies of Saigon units, has resulted in the puppet forces being quickly routed. It is not a case of an army being defeated by another army; it is an entire people mounting the assault and having partisans even in the ranks of the enemy's forces.

In the liberated localities and towns, in an unprecedented atmosphere of enthusiasm, life has been quickly reorganized thanks to the efforts of all, in spite of the ruins and mourning accumulated by long years of American intervention. The most generous clemency shown by the PRG to the members of the Saigon army and administration has greatly helped to win over those men and women, who have quickly put themselves at the service of the new regime. The policy of national reconciliation and concord has been applied to the letter. No slanderous propaganda could shake the cohesion of an entire people resolved to regain their independence and freedom.

In his impotent fury Thieu has sent his planes to bomb the liberated towns and localities, adding a new felony to the long list of his crimes against the country. For its part, Washington has tried to bolster the Saigon regime and to blacken in the eyes of international opinion, the Vietnamese national and revolutionary

movement. Under the pretext of rescuing refugees, Ford has sent American naval units to Viet Nam and organized a California-Saigon airlift. It is certain that the USA still has the financial and material means to prolong the survival of the neo-colonial regime in Saigon. For long years to come the neo-colonial policy of Washington will be to hold on to the end, to maintain for as long as possible bastions in Viet Nam and Indochina, so as to delay as much as possible the liberation of the Indochinese peoples and hamper to the utmost the building of a new society in the countries of Indochina.

But it is no less certain that a severe, if not mortal, blow has been struck at that policy, which is now doomed sooner or later. No power in the world can any longer bar the road of national liberation to the Vietnamese, Cambodian and Lao peoples.

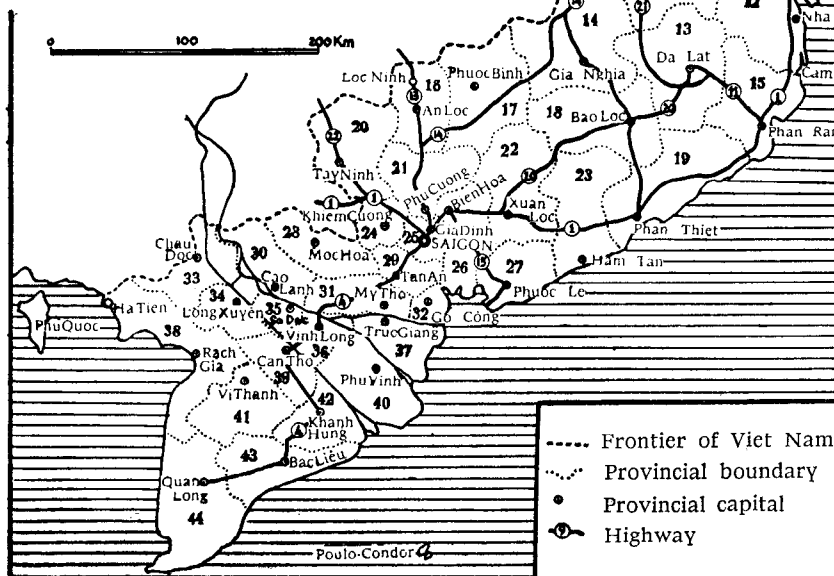
1 April 1975

LIST OF PROVINCES

(as established by Saigon)

The provinces bear the following numbers on the map :

- | | |
|----------------|------------------|
| 1. Quang Tri | 23. Binh Tuy |
| 2. Thua Thien | 24. Hau Nghia |
| 3. Quang Nam | 25. Gia Dinh |
| 4. Quang Tin | 26. Bien Hoa |
| 5. Quang Ngai | 27. Phuoc Tuy |
| 6. Kontum | 28. Kiên Tuong |
| 7. Binh Dinh | 29. Long An |
| 8. Pleiku | 30. Kiên Phong |
| 9. Phu Bon | 31. Dinh Tuong |
| 10. Phu Yen | 32. Go Cong |
| 11. Darlac | 33. Châu Đốc |
| 12. Khanh Hoa | 34. An Giang |
| 13. Tuyen Duc | 35. Sa Dec |
| 14. Quang Duc | 36. Vinh Long |
| 15. Ninh Thuan | 37. Kiên Hoa |
| 16. Binh Long | 38. Kiên Giang |
| 17. Phuoc Long | 39. Phong Dinh |
| 18. Lâm Dong | 40. Vinh Binh |
| 19. Binh Thuan | 41. Chuong Thien |
| 20. Tây Ninh | 42. Ba Xuyên |
| 21. Binh Duong | 43. Bac Lieu |
| 22. Long Khanh | 44. An Xuyên |



COMMUNIQUE OF APRIL 6, 1975 OF THE SOUTH VIET NAM PLAF HIGH COMMAND

This communiqué was issued after the writing of this booklet. We print it to acquaint our readers with the results of recent military operations :

To punish the Nguyen Van Thieu clique, the henchmen of the USA, for their persistent sabotage of the Paris Agreement on Viet Nam, the people and armed forces throughout South Viet Nam have, since early March 1975, launched repeated attacks, staged strong uprisings and won great victories of strategic significance.

The people and their armed forces have wiped out and brought about the disintegration of a large military force including all the live forces, ammunition, technical and other war means in the whole of Military Regions I and II. They have put out of action 270,000 enemy troops, wiped out and brought about the complete disintegration of 6 puppet regular divisions (including 5 infantry divisions, and 1 marine division), the 3rd Paratroop Brigade, 21 multi-battalion

"civil guard" and ranger units, 10 armoured regiments, and 19 armoured battalions, 35 battalions, 9 companies and 70 platoons of ground artillery, and 5 A-A artillery battalions. They have also dissolved all the enemy "militia" and "popular defence" organisations.

Following the victories of the people and armed forces in the Mekong River delta and Eastern Nam Bo, where the local people and liberation armed forces overran and forced the evacuation of thousands of posts and strongholds, took control of many key areas and completely liberated Phuoc Long province, the people and liberation armed forces smashed the enemy's strongest defence system in the Tay Nguyen Highlands and an area stretching along the length of the coastal plains of central Viet Nam, brought about the disintegration of the whole military force and coercive machine of the enemy in vast areas, including many key sectors of very great political, military, economic and cultural significance. They completely liberated 5 big cities : Hue, Da Nang, Qui Nhon, Nha Trang and Da Lat, and 16 provinces : Kontum, Gia Lai, Darlac, Phu Bon, Quang Tri, Thua Thien, Quang Da, Quang Nam, Quang Ngai, Binh Dinh, Phu Yen, Quang Duc, Binh Long, Lam Dong, Khanh Hoa and Tuyen Duc, together with many district towns, military sectors and sub-sectors belonging to Eastern Nam Bo and the Mekong River delta.

So far, 9,300,000 people from the 17th parallel to Cape Ca Mau have been completely liberated.

In face of the high tide of attacks and uprisings of the people and liberation armed forces and in

response to the revolution's call, many units, tens of thousands of soldiers and thousands of officers of the puppet army have refused to obey combat orders, or mutinied, and crossed over to the revolutionary side, bringing along their weapons.

The extremely great victories of the South Vietnamese people and the very heavy setbacks of the enemy in a short period of time have brought about rapid changes in the situation in South Viet Nam. We are progressing in leaps and bounds and the balance of forces between us and the enemy has radically changed. We have a clear advantage over the enemy who is critically demoralized, organizationally disintegrated, materially and technically depleted, and doomed to an irremediable defeat.

The extremely great victories in the past month have ushered in a new and extremely favourable situation for the people and liberation armed forces to continue their advance to even more splendid victories.

These victories of our people and armed forces are splendid successes of the correct and creative revolutionary line, the will that believes that "Nothing is more precious than independence and freedom", the strength of the unity and iron-like determination of our people and armed forces in the fight for peace, independence, democracy and national concord.

They are also splendid victories of the close militant solidarity between the three brotherly peoples of Viet Nam, Laos and Cambodia, of the precious sym-

pathy, support and assistance to Viet Nam from the fraternal socialist countries, and friends throughout the world.

The South Viet Nam PLAF High Command mentions in dispatches the officers and men of all arms in the three categories of troops who have shown a firm resolve to fight and to win, launched overwhelming attacks and fought in close coordination, thus winning brilliant victories and giving effective help to the popular uprisings for the seizure of power.

It warmly congratulates our fellow countrymen in various regions and of various nationalities who, continuing the revolutionary traditions of the entire people in general and the local population in particular, have shown their strong solidarity, bravery and skill, and have risen up to free themselves from the enemy's grip and made an effective contribution to the PLAF victories.

