STUDY OF MILITARY SITUATION IN SOUTH VIETNAM
1955-1960

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The armed struggle and the armed forces in Nam-bo before the 1959-1960 general uprising

In the period ending the year 1959 and beginning the year 1960 throughout the Southern part of our country the absolute majority of our compatriots in the rural area had risen up, like a hurricane, in history's first general uprising which turned the Southern revolution from a political struggle into a combined armed and political struggle, and brought about the first great turning point on the anti-US for national salvation path which was filled with difficulties and hardships. Nam Bo was also the place where took place that early revolutionary hurricane which shook the mountains and rivers.

However, the armed struggle and armed forces did not wait until that period to make their appearance in Nam Bo and in many other local areas. Facing a cruel enemy who since 1954 had plunged our compatriots in a sea of blood, through a campaign of white terror unprecedented in our history, our people did not resign themselves to remain inactive. Where there was oppression there was struggle, the pressure of the water broke the dike's wall, that fact had become a law. Not only did the Southern people struggle with all their political strength, they also took up arms and organized themselves in that early period. That process took place in Southern Trung bo, in the Western highlands, especially in the former bases of the revolution, before the uprising of Tra Bong and Western Quang Ngai broke out. In Nam Bo, under definite historic conditions, the armed struggle and armed forces made their early appearance and carried with them many particular characteristics.

The document below will bring up a number of principal lines for the purpose of helping those readers who wish to study or seek to understand an extremely important period of the revolution of the South in general and of Nam Bo in particular.
Appearance of the armed struggle and the formation of armed forces opposing the dictatorial regime of the US lackeys

None other than the Pentagon, the agency directing the US war of aggression in South Viet Nam, admitted that from 1956 through 1959, when the general uprising began, "the quasi totality of those who took up arms were people of South Viet Nam and the reason for their struggle has never been arranged in North Viet Nam. The official position of the US government on an aggression of North Viet Nam against South Viet Nam is totally devoid of a convincing nature "(1). How can they deny an obvious truth?

As everybody knows, since after July 1954, seriously implementing the Geneva Agreement, all the resistance armed forces south of the 17th parallel regrouped to North Viet Nam, and the people's government ceased to exist. The absolute majority of the people of South Viet Nam, including millions of those who previously lived in the large free area under the control of the Democratic Republic of Viet Nam government, were ready to accept a political struggle in order to achieve a peaceful unification of the country through a free general election in both North and South Viet Nam, scheduled for July 1956.

Yet, right at the beginning, when he just took over, Ngo Dinh Diem, instructed by Washington, undertook to repress the people's struggle demanding the serious implementation of the Agreement; he provoked bloody massacres, terrorized the peace movement in the cities and began to eliminate the opposition factions, exterminated the armed forces of such reactionary organizations as the Dai Viet in Quang Tri, Thu Yen, the Quoc Dan Dang in Quang Nam, Quang Ngai, Dinh Dinh, etc...

From mid-1955, 300 days after troops regrouping, Diem made even greater efforts to establish a dictatorial, family-ruling regime. On the one hand, his clique launched a large scale campaign of

terror, called "denunciation of communists", aimed at the patriots and former resisters as well as the revolutionary masses. On the other hand, he deposed Bao Dai, promoted himself to the presidency, destroyed the opposing armed forces such as the Binh Xuyen, Cao Dai, Hoa Hao. Diem also blandly rejected the negotiation on the election for the unification of the country, organized separate election to legalize his regime, totally sabotaged the Geneva Agreement. Since then, Ngo Dinh Diem, under the command stick of the American neo-colonialist, began in earnest to carry out a large scale pacification campaign for the purpose of putting down the revolutionary movement of our people and other opposing forces. Anti-revolutionary violence was used to the maximum. Prisons sprung up like mushrooms, detaining hundreds of thousands of people. The secret pentagon paper confirmed a figure of 100,000 which was still far from the truth (2). This is not to speak of the tens of thousands of people who were killed, maimed or tortured. They committed all the crimes so they could declare that "From now on, we can conclude that the Viet Minh force (that is the patriots and former resisters --author) is disintegrated and has been reduced to impotence" (3). For this reason they pushed the social contradictions to the highest level of tension. Everything had to be solved by violence: the masses' revolutionary violence opposing the anti-revolutionary violence, and a revolutionary war was unavoidable. The Western scholars themselves also confirmed this fact: "The Saigon government had committed many mistakes and made this war (the revolutionary war --author) unavoidable" (4).

