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Summary Briefing on Vietnam Alternatives

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FOREWORD

This document, only recently unearthed among a colony of earwigs, is being entered into the RAND publication series as a Draft to preserve it as a part of RAND's output on the subject of the Vietnam war. As the date on the cover attests, the briefing was given in November 1968, as the Lyndon Johnson Administration gave way to that of Richard Nixon.

Conceptualization, formulation, and integration of the overall project on which the briefing is based were my doing. Konrad Kellen was responsible for developing and leading the work on the "extrication strategy," and Richard Rainey played the same role with regard to the "population protection strategy." Background data were gathered and analysis was conducted by the three principals assisted by RAND researchers possessing relevant analytical skills and expertise. Shubert, Kellen, and Rainey worked closely together throughout; Kellen deserves most of the credit due for pushing, pulling and cajoling the project into existence.

The principal documentation for the briefing is contained in Oleg Hoeffding and Konrad Kellen *Alternative Vietnam Strategies: The "Extrication Option,"* D (L)-17890-ISA 8 Oct 1968, 17 p. and Steven L. Canby, Brian Michael Jenkins, and R. B. Rainey, *A Ground Force Structure and Strategy for Vietnam in the 1970s*, D-20148-1-ARPA, 15 Jun 1970, 48 p. (C). Related materials are contained in Konrad Kellen, *Lessons Learned: An Inventory of Thoughts on a Forthcoming Study*, D (L) 18191-ARPA/AGILE, 10 Dec 1968, 15 p., and *Mutual Withdrawal from Vietnam: Some Personal Views*, D-18712-ISA, 14 Apr 1969; 46 p.; and M. Gurtov, O. Hoeffding, Arnold Horelick, and Konrad Kellen, *Extrication from Vietnam: A Memorandum for the Record*, D-19252-ISA, 24 August 1969, 7 p.

This briefing was presented in his Pentagon office to the Honorable Paul Warnke, Assistant Secretary of Defense, International Security Affairs. A few (2-4) members of his staff, including Morton Halperin, whose then official post escapes my memory, and, probably, Kenneth Roberts, Deputy Director, External Research, were also present. Considerable informal discussion followed the presentation, and it became clear that the extrication strategy was heavily favored by the DOD people present as well as by the majority of the RAND team. As Halperin put it immediately following the briefing, "The message is clear, but you're preaching to the converted." Warnke added words to the effect that in view of the President's position, and his "unwillingness to be the first American President to lose a war," there was absolutely nothing that could be done to implement that strategy - even though, as I recall remarking, the other side would implement it for us, but on considerably less desirable terms than I believed we could secure as a result of our taking the initiative.

The project, the briefing, the conclusions, and the response constitute, I think, one of the more quirky episodes of RAND's involvement in Vietnam, and signify both the rewards and the frustration inherent in conducting policy research.

Next chapter: Henry Kissinger, in a seminar at RAND in Santa Monica shortly before he took office as National Security Advisor to the next President unwilling to be the first to lose a war, commented "[with feeling] I know we should be out, but [with conviction] there's no way I would recommend getting out, nor is there any expectation that the new administration would accept defeat [if those are not his exact words, then he used words to this effect]." Many bloody chapters were to follow before the United States, trying to cloak the fact of withdrawal with the smoke of "Vietnamization" and other unrealities, departed the scene, with much muttering about "sunk costs" and "one arm tied behind our back."

Gustave H. Shubert, June 1997

SUMMARY BRIEFING ON VIETNAM ALTERNATIVES

In the next 40 or so minutes I'll try to summarize the work we've done in response to the request of Paul Warnke, ASD(ISA), to examine alternatives to the strategy of attrition in Vietnam. We were asked to undertake this work in late 1967, during the pre-Tet period which was characterized by virtually unbounded US optimism, at least in Saigon. The selection of alternatives for analysis was left up to us, but it was clear that even during the siege of optimism Warnke and many of his colleagues shared the belief of many of us who had been working on Vietnam that no victory was in sight. They also believed, as we did, that unless a lower-cost strategy could be developed and implemented, the United States would soon be forced -- largely by domestic political considerations -- to withdraw from the conflict under unfavorable conditions. In spite of all the changes that have occurred since that time, this basic problem has remained with us, and the work we've done is designed to resolve it at two points in time: Now, and in the event current negotiations fail.

As it turned out, one recurring theme of our work has been that of an embarrassment of riches -- that the very abundance of the resources -- both human and material -- the US has devoted to Vietnam, and the high visibility of their consumption, has inexorably drawn us into a "win decisively or get out" situation. (I was most recently exposed to this at our dinner last night.) Whether or not Vietnam resources are fungible to US domestic programs, the magnitude of the resources used in conjunction with the US strategy in Vietnam, when

compared with the achievements of that strategy, has raised serious questions concerning both the efficacy of the strategy and the efficacy of the organization that has so long pursued it -- the US defense community.

The contrast between input and output naturally gives rise to the question of what the US can achieve in Vietnam at all, and especially within the constraints of lower human and dollar costs. The objectives the US has held with regard to Vietnam have varied over time, and from person to person at any particular time. Our initial intervention -- which I mark at the provision of aid to the French in 1950 -- was based on the objective of containing Communism in general, and Chinese Communism in particular, and this idea has remained with us to this day. The building of the government of "Free Vietnam" (as we then called South Vietnam) and the defense of a free, non-Communist Vietnam against the internal and external Communist threat were our objectives throughout the late 1950's and early 1960's. Beginning in 1961 we began to perceive more precise tactical objectives -- defeating a Communist insurgency (the answer, more US military advisors) as well as building the GVN. In 1964 and 1965 our objectives began to shift with the intervention of North Vietnam: to "win" became, first to prevent collapse, then to defeat the NVA and to force its withdrawal (the answer, US ground forces in ever increasing numbers), leaving to the South Vietnamese the task of defeating the Viet Cong. In this way we hoped to achieve a free, viable, non-Communist Republic of Vietnam living in a state of peace and security, and to this end we adopted what has amounted to a strategy of attrition.