At the present time our army and people are winning big victories. The Nguyen Van Thieu clique have suffered heavy defeats. Bright prospects are opening up before us. In their death throes, the US aggressors and their quislings are continuing to commit crimes against our compatriots. They are compelling them to leave their homes and fields and follow them in their stampede, thus condemning them to wander homeless and end up in the concentration camps at Con Son, Phu Quoc, becoming tools to serve their dark designs. Now the enemy are gathering their remaining forces to attempt to resist our army's waves of attacks and our people's uprisings. The American imperialists have

done their best to breathe new strength into the Thieu clique. They have pushed their barbarity to the lengths of killing and taking away thousands of our children.

The struggle of our armed forces and people will remain a very fierce and complex one; but the situation is irreversible. However obstinate and perfidious they may be, the enemy will not escape defeat, and we shall certainly win even greater victories.

Our consistent stand has been to strictly implement the Paris Agreement, but we are resolved to mete out due punishment to the American imperialists and their henchmen for their obdurate continuation of the neo-colonialist war and their sabotage of peace and the Paris Agreement.

The PLAF High Command calls on all officers and men of the regular army, the regional units, militia and guerillas, in view of the new situation and in order to fulfil the tasks entrusted to their units and their areas, to strengthen their determination to win, to show even greater courage and initiative in order to unite with the uprising population to smash all the enemy's hopes for its neo-colonialist war and gain new victories.

The PLAF High Command calls on all the people living in enemy-controlled regions to rise up and close their ranks to defend their sacred right to live, to safeguard their lives and property and seize power, resolutely frustrating all the enemy's attempts to compel them to emigrate.

The PLAF High Command hails the officers, soldiers and policemen of the Thieu administration who have already mutinied to join the ranks of the revolution, acting for the salvation of themselves and their families and for the salvation of the nation.

Nothing is more precious than independence and freedom.

In the momentum of the recent victories, let our people march forward to win new and ever greater victories !

ANNEXES

THE PARIS AGREEMENT AS SEEN BY
WASHINGTON AND NGUYEN VAN THIEU

Nixon :

"The United States will continue to recognize the Government of the Republic of Viet Nam as the sole legitimate government of South Viet Nam".

Televised address on Jan. 28, 1973

Kissinger :

"As a signatory of the Paris Agreement... the United States committed itself to strengthening the conditions which made the ceasefire possible... With these commitments in mind, we continue to provide the Republic of Viet Nam with the means necessary for its self-defense and its economic viability...

We have thus committed ourselves very substantially, both politically and morally, While the South

Vietnamese government and people are demonstrating increasing self-reliance, we believe it is important that we continue our support as long as it is needed."

Letter to Senator Edward M. Kennedy,
March 25, 1974

Sullivan (Kissinger's deputy at the Paris Conference on Viet Nam) :

"We think it is essential for the United States to retain its military presence precisely as it can be seen. We are not abandoning our friends or leaving the area (SEA).

Manila, AP, Sept. 15, 1973

Nguyen Van Thieu :

"In South Viet Nam, there can be only one government and one army... The name 'provisional revolutionary government' cannot exist..."

"I wish to remind you, countrymen, brothers and sisters, of this : what is this ceasefire agreement ? An agreement to have a ceasefire in place, neither more nor less. I have said that it is not because there is the word Peace in it that we shall have peace. It is only a ceasefire in place, neither more nor less.

"I want to remind you, countrymen that a ceasefire in place means to maintain the status quo : where

our administration, army and people are, we shall reign as a king. There everything will depend on us. We shall maintain our laws, our administration ; everything will be done as in the past, there's no change...

"This is a ceasefire in place. A ceasefire in place does not mean that the Communists can go to Saigon market to take a soup or that they can go back to their villages to see their wives, fathers, mothers, brothers, sisters...

"If a Communist comes to a village and the villagers do not recognize him, if his name is not registered and he has no identity card delivered by the village, blow his brains out on the spot.

"Besides the strangers who come back from the maquis, any fellows in the village who raise their heads and speak in a communist way also transgress the laws of the State. We must kill them exactly as we have done so far."

Televised speech, January 28, 1973

"... Who can accept a coalition government with three components ? And why three components and not fifteen, seventeen, eighty-five ? Has it fallen from heaven or issued from the earth, that third component ? And these Communists, what do they have here to demand one-third ? And what are they claiming for the third component that they can demand another third for it ? That is a solution imposed on us... The question of three components is an absurd formula.

It has no foundation. And what they call an "equal part" is but a low trick."

Televised speech in Saigon, October
24, 1972

"No general elections, no peace, no political settlement, the negotiations with the Communists may be suppressed."

Statement made at Vung Tau on
December 28, 1973

U.S. AID TO SAIGON

"Military aid is a less dangerous and less costly method to replace the direct involvement of US forces".

Secretary of Defense Schlesinger
Voice of America, May 23, 1974.

"America continues to help finance the materials of war, to ship the bombs and the bullets that continue to kill Vietnamese... The fact remains that America is involved in the war, even though the dying has been Vietnamized".

Senate report — "Relief and Rehabilitation of war victims in Indochina :
One year after the cease-fire" by
Senator Kennedy's Subcommittee on
Refugees.

"The United States Army is supplying South Viet Nam with almost as much ammunition as it did when

the fighting still raged immediately after the cease-fire one year ago.

"The statistics on monthly shipments to South Viet Nam made available at the Pentagon Friday gave an indication of the ebb and flow of the fighting since the Jan. 27, 1973, cease-fire.

"Altogether, the military has given Viet Nam 1.1 billion dollars worth of equipment and supplies in the first 12 months after the cease-fire...

"For the first three months after the cease-fire, the fighting was known to continue at a high level and shipments averaged 33,000 tons of ground ammunition in each of those months.

"The shipments tailed off sharply, averaging 7,000 tons a month from July to October.

"Shipments then rose again, hitting 9,000 tons in November, 16,000 in December and 22,000 in January, the last month for which figures were available...."

Saint Louis Post Dispatch, March 17, 1974.

"The total budgeted cost of military aid to South Viet Nam is 813 million in this fiscal year, and the Pentagon has asked Congress for 1.45 billion next year, with most of the increase probably going for ammunition, which the South Vietnamese forces had expended at a high rate.

The true costs of the military support probably rise considerably above the official figures. Some of the aid, for example, comes in through economic

programs that dump millions in cash into the Saigon Government's defense budget. And other costs — salaries of Pentagon technicians who make special visits, for example — are hidden in the vast budgets of the United States Air Force, Army and Navy and are not labeled "Vietnam".

These valuable military goods and services have a sharp political impact. They are indispensable to the South Vietnamese Government's policy of resistance to any accommodation with the Communists. Militarily, the extensive aid has enabled President Nguyen Van Thieu to take the offensive at times, launching intensive attacks with artillery and jet fighters against Vietcong-held territory.

Furthermore, the American-financed military shield has provided Mr Thieu with the muscle to forestall a political settlement. He has rejected the Paris Agreement's provision for general elections, in which the Communists would be given access to the press, permission to run candidates and freedom to rally support openly and without interference from the police..."

The New York Times, Feb. 25, 1974

"The Nixon Administration has quietly violated congressional intent to cut economic aid to Indochina in FY 1974. The original Administration request was for 827.8 million. Congress cut this back to under 700 million. By the end of FY 1974, however, the Administration has wound up allocating 1.1 billion in economic aid to Indochina.

The Administration allocated a total of 3.2 billion in FY 1974 for Indochina, almost as much as was allocated for specific countries in the rest of the Third World combined. This figure, for example, is 6 times what went to Africa and Latin America combined for economic aid and this was part of the Administration's continuing commitment to combating local insurgencies, despite a clear public and congressional mandate for non-interventionism in such insurgencies.

... Military and "Indochina Post-war Reconstruction" requests have jumped 45⁰/₀. FY total spending saw only 0.3⁰/₀ actually going toward "humanitarian", "reconstruction" or "development" projects. The FY 1974 budget, therefore was a war budget — caused by the structural unviability of the GVN and Lon Nol regimes. Administration claims that US aid will allow them to "stand on their own" are myths.

.....
The Administration's FY 1975 program, moreover, offers even more the same. Its proposed FY 1975 military and economic aid requests total 3.28 billion — or 27⁰/₀ more than what was allocated last year.

Once more, over 90⁰/₀ of this aid is destined neither for reconstruction nor humanitarian needs, but for the maintenance of the war machines in Cambodia and South Viet Nam"...

Statement made by Mr. Fred Branfman, co-director of *Indochina Resource Center* before the Asia and Pacific Affairs Subcommittee of the House of Representatives, May 1, 1974 (Congressional Record, Proceedings and debates of the 93rd Congress, second session).

"Several years ago, Congress took into account the military needs of the South Vietnamese and Cambodian governments and permitted both countries to use 80 per cent of these local "counterpart" funds generated by the sale of US commodities (provided by CIP and Food for Peace) "to procure equipment, materials, facilities and services for the common defense including internal security".

Last October (October 1973), an adjustment permitted South Viet Nam to spend 100 per cent of these counterpart funds for "common defense".

