"general offensive" and a "general uprising". Their war policy, which had been "occupy the countryside to encircle the cities", now was changed into "occupy the cities to liberate the countryside". To occupy the cities, of course, means a complete political take-over. The Viet Cong had planned to reach this goal within a relatively short time. According to their documents, the "relatively short time" would be from six months to 2 years.

In accordance with their new strategy of attacks against the cities, the Viet Cong established a program of military training aimed at bringing their troops from rural areas into townships. Highlights of the program included:


City fighting tactics:
- Sapper action, disguise and infiltration.
- Secret grouping at night time.
- Concentric advance.
- Raids on mechanized nests, artillery ground firing.
- "Encircling and isolating" tactics.
- Attacking mechanized units in motion within the city, mine attacks.

Combat assignments:
- In-city force
- Force attacking from outside the city
- City "cutting" force
- Reserve force ready for reinforcement on all fronts.
  This force will become the occupying and defense force when the battle is won.
- Force to intercept government reinforcements.
- "Corridor" force assuring logistical and itinerary tasks.
- Workers force
- Anti-aircraft force, artillery force.
- Sapper force, engineering force accompanying infantry units for sabotage action, or going along with assault units for initial break throughs.

Combat Preparation:

Depending on the importance of each city target and its defense system, the enemy attacking forces would receive the following assignments: The main force's role was to attack, support, assault, reinforce, and defend occupied positions; the role of the in-city force including military and para-military elements and political organizations, was to receive, guide forces coming from outside, attack from within, help the main force expand to connected areas after taking control of a city, and remain in the city for further underground activity in case of withdrawal of the main force etc... the workers force would accompany the combat units and carry out logistical tasks; the political force composed of leaders of the uprising committee would take over the city administration, with the help of Communist cadres previously disguised as nationalist elements.

Battlefield Preparation:

The preparation was carried out on all three fields: military, political and proselyting.

Offensive Plans:

Each force was supposed to have its own plan with specific mentions of its mission, composition, direction, behavior and other combined directives.

Means and Equipment:

Members of each force should be well trained for the handling of modern weapons including those captured from government troops such as the M.79, M.72 etc. Units trained for sabotage action, mine attack, convoy attack, destruction of buildings and bunkers, should know how to drive a tank or navigate a ship if necessary; reconnaissance teams should be equipped with civilian clothes and ARVN uniforms and insignias; infantry elements should be equipped on the basis of two AK's for one B.40 or B.41, and each soldier, in addition to his own equipment, must carry one B.40 rocket, or a round of 60 mm or 82 mm mortar or DKZ.

3. City combat techniques: Attacks outside and inside the city, attacks on buildings and bunkers, and counter assaults.

Outside-the-city Phase:

This includes circumstances that require no artillery preparation and circumstances that require artillery preparation,
either briefly before the infantry assault or for a specific length of time to destroy the target's defense capability before attack by the infantry elements. Any attack aimed at occupation of a target outside the city should be executed as quickly as possible.

Inside-the-City Phase:

Upon entering the city, the attacking force should immediately occupy high buildings, street intersections and other strategic points, fan out into smaller units capable of combating independently in separate areas, avoid face-to-face attacks to the maximum for flank and rear attacks, and apply the three-to-three tactics for combined assault and sapper actions.

Attacks Against Buildings:

Upon entering a building, the attacking force should divide itself into several cells: one taking positions upstairs, one downstairs, one mounting guard at the entrance, one searching inside the house, using either bayonets or grenades. The guard cell protects the searching cell, the downstairs cell protects the upstairs one. In case of attack by tanks or repression fire power, the cells must support one another in fierce resistance to effect a safe withdrawal.

Occupation of City Bunkers:

City bunkers are to be avoided, but if necessary they should be overrun at all costs.

Counter assault tactics:

The enemy thought that normally our reaction would consist of tanks accompanying infantry elements, with air and artillery support, being launched in repeated small waves and always in the day time. To counter such reaction, the enemy devised the following method: First an intercepting fire barrage, taking full advantage of the defense bunkers, and launching a counter assault in case of heavy casualties on our side. If our reaction involves air and armored support, the enemy would try to occupy vital positions and divide itself into three factions: one facing our force, one intercepting our flank and one pushing into our rear. In case of a reaction involving heliborne troops, the enemy force would split in two: one part dealing with our ground force, the other with the landing force with fire power chiefly aimed at the helicopters and preventing the landing troops from concentrating.
In addition to such methods and techniques in guerilla type attacks against the cities, other parts of the Communist documents dealt with general problems involved in city fighting. These included:

- Plans for infiltration of troops into the city as well as their movements and activities inside the city;

- Guerilla and sapper tactics to create disorder and confusion among the city population before the offensive, and assert the enemy presence after the offensive.

- Organization, command and information plans to improve the enemy's command and communication network. The enemy later admitted that communication shortcomings during both phases of the offensive were among the causes of his failure (1).

- City logistic plans based on assistance provided by the in-city organizations and various forms of disguise to transport arms into the city, including fake funerals to bury arms in cemeteries, and commercial transport trucks. Logistical problems were extremely hard for the enemy during the offensive because of deserted streets. The only way for the Viet Cong to get food was to steal it from the population.

- The enemy's antiaircraft methods in the city were based on his contention that only armed helicopters and skyraiders were used by government forces in raids on street blocks occupied by the VC. The documents admitted that air raids caused heavy casualties and great difficulty for the enemy. Their countermeasure consisted of using 12.7 and 12.8mm heavy machineguns with concentrated fire to prevent helicopters from flying low.