Experience since 1965 has forced considerable modification of our objectives. Judging on the basis of statements made by the President, the Secretary of Defense, and others, I believe the current US objective to be a negotiated outcome of the war which could provide for South Vietnamese self-determination: one-man, one-vote elections resulting in an independent (not necessarily non-Communist) South Vietnam, free to negotiate at its will the question of reunification with the North. This is not to say I believe we prefer this objective to the earlier goals I've mentioned, nor even that we like it. It is to suggest that we recognize it is about as much as we can hope to achieve with the resources likely to be made available.

I believe there is a combination of strategy, doctrine, tactics, and costs that stands a fair chance of reaching a satisfactory outcome defined in these terms. But this combination does not add up to strategy focussed on attrition -- the first or base case of our analysis. (Chart 1) It may be that combination we've called the "population protection strategy" -- our second option -- but although I believe that in principle this strategy might work -- given enough time -- it is not at all clear that the US and the South Vietnamese can make the changes necessary to implement it. This doubt led us to develop a third option -- the strategy of extrication. Let me deal briefly with each of these strategic options in turn.

First, the strategy of attrition: From the time of their introduction into Vietnam, US ground forces have been almost entirely employed in large units which attempt to destroy in the hills the enemy's regular forces faster than they can be replenished by recruiting and infiltration. The argument is the obvious one that when forces are

being destroyed faster than they can be replaced, eventually the enemy will quit, or become ineffective. However, our calculations show that losses suffered by enemy forces at 1967 rates could be replaced by a combination of infiltration from the North (easily) and recruitment in the South (not so easily). A glance at these curves (Chart 2) shows that in fact the losses of the main and local forces have generally been replaced. These forces have not dipped more than some 17,000 below their peak strength (which may be spurious on this curve) in spite of the major US efforts to attrit them. Doubling the attrition rate would require an increase in US forces past the million mark, even assuming (probably incorrectly) a constant kill-rate at the margin -- and still it would appear that infiltration could replace the doubled losses. This seems to us a very costly and unproductive strategy (Chart 3), although there is no doubt that the enemy has suffered large losses, particularly in the VC guerrilla and administrative forces, which until recently were showing a marked decline in strength.

But to go one step further: it seems likely not only that the VC/NVA can continue to replace higher losses than we have been able to impose -- but that, if attrition begins to make replacement difficult, they can manage their losses. (At one point in time, in nearly 80% of platoon-sized and larger firefights, the enemy was able to put the friendly commander at an initial disadvantage through ambushing or otherwise surprising him, demonstrating that the enemy clearly seems to have the ability to determine in most cases whether or not he chooses to make contact.) The demonstrated American reluctance to continue the costs and casualties being suffered for the

limited results this strategy has provided manifestly makes it one which seems to give advantage to the enemy in spite of his losses -- and, perhaps most importantly of all, to have very little to do with the positive aspects of winning the war: returning the bulk of the population to the control of the GVN under relatively secure conditions.

In an effort to develop a strategy that would relate to the positive aspects of winning the war, we turned to our second option, the population protection strategy. Here we have addressed two questions: what set of strategy, doctrine, and tactics would be most likely to achieve the current US objectives in Vietnam? We are assuming here -- as I said earlier -- that the current US political objective is a negotiated end of the war in which a one man-one vote situation would be the outcome -- that is, members of the NLF would be admitted into the political process, be allowed to run for office, to vote, and otherwise to participate in government.

We have designed the strategy itself with these specific aims in mind (Chart 4):

(1) To lower US human and monetary costs;

(2) To decrease the number of Americans in Vietnam;

(3) To reduce the visibility of US operations in Vietnam;

(4) To reduce the level of violence of the Vietnamese war;

(5) To strengthen and motivate the GVN and its forces to the point of their assuming the major burden of the conflict; and

(6) To attain levels of security that will permit the GVN to operate among the Vietnamese rural and urban population.

Thus if the population protection strategy meets its design goals, it would move toward our political objective by making it clear to the enemy -- through visible and continuing erosion of his political structure and popular base in the South and through reduction of US costs, which increase US staying power -- that he will be better off negotiating a settlement of the war on any given day than he will be on any succeeding day. Put another way, successful implementation of this strategy should affect the enemy's perception of the US and South Vietnamese resolve and capability. More specifically, the US would seem more serious about forcing an acceptable outcome to the war, and skillful enough in husbanding resources to this end that domestic political considerations would no longer seem likely to force us to quit. The recent bombing cessation is, in my view, completely consistent with this strategy.

The key elements of the strategy are these (Chart 5):

(1) Constant, visible military presence <u>at the village level</u> using small patrols -- mostly at night -- to raise the difficulty of Viet Cong access to the population and to protect the police and other officials of the GVN in the performance of their duties;

(2) Integration of village defense forces into a larger system providing for effective coordination of all forces in an area;

(3) Police attack on the political structure of the NLF as population defense measures become effective;

(4) Use of long-range strike teams to penetrate territory containing VC main force and NVA units in order to call in massive applications of artillery and tactical air (and in some cases, ground forces) when contact is made;

(5) Provision for highly mobile reaction and exploitation forces to support the small units when they engage superior enemy forces; and

(6) Upgrading of South Vietnamese forces at all levels to replace US forces as quickly as possible.