Saint Louis Post Dispatch, June 10, 1974

AMERICAN MILITARY ADVISERS IN SOUTH VIET NAM AFTER THE PARIS AGREEMENT

Even as the United States military is packing up for its expected exit from Viet Nam, American officials here are secretly planning a major post-war presence of United States civilians in Viet Nam, with many of them doing jobs formerly done by the military.

About 10,000 American civilian advisers and technicians, most of them under Defense Department contract, will stay on in South Viet Nam after a ceasefire, according to well-informed sources. These civilians will do everything from running the South Vietnamese military's personnel and logistic computers to teaching the Vietnamese Air Force how to fly and maintain newly provided planes and repairing the complex military communications network left behind by the United States Army.

About half of these civilian workers are already in Viet Nam, with others beginning to arrive almost

daily at Saigon's Tan Son Nhut under new contracts signed confidentially in the last few weeks.

The New York Times, Nov. 27, 1972

According to both American and South Vietnamese officials, the American civilians—both employees of private companies and those of the Defense Department—who help with supply activities not only see that the South Vietnamese get the equipment and ammunition they ask for but also advise them on what to ask for.

What is not clear is whether they confine their observations to such matters as the condition of equipment and the rate of ammunition expenditure, or whether they evaluate military tactics and strategies and go so far as to suggest alternatives.

What is fairly certain is that their reports end up in the hands of the South Vietnamese, perhaps providing indirect advice of one sort or another.

A South Vietnamese officer in a position to know said recently that normal procedure called for an American and a South Vietnamese to make an inspection or auditing tour of a military unit together. Then they write up their reports, sometimes separately, sometimes together. The reports, he said, are forwarded up the chain of command in the United States Defense Attache's Office, which then relays copies of them to Lieut. Gen. Dong Van Khuyen, head of the Logistic Command for the South Vietnamese Joint General Staff.

More direct, overt advice is sometimes given by zealous Americans who are still stationed in every province. An embassy official reported recently that an American based in one province boasted to him about a successful military operation: "I told them to clear the communists out of there."

David K. Shipler — *The New York Times* — Feb. 25, 1974

VIOLATIONS OF THE CEASE-FIRE

"... Major causes (of violations) have included the fact that the South Vietnamese Government has continued to fight to regain all positions it had lost just before the cease-fire and that it has continued to seek and attack Communist units whenever it could find them."

The New York Times — Feb. 28, 1973

"The Saigon administration continues to mobilize large armed forces, coordinated with aircraft, tanks and artillery to launch nibbling operations."

Washington Post, Jan. 30, 1973

"Vietnamese Air Force pilots in the Mekong Delta have orders to strafe and bomb any village flying Viet Cong flags."

Unidentified US official, *Newsweek*, Feb. 19, 1973

"The US Administration has not denied that South Viet Nam (Saigon) has committed violations of the ceasefire accord."

The New York Times, April 21, 1973

"The Saigon government has pressed hard on the Communist forces in South Viet Nam, recapturing many of the areas which it seized just before the cease-fire went into effect, and circumscribing and obstructing the Communist side in its operations throughout South Viet Nam in the last three months. Privately, some very authoritative South Vietnamese sources concede just that.

Breakdown of the Viet Nam Cease-fire : the Need for a Balanced View,
Indochina Resource Center, p. 39

"Much of the fighting in the delta has been touched off by Saigon Government troops sweeping through areas long held by the PRG"

Unidentified authoritative Western sources, *The New York Times*, June 27, 1973

"Much of the fighting in the military region III, which envelops Saigon, has been initiated by South Vietnamese commanders..."

The New York Times, Oct. 21, 1973

"Thieu has ordered his forces to make preemptive strikes to forestall attacks, and field reports indicate the Saigon army is engaged in what the Viet Cong call land-grabbing operations in some areas".

Chicago Tribune, Nov. 4, 1973

"The South Vietnamese have officially admitted that they have broken the January cease-fire, including the air raid against the PRG town of Loc Ninh."

London Observer, Oct. 11, 1973

"The Saigon Government has launched continual attacks against Viet Cong-controlled areas within what it regards as its territories."

Newsweek, Nov. 26, 1973

"Thousands of South Vietnamese troops swept across the lower Mekong Delta..."

AP, *St Louis Post-Dispatch*, Dec. 27, 1973

"During our two weeks with the Vietcong, we saw planes on bombing runs or heard the shelling every day

and on several occasions had to scramble into bunkers in the middle of the night."

Ed. Bradley, CBS correspondent in South Viet Nam, reporting on CBS News in the US on November 14 and 16, 1973 about the situation in the PRG areas.

"Three battalions of South Vietnamese Rangers and ARVN troops were carrying out major military operations recently to "pacify" and hold vast areas of Quang Ngai province. These areas have consistently been controlled by the National Liberation Front (NLF) for over ten years.

"An integral part of the operations is forcing civilian farmers from the region to precede the troops to clear away bush and trees which are laced with booby traps and mines. Scores of civilians were killed or injured in the operations.

"... According to a Ranger battalion commander, the object of the operations is to organize the people presently living there into villages and hamlets under Saigon government control. A ranking officer predicted that the troops would stay in the area for at least six months.

"We will pacify the area and build outposts which will in time be taken over by local military forces," he said."

Guardian, June 19, 1974

THE NEWLY LIBERATED AREAS

From March 13 to April 4, 1975, 16 provinces have been liberated :

Order number	Province	Area (sq. kil)	Population	Provincial capital	Date of liberation
1	Darlac	12,800	277,000	Buon Me Thuot	March 13
2	Pleiku	8,860	283,000	Pleiku	March 18
3	Kontum	11,230	139,000	Kontum	March 19
4	Phu Bon	4,800	61,300	Hau Bon (Cheo Reo)	March 19
5	Quang Tri	4,740	300,000	Quang Tri	March 19
6	Binh Long	2,240	27,720	An Loc	March 20
7	Quang Ngai	4,300	720,000	Quang Ngai	March 24
8	Quang Duc	5,740	30,000	Gia Nghia	March 24
9	Thua Thien	5,670	600,000	Huê	March 26
10	Quang Tin *	4,000	400,000	Tam Ky	March 27
11	Quang Nam *	8,000	1400,000	Hoi An	March 28
12	Lam Dong	4,700	58,000	Bao Loc	March 28
13	Binh Dinh	7,000	900,000	Qui Nhon	April 1
14	Phu Yen	4,200	350,000	Tuy Hoa	April 1
15	Khanh Hoa	4,300	300,000	Nha Trang	April 3
16	Tuyen Duc	4,770	250,000	Da Lat	April 4

* Quang Tin and Quang Nam correspond respectively to Quang Nam and Quang Da in the administrative division of the PRG.

Below is some information about the most important areas recently liberated.

THE TAY NGUYEN HIGHLANDS AND THE TRUONG SON RANGE

Land and Natural Resources

The Tay Nguyen Highlands include from north to south five high plateaus called Kontum, Pleiku, Darlac, Lang Biang and Upper Dong Nai. At present they are divided into seven provinces :

Kontum	Capital : Kontum
Pleiku	Capital : Pleiku
Phu Bon	Capital : Cheo Reo
Darlac	Capital : Buon Me Thuot
Quang Duc	Capital : Gia Nghia
Tuyen Duc	Capital : Dalat
Lam Dong	Capital : Bao Loc

The area along the Truong Son includes the western parts of the coastal provinces of Central Trung Bo, from Quang Nam to Binh Thuan, which are closely related to the Tay Nguyen Highlands in the ethnic, geographical, linguistic and historical fields.

The area is about 80,000 square kilometres, of which 48,000 belong to the Highlands.

The Truong Son mountain range runs north-south ; it is dominated in the north by peaks of over 2,500

metres (A Tuat, Ngoc Linh), and in the south by 2,000-metre peaks (Chu Yang Xin, Vong Phu, Lang Biang).

The Tay Nguyen Highlands have an altitude of 1,000 metres in the north, 500 metres in the centre, and 1,000 metres in the south where it gently slopes down to 500 metres at its tip.

They have about 700 kilometres of common frontiers with Laos and Cambodia, adjacent to the Boloven Plateau in Laos in the north and to the northeastern part of Cambodia in the west. This tri-border region is of great strategic importance as it commands the whole of southern Indochina.

Many rivers watering South Viet Nam (Ba River and Dong Nai River) and the big tributaries of the Mekong River (Serepok, Krong Pocco) have their sources in the Tay Nguyen Highlands and the Truong Son range ; many rivers have powerful waterfalls such as the Da Nhim and Krong Pha waterfalls, which are a huge potential source of hydro-electric power for the whole of South Viet Nam.

The Tay Nguyen Highlands are crisscrossed with an extensive network of strategic roads.