- Roadblocking methods consisted of cars parked across the street or at street ends, burning materials, cutdown trees, and debris from demolished houses, etc.

The enemy also envisaged an administrative take-over while giving specific directives to soldiers on what not to do to win the support of the city population.

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(1) We think that the enemy attacks were well coordinated across the country.
What the Communists learned from their general offensive

From their offensive against Saigon, the Viet Cong learned some experiences in city fighting which they claimed were particularly useful. Here are some of their seemingly most sound conclusions:

- Before the offensive, sapper and ranger units as well as city underground elements should be launched deep into the target area. The main attacking force will follow. This was the plan the enemy followed during the second offensive wave in May 1968. The Communist main force was then able to penetrate the 5th, 6th and 7th precincts because it had been preceded in the areas by the sapper, ranger and underground elements. During the first offensive wave the sapper elements were inserted with the main force and were not able to create favorable conditions for the enemy to take control of street blocks.

- In defense of their positions, the Viet Cong would leave only a small force to face our troops while their main force would split into several units which would concentrate when ordered on flank or rear attacks. The enemy called this a combination of defensive and surprise offensive tactics. The size of the surprise offensive force would be from platoon to company strength. Diversionsary tactics and various disguised methods would also be used extensively, particularly in intelligence and reconnaissance operations.

- The movements of combat units into and within the city require easy-to-carry equipment and reduced numbers. Each squad would have no more than 7 men divided into 3 cells: 2 combat cells and 1 anti-tank cell. A platoon would consist of only two squads. But a company should have 5 or 6 platoons as the company is the basic combat unit in city fighting and requires combat support as well as anti-aircraft and engineering supports. The troop movement within the city should be avoided. Destruction of street lamps should be carried out when necessary. Guides must be efficient and as numerous as possible.

As far as weapons are concerned, extensive use of the B.40 and B.41 should be avoided because of their limited effect.
The rockets also are too heavy, and have no serious effects when fired into upper stories of tall buildings. Weapons that should be used include the AT (anti-tank) tromblon, and the Basdor which is stronger and more efficient than the B.40 or B.41. A Basdor bullet can blast through a thin wall, destroy an armored vehicle or bring down a helicopter. In addition, the 60 mm mortar, M.79 and 12.8 anti-aircraft machinegun should also be used. Individual anti-gas masks are also necessary while urine can be used to neutralize the effects of tear gas.
CHAPTER IV

CAUSES OF VIET CONG TET DEFEAT
Causes of Viet Cong Tet defeat

The Communist Tet offensive was the result of long months of planning. In their own judgement, as maintained in a Communist document complementing what was known as their "Decision No 13", the time had come for decisive action on all three fronts - political, military and military proselytizing - to achieve final victory.

The Communists chose to launch their general offensive on a day when it was less expected by the government side: the day of the Tet cease-fire, a truce which the Viet Cong themselves had proposed to expand to three days.

They had changed their strategy of encircling the cities from strong positions in the rural areas into one aimed at taking over the cities in order to liberate the countryside. In case of success of their "general offensive general uprising" plan, they would form a coalition government in Saigon and demand that the United States leave South Vietnam. In case of failure, their forces would go back to the countryside, leaving behind special guerilla and sapper elements to create a permanent state of disorder in the cities.

Tactically speaking, the Communist plan consisted of three phases:

1. Infiltration of guerilla units as well as arms and ammunition into the cities and townships for combined action with underground sapper elements in opening the offensive.

2. Regular enemy forces would subsequently enter the scene and occupy key military and administrative installations, particularly radio stations to broadcast both taped Communist statements and forced appeals to the population by local military and administrative officials.

3. Street demonstrations in support of the Viet Cong, calling for a cease fire and the formation of a coalition government.

In spite of the enemy's determination to win in launching their offensive and its being so well planned, the results
were not what they had expected. Well conceived as it was, their whole scheme collapsed in the end, showing how futile Hanoi's efforts had been in mobilizing all its resources in pursuit of an illusory victory. The Communists, however, will not give up dreaming of winning the war through military efforts beyond the capacities of a small nation and with a party dictatorship machinery that forces innocent people into a destructive, never-ending war.

Much has been written here and throughout the world, on the Communist Tet offensive of 1968 with conflicting assessments of its results. The enemy claimed it was a victory while our side described it as a major defeat. It is therefore extremely difficult for us to put forth arguments of our own in assessing the Tet Mau Than events without the risk of being labelled as not objective.

At the time of this writing, the preliminary peace talks between the United States and the Communists had already begun in Paris in an attempt to bring the war to an end. A new assessment of the causes of the Communist defeat in their 1968 general offensive, therefore, does not seem out of context:

A. - STRATEGY

In their own judgement, the Communists maintained that on the one hand the ARVN had no strength for both offensive and defensive actions and would collapse in the face of a total, surprise attack; and on the other hand, the people of South Vietnam would welcome the Viet Cong forces and would help them destroy the anti-revolutionary Saigon regime.

What actually occurred was the reverse of the Communist prediction. The armed forces of the RVN did fight well and efficiently in both offensive and defensive actions to repel the Communist surprise attack. No ARVN unit surrendered to the enemy although some were under heavy Communist pressure. Only a few withdrawals from isolated posts were reported (1).

No city or provincial town was captured by the enemy, and no key military position fell into enemy hands, while even minor positions remained well defended.

Our reaction was immediate (2) and efficient although at the beginning the Americans were rather slow in joining the fight.