In order to synthesize these key elements into an overall strategy, we divided South Vietnam into three operational areas -- the demilitarized zone, the sparsely populated highlands, and the high population-density lowlands and highlands district capitals. (Chart 6) We considered the densely populated areas to be our key areas and developed ways in which the highlands and the DMZ would serve as quasi-barriers bordering them. We then determined the force requirements to implement a lowlands population protection strategy, subtracted these troops from the existing force, and allocated the remaining US manpower to a reinforced mechanized brigade for use south of the DMZ and to about 30 strategic reserve brigades (2/3 US - 1/3 Vietnamese) whose primary mission is to serve as a reaction reserve for the lowlands and the DMZ. A brief description of each of these elements should help to clarify the strategy:

First, the quasi-barrier: Since the strategic reserves were needed as a reaction force only if the enemy attacked along the DMZ or into the populated areas, most of the reserve brigades were billeted in the highland fringes near the populated lowlands. By increasing the target acquisition capability of these brigades through use of small patrols, we effectively converted the highland fringes to a porous but in-depth barrier which helps isolate the highlands from the lowlands.

Second, the DMZ strategy: We have changed the risk-minimizing but costly DMZ-blocking strategy to a defensive-offensive strategy, permitting a number of gains. Moving the forces south out of enemy artillery range [about 20 kms] reduces potential casualties and provides a maneuver area adequate to take advantage of our superior mobility and firepower without the political costs of invading North Vietnam. Second, in case of a major invasion, we have traded limited space for time, both to induce the NVA to commit large forces and to permit reinforcement by the strategic reserve brigades to destroy these large forces. Third, by deploying small patrols backed by artillery and mobile reaction "pile-on" forces instead of large forces, we become the ambusher rather than the ambushed should the enemy attack.

Third, the lowlands, the key to our overall strategy: To prevent enemy military, political, and logistical operations among the population, we devised a tactic which would attempt to smother all unmonitored interhamlet movement: a system of randomly located ambush points. We believe that this system can so hamper all inter-hamlet movement that intelligence, police, and other government agencies can successfully perform their functions. (Chart 7)

To implement this tactic, we merged an American squad with a Vietnamese militia platoon in each village in a fashion similar to that already employed by Marine Corps Combined Action Platoons, thus increasing our own target acquisition capabilities and providing us a better understanding of local conditions through continuity of presence and a close working relationship at village level. This provides the local Vietnamese forces with leadership and training on a continuing

basis -- both of which have been sorely lacking to date except in those villages in which Marine CAPs are stationed. In addition, we embedded our village defense units in a system which provided both mutual support among villages and echeloned reserves designed to entrap any attacking enemy. So much for the components of the strategy.

Although I think the synthesis of the elements of the population protection strategy is a Rand contribution (it has already been provided to a special study group in Vietnam), none of its six components is a brand-new, shining Rand innovation -- in fact, as far as we can tell, all of them have been implemented at some time and to some extent in Vietnam. But nearly all of them -- particularly those requiring large increases in the number of small units in the villages -- have been and are objected to because of the large requirements they generate for infantry manpower. We have found that given the present organization of US ground forces, these objections are valid for any such strategy which would attempt to blanket the country. Of the almost 540,000 US military in Vietnam as of July 1968, only some 58,000 were in infantry rifle platoons. What is new, then, is our recognition that proposals for reallocation of manpower to implement this strategy are empty unless ways can be found to increase that US combat capability most relevant to Vietnam -- men in infantry platoons* -- within the context of decreasing costs.

Thus, although I believe that adoption of such a strategy will enhance the prospects for a favorable war outcome -- and, perhaps

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*Defined here as troops with the mission of combat on foot, armed with no heavier weapon than the 90 mm recoilless rifle.

of greater relevance, will provide us with a stronger negotiating position in Paris and in Saigon, and that on these grounds it is preferable to either of the other options we have studied, to implement the strategy and to permit the American force reductions we envision a virtually complete reorganization and redeployment of US forces is required. Let me present the flavor of the changes we believe are necessary.

By using specially designed organizational structures to meet the unique requirements of the village defense units and the strategic reserve brigades, we were able to increase the number of American infantrymen from less than 58,000 to some 94,000 without reducing the level of on-call indirect fire support. We accomplished this by reducing unit movements, decentralizing command, and concentrating logistics and indirect fire support at higher levels. Using the resources freed by these changes, more infantry units could be formed and deployed, which provides for the first time the continuity of presence essential to effective counterinsurgency operations.

The large gain in infantry strength (over 60%) came from analyzing only the some 150,000 troops in combat battalions (artillery, tank, armored cavalry, and infantry). We have not systematically analyzed the remaining 400,000 men in the Air Force, Navy, Coast Guard, Command/Staff, and logistical portions of US forces in Vietnam. Although we do not suggest any withdrawals of combat infantry troops until South Vietnamese forces have been upgraded to fill their shoes, we do believe that a reappraisal of the remaining 400,000 men might well permit rapid force reductions of up to 200,000 men. Additional

early reductions could be achieved by a decision to limit the areas in which we would attempt to operate. Subsequent reductions in combat forces would be achieved as the upgraded Vietnamese forces assumed a greater share of the war. Should we be able to make the changes necessary to implement the strategy and should it work, we would look forward to US forces of less than 200,000, and expenditures of around $10 billion per year, required to sustain the effort.

Now, let us suppose for a moment that the US is unable to implement this strategy, or anything like it, at reasonable cost -- or that, as some Rand people believe, the strategy, once implemented, proves inadequate. This concern, plus our perception that no one had seriously or systematically examined disengagement, led us to the development of our third option, the extrication strategy. (We have, in a sense, thought seriously about the unthinkable -- a damage-limiting, loss-cutting course of action.) (Chart 8) This strategy -- which is essentially a quick way but not the easiest way out of Vietnam -- is based on the assumption that the Administration, after a full assessment of objectives and available courses of action, arrives at the decision that the least unprofitable option for the United States would be to liquidate its military involvement in Vietnam. We have constructed it with the objective of minimizing the political cost of such liquidation -- to us and (more controversially) to the South Vietnamese.