— Highway 14 runs through the highlands, linking Hue city and Da Nang port in the north to Saigon in the South ;

— Highway 5, from Mo Duc (Quang Ngai) to Kontum, is connected to the road leading to Attopeu in Lower Laos ;

— Highway 19 links Qui Nhon port to Pleiku town, and goes as far as Stung Treng, a Cambodian town on the bank of the Mekong river.

— Highway 7 links the coastal town of Tuy Hoa to Pleiku ;

— Nha Trang port and Ninh Hoa are linked by Highway 21 to Buon Me Thuot and the mountain resort of Dalat ;

— Highway 11 and a parallel railway line run from the coastal town of Phan Rang to Dalat ;

— Highway 8 runs from the coastal town of Phan Thiet to Di Linh town where it meets Highway 20 linking Saigon to Dalat.

By their situation, the Tay Nguyen Highlands are regarded as an important strategic area.

The Truong Son range and the north of Kontum province are covered with forests on hundreds of thousands of hectares where can be found such precious timber trees as : *xa nu*, *lim* (ironwood), *trao* (dalbergia), *kien kien* (Hopea pierrei Hance), besides a wide range of forest products and wild animals (elephants, deer, gaurs, tigers...)

In the Tay Nguyen Highlands, only 1.5 million hectares of land have been brought under cultivation. The valleys and areas around Ho Lak (southeast of Buon Me Thuot) lend themselves perfectly to the growing of wet rice. The basaltic soil in the highlands is suited for the growing of coffee, tea, rubber, tobacco, jute, sugar cane. According to preliminary estimates, there are in the highlands over 150 plantations (dating back to the French period) and agricultural settlements (set up by the Americans and the Saigon quislings). Darlac contains 123 of these estates (60 plantations and 63 agricultural settlements), the biggest being Dak Mil, Katum, Mewan.

Phu Bon province (formerly Cheo Reo district of Pleiku province ; population : 61,300 ; area : 4,800 square kilometres) has 500,000 hectares of cropland, of which 60,000 hectares in the valley of the Ba River are most suitable for cotton growing. In 1960-1962, French planters obtained 8,417 kilograms of cotton per hectare from experimentation fields. 50,000 hectares of fertile red soil at Boun Blech are suitable for the growing of mulberry trees, rubber, coffee..., while the remaining 300,000 hectares are covered with forests.

The high plateaus in the West have also immense grasslands suitable for the breeding of oxen, sheep, goats, horses... West of Highway 14 in the provinces of Gia Lai and Darlac, grasslands cover hundreds of square kilometres.

The subsoil of the Tay Nguyen Highlands contains such ores as gold (extracted at Bong Mieu, 100 km southwest of Da Nang), lead, zinc (at Bao Loc, Lam Dong province).

The Tay Nguyen, besides their strategic value, have also a great economic potential.

The people

Up to now there are no accurate figures of the population of the Tay Nguyen Highlands (owing to the constant demographic fluctuations). A rough estimate puts it at more than one million inhabitants, of whom 850,000 are members of 30 minority natio-

nalities belonging to two linguistic groups (the Malayo-Polynesian or Indonesian, and the Mon-Khmer) and two cultural currents :

— The Cham culture : it penetrated into the Highlands in the 11th century by the Ba valley and influenced such nationalities as the Ede (Darlac), Jarai (Pleiku), Raglai, Coho (west of the provinces of Khanh Hoa, Ninh Thuan, Binh Thuan, and the provinces of Lam Dong, Tuyen Duc.)

— The Mon Khmer culture : it influenced greatly the people living at higher altitudes, who were not influenced by Cham culture : Katu, Kor, Hre (West of Quang Nam, Quang Ngai, Binh Dinh), Sedang, Gie, Banar (Kontum), M'ngong (Darlac), Ma, Satieng in Upper Dong Nai, etc.

The life of the minority people is also influenced by the Viet and Lao.

Those various tribes live mainly in a primitive economy. Except for a few nationalities who grow rice in flooded fields (west of Quang Ngai, Binh Dinh), in the Lak region (northwest of Buôn Mê Thuôt...), the overwhelming majority live by slash-and-burn farming, hunting, and gathering of forest products. A very small number work in plantations.

As farming methods were backward, and farm tools rudimentary, the rice yield was only about one ton per hectare. That is why under the old regime, people ran short of food for 5-6 months a year. Today, in the liberated areas, farming technique has been improved, and productivity has risen two or three times; in many localities, virgin land in the valleys has been cleared for rice planting.

Handicrafts, such as weaving, metal-working, earthenware, are little developed.

Under French rule, only four ethnic minorities had their own scripts (Banar, Ede, Gia Rai, Cobo). Very few people could afford to go to school ; the majority of highlanders were illiterate. Today, almost all the minorities living in the liberated areas possess their own scripts ; many highlanders have learnt to write and read ; in many villages illiteracy has been liquidated among the cadres and the youth ; many of the latter have become teachers, engineers, doctors.

The highlanders have a rich folk culture which however has not yet been fully developed ; many ethnic minorities have a treasury of ballads and dances and many traditional musical instruments (gong, xylophone, flute...).

Tradition of anti-imperialist struggle

The best-known movements were :

Insurrection of the Ede, Gia Rai, led by chieftains Ama Val, Ama Dhao, Ama Trang Gun and Patan Pui in which many French soldiers and administrators were killed (1885-1905).

The 18-year struggle (from 1914 to 1932) of the M'ngong and other nationalities led by Ama Trang Cong against French penetration into the mountain regions, against corvées and pressganging.

The Sam Bram uprising (1937-1939) which spread from west of Phu Yen to north and south of the Truong Son range, and east of the Tay Nguyen High-

lands, during which many military posts from western Quang Nam to southern Binh Dinh, eastern Kontum and Upper Dong Nai, were wiped out.

The victorious uprising which annihilated the Ba To post (west of Quang Ngai), set up revolutionary power and established a resistance base against the Japanese (March 11, 1945).

General insurrection in August 1945, leading to seizure of power in various provinces.

During the resistance war against the French (1945-1954) :

Following the French occupation of the Tay Nguyen Highlands in July 1946, the patriotic forces established guerilla bases and resistance bases, even behind the enemy's lines : Stor (Gia Lai), Soap Dui (Sedang), De Leya (Darlac)...

In 1954 : cooperation with the people's armed forces in the liberation of Kontum province, nearly all the province of Gia Lai, and other localities.

— Struggle against the US and its quislings :

From 1954 to 1958 : consolidation of the bases along the Truong Son range and in Kontum ; development of bases in all provinces in the highlands, in the towns, and west of Highway 14. Struggle against "denounce communists" campaigns, against penning up of the population.

In 1959 and early 1960 : Destruction of concentration camps in the western part of Ninh Thuan, western Binh Dinh, and Quang Nam.

Armed insurrection at Tra Bong and west of Quang Ngai (August 28, 1959) and other provinces in Trung

Bo : liquidation of cruel enemy agents, suppression of the puppet administrations, setting up of revolutionary power.

Attacks on many posts, armed uprisings in mountain provinces in October and November 1960, shattering of the puppet rural administration.

From 1961 to 1965, fighting against the US "special war", "pacification" plans, the penning up of the local inhabitants in strategic hamlets and concentration camps, which were all destroyed by the end of 1965 ; 500,000 people liberated.

Foiling the plan to set up "special units of montagnards" and to "arm montagnards" in villages and hamlets.

1965-1968 : Cooperation with the people's armed forces to counter "search and destroy" and "pacification plans" :

At Pleime (Gia Lai) : 1,700 enemy troops wiped out (from October 19 to November 18, 1965).

At Plei Jirang (Gia Lai) : 2 American battalions and 8 companies annihilated from February 15 to March 31, 1967.

Uprising in January 1968 : occupation by the patriotic forces of the towns of Kontum, Pleiku, Buôn Mê Thuôt, Dalat.

1969-1972 : fighting against Nixon's "Vietnamisation" of the war :

Campaigns of Dakto, Bu Prang — Duc Lap (1969), campaign of northern Daksieng (1970), campaign of Dakto (1971).

Offensives and uprisings in 1972 : breaching of the Dakto-Tan Canh line (April 1972), annihilation of the system of strategic hamlets, of the concentration area west of Gia Lai, occupation of part of Kontum town (October 1972).

1973-1975 : Struggle against pacification and land-grabbing by Saigon troops, and for the implementation of the Paris Agreement.

PROVINCE OF QUANG TRI

Quang Tri is South Viet Nam's northernmost province, just below the Ben Hai River at the 17th parallel (provisional military demarcation line).

Area : 4,740 sq. km with 610 sq. km of plain.

Population : 300,000 inhabitants.

Capital : Quang Tri (1,274 km from Saigon) ; 20,000 inhabitants.

The province comprises 7 districts : Gio Linh, Vinh Linh, Trieu Phong, Hai Lang, Huong Hoa, Cam Lo and Ba Long.