As far as the people were concerned, generally
LTC Phan Viet Dung, Commander of Regiment 65/CT7 as shown meeting with the press 31 May 1968

Phan Van Xuong, Deputy Commander of the Quyet Thang Regiment.
Pictured on 17 June 1968.

LTC Tam Ha, Deputy Political Commissar of Military Region I as interviewed by the press on 16 May 1968.

Most houses destroyed in Saigon have been replaced by apartment houses. Photo above shows the Van Hanh complex building.
speaking there was no sympathy with the enemy. The general reaction of the population throughout the country was recorded as follows:

- Everybody sought to flee the battle scene although the enemy tried hard to prevent people from fleeing;
- Except Hue where a small minority supported the enemy, people in all other cities remained indifferent to the Communist call for rebellion;
- In only a few provinces, peasants were brought into town by the enemy for street demonstrations, but they were stopped and disbanded as soon as they reached the city's outskirts, and showed signs of relief upon escaping enemy hands;
- There were no popular movements. Only leaflets were distributed by some Communist political cadres operating underground.

As early as on the very first day of the general offensive, one could already see the strategic errors of the whole Communist plan. The enemy had indeed underestimated the ARVN strength. A high-ranking VC cadre by the name of Nam Dong, arrested before the offensive, said the Communists believed the ARVN had no capacities for both offensive and defensive actions because ARVN soldiers had no ideal to fight for, being mere mercenaries for the imperialists. The Communists had expected that a general, surprise offensive into key ARVN positions would cause the collapse of the whole RVN army.

Such a reasoning, based on subjective considerations rather than facts, was the cause of the Communist defeat.

The RVN armed forces, indeed, have always been animated by a strong anti-Communist tradition marked by a deep

(1) Throughout the offensive period, the VC radio broadcast false reports of defections to their side by a number of officers and enlisted men of the 2/9 Battalion and the 269th Regional Force Company. In reality, these units were fighting fiercely and inflicted heavy casualties on the enemy.
(2) The reaction was immediate in almost all the cities and townships throughout the country, within no more than 3 hours after the enemy offensive was launched. Hue was a particular case with the reaction force being isolated.

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hatred of the Communist regime. This tradition never faltered under any circumstances. Even in late 1964 when the ARVN was under heavy pressure by overwhelming enemy forces coming from the North, our soldiers accepted many sacrifices in resisting the enemy advance. There was not a single defection or spontaneous abandon of position by any ARVN unit.

Also in 1964 when the country was deep in a political upheaval, no foreign influence was able to alter the nationalist, anti-Communist attitude of the ARVN.

In addition to this anti-Communist tradition, other ARVN characteristics are to be mentioned as determining factors in building up the ARVN combat capacity and willingness:

- The ARVN salary scale shows no big differences between lower and higher grades, thus causing no detriment to the confidence between officers and enlisted men. Such a salary scale could be described as a social revolution which leveled injustices in the armed forces so that all soldiers can feel equal in the treatment received and thereby more enthusiastic in carrying out their duty of national salvation.

- The ARVN soldier's morale is subjected to continued boosting. He is proud of being part of the nation's defense force and regards the act of surrender as an act of betrayal to his dead comrades-in-arms. Close and sincere confidence among soldiers is another ARVN characteristics, although too much confidence often leads to loose discipline (1).

- The ARVN's moral strength was not conspicuous because of the many ills that beset the national life prior to and under the Second Republic. This caused the Viet Cong to believe at first glance that the ARVN was a weakened, ready-to-collapse force.

The same one way judgement on the part of the Viet Cong prevailed in their assessment of the civilian side of the matter. They believed that the populations in cities and townships had been "ripe" for a general uprising "to save the nation from the US imperialist aggression".

(1) People in nearly all cities and townships attacked by the enemy complained they had things stolen from their houses.
The Viet Cong, of course, never admitted before the people that this is an ideological war initiated by themselves with the objective of communization of South Vietnam. The people of South Vietnam are all well aware that prior to 1959 there were no more than 300 American advisors in the country, and that American troops had come here at the request of the RVN government. The people of South Vietnam also know quite well that Communist North Vietnam had the backing of other Communist countries without which its aggression against the South could not have been launched. The presence of American forces in South Vietnam, thus, is regarded by the South Vietnamese as something natural in the nation's anti-aggression process.

Although there are in free South Vietnam various political tendencies which differ from the anti-Communist stand of the majority, these tendencies do not reflect the general attitude of the population itself varies from one part of the country to another. For example, people in the northern part of the South, being poor and full of complexes, are more enthusiastic about politics than people in the southern part where easier living conditions create less interest in political problems. The country's political upheaval in 1963, thus, was marked by small struggle political movements in Hue, Danang and other cities of Central Vietnam while all cities in the western provinces remained quiet. The capital city of Saigon was also calm despite its status as the center of national politics.

A major change was brought to the social face of South Vietnam in the course of 1966 and 1967 by the arrivals of allied troops from the United States, the Republic of Korea, New Zealand, the Philippines, Thailand and Australia, totalling 550,000 men. The presence of these troops made the country's economy prosperous but troublesome.

People in areas where allied troops (1) were stationed were provided with many kinds of jobs in such varied fields as base and airport construction, utility maintenance and repair, rest and recreation, house rent and car wash, and other services, with


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monthly incomes often higher than the salary of a government official. Manpower was much needed for the construction of houses designed for rent to Americans, and for other activities connected with the allied logistics and support operations, providing opportunities for Vietnamese laborers to earn an easy living for themselves. In the meantime those workers with a fixed salary became needy under the crushing monetary volume launched on the market leading to a devaluation of the Vietnamese piaster.

