

HUMANITARIAN PROBLEMS IN SOUTH
VIETNAM AND CAMBODIA: TWO
YEARS AFTER THE CEASE-FIRE

A STUDY MISSION REPORT

PREPARED FOR THE USE OF THE
SUBCOMMITTEE TO INVESTIGATE PROBLEMS
CONNECTED WITH REFUGEES AND ESCAPEES

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PREFACE

(By Senator Edward M. Kennedy, Chairman)

January 27, 1975 marks the second anniversary of the Agreement on Ending the War and Restoring Peace in Vietnam.

1973 began with the promise of peace—with ceasefire agreements for Vietnam and Laos, and the anticipation of a similar agreement for Cambodia. It also began with generous commitments by governments and others to contribute to the post-war rehabilitation and reconstruction of the peoples and nations of Indochina. With all this in mind, in 1973 and 1974 special Study Missions traveled to the area in behalf of the Subcommittee—with the hope that the Subcommittee could contribute responsibly to a discussion over our country's future relations with Indochina, in the aftermath of war. But, as so often in the past, their efforts were carried out under the spectre of continuing violence and warfare, which not only served to heighten the agony of a rapidly growing number of civilians in the war affected areas, but which also threatened the prospect of ending violence—or at least lessening it significantly—under the ceasefire agreements.

And so, for a good share of Indochina, the problems in 1973 and 1974 have been less about a post-war future, than how to meet the daily exigencies of battle, and the growing humanitarian needs created by continuing war. These have also been problems for American policy. And the issue now at hand is less about a future peace, than about recent developments and the present course of American policy—especially toward Vietnam.

In Cambodia, a high level of violence continues unabated. Each day of war brings another day of human suffering. Tragedy is piled upon tragedy. As rockets fall upon Phnom Penh, and as more artillery is fired into the countryside, more civilians become casualties or die. More children are orphaned or maimed. And more refugees flee devastated villages and towns.

A ceasefire, of course, has never been declared in Cambodia, so the conflict there is at least labeled for what it is—war. In South Vietnam, however, an elaborate ceasefire mechanism has been constructed, agreed upon, and signed—yet the fighting goes on, and even escalates, as each side competes with the other in violating the Paris agreements.

As always, the most accurate barometer of the level of conflict in the field, is the movement of refugees and the occurrence of civilian war casualties. By this measure alone, the first year of the ceasefire in Vietnam was bad enough. But the second year produced a toll of war victims that comes close to matching some of the worst years of the pre-ceasefire war. New refugees numbered more than 594,000. And the total number of civilians admitted as war-related casualties to South Vietnamese hospitals was, by official count, at least 43,000. Moreover, the military deaths of both sides far surpassed those suffered by all American servicemen over an entire decade of the war.

All of this is not to denigrate the historic importance of the Paris agreements, which hopefully still provide a political framework for reconciliation in Vietnam, or to underestimate the importance of the very measurable progress towards reconciliation and normality in neighboring Laos. Rather, it is to remind us that war continues in many parts of Indochina, and that many civilians remain pawns in the conflict and continue to fall victim to the crossfire of war.

It is also to remind us that America is still involved in Indochina—and the question of what the character of this involvement should be—still remains an urgent issue before the American people.

The ceasefire agreements for Vietnam and Laos provided the United States with its first opportunity in over a decade to reorder our priorities in Indochina—to change the character of our involvement, to embark on new policies, and to practice some lessons from the failures and frustrations of the past.

But clearly, the thinking of a wartime bureaucracy, preoccupied with weapons delivery and how to maximize American influence and presence, still dominates our policies and programs in Indochina—despite new conditions, the ceasefire agreements, the return of our servicemen and prisoners of war, and the hopes of all Americans that we were finally disengaging from our heavy involvement in Indochina.