Necessary to any such option is the assumption that the original US objectives in Vietnam, and the present objectives, have been discarded. Extrication itself becomes the new primary objective,

supplemented by a set of secondary objectives, essentially of a "damage-limiting" kind. Three main elements would underlie the decision to disengage:

(1) The military prospect in Vietnam remains that of a long and inconclusive war, inordinately costly to the United States in terms of lives, money, disruptive political effects at home, and damage to foreign relations worldwide. In other words, efforts to implement a population-protection strategy have failed, or the strategy has proved ineffective.

(2) Hopes of "Vietnamizing the war" have largely failed: the Government of Vietnam and its forces have remained ineffectual and unstable.

(3) The Paris talks (or other associated negotiations) have made no progress.

Now here I must stress that these points are not meant to be predictions of things to come. But we do believe that the probability of something like them happening is quite high enough -- which does not have to be very high -- to justify serious thinking about the pros and cons of the extrication option.

Turning to the option itself: Implementation would begin with a communication to Hanoi that the United States has made a decision to liquidate, completely and expeditiously, its military presence in South Vietnam provided that Hanoi agrees to, and subsequently adheres to -- at least for some time -- certain minimum American demands.

Paradoxically, or so it may seem, we believe -- and this is one of the central assumptions of the study -- that a decision to

extricate, if it were definitive and credibly signaled to the enemy, might improve the US bargaining position toward Hanoi, although the decision to extricate would, of course, limit what the United States could demand from the enemy. The central point here is that an American extrication from Vietnam, bringing with it not only an end to the fighting, but also an end to the many as yet unconsummated threats hanging over the enemy's head, would be a prize of such value to him that he would very probably be willing to pay a price for it. In other words, our bargaining position would be improved because (1) we would be asking less and (2) would be ready to provide a quid pro quo -- our withdrawal -- that makes our demands, we think, acceptable to the enemy.

What price should the United States ask in return for its offer to leave Vietnam? We think that it could be limited to a short list of requirements. (Chart 9)

The first would be the release of American prisoners.

Second, the United States would require the enemy to desist from any deliberate military interference with the withdrawal operation.

Third, we come to the most problematic part of the price to be exacted for withdrawal: time. Here we would want the enemy to agree to a cease-fire of sufficient duration to permit not only the extrication of American forces but also to allow a reasonable interval between that withdrawal and any attempt at a violent takeover of the Government of South Vietnam. Both the length and the form of the interval are highly controversial, not only among people at Rand, but also among those who have developed the extrication strategy. I would

estimate that an interval of a year following the withdrawal of US forces would be adequate for the US to adjust to the new situation at home and abroad; one or more years might well be obtainable. As for the form of the interval, three possibilities have been developed:

(1) The Government of Vietnam remains in power; the Constitution is amended to permit participation in free elections by all South Vietnamese; a date is set and arrangements made for national elections prior to the end of the specified cease-fire period. (Clearly, this is our most favored option.)

(2) A provisional government is formed in Saigon including representatives of the NLF but also including substantial and prominent non-Communist elements. The Constitution is amended, and elections are scheduled. This less-favored option would be made the subject of prior negotiations with the GVN and subject to their approval. The US would <u>not</u> force this arrangement on the GVN. However, I think that the choice the GVN would perceive here would <u>not</u> be that of its continued viability <u>versus</u> certain extinction by coalition, but rather a chance to survive within a coalition as opposed to resumption of hostilities without direct US participation in the conflict. Let me emphasize again that under this option the US would not be imposing a coalition government on South Vietnam, but would be providing the GVN -- subject to its approval -- the best chance we could to preserve its interests. (But I can only add that this is a point on which there is violent disagreement, within Rand as elsewhere.)

(3) Hostilities are resumed at the end of a specified cease-fire period. This option would, essentially, leave the GVN to survive as best it can -- presumably with continued American economic and military assistance, but without direct US involvement.

What reasons would the enemy have to accept settlement short of the "total victory" that he might regard as his due given the prospect of a voluntary US withdrawal? I think that basically they are these: first, he knows he cannot defeat us militarily and force us out of Vietnam -- and as long as we are present his prospects of any victory at all are virtually nil. His rejection of the option would leave him facing "more of the same" (or even "worse yet to come"), an alternative probably at least as unpalatable to him as it would be to the United States. He <u>is</u> tired, and he <u>has</u> borne heavy costs.

Second, he would be likely to accept because an American withdrawal would put him in a much better position to achieve his ultimate objectives of Communist control in the South followed by unification at much lower cost -- provided he would employ tactics and timing that would allow for a tolerably "decent interval" before renewing an overt attempt at takeover in the South, and reasonably bloodless methods.

US economic aid to the GVN and to Hanoi, or to the provisional coalition government, might serve as a carrot (albeit a stale one) to bolster the durability of the interval. And the Extrication Option contains a stick in the form of a "reversal threat," <u>not</u> a threat to return to the present type of warfare, but one to carry

out air and naval actions designed to induce compliance or to punish violations of agreements made.

Nonetheless, we recognize that there would be a definite risk that the post-withdrawal interval in Saigon would not be decent.

So much for the option itself. What of the implications of its adoption? A major part of our study -- and by no means the least controversial part -- is its look at the world outside Vietnam. We came to these general conclusions: (1) the situation in Vietnam developed out of circumstances unlikely to be duplicated elsewhere by the Communists; (2) the American withdrawal from Vietnam would not by itself create sufficient conditions for successful Communist insurgencies in other parts of Southeast Asia, with the probable exception of Laos; and (3) with regard to those countries (other than Laos) immediately affected by the withdrawal, the US could take certain actions to reduce potentially adverse consequences. In general, developments in the wake of withdrawal are likely to encompass a range of consequences -- some adverse, some adverse but reversible or ameliorable, some even quite positive.