Mountains cover more than half of the territory. Highest peak : Ta Linh or Voi Mep. Lao Bao (350m) is the lowest pass of the Truong Son Range. Principal rivers : Thach Han (or Song Han), Ben Hai, Cam Lo.

The coasts, 40 km long, are flat. They shelter two ports : Cua Viet, 10 km from Quang Tri city, accessible to 1,000-ton vessels, and Cua Tung.

Principal communication routes :

— Highway 1, flanked by a railway ; runs through the province from North to South and past Quang Tri city and the districts of Dong Ha, Hai Lang, Gio Linh and Trung Luong.

— Highway 9 links Dong Ha (on Highway 1) to the Lao border, crossing over the Huong Hoa and Cam Lo Rivers.

Rivers and canals form a dense network of waterways.

Airfields : Quang Tri city, Xun Cam, Cam Lo and Cua Tung.

Economic resources :

— The population lives chiefly by farming. Principal crops : rice and other food plants, coconut, coffee, tea, tobacco, pepper, sugar cane.

— 195,000 hectares of forests including 129,000 ha. of reserves : bamboo, pine, palm, cinnamon.

Forest products : rattan sandalwood, asarabacca, mushroom, precious woods in the western jungle.

— Fishery is fairly prosperous at the river-mouths.

Products of small industry and handicrafts : lime, bricks, tiles, wood articles, ceramics, wickerware, mats, oil. etc...

Historical data

1885 : From Tan So, whither he had retreated, the Emperor Ham Nghi launched the Edict of Anti-French Resistance.

August 23, 1945 : triumph of the general insurrection in the province.

The Resistance forces won victories at Tan Lam, Dong Duong, Nam Dong, Ba Doc, Cau Dai, Huong Hoa.

— 1960 : Uprising and establishment of a revolutionary base.

— 1964 : General uprising.

— 1966 : The PLAF defeated US Operations Hastings, Prairie and Deckhouse in the Cam Lo, Gio Linh highlands.

— 1967 : An attack in depth behind the enemy lines by the PLAF on the night of April 5 destroyed the base camp of the 2nd Regiment, Saigon First Division, at La Vang.

Attack on Quang Tri city.

— 1968 : General offensives and uprisings on the night of January 30.

February : Lang Vay position was taken.

July : the Khe Sanh system of strongpoints, following a 170-day siege (January 21 to July 9), was liberated.

— 1971 : In coordination with Lao patriots in southern Laos, the PLAF frustrated Operation Lam Son 719 by US-Saigon troops (January 30 — March 31).

— 1972 : In the Spring offensives, the PLAF breached the strongest US-Saigon defence line. In 30 days of fighting, they put 20,000 mercenaries out of action and took 3,500 prisoners of war.

PROVINCE OF THUA THIEN — HUE

Thua Thien

The province forms a narrow stretch of land, 100 km in length and 50 km in width, 1,100 km north of Saigon.

Area : 5,670 sq. km.

Population : 600,000 inhabitants.

The Van Kieu, Ta Oi, Catu, Paco and Buhay ethnic minorities inhabit some districts. There are six districts altogether : Phong Dien, Quang Dien, Huong Tra, Huong Thuy, Phu Vang and Phu Loc.

The province is mostly mountainous, especially to the West and the Northwest.

Principal river : Song Huong with its source in the Truong Son Range.

The coast is deeply indented by Thuan An channel, 13 km from Hue.

Principal communication routes :

— Highway 1, north — south, flanked by the railway.

— Highway 14, strategic road linking Highway 1 (20 km South of Hue) to the Tay Nguyen Highlands.

— River transport is favoured by a thick network of waterways.

— Airfields : Pho Trach, Van Xa, A Luoi, Huong Thuy and Phu Bai.

— Mineral resources : iron, titanium and copper ores have been prospected.

There exist hot springs at Huong Binh and Thanh Tan.

The forests, which cover 376,000 hectares, supply timber and precious woods.

Agriculture is the major source of income. Rice is the main crop. Some fruits are renowned : citrus, longane, peach, lotus seeds, etc...

Fishing is the second most important economic activity. Rivermouths, sea branches and lagoons are teeming with fish and crustacea.

Handicrafts cover a wide range of trades : silk weaving, copper work, wood and ivory carving, mother-of-pearl inlaid work, basket and mat making, etc... The province is renowned for its palm-leaf conical hats.

Huê

Attached to Viet Nam more than 6 centuries ago, Huê was the capital of the last feudal dynasty from 1802 to 1945.

Area : 13 sq. km.

Population : 225,000 inhabitants.

South Viet Nam's second political centre after Saigon, Huê is also a cultural and religious centre : Huê University which comprises several faculties, the Institute of *Han* (classical Chinese), etc. Buddhism is flourishing. Huê and Thua Thien count not less than 70,000 faithful and 400 pagodas, spread virtually all

over the province. The Catholic Church is also very active. Huê, a bishopric, possesses seminaries which trains the clergy for Central Viet Nam.

Scenic spots and monuments

Thua Thien is ringed by picturesque mountains and hills : Kim Ngoc, Tam Thai, Thien Tho, Tam Thanh, Kim Phong, Truoi, etc... The Perfume River, Mount Ngu and Lake Tinh Tam make Hue a poetic city. The tourist is entranced not only by the beauty of these natural sites, but also by the charm of architectural works of art such as the citadel, the palaces, the royal tombs, the Thiên Mu Pagoda.

Historical data

1802 : Huê became the capital of the Nguyen dynasty.

1946-1954 : Thua Thien — Huê constituted, together with the provinces of Quang Binh and Quang Tri, the Binh Tri Thien front. Their armed forces contributed to wiping out many important forces of the French Expeditionary Corps and incapacitating others.

1963 : A powerful movement launched in mid-year by the population of Hue, particularly the Buddhists, contributed to the fall of Ngô Đình Diêm (November 1).

July 1964 : Popular uprising. The puppet village administrations were dismantled in the whole of the province.

1965-1967 : Fresh outburst of the anti-US-Saigon struggle. Hundreds of military operations were launched against outposts, even in Hue.

Tet 1968 : General offensives and uprisings against US-Saigon leading organs, bases and district capitals. The armed forces and population of Thua Thien seized the city of Hue and controlled it for 25 days.

1972 : During the general offensive, the armed forces and people of Thua Thien — Hue, in coordination with those of Quang Tri, smashed Saigon's strongest defensive belt close to the 17th parallel and threatened its defence system west of Hue.

Read : *Vietnamese Studies* No. 37
Hue, Past and Present

QUANG NAM PROVINCE AND DA NANG PORT-CITY

Quang Nam (including Da Nang) is about 870 kilometres north of Saigon ; it borders the sea in the east, Laos in the west, Quang Ngai and Kontum in the south, Thua Thien in the north. Total area : 12,000 sq. km.

It has a population of 1.8 million (1966 figure, not including Da Nang), mostly Kinh ; 50,000 are minority people : Ka Tu, Ve, Cor, Sedang...

The Saigon administration has divided it into two provinces and one municipality :

* Province of Quang Nam in the North.

Area : 8,000 sq. km (including Da Nang) ;
8 districts :

Hoa Vang, Dai Loc, Duy Xuyen, Dien Ban, Hieu Dua, Hieu Nhon, Thuong Duc, Duc Duc.

Population : 1,400,000 (not including Da Nang).

Provincial capital : Hoi An.

* Province of Quang Tin in the South.

Area : 4,000 sq. km.

Seven districts : Thang Binh, Que Son, Tam Ky, Tien Phuoc, Hiep Duc, Hau Duc, Ly Tin.

Population : 400,000.

Provincial capital : Tam Ky.

* The port-city of Da Nang .

Located on the 16th parallel, 759 km from Hanoi, 979 km from Saigon, at the mouth of the Cam Le river, in the northeast of Quang Nam province.

— Two sectors : the inner city and the Son Tra peninsula.

Population : 600,000.

The Bay of Da Nang, also called Vung Thung, is 29 miles long ; it borders Mount Son Tra in the east, Mount Hai Sam in the northeast, Mount Cu De in the west, and is therefore well sheltered ; 10,000-ton ships can cast anchor 1.2 kilometres off shore. Since the 18th century Da Nang has been an important seaport. Under French rule, particularly during the resistance war (1945-1954), it was a supply base for the French forces with an airfield serving Central Indochina (including Lower and Central Laos).

Starting from 1954, the Americans transformed Da Nang into a big complex having a large airfield for jets and several smaller ones. Da Nang was the HQs of the puppet First Army corps and the First Tactical Area, and it is there that the first contingent of GIs landed in March 1965, at the start of the US war of aggression. Da Nang became a base for the US air, naval and marine forces.

A section of the Truong Son Range runs from the north to the south of the province with such peaks as A Tuat (2,500 metres) near the Viet Nam-Lao border, and Chua (1,400 metres). Thirty kilometres southwest of Da Nang is the Ba Na resort. Quang Nam province and Hue are separated by the Hai Van mountain which slopes to the sea and is crossed by the Hai Van pass.