At the expense of vital American interests at home and abroad, the new Administration continues an old obsession with Indochina. Whatever the reason, there apparently remains a determination within the Administration to impose its views on the countries of the area. And in the absence of any change in Vietnam, on American terms, we shall continue to fuel a senseless war.

We are told we have a “moral commitment” in Indochina. And we hear officials say that if Congress does not provide the amount of military and economic aid requested, it will be a violation of the “clear understandings” the South Vietnamese had from us at the time of the ceasefire.

What “understandings”? And who made them? And why are they hidden from Congress and the American people?

And what about our “moral commitment”? What is so moral about providing vast quantities of ammunition for Indochina? What is so moral about an aid program that places a priority on fueling war and keeping a war-economy afloat, rather than helping to meet the needs of war victims throughout the area.

We have a moral obligation to help accomplish the political goals of the ceasefire agreements. We have a responsibility to remove our assistance to the people of Indochina from the political conflict, by channeling it through United Nations and other international humanitarian organizations. We have a duty to help people, not to buy time for governments too weak to support themselves.

Regrettably, the priority of American policy toward Indochina remains with the means of war rather than the tools for building peace. The President's recent request for additional military assistance to Saigon, and his suggesting the possibility of new American military operations, ignores the Paris Agreements of 1973 and our responsibility for helping to make them work.

Rather than hearing about military options and a need for more ammunition and military hardware for more war, Americans should be hearing about what our diplomats are doing to bring peace.

The lingering and bloody conflict in Cambodia deserves better of our diplomacy. The breakdown of the ceasefire agreement in Vietnam demands more than belligerent rhetoric and new military aid for Saigon. The fragile peace in Laos requires our support. And the deadlock in our relations with Hanoi must be broken.

As in the past, there is much to be done to bring peace and relief to the people and countries of Indochina. And there is much more our country must do to help.

INTRODUCTION

The Subcommittee's concern for refugee developments in Asia, especially in South Vietnam and Laos, was initially emphasized in a special report (S. Rept. 59, 89th Cong., first sess.) released on February 9, 1965. This concern was reiterated in a subsequent report (S. Rept. 371, 89th Cong., first sess.) released on June 25, 1965. Sensing the growing seriousness of the refugee problem, especially in South Vietnam, and a failure on the part of Washington and Saigon to readily identify this problem and initiate adequate programs of assistance, a series of 13 hearings followed in July, August, and September. After a field visit to South Vietnam and Laos by the Chairman and other members of the Subcommittee, and additional hearings and consultations, the Subcommittee issued a definitive report (S. Rept. 1058, 89th Cong. second sess.) of its findings and recommendations on March 4, 1966.

As the record since that time will indicate, war related civilian problems in South Vietnam, and all of Indochina, have been an item of continuing interest and primary concern to the Subcommittee. Field studies have been conducted almost annually by the Chairman and others, numerous hearings and additional consultations have been held, and reports on findings and recommendations have been held, and reports on findings and recommendations have been issued. A definitive report on field conditions during the "Vietnamization" phase of American policy, for example, was issued on September 28, 1970 (Committee Print, 91st Cong. second sess.).

The most recent Subcommittee report was issued on January 27, 1974, the first anniversary of the Paris Agreement, and is entitled "Relief and Rehabilitation of War Victims in Indochina: One Year After the Ceasefire" (U.S. Government Printing Office, Stock Number 5270-02260), and was based upon the findings of a special nine-member Study Mission which visited all countries of Indochina in 1973.

Throughout these activities over the past few years, the Subcommittee has offered its help and suggestions to officials in the Executive Branch and others, in a diligent effort to help find reasonable and humane solutions to the undeniably tragic problems which war has brought to the people of Indochina. The Subcommittee fully recognizes the progress that has been made over the years; but it also regrets that whatever priority our own Government has attached to these basically humanitarian problems, has too often been gauged by the degree of Congressional and public pressure, than by an active moral or political concern at the highest levels of our natural leadership.