This is not to argue that the repercussions can be casually dismissed. Laos -- in an unenviable position even with US forces in Vietnam -- is quite likely to fall, and the risks faced by Thailand will almost certainly increase. But these same risks might stimulate the Thai government to take a more independent, nationalist foreign policy leading to a policy of well-armed neutralism and to internal reforms, both of which would work to the detriment of the Thai insurgency. And the US could take compensatory measures with respect to the Thai that might include expressions of continued US interest and

renewed pledges of support against external aggression; continued, perhaps increased aid to assist in defense and internal changes; and support for Thai efforts to bring about regional cooperation.

In Indonesia the elites, who are not hostile to Communist countries per se, but only to China as a potential aggressor, would not in our judgment be adversely affected by American withdrawal from Vietnam. In Japan, where the ruling conservative party is split on the Vietnam issue, the opposition parties are united in their condemnation of US policy in Vietnam, and there is widespread public expression of opposition to the war, withdrawal might have major immediate effects including opposition to any alliance relationship with the US that might embroil Japan in local war, and increased pressures for the normalization of relations between Japan and Mainland China. But these effects of US withdrawal, initially alarming, should reinforce the growing desire of the Japanese to assert themselves as a fully independent nation in all their international relations -- a policy stance that in the long run would benefit the US, as it would lead Japan to take on more responsibility in evolving programs aimed at stabilizing non-Communist Asia.

These are just brief examples, and very condensed at that, of the assessments we made of the worldwide implications of extrication, leading us to conclude that (1) initial damage, when compared with that caused by costly and inconclusive pursuit of the war, would not be decisive, (2) compensatory measures could be taken in virtually every case (except Laos) in which they would be necessary, and (3) in some cases advantages might even accrue, as in Latin America, where the war is very unpopular, [redacted]an countries, or in our relations

with the Soviet Union, in the form of a better climate for detente, despite Czechoslovakia. I must repeat, however, that these general conclusions, and the specific assessments underlying them, are highly controversial -- all 70 pages of them -- even within Rand.

Now, I must also emphasize again that the extrication strategy is essentially a damage-limiting and loss-cutting course of action. (Its costs and benefits are not to be compared with those of a "victory," but with those of a long and very costly and inconclusive war.) Perhaps its most interesting feature is that it might present the United States with a better bargaining asset other than the so far ineffective one of applying force and threatening more of it. Viewing continued pursuit of the war in the global context, our work indicates that to extricate may well become the most advantageous option for the United States to pursue, assuming that the preconditions for exercising this option postulated earlier do apply.

Thus a crucial problem becomes that of assessing where we are in Vietnam today, what the direction of movement is, and how likely or unlikely it is that the gloomy preconditions underlying the extrication option do or might apply.

There is little doubt that VC and DRV main force units have been badly hurt this year, but, remembering that to a large extent the enemy initiated the actions in which he was hurt, and that the enemy's potential to continue the political war in the hamlets remains significant, we see little evidence that he has been so badly hurt that he is ready to grant the US anything like its original objectives. We do believe, however, that the prospect of a long-term, low-cost American

strategy (supported and participated in by the South Vietnamese in ever-increasing numbers) will hold no joy for the Communist decision-makers, and that steps to implement such a strategy will significantly improve the US position at the bargaining table. This is the principal reason that I, at least, conclude that implementation of such a strategy is even now worth trying.

Are we now moving in this direction? The evidence available to us is conflicting; we have no simple answer, although major changes have certainly occurred over the past year.

(Chart 11) The bombing of the North has stopped; but the way in which the resources freed will be used in the South remains to be seen. There are reports of increases in small-unit actions; but the "small unit" is too large, and DOD "numbers" do not, in general, support these reports. There are reports of an increasingly effective South Vietnamese military establishment; but it is also reported that ARVN's net desertion rate has climbed this year [from 230 per 1000 to 320 per 1000] and, according to the latest figures, is still increasing [at a rate an order of magnitude higher than ARVN's strength is increasing]. The Vietnamese force modernization program is proceeding; but ARVN looks more and more like conventional US units and emphasizes offensive ground combat capability; by 1970, if the program continues, local force units (the key to our population protection strategy) can look forward to nothing better than firepower "parity" with VC guerrilla forces. The Marine Corps Combined Action Platoons continue to have success at village and hamlet level; but they remain unintegrated into any overall system. The US has moved to protect Saigon; but

nearly all [99%] of the hamlets surrounding Saigon are subject to an active VC infrastructure. General Abrams has recently directed all commanders to get their forces into the hamlets, certainly a major change; but they were not directed to stay in the hamlets. The GVN (particularly President Thieu) "looks better;" but there was a coup attempt in October, and popular support for the GVN remains questionable, at best. There is no indication that the US tour of duty in Vietnam will be lengthened, or that we have succeeded in developing the kind of institutional memory that's needed, and little sign that even the quality and objectives of the enemy are sufficiently understood.*

All this is not to imply that in our view the changes over the past year have netted out to zero, but rather that we cannot get close enough to the situation to derive any precise balance. It does seem clear that we are no longer concentrating our military efforts