The rivers rise on the Truong Son range and empty into the sea : Song Thuy Tu, Song Thu Bon, the biggest, flowing through Hoi An, formerly a bustling commercial centre, now the provincial capital of Quang Nam.

— The main communication lines include Highway I and the trans-Viet Nam railway which runs through the province from north to south.

— The section of Highway 14 which runs from Kontum to Hue crosses the hilly western region of Quang Nam and is linked to Da Nang by provincial Road 100.

Quang Nam is one of the richest provinces of Central Viet Nam :

* Its plains, about 1500 square kilometres in area, have 117,000 hectares of cropland. Mulberry trees are grown on the banks of its rivers, from which a renowned silk fabric is produced. Cam Le tobacco is also much appreciated.

* Its forests are full of high-quality timber : Kien Kien (*Hopea pierrei* Hance), sên (*Madhuca pasquieri*), iron wood (*Erythrophloeum fordii*) xoay (*Dialium cochinchinensis*). Cinnamon is grown in Tra Mi. A well-known local fruit tree is the *lon bon*.

* Fishing is thriving. The region is known for the fish brine produced in Nam O, and the swallows' nests on its islands.

* The subsoil of the province contains such minerals as gold, coal, iron, lead, copper, zinc. Gold is mined at Bong Mieu, 100 kilometres southwest of Da Nang. The coalmine at Nong Son (Que Son district) south of Da Nang is the biggest colliery in South Viet Nam. Mining of zinc and copper at Duc Bo (Tam Ky) has only just begun.

Struggle against imperialism

* August 31, 1858 : An attack on Da Nang by 14 French warships started the French invasion of Viet Nam.

* The province became a powerful center of the Can Vuong and Van Than patriotic movements (1885-1888), the movement for progressive reform (1905-1908). Peasants protesting against heavy taxation besieged the provincial mandarin's office and five district offices (1908). An insurrection led by Viet Nam Quang Phuc Hoi broke out in 1916.

* After 1930, there were in the province strong bases and a powerful movement led by the Indochinese Communist Party.

* Seizure of power in the province in the general insurrection of 1945.

* During the nine years of war (1945-1954) the French were able to occupy only one-third of the territory of the province (northern part) while the rest belonged to the free area of the 5th interzone.

Struggle against the Americans

* Powerful popular movement against the Diem regime; armed insurrections in the highlands (1959-1960), in the plains (1960-1961); protest movements of the Buddhists and other sections of the population against Diem (1963).

* Against the US "special war", big victories were won at Viet An, Dong Duong (1964); many strategic hamlets destroyed.

* Struggle against the US, and secession from the Saigon administration by the population and the opposition factions in the puppet army and administration (1965-1966).

Annihilation of Nui Thanh post held by an American company, the first victory over the American troops (1965); repeated attacks against Da Nang airfield, Chu Lai base (1966-1967); destruction of many posts, successful countering of enemy raids. Uprising and occupation of a part of the city and the H.Q. of the First Army Corps (1968).

* Fierce fighting against US "Vietnamization" of the war: victorious counter-raids southwest of Da Nang

(1969), popular movement against the Saigon troops' invasion of Southern Laos (1971), offensive and uprising in the countryside, shelling of Da Nang (1972).

*After the signing of the Paris Agreement: countering of "pacification" and encroachment operations; popular movements for the implementation of the Paris Agreement and for getting rice supplies to combat famine.

Annihilation of the military sub-sector and occupation of the district town of Thuong Duc and of the Nong Son-Trung Phuoc area (1974) wiping out of Tien Phuoc and Phuoc Long military subsectors, liberation of Tam Ky town, Quang Tin province, Hoi An town, and Quang Nam provincial capital (March 1975).

PROVINCE OF QUANG NGAI

Capital: Quang Ngai, 877km Northeast of Saigon.

Area: over 4,300 sq.km.

Quang Ngai comprises 10 districts: 6 in the delta plain (Binh Son, Son Tinh, Tu Nghia, Nghia Hanh, Mo Duc and Duc Pho) and 4 in the uplands (Tra Bong, Son Ha, Minh Long and Ba To), with a total of 122 villages and 319 hamlets.

720,000 inhabitants (Saigon administration's 1960 statistics) of whom 80,000 belong to ethnic minorities: Hre, Cor, Ca Dong.

Four rivers with their sources in the Truong Son Range : the Tra Bong, Tra Khuc (the longest, 120km) Ve and Tra Cau.

Along the 98-km coastline there are many sand dunes. Cape Ba Lang An is a summer resort. Five estuaries : Son Tra, Sa Ky, Co Luy, My A and Sa Huynh, the largest of all, accessible to big junks and even seagoing vessels.

Mountains and jungles cover two-thirds of the territory. The Truong Son Range runs along the province from North to South. Mountains : Ca Dam, Thach Bich, Xuan Thu (the last-named more than 1,500 metres high).

Principal communication routes :

Highway 1 and the railway traverse the province from North to South ; Highway 5 links Quang Ngai city to the capital of Kontum province in the Central Highlands ; the Binh Son — Tra Bong — Tra Mi (Quang Nam) road ; the Son Tinh — Gi Lang — Gia Vut road.

Natural resources

The province has 80,000 ha of arable land mostly under rice (2 or 3 crops annually) or sugar cane. Sugar cane is grown on 10,000 ha, giving 20,000 tons of sugar per annum.

Forest covers 100,000 ha, of which 40,000 can be developed. Cinnamon is grown in Tra Bong and oil-bearing trees in Ba To.

Mining deposits : lead at Son Tinh, kaolin at Son Ha, iron at Mo Duc. Salt-marshes : at Sa Huynh.

Historical data

After the conquest of the country by the French colonialists, the Can Vuong Resistance Movement was laun-

ched (1885-1888), followed by successive insurrections of the minority peoples (1900-1920).

1917-1925 : Struggle for progressive reforms.

From 1930, Quang Ngai became one of the main centres of activity of the Indochinese Communist Party.

March 11, 1945 : Launching of the Ba To insurrection

During the first Resistance (1945-1954) Quang Ngai was part of the liberated zone, supplying manpower and material resources to the resistance in Central and Southern Trung Bo.

— 1959 : Tra Bong uprising and resistance to the Ngo Dinh Diem fascist dictatorship in the Western part of the province leading to the collapse of the puppet administration, the establishment of revolutionary power and the setting up of the liberated zone ;

— 1961 : Chain uprisings in the plain dismantled strategic hamlets ;

— 1965 : Victory of Ba Gia where a whole mobile group of Saigon soldiers was destroyed ; at Van Tuong, the first major battle against US troops was fought in August.

1967 : Park Chung Hee's Blue Dragon Brigade put out of action in October.

1968 : Occupation of the province capital following the general offensive and uprisings at the beginning of the year ;

1972 : Liberation of Ba To district in September.

End of 1974 : Liberation of Nghia Hanh and Minh Long districts and Gia Vut base.

PROVINCE OF BINH DINH — QUI NHON

Binh Dinh

Second most important province of Trung Bo.

Area : 7,000 sq.km.

Population : 900,000 inhabitants.

The province comprises 7 delta districts : Hoai Nhon, Hoai An, Phu My, Phu Cat, An Nhon, Tuy Phuoc and Binh Khe, and 3 upland districts : An Lao (Hre ethnic minority), Vinh Thanh, Van Canh (Banar ethnic minority).

Capital : Qui Nhon.

Two spurs of the Truong Son Range, the province's backbone, jut out towards the sea, separating Binh Dinh from the neighbouring provinces.

Communication lines : 2 major rivers (Song Lai and Song Con) and several smaller ones ; National Route No 1 and the railway run through the province from North to South. A rice bowl of Central Trung Bo, Binh Dinh possesses 75,000 ha of cultivable plains. Phu Phong and An Thuong are famous for their silk-weaving.

The province has more coconut palms than any other in Trung Bo. Copra feeds a soap-making industry.

Binh Dinh still has many vestiges of *Cham* culture : Do Ban citadel, Vang, Bac, Canh Tien towers and the ancient citadel of An Nhon, formerly capital of the province.

Qui Nhon

Built on a peninsula, Qui Nhon port is the fifth largest city of South Viet Nam.

Population : 215,000 inhabitants.

The military port, an important logistic base, catered for a major part of the needs of the US and Saigon troops in the Tay Nguyen Highlands.

Strategic Highway 19 links Qui Nhon to Pleiku and to Stung Treng in Northeastern Cambodia. A branch-line of the railway connects the city with the former Trans-Indochina Railway.

The city airfield, accessible to huge US transport planes, formed along with Phu Cat and Go Quan, the base camp of the First, Second and Sixth Air Force of the Saigon Second Military Region.