This report is essentially an up-date of the 1974 Study Mission report, focusing primarily on humanitarian problems in South Vietnam and Cambodia. It attempts to assess the continuing problems of refugees, civilian war casualties, and other war-related humanitarian problems in these two countries. The field work for this report was

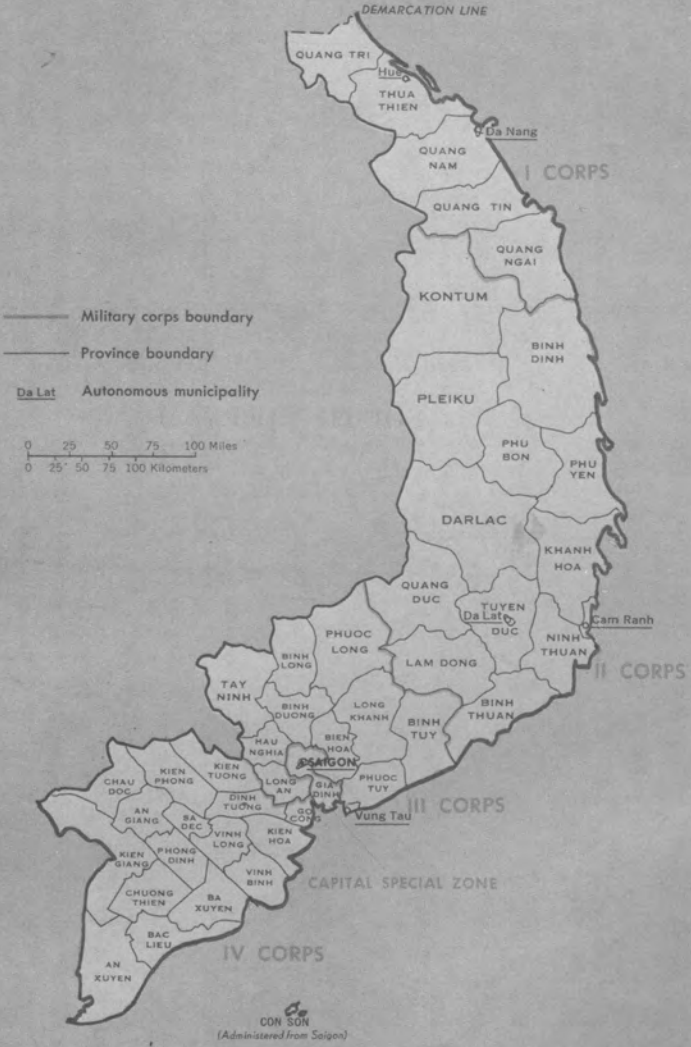
undertaken earlier in the year by Mr. Wells Klein, Executive Director of the American Council of Nationalities Service, New York, and Dr. David French, Director of the Office of Community Health Affairs of Boston University's Medical Center. Both have served, in their private capacity, as consultants to the Subcommittee previously, and have traveled previously in the area. Additional information was gathered in a July 18, 1974 hearing,¹ and subsequent inquiry by the Subcommittee.

To supplement these reports, at the request of the Chairman, related studies on war victims and rehabilitation programs were undertaken by the General Accounting Office (GAO), and are printed in their entirety in the hearing record of July 18, 1974.

¹ "Humanitarian Problems in Indochina", Hearing, Subcommittee on Refugees, Committee on the Judiciary, U.S. Senate, July 18, 1974.

SOUTH VIETNAM

SOUTH VIETNAM ADMINISTRATIVE DIVISIONS



SOUTH VIETNAM

As for so many years in the past, the promise of peace still eludes the people of Vietnam. The second anniversary of "peace" in Vietnam will find more refugees driven from their homes and lands than ever before. More children are homeless orphans, and more war widows struggle for survival. And tens of thousands of men, women, and children continue to fall as casualties of continuing violence. Every new day in Vietnam sees more war, more violence and even greater tragedy.