The South Vietnamese economy before the 1968 Tet offensive was one of apparent prosperity mostly to the benefit of two categories of people: firstly the business go betweens, and the laborers, either skilled or unskilled, who had been able to find jobs easily and earned much more money than they were used to, and secondly, those who faced no problems created by the increase of prices as they had reached a standard of living higher than ever before.

The economic factor is vital in the life of human beings. Prosperity causes no discontent while hunger forces people to struggle for a change. In preparing for their general offensive of 1968, the Communists did not realize that what they called the poorer class in South Vietnam had actually been enjoying prosperity and the richer class had become richer, while the petit bourgeois people, who suffered most under the economic circumstances, remained the strongest anti-Communist elements of the community. The Communist plan for a general popular uprising, thus, could not materialize.

B. - TACTICS

A Communist document dated Feb. 9, 1968 captured in Danang - a report to the Communist Command of Zone 5 - listed the enemy's shortcomings in the Tet general offensive. These were regional shortcomings but they were typical of the nationwide pattern:

- The Communists admitted that their forces inside the cities were not strong enough to help the attacking forces from outside reach their goals;

- The combat capabilities of the ARVN had been overestimated by the attacking forces. Therefore, they dared not deploy larger contingents (1).

(1) This contradicts the VC strategic view that underestimated the ARVN strength.
The date and time of the offensive had been delayed without all units being informed, resulting in discrepancies that reduced the initial surprise factor.

The general offensive and general uprising plan was carried out at a time when the ARVN and allied forces were in a "shaky" position (?) and not entirely depressed as they still had 1,200,000 men available (sic).

The same document presented a post-offensive VC reasoning as follows:

"The General Offensive was an operation, a continued fighting phase that will last until the final victory. How long it would last depends on our efforts and leadership".

The operation as envisaged by the VC implied three possible developments:

1. General offensive and general uprising at the same time.

2. General offensive first, followed at a certain point by general uprising.

3. General Offensive without success in inciting the population into general uprising: in this case, the troops must withdraw and regain strength to start all over again.

The Viet Cong said the first development did not occur, the second development was obtained in Hue, and the third development was what happened in all the other cities and townships.

The Communists were defeated in both their strategic and tactical schemes, but they were clever enough to conceal their defeat under some new terminology, a field in which they had been specialized. Unsuccessful as it was in achieving what it had been intended for, the "General Offensive - General Uprising" now had its decisiveness substituted by the notion of protracted, flexible pursuit of the same goal. This was to boost the morale of Communist soldiers which had been on the verge of collapse following the bloody Tet frontal assaults. Communists leaders knew only too well that their troop units were good only for guerilla and countryside warfare, and their participation in frontal attacks against the cities would cause resentment and perplexity among the regional cadres.
They gave to the Tet general offensive a new direction to prove that the party's leadership could not have been mistaken. As a matter of fact, when the general offensive strategy was put out by the party's leadership, regional Communist cadres were much perplexed as to how to implement it to reach the huge goals set. Namely, the heart of the cities. Therefore there was much doubt about the success of the plan at its very onset.

Documents showed that the Communists had to postpone twice the launching of the offensive's first phase. The second phase was originally set for Feb. 15, 1968, but was later postponed to 17 June 1968 and then cancelled altogether, with only indiscriminate mortar and rocket shellings being launched instead. The third phase, originally planned for 22 April, was first delayed until 28 April and later until 5 May 1968.

Internal difficulties also forced the enemy to change their forces, targets and troop itineraries. For example, in the Tri-Thien-Hue area, the Group 8 force replaced the Group 9 force at the last minute. The 2nd sub-zone (North of Long An) had its targets substituted by those of the 3rd sub-zone (Binh Tan) and vice-versa, one day before the offensive. The 9th sub-zone which had originally been scheduled to attack Saigon's 9th Precinct was sent against the Highway Bridge instead.

Major shortcomings also were noted in the enemy's communication and liaison network. No sooner than the offensive was launched did the Communist command lose its contacts with the Saigon front. Units attacking Saigon also were not able to communicate with one another. Communist soldiers fled in complete disorder, and many units got lost. Two companies of the Communist 6th Battalion happened to enter the Phu Tho race track area while their target was somewhere else. The 10th Rangers lost contact with the "R" front command and the sub-zone one command. Political cadres based at Phu Tho Hoa were unable to communicate with the unit attacking the Saigon Radio Station.

Also according to enemy documents, the Communists admitted that although they were able to take control of Hue at the beginning, their offensive plan was upset due to:

- weak defense positions after occupation of the city;
- loss of direction in street fighting;
- loose combined actions, slow deployments;
- untimely use of reserve forces;
- reluctance in concentrating forces for fear of air raids.

Similar circumstances were noted at other places throughout the country:

- the enemy's main forces, with the support of sapper and underground elements, after succeeding in entering the cities, failed in all their attacks against our positions although in some cases the defenders were out numbered;
- the enemy's main forces did not have enough troops after they entered the cities for decisive, quick action against our key positions;
- the attacking forces did not have any rest and lost all their energy after night's fighting; they were able to hold for a few more days only after taking refuge in civilian houses;
- no enemy reinforcement was able to reach the city from outside;
- heavy casualties and losses of weapons were sustained by the enemy everywhere.

Heavy enemy casualties and losses were acclaimed by both local populations and friendly troops throughout the country. People realized that the Communist morale and combat technique were much lower than they used to be before 1954.

Communist soldiers, impressed by large streets and tall buildings they had never seen before, lost their confidence as soon as they heard our counter-offensive gunfire.