Historical data

At the end of the 18th century, the highlands of Binh Dinh served as the springboard of the Tay Son Movement led by the national hero Nguyen Hue. The port of Thi Nai (Qui Nhon) was the scene of famous naval battles.

1885-1888 : The Can Vuong Movement, conducted by Mai Xuan Thuong, mobilized the ethnic minorities against the French.

1908 : Peasant movement against taxes.

The revolutionary movement led by the Indochinese Communist Party which had broad support in the

province, culminated in the general insurrection of August 1945.

In the period 1945-1954, Binh Dinh which formed part of the liberated region of the 5th Interzone was an important reserve of human and material resources for the Resistance.

1959 : Popular uprising at Ta Loc and Ta Lec in the commune of Vinh Hiep, district of Vinh Thanh. The movement spread to every part of the province.

1964 : All strategic hamlets were demolished and 100,000 inhabitants liberated.

December 1964 : Liberation of An Lao district.

1965-1966 : The PLAF defeated a US column in the 'Five-Arrow' counter-offensive of Westmoreland and inflicted serious losses on the First Air Cavalry Division and South Korean mercenaries.

Binh Dinh, one of the provinces on which the US-Saigon troops concentrated their main efforts, was never "pacified" by them.

1968 Tet offensive : a section of Qui Nhon city fell into PLAF hands.

1972 : Three districts were liberated : Hoai Nhon, Hoai An and Vinh Thanh.

SAIGON TROOPS DEBACLE SEEN BY THE INTERNATIONAL PRESS

On the Highlands

Reuter (Saigon, March 20) :

"The battle of Buôn Mê Thuôt, now emerging as one of the most crucial of the entire Viet Nam war, was the pivotal contest in the swift chain of events that have led to the Saigon government's loss of control in much of Central Viet Nam, according to several military analysts here.

"The decisive moment, says one professional observer, came when Saigon's commanders rushed the equivalent of an entire division — some 10,000 men — in a vain effort to drive back the communist thrust into Buôn Mê Thuôt".

AFF (Saigon, March 12) :

"The attack against the town during the night of Sunday to Monday was led by montagnard tribesmen claiming to be members of "FULRO" (United Front

for the Liberation of Oppressed Races) and by units of the South Vietnamese National Liberation Front (NLF)

"...At daybreak, the small armed FULRO groups were joined by Viet Cong units supported by tanks... all (the attackers) were FULRO and Viet Cong belonging to local regiments.

"It appears that the first to enter Buôn Mê Thuôt were the montagnards. They were the ones who opened the way for the local Vietnamese communists.

AP (Saigon, March 22, 1975) :

"The loss of the Central Highlands cities of Pleiku and Kontum was a particularly bitter pill because not a shot was fired for either of them."

AFP, Saigon, March 19.

"Only ten days after the attack of the communist forces against the small town of Buôn Mê Thuôt on the High Plateaus of Central Viet Nam, the map of the Second Military Region covering twelve provinces along a north-south axis over 400 kilometres long, has been upset.

"Apparently irreversible in the hinterland provinces of that Second Military Region, the situation of governmental troops in some coastal provinces is difficult...

"That unprecedented modification of the military map in Central Viet Nam has, in a few days, affected 500,000 inhabitants of the border provinces who

mostly lived either in the provincial capitals or in the immediate surrounding areas till then under government control."

In Huê

UPI, Saigon, March 19

"Government authorities urged more than 300,000 civilians to flee the former imperial capital of Hue and the residents of the city left Wednesday for safe haven to the south, field reports said."

USIS, Washington, March 20

"In what apparently is the worst setback in three decades of warfare in Viet Nam, the South Vietnamese city of Hue has been abandoned by government forces and civilians and communist troops have gained control of eight south Vietnamese provinces."

At Da Nang

UPI Saigon, March 29

"Government commanders and US officials Saturday evacuated Da Nang and the situation in South Viet Nam's second largest city is considered hopeless, military sources said.

"The sources said there had been a total breakdown of discipline among government troops at Da Nang and at least 100,000 soldiers, marines and rangers were in complete disarray.

"All communications — with the exception of a single civilian telex — were lost overnight with Da Nang.

"The loss of Da Nang would be the worst defeat of the Indochina war for the South Vietnamese" (the Saigon administration).

UPI Saigon, March 29

"Military sources in Saigon said the situation was hopeless.

"The loss of Da Nang would be the worst defeat for the government in the history of the Indochina war".

Reuter, Saigon March 30 :

"An enormous — but demoralized and disorganized — government force estimated at nearly 100,000 troops of all kinds was believed to have been cut off after resistance crumbled.

"They included some of the best units the government has — men from the marines, the rangers and the respected First Infantry Division among others."

AFP, Saigon March 30

One hundred thousand governmental troops thrown in complete disorganization, anarchy and panic have surrendered without resistance... with their arms and baggage, including armoured vehicles and artillery pieces."

AFP, March 30

"It was the indescribable frenzied panic which has caused the catastrophe of Da Nang."

UPI, March 20

"I am absolutely certain South Viet Nam will collapse, but it will not end there."

Robert Thompson, ex-military adviser of the White House, *BBC* radio interview.

AFTER LIBERATION

IN LIBERATED BUON ME THUOT

Nobody in Buon Me Thuot could have believed in such a rapid transformation of the town.

The centre of the city, for about 1,5 kilometres on every side, was enclosed behind a cordon of posts and barracks. To the South was the headquarters of the 23rd Division adjoining the officers' residential area, the subsector of the provincial militia, and the prison. The military sector, with its air strip, stretched from North to East up to the command post of the 45th Regiment and its base camp. To the West: the barracks of the armoured regiment and the artillery battalion spreading over an area as large as that of the whole civilian quarter. The Mai Hac De munitions depot, situated in the South West of the city, can give some idea of the importance of Buon Me Thuot in the defensive system of the Central Highlands: it was 1.5 km long by 800m wide or half the area of the civilian quarter.

It only took a few dozen hours for all this powerful arrangement to collapse. Now, high in an azure sky, floats the liberation flag with its gold star in the centre, marking the historic day of 11 March 1975 when the armed forces and population of Buon Me Thuot became masters of the town.

By 14 March, the water supply was back to normal, its former workers having repaired the machine and pipe system.

On 16 March, after a meeting between the PRG representative, Mr. Nguyen Quang Chinh, the head and deputy heads of the Education Office and 200 teachers, the secondary and primary schools reopened. Teachers and students set to work to put their schools back in good order and to dig air-raid shelters.

The same day Mr. Dang Tran Thi, Vice-President of the Federation of Workers for the Liberation of South Viet Nam headed a delegation on a welcoming visit to workers' trade unions.

The headquarters of the Revolutionary Committee is always full of people. Intellectuals come to offer their services. Dr. Le Kim Son, with the help of health cadres, has got the hospitals working again; the consultation rooms are more numerous than before 10 March. The representatives of various religious beliefs welcome the revolutionary government's policy of religious freedom. Businessmen, managers of sawmills, transport companies, printing presses... come to ask to be supplied with raw materials and fuel. Some Frenchmen, working in rubber and coffee

plantations turn up to ask authorization to continue their activities.

On 16 March too, the markets are held as usual. The next day nearly all the shops reopen. Traffic is heavy along the streets. From the plantations people come to stock up on consumer goods. The population keeps away from the town centre as a safeguard against bombing raids.

Self-management committees — committees of the population's representatives — are set up. People flock there to put their names on the State lists, ask for allowances or simply to get information.

To avoid long queues, written statements are distributed to them. The young people and school-children form a crowd of willing volunteers. They explain the reconciliation policy of the PRG to the families of former soldiers and encourage them to recall their near ones. Numerous officers and men of the Saigon army hand over their arms ; they are given a good reception by the Liberation security forces. Y Le-pinh, an Ede minority woman, has brought in her husband, formerly a soldier in the Saigon army. Those who have crossed over give active cooperation to the security forces in defending the city and searching out recalcitrant Saigon agents. Saboteurs have been punished before they were able to do any damage.

On 18 March, one week after liberation, the Revolutionary Committee of Darlac Province and the Military Administrative Committee of Buon Me Thuot made a public appearance before hundreds of representatives of the ethnic minorities and different social strata. Colonel Y Bloc Eban at their head,

proclaimed the establishment of revolutionary power, the beginning of a new order. He called on the population, made up of different minorities, to remain united so that life could go back to normal, to heighten their vigilance and determination to smash any attempt and act of sabotage and at the same time to develop production and the building of a new life.

It had been with emotion that, several days earlier, the inhabitants of Buon Me Thuot had learnt of the appointment of Colonel Y Bloc Eban, a son of Darlac. Today, seeing him mount the rostrum, many delegates from the ethnic minorities were unable to contain themselves and wept for joy. For, from today, under the revolutionary power, the equality of the ethnic minorities, in the great family of Viet Nam has become a reality.