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*"Major General Charles P. Stone rocked back in his leather chair, propped his boots on the desk and smiled the smile of a man who held a trump card. 'I think the enemy is third-rate, and I fight him on that basis,' said the six-foot, five-inch tall commander of the United States 5th Infantry Division. 'Besides, I hold everything he wants, and he isn't capable of taking it away from me....They say I'm the most confident commander in Vietnam, and I think they're right,' the 53-year-old soldier said. 'If I worried about all the ghost units supposedly coming to get us, I wouldn't get much sleep....People ask me what my techniques of fighting the war are. Well, I can't answer that. I fight differently every month. The assessment of success is to determine if the enemy is able to achieve what he sets out to do.... You don't have to count bodies to know he's getting clobbered. Three NVA divisions came down here in April and May. They did not capture a single hill or fulfill a single objective.' To maintain this tactical advantage, General Stone keeps his 18,000 soldiers constantly on the move, deploying them in a fleet of 131 helicopters to likely areas where the Communists can be 'intercepted and destroyed.'" (The New York Times, November 4, 1968.)

against the enemy forces in the hills, and this is a major plus. (Chart 12) I believe that this change has been brought about by a combination of enemy action and resource constraints imposed by the American President -- no more troops. These pressures have not only given us better leverage on the GVN, but have also resulted in a step in the direction of our population protection strategy, and can only make us look more threateningly to Hanoi and the Front, both in Vietnam and in Paris.

But much more needs to be done, and I believe that our work can serve as a useful guide not only by clarifying what it is that needs to be done, but also by suggesting how resource restraints can be used not only to increase the effectiveness of our strategy in Vietnam, but also to demonstrate to the enemy -- and to the world -- that we can design and sustain a durable, low-cost effort. I would submit that the most important and effective step we can take now is to reduce our forces and costs in Vietnam, which will not only increase the incentives for better performance by the South Vietnamese but will also -- if it is done right -- persuade Hanoi and the Front that we are buckling down. (We see ways in which, for example, 14,000 men might be taken out almost immediately, bringing about a saving of some $400 million on an annual basis.)

The population protection strategy does not, in my view, promise an easy "victory" in terms of our 1965 objectives, nor does it promise a quick win even in terms of our current, greatly reduced goals. But insofar as it dims Hanoi's expectations of an early US withdrawal brought about by the unhappy combination of frustration

and spectacular costs we have achieved to date, it may well force enemy concessions in current or future negotiations which would permit self-determination in South Vietnam. Should we fail to implement an effective, low-cost strategy, however, or should the strategy fail, I believe that something like our extrication strategy would become the most desirable course to pursue.

