The problems of transition to a settlement in Vietnam

By Mark Gayn

The transition from war to peace is never simple. In South Vietnam it has been (how can one best put it?) most unusual.

The United States undertook an airlift second only to that which saved West Berlin a generation earlier. In one 48-hour period in November, some 60 giant U.S. transports brought in 1,400 tons of military matériel. U.S. Air Force emissaries went searching the hangars of friendly nations, from Iran to South Korea, for planes that could be transferred hastily to the government in Saigon. In a few instances, for fear that the ceasefire might occur too soon, war supplies were formally transferred to the South Vietnamese Government while they were still waiting to be put aboard ships in U.S. ports. Through this device no one could, on some future day, accuse the Americans of having breached the draft agreement under which no military hardware could be transferred once the truce was arranged.

It was also a rare day at Saigon's vast Ton Son Nhut airport when arriving planes did not bring in yet another group of uncommunicative American civilians. In mid-November, 5,000 of them were already in South Vietnam, and another 5,000 were being hired under secret contracts to serve as "civilian advisers" to the government in Saigon. One heard also of American companies come to do good, but with no publicity: the Lear Siegler, Inc., whose men will be servicing the F-105s; the Norman Harwell Associates of Texas, which will be helping with the maintenance of what has already been billed as the world's third-largest air force. Many of the planes delivered to S would have to be mothballed, for i not have half enough pilots to fly

But let no one jump to the c sion that the United States, in its p of peace, has been any less sincere North Vietnam. The latter, too, has moving arms south. And it has be sisting adamantly on keeping its 1 troops there — obviously to give prot to the Viet Cong and its political spreading across South Vietnam's tryside for tomorrow's tests of stren

This accumulation of weapons gested that both Washington and expected the conflict to continue. B would be a different kind of strug 1965-72, it had been a miniature war, much like the conflict in Spain thirties. The arrangement that was painfully hammered out in late 1972 it clear that the three major pow volved in the struggle — China, the Union and the United States — wer ing it down and ending direct in ment. The new arrangements would a continued civil war, or at least a p struggle with a great deal of m thrown in. But it would no long uniformed Americans die in this tated land, and it would no longer the relations among the Big Three.

Détente as goal

This change has been the produc major historic development. About all three major powers involved in nam began to re-examine their in and national priorities. And each, own compelling reasons, decided th war in Vietnam no longer served its that the old-fashioned cold war w rewarding, and that what each desired was a world-wide *détente* coincidence of interest, unpreceden the past quarter of a century, has b the dominant political fact of our t

It is useful to recall why each three became initially enmeshed in nam. The United States entered th

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