The basic fact of life for the Vietnamese remains what it has been for the past forty years—unending conflict and ever-present violence. Today it is called a "ceasefire war," which began before the ink was dry on the Paris Agreement signed two years ago.

The war continues because the 1972 treaty, like the 1954 accords two decades earlier, failed to set in motion the steps necessary to settle the basic issues which have been at the root of the conflict in Vietnam for at least three generations. And because most of the old political dilemmas and the attendant military and territorial problems remain unresolved by the Paris Agreement, there is today still no end in sight to the war. There appears little interest, on either side, in seeking a negotiated settlement, or in further implementing the 1972 ceasefire provisions, except on each side's own terms. Until this changes—until renewed diplomatic efforts are undertaken to restore the Paris Agreement—there will be little prospect for a reduction in the violence, and even less hope for peace.

There is no better indication that the basic confrontation in Vietnam stands unchanged—and no more certain evidence of the continuing violence—than the statistics on the toll of human life the conflict continues to take in military casualties, civilian war casualties, and the creation of orphans, war widows, refugees, and the many other war victims maimed or disadvantaged each day by the violence.

To review some of these statistics on the human costs of the ongoing war, is to underscore the point that, contrary to today's headlines, the current violence is not "new" in South Vietnam, nor is it entirely the result of a "new" offensive. Rather, death and destruction has continued, from both sides, from the day the ceasefire agreements were signed in Paris.

The statistics on refugees and civilian war casualties tell us also not only how much the Vietnamese people continue to suffer, but also of America's continuing involvement in their suffering, and our even greater responsibility to help bring relief and rehabilitation to millions of war victims in need. Although American soldiers have left the shores of Vietnam, and the law forbids any direct American involvement in the fighting, we still finance the materials of war—to ship the bombs and the bullets that continue to kill Vietnamese. Whatever the merits or purpose of this policy—increasingly a subject of

controversy—the fact remains that America is involved in the war, although the dying has been “Vietnamized” for two years.

Had the United States no previous responsibility to help heal the wounds of a war we directly participated in—a responsibility we clearly have—the fact that we continue to fuel the war from afar, makes it all the more imperative that we recognize and understand the human toll resulting from a conflict our government continues to finance.

1. THE REFUGEE SITUATION

The most enduring legacy of the Vietnam war will undoubtedly be its cumulative impact upon the lives and the social structure of the people of South Vietnam. Well over half of South Vietnam's estimated population of 19½ million people have been forced to move as refugees, often many times over, since the war escalated in late 1964 and early 1965. And each new day of conflict adds to this already massive displacement. As Table 1 indicates, the cumulative total of refugees displaced since 1964–65 in South Vietnam, now stands at 11,683,000.

This represents an increase of 1,413,000 new refugees displaced since the ceasefire agreement was signed—some 818,000 new refugees in 1973, and 594,000 new refugees reported during 1974. This is a rate of refugee movement, during both years, that exceeds the total of every previous year of fighting in South Vietnam except the year of the Americanization of the conflict in 1966, the Tet offensive in 1968, and the 1972 Easter offensive.

TABLE 1.—*Statistical summary of refugee and war victim movement in South Vietnam, 1965–74*

1. Newly registered refugees :	
1965 -----	772, 000
1966 -----	906, 000
1967 -----	436, 000
1968 -----	494, 000
1969 -----	590, 000
1970 -----	129, 000
Registered in 1970, but generated earlier -----	281, 000
1971 -----	136, 000
Registered in 1971, but generated earlier -----	268, 000
1972 -----	1, 320, 000
1973 -----	¹ 818, 700
1974 -----	² 594, 300
Cumulative total -----	6, 745, 000
2. Cambodian repatriates, ethnic Vietnamese expelled from Cambodia 1970 -----	210, 000
3. Estimated casualty and damage claimants, including some one million temporarily displaced during Tet and May, 1968 -----	2, 028, 000
4. Displaced persons in PRG-controlled areas and other nonregistered refugees from the 1972 offensive -----	700, 000
5. Estimated non-registered refugees, including some one million in Saigon ineligible since 1964 to register -----	³ 2, 000, 000
Cumulative total since 1965 -----	11, 683, 000