Other tactical mistakes on the Communist part were noted in cities such as Quang Ngai where the enemy artillery shelled the city before the infantry waves were launched, and Nhatrang where the Communists concentrated their attacks on minor positions leaving the Special Force Command free to stage a counter-offensive. A similar circumstance occurred in Kontum where the enemy did not attack the 24th Special Zone Command on the first day of the offensive. In Phan Thiet, the enemy's main thrust was against a suburb post.

Generally speaking, Communist soldiers were not battle trained and lacked enthusiasm. Most of them, furthermore, were too young, with many being new recruits. They were sent into the cities, where they fought in disorder, not knowing whether they were winning or losing, or what had been captured or recaptured (as

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in the case of Quang Ngai). Political cadres in seeking to foment an uprising were relying on the troops while the troops were relying on a political success.

Thus, the general offensive strategy of the enemy had been conceived beyond the tactical capabilities of the Communist units in South Vietnam who were but guerilla units unable to cope with conventional warfare facing an opponent army with strong supporting firepower.

All that the general offensive was able to achieve was a propaganda impact and confusion, death and destruction among the urban population, for which the Communists had to pay a high price in human lives and weapons.

C. - POLITICAL

The Viet Cong created a new political organization called the "Alliance of National, Democratic and Peaceful Forces", also called Front Number Two. Why? According to Huynh Tuong, a Khanh Hoa provincial political commissioner who was arrested in Nhatrang during the Tet offensive, stated that even high-ranking VC cadre in the South did not understand this new move. They contended that the "National Liberation Front" had been conducting the war against the American imperialists and the Saigon regime in the name of the people of South Vietnam since the end of 1960, and there was no reason for substituting it with another front. What was harder for them to understand about the formation of the Alliance was the fact that the NLF had been expanded since late 1967 to include more elements as indicated by a change in its name (1).

The issue was quite embarrassing for high-ranking Communist cadre who had to try to explain the new move. As the name "Liberation Front", had been familiar to the people and had brought some significance to the struggle in South Vietnam despite it being actually supported by the North Vietnamese Communists in a war of aggression against the South. Therefore, why change the name.

But North Vietnam had a different viewpoint. Convinced that the 1968 general offensive would lead to a final victory

(1) From "Liberation Front of South Vietnam" to "National Liberation Front of South Vietnam".
Hanoi leaders deemed it necessary to create a new political organization as a timely move that could attract more people from the opposition, increase the possibility of holding direct talks with the United States and gain international recognition in view of the immediate formation of a coalition government.

The new political alliance was formed to include leading elements living in the nationalist zone in order to deceive world public opinion.

After the failure of the general offensive, nobody knew which of the two Communist made fronts in South Vietnam was the main one. What appeared crystal clear to all was the NLF could no longer conceal its nature as a tool of Communist aggression. As far as the "Alliance of National, Democratic and Peaceful Forces" was concerned, it had turned out to be an abortive movement. The Communist general offensive, designed to present it to the world, had failed. In the eyes of the urban populations, it was no less a disguised Communist organization than the NLF.

D. - PROPAGANDA

What was played up by the Communist propaganda machinery through both Hanoi and NLF radios during the Tet general offensive? First, the formation of the so called "Alliance of National, Democratic and Peaceful Forces" in the South was announced. It was the NLF who acted as spokesman for the Alliance, calling for united action to restore "independence, democracy and peace" to the South in view of later national reunification.

The Alliance's avowed aim was to topple the legal government of South Vietnam and to form a neutralist coalition government that would include nationalist elements that oppose the RVN government and the American intervention.

Although the general offensive failed the very day it was launched, the Communist radios kept claiming victories for more than a week, trying to boost the red soldiers' morale. It might be interesting to record these facts here for future generations to judge how untruthful the Communist propaganda was:

A communiqué issued by the Communist command in Saigon - Gia Dinh reported that offensive troops had occupied "within ten days" the ARVN General Staff headquarters, the American
Embassy, the Tan Son Nhut air base, the Go Vap rear area, and had control on most of Saigon's 5th, 6th, 7th and 8th precincts while expanding their thrust into the other precincts. The same communique said Communist troops had taken control of Bien Hoa and Binh Duong cities and the connected bases, the districts of Cu Chi, Ben Cat, Duc Hoa, Thu Duc and Tan Uyen and most of the countryside around. It said that 10,000 allied troops including 3,000 Americans had been killed, while tens of thousand others had defected, and that the whole government machinery in Saigon had collapsed. The communique also claimed that 200 planes, over 600 military vehicles including 200 armored cars had been destroyed, and people from all walks of life in the liberated cities and villages had joined popular self-defense units with "weapons captured from the enemy". It said tens of thousands of ARVN officers, soldiers, police men and officials had joined the "people's ranks"; and all conditions were favorable for a complete final victory.

Another Communist communique, issued by the central area command, had the following contents: "From 30 January to 4 April 1968, our forces smashed key military and administrative organs of the enemy in the cities of My Tho, Ben Tre, Chau Doc, Dinh Tuong, Kien Phong, Go Cong, the towns of Mo Cay, Thanh Phu, Binh Dai, Cho Lach, Cai Lay, Cai Be, Hoa Dong, Tri Ton, Tinh Bien, An Phu, Tuyen Nhon, Kien Binh, Thanh Binh, Hong Ngu. Six sub-area command headquarters, and 4 operational staff commands of the sub-area level were destroyed. 16,000 enemy soldiers including nearly 1,000 Americans were killed. Seven battalions, including one American battalion, three 41-vehicle armor units were annihilated. 14 vessels and 115 military vehicles were destroyed and 13 planes were shot down. In My Tho alone, 5,000 enemy soldiers were put out of combat, 50 posts were completely destroyed, while the Marine Battalion at Cai Lay lost 500 men within three days. In addition, 400 enemy soldiers surrendered to our side. Key highways such as Highway 4, Highway 24, the Cao Lanh - An Huu road, Highway 6 and the Ben Tre - My Tho road were under constant pressure by our troops. We destroyed the Rach Mien bridge and took over the My Thuan ferry..."