That revolutionary war, according to the law, began with the political struggle which was extremely widespread in the South as in Nam Bo, the struggle of the people of all social strata, especially

(2) The Pentagon Paper p.59
(3) The struggle against communist subversion (English text) published by the Information Office of the Republic of VN in Jan. 1957, Saigon
(4) Bernard Fall: The two Viet Nam - Payot Paris 1957, p.362
the rural people, who demanded the negotiation in view of holding
the election for unifying the country, who opposed the terror and
communist denunciation campaign, who demanded freedom, democracy
and welfare. In the years 1955-1956, there were frequent rallies,
street demonstrations gathering 3,000 to 5,000 people, and sometimes
ten thousand people at one time, especially in the Western and
Central Nam Bo areas. At that time the US-Diem clique was still
busy concentrating their forces to attack and destroy the provinces
in the former free zone of Interzone 5, they had not the time to
lay their hands on the rural area of Nam Bo, in the Mekong delta.
In this area, there were large liberated regions or former guerrilla
zones of the anti-French resistance period, where the peasants
were enjoying the achievements of the revolution, of the people's
regime, especially the land policy. Of the 630,000 hectares of
land which the resistance temporarily distributed to the tillers,
564,847 hectares were in Nam Bo, principally in Western and Central
Nam Bo(5). Here, there are immense rice fields, numerous canals,
here, the people lived far away from large communication axes and
enemy political centers, they lived in large communities and were
closely united under a correct leadership, for this reason, they
always had an absolute political superiority over the US-Diem's
lackeys recently implanted in the villages and hamlets. Thanks to
this, the revolutionary stance of the masses, generally speaking,
was intact, the leadership organizations and mass organizations
were maintained.

Meanwhile, the troops proselyting movement which began in the
last period of the anti-French resistance had become a permanent
task of the masses, a task of the entire people. The influence of

(5) Tran Van Giau: South Viet Nam firmly holds the brass wall --The
Scientific Publishing House, Hanoi, 1964, p.199
(6) In 1963, a large scale proselyting campaign aimed at the enemy
and puppets had disintegrated tens of thousands of puppet troops.
the revolution had largely affected the puppet officers and troops. Desertions occurred frequently. This was one of the reasons why the puppet troop strength after 1954 had been reduced to 250,000 men. In Western Nam Bo, scores of companies and several battalions of puppet troops had established good relations with the revolution and were ready to side with the people. We had won even the sympathy of high ranking officers who usually showed a positive attitude toward the revolution and acted accordingly. As for the puppet administration at the base level, in some places it was staffed by our own people, in a majority of other areas it was staffed by people working for both sides.

It was also in this period that, in the face of the extremely reactionary attitude of the Diem administration, the leaders in Nam Bo, who had seen more clearly the cruel nature of the enemy, had decided that there was no other course of action than the use of the masses' revolutionary violence to cope with the enemy. The form of simple political struggle was no longer relevant, it was necessary to prepare all conditions for an unavoidable armed struggle which was prompted by the crimes of the US-Diem clique. During that time, taking advantage of the transitional period between two regimes, robbers and looters (the majority of them were puppet deserters) sprang up in many places. The urgent requirement then was to set up a form of self-defense for the leadership agencies and in the long range it was necessary to set up an armed force to cope with an eventual decisive situation.

For this reason in the villages and hamlets various people's self-defense organizations took shape in the name of defense against robbers and looters. Each village had from one or two squads to one or two platoons. Most of the personnel were youths, patriots and former resisters, a few of them were former troops and guerillas who had returned to their normal life after 1954. They mingled
with the people and took part in the political struggle. When necessary, they equipped themselves with whatever weapons they could lay their hands on in order to fight against the cruel tyrants who were out to hunt for people, or to fight the robbers and looters, or to turn themselves into self defense forces in the demonstrations.

The communist-denunciation activities became more intense day after day, the patriots, the former resisters were unable to live and carry on their struggle in the villages and hamlets. They fled to the former resistance bases where they organized themselves into concentrated armed units of company or battalion size which operated in definite areas. In Western Nam Bo, some provinces such as Rach Gia, Ca Nau, Can Tho saw the formation of these troops with strength from two or three companies to one battalion. Those were the armed organizations born from well-led and well-organized political struggle movements.

Beside these armed organizations there were also "spontaneous" armed organizations. Some units of these organizations were constituted by groups of cadres, resisters or former troopers and guerrillas who because of enemy terrorism had lost contact with their original units. They flocked together, armed themselves and occupied the former resistance bases or war zones where they produced to feed themselves and organized their defense against the Saigon regime that was pursuing them. Since the beginning of 1956 many such armed units made their appearance in Eastern Nam Bo, for instance, the Chin Quy unit in War zone D, the Ba Hung unit in Long Nguyen, the Tu Long unit in Tay Ninh, the Ba Som unit in Bien Hoa, etc. Some of these units were constituted by the brothers having no definite professions, the "tough guys" whom Diem pushed out of the cities and who fled to forests or remote rural areas where they armed themselves to oppose the US-Diem clique and made a living in the style of the "Luong Son Bac heroes" (the equivalent of Robbin Hood --transl.) One of such units was the "Rung Xanh" (Blue forest) unit of the Lieu, Boi brothers in Lai-thieu, Gia-dinh province. In Western and Central Nam Bo there
were similar units of "heroes" such as the Lăng and Dài units in U Minh forests which sometimes gathered up to one thousand people.