¹ For 1973 USAID indicates only 88,000 new refugees were officially registered; however, the Subcommittee estimate includes the total number of refugees generated during the year, both in government controlled as well as estimates of PRG areas, this also includes those temporarily displaced during the immediate post-ceasefire “land grabs,” but not registered. For example, USAID/Saigon acknowledges 490,000 casualty and damage claimants in its up-dated 1973 statistics, some of whom are here considered as refugees, since they were forced to move temporarily from their homes during the immediate post-ceasefire struggle in 1973.

² Cumulative total of officially reported refugee movement throughout 1974, many of whom were never officially registered. Prior to May 1, 1974, no new refugees were registered, and subsequently only a small percentage of refugees forced to flee their homes, sometimes for many weeks, have actually been registered as “Temporarily Displaced War Victims.”

³ USAID claims no official estimates. This estimate is based upon the Subcommittee's hearings and findings from 1965–73.

During 1973, the first year of the ceasefire, the greatest refugee movement occurred during the months immediately after the accords were signed in Paris, as each side engaged in a period of "post-ceasefire land-grabs." During February and March 1973, offensive operations erupted in 33 of South Vietnam's 46 provinces, as both sides engaged in military efforts to reshape the nearly non-existent ceasefire line to its own advantage. This process continued throughout the year on a fluctuating basis, with the Government of South Vietnam (GVN) alleging there were some 31,672 ceasefire violations by the other side during 1973 alone—or about 100 violations for every day of the year. The Provisional Revolutionary Government of South Vietnam (PRG) has also protested ceasefire violations, citing GVN air operations in 1973 that were long denied, and only officially admitted in the early weeks of 1974.

During 1974 the GVN accused the other side of another 35,000 ceasefire violations, bringing the total past the 66,700 mark.

As always, the most accurate index of conditions in the countryside—of the level of conflict and violence—is the number of refugees fleeing rural areas and the number of civilian war casualties filling hospital wards. By these measures, it is clear that the second year of the ceasefire was one of the worst years for the people of South Vietnam.

As Table 2 indicates, some 594,300 South Vietnamese refugees were officially reported as being displaced during 1974—some for the second or third time. Based upon the cumulative reports from the field, the worst period during 1974 was not late in the year, during the "dry-season offensive", as officials in the Pentagon are prone to call it. Rather, the worst period for Vietnamese refugees was during the months of May–August, when escalated military operations were reported from both sides, especially in the northern and central regions. Some 353,100 refugees were reported displaced during May–August, compared to 201,800 during the recent September–December period.

These figures are cumulative totals of officially reported refugee movement. Only part were officially registered as "Temporarily Displaced War Victims," which was the new category introduced mid-way through 1974 as the refugee toll mounted. Prior to May 1st, it was GVN policy not to register new refugees, and even today no formal refugee camps are being constructed. Only some 39,000 refugees, including 26,000 Cambodian refugees, are today physically situated in refugee camps. The remainder have come and gone, and even of those who remain displaced, only a portion have been officially registered as "Temporarily Displaced War Victims", receiving modest rations of food and rice or some monetary assistance.

TABLE 2.—*Refugees in South Vietnam in 1974*¹

1. January-April (refugees in old camps)-----	39, 400
2. May-August (new refugees reported displaced; not in camps)-----	353, 100
3. September-December (new refugees reported displaced; not in camps)-----	201, 800
1974 total-----	594, 300

¹ Based upon cumulative totals of officially reported refugee movements throughout the year, not upon official registrations. New refugees were not registered until after May 1 as "Temporarily Displaced War Victims," some of whom have now returned to their homes. Registration has consistently lagged behind refugee movement, and it is officially estimated that over 98,000 refugees displaced September–December remain unregistered and have received no assistance.