A third communique issued by the Command of the western area had the following contents (summary):

"From 31 January to 7 April 1968, simultaneous attacks were launched against the cities and towns of Can Tho,
Soc Trang, Vinh Long, Bac Lieu, Ca Mau, and Rach Gia. The command headquarters of the IV Corps suffered heavy losses; the command headquarters of the 14th, 16th and 32nd Regiments were destroyed. 6,200 enemy soldiers were captured. 25,000 enemy soldiers and cadres were put out of combat. Eight regular battalions were decimated as were the 43rd and 44th Ranger Battalion, the 2/31 Battalion, the Engineer Battalion at Can Tho, the 4/14 Battalion, the 1/15 Battalion, and the 3/32 Battalion. In Vinh Binh alone, 1,200 security and police agencies defected and 1,000 weapons of all kinds were seized. Our forces attacked 7 airfields, inflicting crippling damages to the Lo Te, Vinh Long, Tra Vinh and Ca Mau airfields. 100 planes were shot down and hundreds of military vehicles were destroyed including 40 armored cars. Tens of vessels were captured, as were the two junk bases of Vinh Long and Tra Vinh. The enemy pressure on rural areas was lifted the whole of Soc Xoai town was liberated, and more than 200 posts were smashed.

The enemy command in charge of Thua Thien - Hue also issued a communique with the following contents:

"From 31 January to 9 February 1969, our forces liberated the Thua Thien - Hue area through 175 battles not taking into account hundreds of other battles fought by regional guerilla units. We overran 53 enemy positions, destroyed two prisons, captured more than 10,000 enemy soldiers including 1,800 Americans. The 7th Armor Regiment was annihilated as were 6 enemy battalions including 2 riot police battalions, 1 mechanized transport battalion, 1 engineer battalion, 2 infantry battalions and 17 American companies. The 1st Infantry Division was decimated, with its 1st and 3rd Regiments losing up to 3/4 of their men. The Paratroop Brigade was put out of action. The whole popular force structure including 169 regiments, 18 Revolutionary Development companies were destroyed. 118 planes of all kinds were shot down or destroyed, 250 military vehicles including 60 tanks, and 20 artillery pieces of the 175-mm, 155 mm and 105 mm types were destroyed. 10 war vessels and junks were sunk. 10 arms and ammunition depots were seized, along with 2,000 weapons of all kinds. 12 bridges were blown up. Tens of thousands of people welcomed the formation of a revolutionary government. Youth, students and school boys received arms to form combat units which were ready to fight the enemy after intensive military training. The Americans are now reinforcing the puppet regime's troops in an attempt to recapture Hue. They have suffered heavy casualties and will certainly be defeated."

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All other enemy war communiques were of the same line. All claimed big victories, with particular emphasis on a final victory described as within reach to boost the red soldiers' morale.

On 14 February 1968, marking the 7th anniversary of the unification of the liberation forces in the South, Vo Nguyen Giap declared:

"Looking toward the South, our brother land, the great war front of our nation, all the cadres and soldiers of the Vietnam People's armed forces swear to uphold the heroic, unflexible, lasting and creative spirit of combat as well as the valuable experiences of the soldiers and people in the South, for a closer and more determined action in view of our final victory over the Americans".

A news bulletin issued on 13 February by the NLF news agency announced that the Command of the Liberation forces in the South had warmly praised the various units involved in the general offensive, with most of them being awarded the Liberation Military Medal.

The intensity of the enemy's victory broadcasts later died down, and Liberation Radio returned to its usual themes. The Alliance of National, Democratic and Peaceful Forces was no longer heard of. People in North Vietnam and in Communist controlled areas of the South began to realize that the general offensive had failed. Critical views from the Communist camp were heard for the first time.

According to a dispatch from Hong Kong on Feb. 14, Mao Tse Tung was not pleased with the Communist general offensive in Vietnam. He viewed it as not in accordance with his own doctrine as it violated the basic rule of guerilla warfare by attacking the cities. Mao regarded the VC general offensive as a manifestation of adventurism which used to be the subject of the Red China's biggest ideological conflict before the Cultural Revolution. The conflict opposed Mao and Ly Lap Tam, a member of the Chinese Communist Party - Central Executive Committee's Politburo who was in charge of the Party's propaganda. Ly, who had the backing of almost all the leaders of international Communism, maintained that attacks against cities and the establishment of city bases should be conducted at the same time as guerilla warfare in the countryside.

The defeat of the Communist general offensive was a great disappointment for the people of North Vietnam. It caused much
confusion among the Communist ranks in South Vietnam as they no longer hoped for either a military victory or an early end to the war. They lost their confidence in the Communist leadership. In the face of the American military might, they now realized that a victory would not be as easy as the Hanoi leaders had claimed. They felt they had been pushed into a bloody war where their individual and crew served infantry weapons could hardly fight the mighty air, artillery and armor fire power. They concluded that continued fighting on such a basis would certainly lead them to death.