ALTERNATIVES EXAMINED

- STRATEGY OF ATTRITION
- POPULATION PROTECTION
- EXTRICATION

Chart 1

VC/NVA CONFIRMED MAIN AND LOCAL FORCES

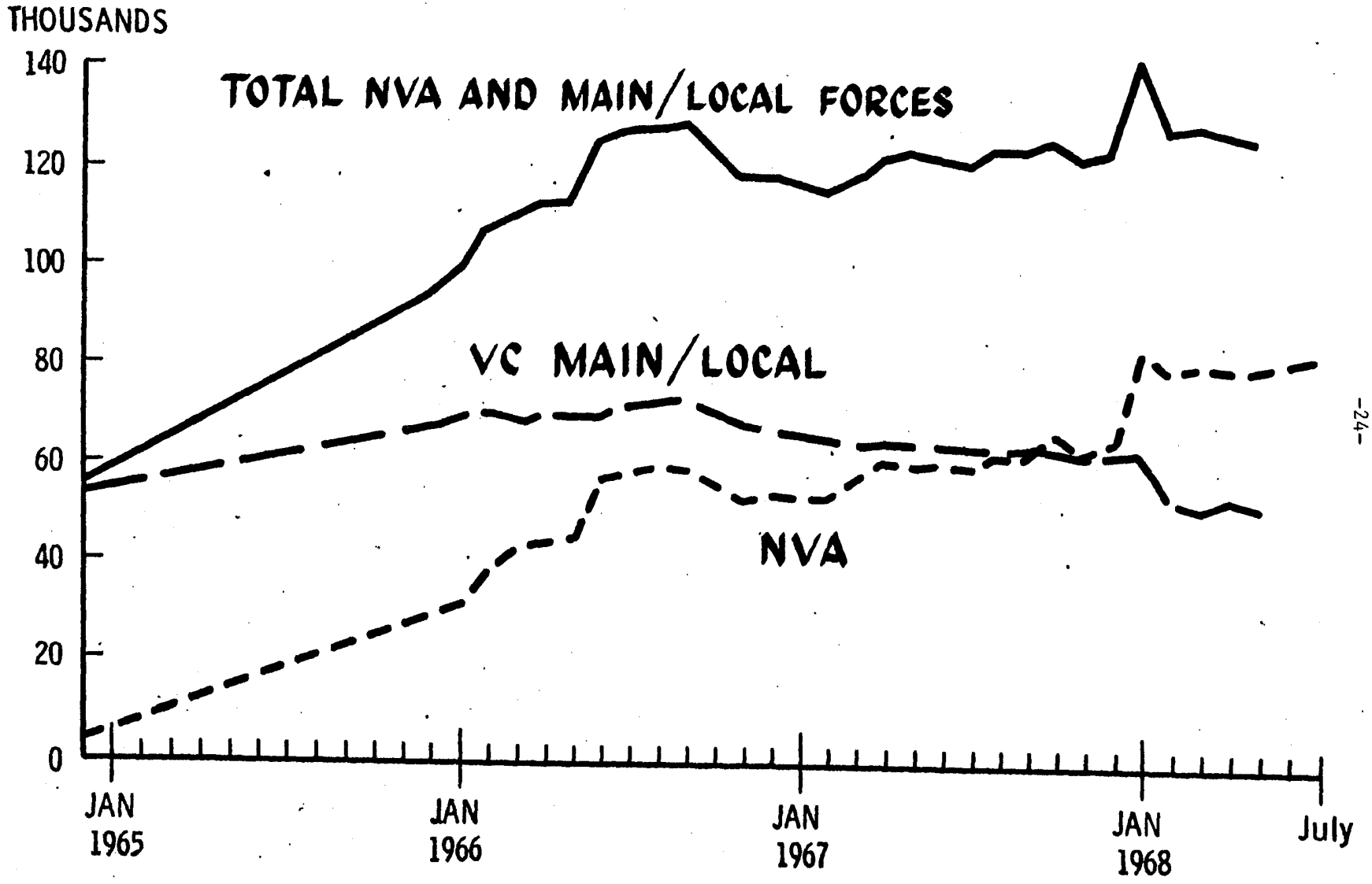


Chart 2

THE STRATEGY OF ATTRITION

- COSTLY
- UNPRODUCTIVE
- CONTROLLABLE BY ENEMY

Chart 3

DESIGN GOALS OF POPULATION PROTECTION STRATEGY

- LOWER U.S. HUMAN AND MONETARY COSTS
- FEWER AMERICANS IN VIETNAM
- REDUCED VISIBILITY OF U.S. OPERATIONS
- LOWER LEVEL OF VIOLENCE
- STRENGTHEN AND MOTIVATE SOUTH VIETNAMESE
- PERMIT GVN TO OPERATE AMONG POPULATION

Chart 4

POPULATION PROTECTION STRATEGY

- CONSTANT PRESENCE AT VILLAGE LEVEL
- INTEGRATION TO BLOCK ENEMY MOVEMENT
- POLICE
- LONG-RANGE STRIKE TEAMS
- REACTION AND EXPLOITATION FORCES
- UPGRADING OF SOUTH VIETNAMESE FORCES