Even in provinces where the GVN has attempted to register refugees, official paperwork has, as usual, lagged behind. The U.S. Mission estimates, for example, that of the refugee movement in November-December, close to 100,000 refugees, particularly in the Mekong Delta region, remain unregistered and have received little or no assistance.

Since the ceasefire it has been the established policy of the Saigon government to empty the refugee camps, and to resettle as many refugees as possible from 1972, as well as those inadequately resettled in earlier years. Following the 1972 offensive and the upsurge of fighting immediately after the ceasefire, refugee camps throughout South Vietnam contained over 600,000 refugees, with tens of thousands in a refugee status out of camp. The deplorable situation of these people was documented in the Subcommittee's report of 1973.¹ The last of these in-camp refugees was finally resettled as of July 1, 1974—a full two years after they were first displaced during the 1972 offensive. However, as will be noted below, many of these refugees, who were resettled in the "model" resettlement villages in Region III, have now been displaced once again.

2. CIVILIAN WAR CASUALTIES

Tragically little has changed since the Subcommittee's report of last year in terms of the number of civilians who continue to fall victims to the continuing war in South Vietnam. As seen and experienced by the average Vietnamese, the "ceasefire war" is clearly as dangerous as the old war. The monthly rate of civilian war casualties admitted, by official count, to hospitals for treatment remains as high as last year.

The monthly average for 1974 was 3,600 war-related admissions each month, as compared to 3,616 war-related casualties each month in 1973; (see Tables 3 and 4). These monthly averages for civilian war-related casualties compares to a monthly average of 4,491 in 1972 or 4,228 in 1971—some of the peak years of the war. Thus, the ceasefire war has reduced the toll of civilian casualties only by an average of 700 to 900 each month. To those 3,600 civilians still wounded, and the undetermined number who die, this reduction is scant comfort. And they are added to the incredible toll of 553,279 civilian war casualties officially reported since 1965, and the Subcommittee's

¹ *Relief and Rehabilitation of War Victims in Indochina: One Year After the Ceasefire*. Subcommittee on Refugees, U.S. Senate, Jan. 27, 1974.

cumulative estimate of 1,435,000 both wounded and dead since 1965; (see Table 5).

TABLE 3.—CIVILIAN WAR CASUALTIES OFFICIALLY REPORTED BY SOUTH VIETNAMESE HOSPITALS IN 1973-74

Month	Officially reported war-related hospital admissions		Month	Officially reported war-related hospital admissions	
	1973	1974		1973	1974
January.....	5,506	3,069	August.....	3,199	4,184
February.....	5,476	3,213	September.....	2,851	3,227
March.....	4,137	3,504	October.....	3,037	3,232
April.....	3,333	3,634	November.....	2,900	1,600
May.....	3,184	3,778	December.....	3,240	1,450
June.....	3,624	3,338	Total.....	43,406	43,090
July.....	2,919	3,811			

¹ Estimates.

TABLE 4.—MONTHLY AVERAGE OF CIVILIAN WAR CASUALTIES IN SOUTH VIETNAM (ACCORDING TO OFFICIAL HOSPITAL ADMISSION STATISTICS)

Year	Annual total	Monthly average	Year	Annual total	Monthly average
1965-66.....	50,000	4,166	1971.....	50,737	4,228
1967.....	49,707	4,142	1972.....	53,901	4,491
1968.....	86,993	7,429	1973.....	43,406	3,606
1969.....	66,002	5,500	1974.....	43,090	3,600
1970.....	59,663	4,971			