Communist soldiers from North Vietnam had to endure more sufferings. They missed their wives and children, and were afraid they would die away from home. During their infiltration into the South, they had been deceived by their leaders whose order was to "go and take over" the South as three-fourths of the land had been occupied by "our comrades in the South". In short, the Communist general offensive brought about the collapse of the Red soldiers morale.

Many enemy soldiers killed during the offensive were very young. Most of those arrested were between 14 and 18, and had come from the North. They showed no signs of toughness upon arrest, and would readily tell questioners all they knew. They were in direct contrast to the Communist soldiers arrested before 1954 who never gave any information. Such young boys had been sent by North Vietnam into the South probably because they had no family ties and were considered more enthusiastic.

These youths, however, did not fight with much enthusiasm during the general offensive, as illustrated by the fact that no RVN key positions fell into their hands. This showed that the younger generation of North Vietnamese are less fanatic about Communism than their elders were during the resistance war against the French. Youths fighting the resistance war against the French, in addition to their desire for independence, also wanted to overthrow the feudal regime then prevailing in Vietnam. Now that the feudal regime had been abolished and replaced by a Communist regime which turned out to be no better and even worse, the new youths of North Vietnam felt they had no cause to fight for.

According to Communist returnees, the soldiers in North Vietnam were subjected to a very simple propaganda drive. Without the endless terminology of Marxism and other Communist dogmas, they were guided by the North Vietnamese military leaders. The slogan "Our comrades in the South" was not based on the fact that 90 percent of the South Vietnamese population were in favor of the Communist cause. The people of South Vietnam were not aware of the Communist's propaganda and influence. The civilians of the South and people in rural areas did not know the North Vietnamese general offensive had been overblown. Many friendly relations were made between the North Vietnamese and the South Vietnamese, but the people were not aware of this. The North Vietnamese also did not inform the South Vietnamese that the general offensive was conducted with the assistance of the international Communist movement.

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dogmas, the drive was centered on patriotism: fighting the American imperialists and their puppet regime.

Many North Vietnamese soldiers and people, however, did not ignore that in waging war against the South, their leaders had the assistance of Communist China and the Soviet Union and the influence of both had altered the country's independence. They also were aware that the anti-American call was designed to deceive the people and conceal the true nature of the war: an aggression against South Vietnam, an ideological war that had lost its meaning. This explained the collapse of the Communist morale during and after the general offensive. This collapse marked for the first time by mass surrenders of hundred of Communist soldiers - something that never happened during the resistance war against the French.

Following their acute setback, the enemy retaliated madly by shelling the cities indiscriminately for one month. This was a big mistake in what they claimed to be a people's war. The Communists betrayed their own rule, just because the people in the cities had failed to welcome them. Another retaliation measure was the massacre of civilians in Hue where thousands were executed or buried alive. Ordered by the Communist leadership itself, the massacre shocked public opinion both at home and abroad.

After their defeat in the cities, the enemy returned to rural areas and their usual guerilla activities. Again they claimed they had taken control of the countryside to encircle the cities. But this argument had lost its appeal to the peasants, who had suffered too much from the war and heard too many VC promises to continue to believe the Communists would win. What the Reds claimed as great victories had turned out to be nothing but sheer exploitation, heavy taxes, unpaid labor, destruction and death.

To strengthen their infrastructure in rural areas, the Communists now could rely only on their hard core cadre, reinforced by cadre coming from the North, which further unmasked what they had claimed to be a people's uprising in the South.

Another important fact that should not be overlooked was the defection of high ranking Communist cadre to the government side, something that never occurred during the resistance war against the French. Many returnees under the RVN "Chieu Hoi" program were high ranking Viet Cong cadre. They rallied to the government side for various reasons, but indicated in the final analysis.
that the morale of VC troops had actually collapsed. Following are some typical examples:

- Colonel Tam Ha alias Tran Van Dac, 50, of Binh Thuan province, a high ranking officer in the command staff of the VC 9th Division, rallied the government side after the first wave of enemy attacks against Saigon. He said after the Tet offensive, he was ordered by VC General Tran Van Tra to replenish at all costs his decimated unit in view of a new offensive. He said he found such an order extremely embarrassing and disappointing and this was one of the reasons that prompted him to quit the VC ranks.

- Captain Phan Van Xuong, 44, of Gia Dinh, Deputy Commander of the Quyet Thang Regiment, said since he left South Vietnam to go North after the Geneva Agreement of 1954, he had always thought that there would be two ways for him to see his family again in the South: a complete Communist take over in the South or a defection to the RVN ranks. After years of fighting, he had come to the conclusion that the Reds could never win this war as "it is an aggression war that goes against the aspirations of the South Vietnamese people". The only alternative that remained for him then was to defect. And immediately after his defection, he was able to reunite after 14 years of separation with his wife, Nguyen Thi Ba, a school teacher at Hoc Mon, and his only son, Phan Van Thach.

- Senior Captain Nguyen Cong Tan, deputy VC security chief at Binh Thuan, said a Viet Cong rule stipulated that "three returnees are worth seven Americans or RVN soldiers". This indicated that the Viet Cong tried hard to prevent their men from defecting.

- Senior Captain Nguyen Van Giau, 44, a medical doctor, chief of the VC medical service in the Saigon - Cholon - Gia Dinh special area, who was born in Khanh Hoa, Saigon and had been a Communist Party member for six years, had an active role in the Communist general offensive. He said because of his petit-bourgeois origin - his father was a member of the Democratic Party - he had always been ill treated by the Communist Party despite his 23 years in service of the Communist cause. Giau added that he quit the Communist ranks without any regret as he had always felt he would be purged by the Party in the end.