Quan Doi Nhan Dan correspondent's
cable from Buon Me Thuot

HUE : A GARDEN OF FLAGS

I entered Hue with our troops. The liberated city was in a joyful mood. The streaming crowd mingled with the bicycles, hondas, cars, all along Tran Hung Dao, Nguyen Tri Phuong, Nguyen Hue Streets, on Trang Tien, Bach Ho and Cau Moc bridges. Everywhere, the red and blue flag with its golden star floated gaily in the breeze to welcome the 26 March, historic date

of the liberation of Hue and the province of Thua Thien.

What joy, what emotion I felt to see again my compatriots of Hue, to read their happiness in their looks and their smiles. The Perfume River is no longer overflowing with tears, as the poets used to say ; its limpid waters are blazing with the red of the flags. Hue is bright under the spring sunshine. Walking along Tran Hung Dao Street, I was just in front of the Phu Van Lau pavilion when a detachment of the People's Armed Forces passed by. Seeing the PRG flags hoisted on the turrets of their tanks the people gathered around our fighters, calling out good wishes to them. An old woman, on her way to Dong Ba market, took me by the arm, on the verge of tears — "Oh my dear son, we have been longing for this day for years". My eyes, too, began to water.

The market was full of customers. Young women with flowing rose or violet robes were strolling around the food sellers displaying the traditional dishes of Hue. On Dong Ba bridge, lines of baskets of still wriggling shrimps and loads of fresh vegetables were coming from the outskirts. Like Dong Ba and An Cuu the other markets were crowded with joyful buyers from the first day.

Some districts still bore traces of the enemy's precipitate flight : military vehicles abandoned where they stood with stores of rice there hadn't been time to plunder.

The traffic was very heavy all along Nguyen Tri Phuong, Nguyen Hue, and Phan Boi Chau Avenues. A

student ahead of me turned to shake hands with me and we started talking. He spoke of the struggle carried on over the last few days, before the liberation of the town by the students and the population. The enemy were forcing the people to flee with them to Da Nang and rounding up students under Saigon's general mobilization order. Ly An Lien, a hairdresser in An Cuu quarter told me that the price of a bus ticket to Da Nang rose to 15,000 — 20,000 piastres. "Most of the workers and inhabitants of Hue would have rather died than be forced to evacuate. We struggled in different ways to stay in the town and wait for the arrival of the liberation troops."

These days there is an atmosphere of enthusiasm in my quarter, he went on. The young people are joining up in the self-defence units. Workers, Buddhists, students are eagerly taking part in public affairs.

On Trang Tien bridge, where we were, I saw cars passing flying PRG flags and banners. The pure voice of a woman announcer came over the loudspeaker. "On 26 March, the People's Revolutionary Committee of Hue city was formed. The representatives of the town's forces of peace and national reconciliation have also made their first public appearance."

Inside the old citadel I found the first newly-created self-defence units, going out on patrol and ensuring order and security in the streets. A new recruit, Nguyen Van Ban, a pupil at the Gia Hoi Secondary School, told me : "I am overjoyed to welcome in the revolution. Before I did not know what life would have in store

for me. My family was very poor. Now I am going to work my hardest to build this city and defend the revolutionary power."

TRAN MAI HUONG

Giai Phong (Liberation) Press Agency
correspondent in Thua Thien — Hue

DA NANG : THE FIRST DAYS OF FREEDOM

On 29 March, at 3 o'clock in the afternoon, Da Nang, second largest city of South Viet Nam, was liberated. By different arteries, Phuoc Tuong, Thanh Khe, Nguyen Truong To... the PLAF fighters entered the town to the cheers of hundreds of thousands of Da Nang citizens. A line of cars, the PRG colours streaming in the wind, crossed the Trinh Minh The bridge over the Han River, stopping every now and then in response to the cheering crowds of people. The old women had tears in their eyes.

"Stop a minute, my sons," one old man cried, "please let me just look at the flag of the Front !"

Too far away to come close to the convoy, he contented himself with gazing at this symbol of the revolution from a distance, and burst into fresh weeping.

At one street corner the fighters found themselves tightly surrounded by dozens and dozens of people offering rice, refreshments. Townspeople and children

flocked around them as though they were dear friends just returned from a long absence.

The affection and brotherhood expressed towards the combatants by the population is not a new growth. Da Nang — the home town of great patriots like Hoang Dieu and Thai Phien, where, a century ago, Ong Icn Khiem launched the first resistance against the French, has always been a revolutionary city. Just before the town was liberated, nearly 2,000 Saigon soldiers from the Hoa Cam training centre mutinied and joined the ranks of the Revolution. And in several quarters, An Hai South, An Hai North, Nang Thai, Nai Nghia, the population rose up in concert with the self-defence units and seized power even before the flight of the enemy. On the morning of the 29th, the American consulate in 60 Bach Dang Street was taken by assault by thousands of insurgents.

Arriving in the city in the first hours after liberation I was carried away by the general exhilaration. PRG flags were everywhere, from Phuoc Tuong base to Non Nuoc strongpoint, from the airport at Thai Binh beach to the Son Tra peninsula. Along Thanh Khê, Hung Vuong, Dong Khanh Streets... a flood of people was streaming into National Road No 1. They had come from Hue and Quang Tri, forced to follow the enemy in his flight to Da Nang. Now they were heading back to their homes. On the Han River rows of motor boats with a multitude of waving red pennants. The electricity and water supply was normal. In front of the City Hall, in Bach Dang Street, not far from the still burning American Consulate, a young militia woman carrying a rifle was standing guard. At her feet were dozens of

torn up portraits of Nguyen Van Thieu, scattered in the mud.

A man shouted over to the fighters — "We are so happy to see you ! I've suffered so much for so long ! But now, thanks to the Revolution, thanks to Uncle Ho !"

He was a fisherman, living near the An Chanh dunes. How many others were repeating the same words at that time !

Life rapidly returned to normal. People's Revolutionary Committees were set up in town quarters and districts. Markets reopened. Hundreds of people joined the city self defence units. The Cathedral bells sounded the noontime angelus. The murmur of prayers to the beat of the tocsin rose again from the Pho Da pagoda.

In liberated Da Nang the workers once more became masters of their life. In the harbour two welders, Cu and Vo, red bands on their arms and rifles over their shoulders, were going the rounds. A native of Hue, Cu has been settled in Da Nang for a long time, and readily tells all he has endured under the US-Thieu yoke. He had just been admitted, at his own request, into a self-defence unit.

A driver, Le Duc Loc, also talked about the past. "I paid a hundred thousand piastres to escape forcible conscription into the Thieu army. We have longed for you day and night. I went at once to the Revolutionary Committee to offer my services as driver."

In his car, Loc took us on a tour of "his" town.

For many Da Nang is also a "rediscovery". Lam Dong, the press photographer who accompanied me,

had, 29 years ago, spent five years in Da Nang prison. Today, he was recording the images of the liberated town with his heart as much as with his camera. Vinh An, too, a young girl, had grown up in Da Nang's first district and gone to Da Nang girls' Secondary School, before leaving for the resistance. Now she was back as a cadre of the Propaganda Commission. She could not hold back her joy. Dressed in her best clothes — black trousers, black robe and beige overcoat — she was going round the city carrying the Giai Phong press photographer on the back of her family moped. From time to time she had to stop to say hello to some old acquaintance.

"It's like a dream", she told me. "For thirty years we've been dreaming of this moment. It's the happiest day of my life."

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Da Nang still bore many traces of the enemy's rapid flight. Everywhere you could see abandoned arms, ammunition, tanks, and jeeps. Many aircraft painted with US or Saigon emblems were still parked on the vast airfield. In 1965, on 8 March, the first GIs had disembarked on the Son Tra peninsula. On 29 March 1973, without any fanfare, the last GI quitted our country. This year in the month of March tens of thousands of Thieu troops from the First and Third Infantry Divisions, the "Marines" and the "Rangers" were wiped out or forced to surrender. The sight of some young PLAF fighters chatting cheerfully in front of the Nguyen Tri Phuong barracks came to my eyes. Here had been the Headquarters of Army Corps I, where General Ngo

Quang Truong had ordered his men to hold Da Nang to the end. (By the time this breath-taking declaration had appeared in the Saigon papers, Ngo Quang Truong had already taken flight). Following a liberation fighter, I entered the General's former office, on the first floor of the right wing. Everything gave an impression of panic. The floor was strewn with operational maps, documents, books, photos... The pennant with its three stars (Truong was a three-star general) was upside-down on the ground ; under the table lay his portrait, dirty and crumpled. The young combatant, his eyes gleaming with malice, seated himself down in the chair, with its three stars. I picked up a book at random : *Bao Lut mien Trung* (Tempest over Central Viet Nam). What an appropriate title !

For Da Nang the tempest is over and the day has dawned. This morning the sun is shining over the town and port with a special light. A new life is beginning.

TRAN MAI

Giai Phong (Liberation) Press Agency's
correspondent.

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