TABLE 5.—STATISTICAL SUMMARY OF CIVILIAN WAR CASUALTIES IN SOUTH VIETNAM, 1965-74

Year	Officially reported hospital admissions ¹	Subcommittee casualty estimates including deaths	Subcommittee death estimates
1965.....	² 50,000	100,000	25,000
1966.....	² 50,000	150,000	50,000
1967.....	49,707	175,000	60,000
1968.....	86,993	300,000	100,000
1969.....	66,002	200,000	60,000
1970.....	59,663	125,000	30,000
1971.....	50,737	100,000	25,000
1972.....	53,901	200,000	65,000
1973.....	43,166	85,000	15,000
1974.....	43,090	(³)	(³)
Total.....	553,279	1,435,000	430,000

¹ Officially reported hospital admissions grossly understate the overall civilian war casualty problem. They exclude all civilian casualties treated elsewhere, those not treated at all, and most significantly, civilians who are killed outright or die before reaching treatment facilities.

By official count since 1967, women and children made up a significant proportion of hospital admissions—during 1972, for example, up to 1/4 of civilian war casualties were females 13 years old and older, and up to 1/4 were children 12 years old and under. Thus, over 50 percent of civilian war casualty hospital admissions were children.

By official count since 1967, some 27 percent of civilian war casualty hospital admissions were attributed to shelling and bombing, some 20 percent to gunfire and grenades, and some 53 percent to mines and mortars—the Refugee Subcommittee estimates that well over 50 percent of civilian war casualties were attributed to Government of Vietnam and U.S. firepower.

² Represent estimates, based upon hearings, field reports, and reports submitted over the years by the General Accounting Office.

³ Estimates not available.

TABLE 6.—*Human costs of the continuing war in South Vietnam since the ceasefire (a summary of official statistics, Jan. 28, 1973, through Jan. 8, 1975)*

I. Human costs since the ceasefire:	
1. North Vietnamese/PRG military reported killed	124, 863
2. South Vietnamese military:	
ARVN killed	25, 277
ARVN wounded	103, 186
ARVN missing	13, 416
3. Civilians wounded and admitted to hospitals ..	86, 496
II. New refugees (January 1973–January 1975)	<u>1, 413, 000</u>
III. Totals:	
1. Military killed	150, 140
2. Military/civilians wounded	189, 682
3. New refugees in all areas	<u>1, 413, 000</u>
Total, since the ceasefire, of Vietnamese killed, wounded, or made refugees (according to official reports)	
	1, 752, 822

NOTE.—Total U.S. deaths for the entire war, 1961–73, are 45,933 combat deaths, 10,298 noncombat deaths, for a total of 56,231 American dead; some 1,500 are still listed as missing in action.

When the 1973 and 1974 toll of wounded and killed civilians is added to the official accounting of military casualties for the same period, it becomes tragically clear just how violent the ceasefire has been: (see Table 6). According to South Vietnamese records, between January 28, 1973 through January 8, 1974, an estimated 124,863 North Vietnamese/PRG military personnel were killed, along with 25,277 South Vietnamese (ARVN) military—for a total of 150,140 military deaths since the ceasefire, or three times the total American combat deaths of 45,933 during the entire decade of our involvement in the war. If the total military deaths are added to military and civilians wounded (189,682), plus new refugees and casualty claimants (1,413,000) since the ceasefire, the people of Vietnam have suffered far more in two years of “peace with honor,” than America experienced during a decade of fighting.

3. REFUGEE RESETTLEMENT AND RETURN TO VILLAGE

Since the beginning of the war, a constant theme of life in Vietnam has been the tragic cycle of violence and refugee movement, and an accompanying pattern of humanitarian need and refugee neglect. 1974 saw little change in the basic character of the refugee situation in South Vietnam. The year was marked more by a feeling of the clock-being-turned-back than of “progress” in refugee resettlement.

Insecurity and violence in the countryside once again escalated, forcing refugees to flee their homes and lands. Once again thousands sought the security and shelter of district towns and provincial cities. Many thousands more returned to old refugee sites and abandoned camps. Yesterday’s model resettlement projects became today’s new refugees, and return to village programs one day became a return to the refugee camp the next.