- Captain Vo Thai Thanh alias Ut, 32, of Can Tho, deputy commander and chief of staff of the Tay Do 2 Regiment, defected to the government side at Chuong Thien in July 1968. Captain
Thanh said he had intended to defect since he was sent by the Party to a Marxist Indoctrination course. Upon comparing the Marxist doctrine with the realities of life, he found out that the doctrine contains nothing but illusions that could bring no real social progress and help eradicate injustices of which he had been a victim throughout his years in service of the Party and Uncle Ho. Thanh said his regiment was decimated in the grand offensive and lost all popular support upon returning to its base area. People who used to be enthusiastic now became cool and indifferent. Communist propaganda no longer attracted them as opposition to the party leadership was growing even openly.

Thanh continued: "I tried hard to explain things to the people but failed to convince any of them... because before the offensive we had told them that our victorious troops would celebrate New Year in Can Tho.

"The people wouldn't listen to us anymore. You cannot deceive them twice: Facing such an audience, we found ourselves in a very embarrassing situation. Party and Front orders indeed had put us in a deadlock. And that's why I quit and joined the government ".

Similar statements were made by many other enemy soldiers who defected to our side after the general offensive. They all indicated that the bamboo curtain had shown signs of being shaken.
CONCLUSION

THE "Tet" Offensive was the largest campaign ever staged by the Viet Cong. It took them over a year to prepare it and all of their resources and resourcefulness to execute the plan of battle that they hoped would shift the military balance in their favor.

Now that the campaign has come to an end with both success and failure characterising its development. The campaign marks a definite turning point in the Vietnam crisis which emphasizes the following points:

In the first place, the "Tet" offensive brought the fighting war to a new degree of intensity in which new strategic and tactical concepts were initiated. The new Viet Cong strategy was mainly based on our subjective assessment of the enemy's capabilities and their troop deployments in-country and diplomatic moves abroad. All moves were aimed at striking a decisive blow. Tactically, the Viet Cong relied on surprise attacks - in the daytime, during a holiday period and in the course of a holiday ceasefire.

In the second place, the general offensive campaign soon became a general retreat. In bringing the war into the cities, the enemy also committed two mistakes: the deployment of an army of guerrillas in cities, and their inaccurate assessment of popular support. These two mistakes resulted in the total failure of their offensive campaign.

In the third place, it somehow brought about the joint participation of US and Viet Cong delegations in the Paris conference. The opening of the Paris talks could be explained by Hanoi's weariness and Washington's desire to placate anti-war sentiments both in the US and abroad. This is definitely a turning point in the struggle which then became more political than military although the first stage of the talks brought about nothing dramatic.

On the side of the Republic of Vietnam armed forces, the "Tet" developments indicated the following shortcomings: (1) Over-confidence in one's strength, thus a prevailing mood of complacency in every walk of life. Too much self-interest which was incompatible with the conditions in a country at war. These shortcomings can be...
partly traced to an attitude of over-reliance on the American allies in spite of the many calls of the nation's leaders to more austerity and dedication to national unity. The feeling of over reliance was still very much intact until the day the enemy struck.

On the part of our American allies, there also was too much optimism.

The VC, too, suffered from this optimism. As they failed to gain their objectives, they soon recognized that the main reason for their failure was that they skipped a stage of the doctrine of revolutionary warfare. This truth was apparent in many captured Communist documents. Moreover, the Viet Cong failure also resulted in incomparable losses in manpower and equipment, followed by deteriorating morale that had its best reflections in their lack of confidence in the traditional Communist strategy and the leadership of the Party.

Following step by step the long "Tet" campaign, one certainly would see more than an indication of Hanoi's war weariness. This had its best reflections in; an ever growing number of teenaged combatants sent to the frontline without adequate preparation, in the dipping morale of Viet Cong troops, who became more and more unwilling to make the necessary sacrifices, and the mounting difficulties faced by the Communist war machinery in bringing so many people and supplies to the Southern frontlines.

The enemy was faced with very much the same dilemma before and after their "Tet" offensive. Since they were unable to win the war militarily in the face of strong allied power, their expectations to achieve a military victory turned into gloom. There lies the reason why the conflict was brought to the conference table that originally saw only the participation of US and North Vietnamese delegates.

In this last phase of the conflict, the enemy again tried in vain to bring the war to the cities of South Vietnam. His failure to achieve any clearcut victories, however, once more resulted in the death of thousands of innocent civilians and the destruction of many populous areas. It also reflected the enemy's resentment at not being supported by the people since there is no other explanation for the pounding of populated areas with 122mm rockets.

In the view of quite a few Vietnamese observers, this also indicates the enemy's inability to enter serious negotiations.
that may result in a lasting peace. Also, the many mass meetings organized by the Viet Cong in the countryside during the "Tet" events proved that in the case of an arrangement for a peaceful conclusion of the conflict, the enemy will not hesitate to resort to terror to win the peaceful contest.

On the basis of the many acts of terror recorded during the campaign, especially in Hue, it can also be said the implacable Viet Cong will be more implacable - especially vis-a-vis those who fail to give them their support. The assassination and mass murder of so many innocent people in the former imperial capital also may indicate the Viet Cong not only want to eliminate all opposition but also all seeds of opposition.

In addition, it can also be said that to strengthen the hands of their representatives at the conference table, the Communists will make a great military effort. The prospect for the future is one of intense fighting following this "Tet" offensive.

Saigon, August 1968