Chart 5

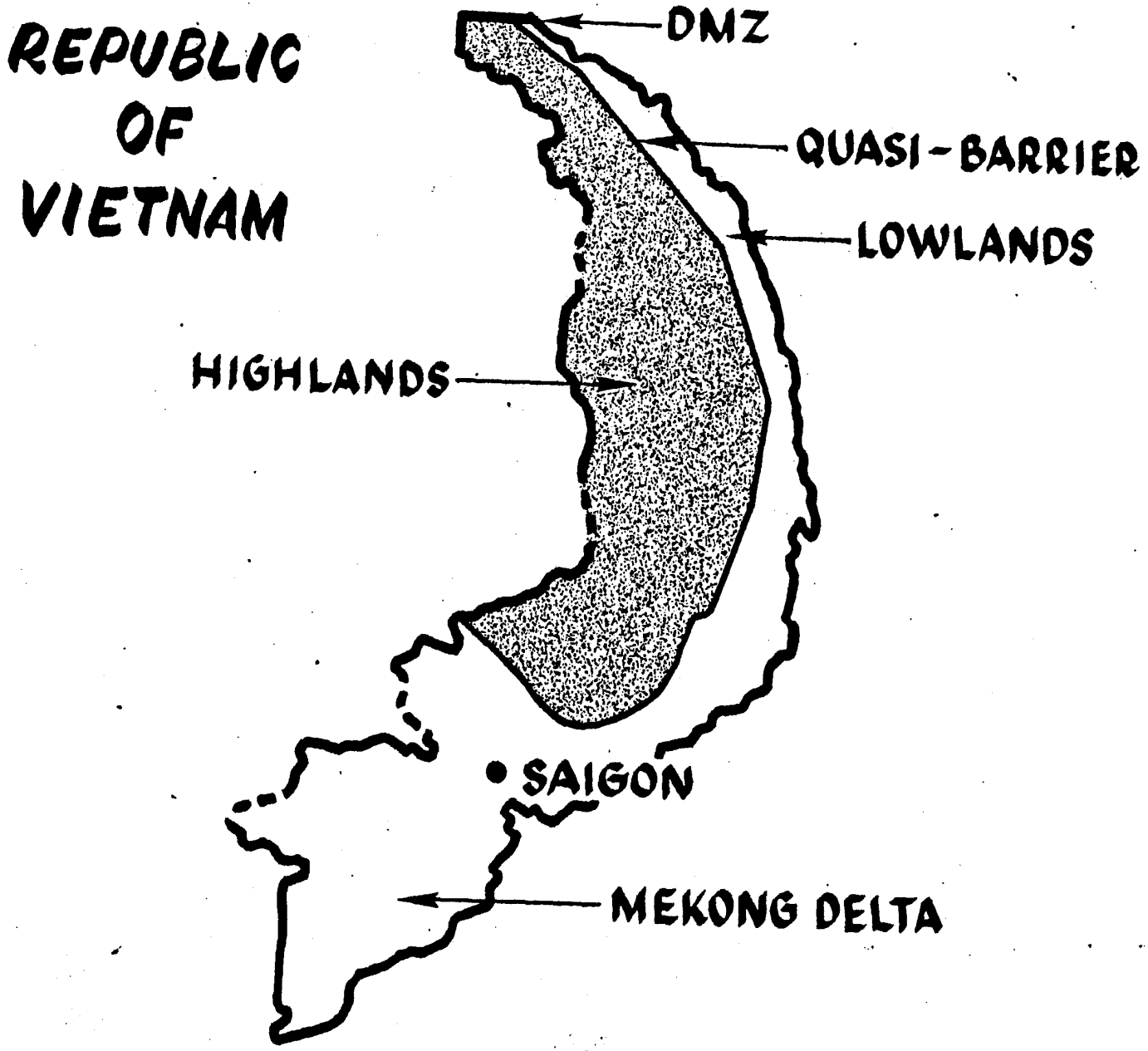

REPUBLIC
OF
VIETNAM
DMZ
QUASI-BARRIER
LOWLANDS
HIGHLANDS
SAIGON
MEKONG DELTA

Chart 6

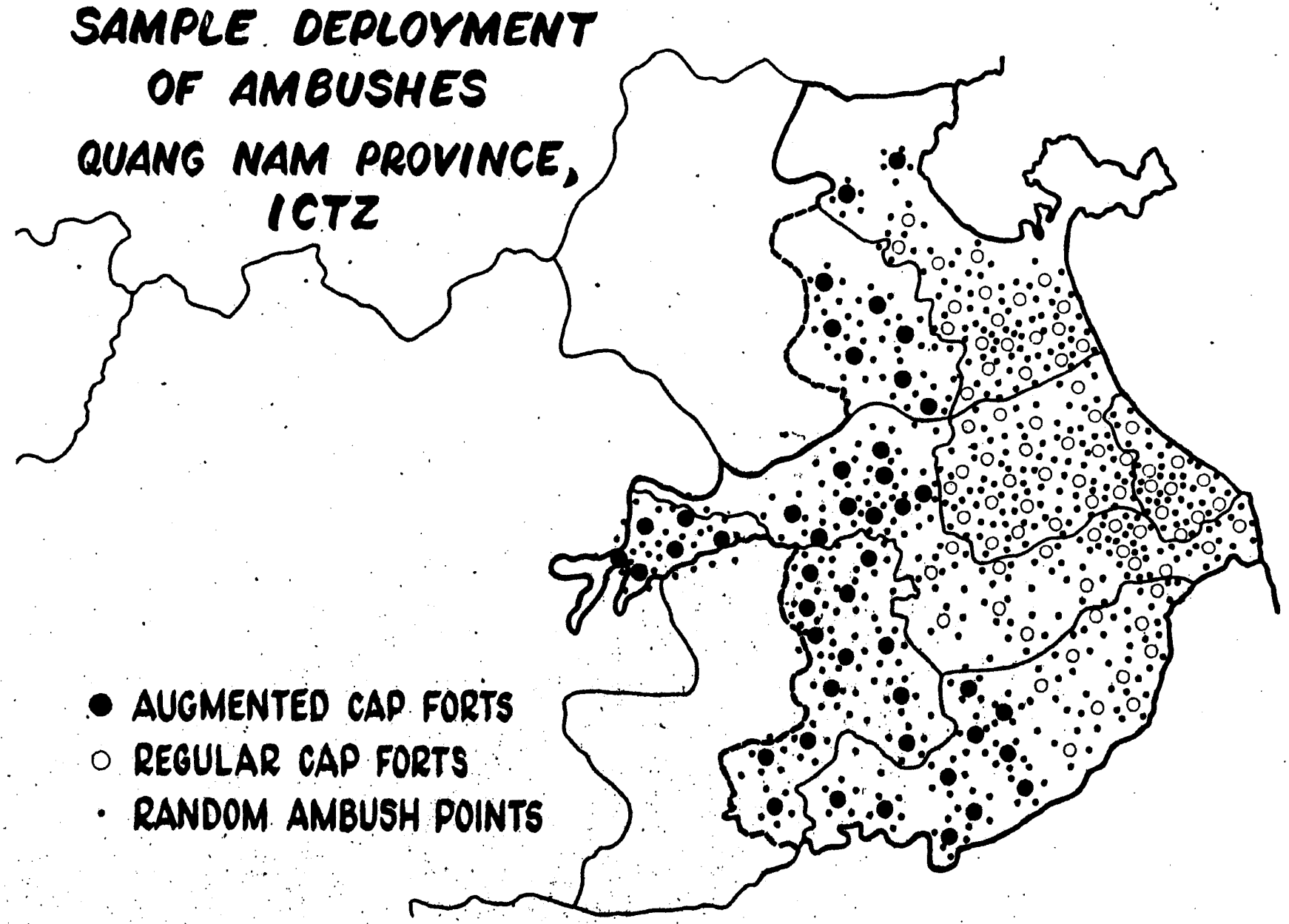

SAMPLE DEPLOYMENT
OF AMBUSHES
QUANG NAM PROVINCE,
ICTZ
● AUGMENTED CAP FORTS
○ REGULAR CAP FORTS
· RANDOM AMBUSH POINTS

Chart 7

PRINCIPAL FEATURES OF "EXTRICATION STRATEGY"

- DAMAGE LIMITING, LOSS-CUTTING STRATEGY
- ORIGINAL AND PRESENT OBJECTIVES DISCARDED
- EXTRICATION BECOMES PRIMARY OBJECTIVE
- ENEMY WILL PAY FOR U.S. DISENGAGEMENT

Chart 8

MINIMUM AMERICAN DEMANDS

- PRISONER RELEASE
- NO INTERFERENCE WITH DISENGAGEMENT
- TIME

Chart 9

POSSIBLE FORM OF THE INTERVAL

- GVN REMAINS IN POWER
  - FORMATION OF PROVISIONAL COALITION
    - CEASE-FIRE ONLY

Chart 10

CONDITIONS IN SOUTH VIETNAM (1)

- BOMBING OF NORTH
- SMALL-UNIT ACTIONS
- EFFECTIVENESS OF FORCES
- MODERNIZATION OF FORCES
- COMBINED ACTION PLATOONS
- PROTECTION OF SAIGON
- FORCES INTO THE HAMLETS
- STATE OF THE GOVERNMENT
- U.S. "SELF-IMPROVEMENT"

Chart 11

CONDITIONS IN SOUTH VIETNAM (2)

- NO LONGER EXCLUSIVELY PURSUING ATTRITION STRATEGY
- MUCH MORE NEEDS TO BE DONE
- RAND WORK ON POPULATION PROTECTION A USEFUL GUIDE
- EXTRICATION A VIABLE OPTION

Chart 12