At the end of December 1956, more than 600 patriots and former resisters detained in the Bien Hoa prison who could no longer bear the savage oppression of Diem broke jail. They captured the guards, punished the most obdurates of them, seized a number of weapons which were enough to equip a company and fled away. They escaped through the enemy posts and pursuing troops and reached the War zone D and Plain of Reeds where they joined the units which were operating there.

So, from the struggle against repression and terrorism, the struggle defending the people's normal life, defending the people's rights to freedom, democracy and welfare, from the rural to the urban area, were born the people's self defense armed forces under different forms. One fact we cannot overlook is that these forces made their appearance in the rural area of Nam Bo, the innermost part of South Viet Nam.

As mentioned above, since the summer of 1955, Diem began his offensive against the armed forces of the Binh Xuyen and the Cao Dai, Hòa Hao religious sects (hence called the opposing religious sects). The three associated sects fought back. A real war took place, especially in Saigon. Because they were not closely united together, due to Diem's divisive tricks, because they did not have the support of the people, the sects'forces, about 60,000 men strong, were rapidly disintegrated or paralyzed.

If in Quang Tri, Quang Nam the armed units of the opposing organizations were annihilated even after they succeeded to reach the former resistance bases of Ba Long and Tra Dong, the sects in Nam Bo were facing a different fate.

The armed force of the Binh Xuyen, after being pushed out of Saigon, continued their fight until October 1955 in the Nha Be, Can Giuoc area. A number of them surrendered to Diem or were disbanded. Another group of them fled to the Rung Sat area where they made contact
with the patriots and former resistants. The latter had closely watched their desperate struggle in the heart of Saigon, grasped the right opportunity and showed them the correct way to survive and to fight the US-Diem successfully: to win the people's support to use the forests and mountains, the former resistance bases as war zones for a protracted resistance. About 2,000 men under the command of Lieutenant Colonel Vo Van Mon, Chief of Staff, went to the Plain of Reeds, the large majority (of the Binh Xuyen remnant troops) went to War zone D. A number of resistance cadres joined these troops from the beginning.

After pushing the Binh Xuyen out of Saigon, Diem directed his attack at the Hoa Hao in Western and Central Nam Bo. While attacking, Diem also used tricks to buy off and divide the Hoa Haos. In this way Diem quickly dislocated the armed forces of the Hoa Haos. The majority of these troops fanned out in the rural area to continue the fight. They joined the people's large movement against the US-Diem clique. However, very soon, the chieftains of these forces were bought off by Diem, surrendered to Diem or were killed by Diem with the subsequent disintegration of the sect's force. A large majority of these troops joined the Diem army or turned themselves into bandits. About 2,000 of them stuck into the delta to continue their struggle; among them, 300 men under the command of the late Hoa Hao pope's son, fled to Can Tho where they continued to oppose the Saigon regime.

Meanwhile, about 500 troops of the Cao Dai sect—which at that time was wavering under Diem's divisive trick—under the command of Major Le Hoang and Lieutenant Colonel Manh fled to the Duong Minh Chau War zone, in Tay Ninh province, where they relied on the support of the people and former resistants to organize their protracted resistance.

In mid-1956, Diem rejected the holding of the election and the situation had become very tense. He also actively purged his own organization. Tens of thousands of Saigon officers and troopers,
including the people who had joined the sects, the Catholic refugees, the local Catholics, the cadres and youths who had joined the resistance and who had been forced to join the Saigon puppet army, deserted and fled to the rural area, especially in Western Nam Bo. A small number of them joined the forces that were fighting against the US-Diem clique.

So, an armed force was born which fought against the dictatorial fascist regime, lackey of the US neo-colonialists who at the time had kicked out the old French colonialists. In December 1956, in the War zone of the Plain of Reeds the leaders of the religious sects met together and decided to unify their armed forces under a common command: The Cao Thien Hoa Binh general staff (this was the abbreviation for the Cao Dai, Thien Chua --Catholic--, Hoa Hao and Binh Xuyen sects). During this period they were maintaining contact with and receiving financial aid from a number of anti US-Diem exiles living in France and Cambodia.

After they came into being, all the armed forces opposing the US-Diemists strove to consolidate themselves and keep themselves ready for the right opportunity.

The sects' forces, with the help of the former resistsants, improved their organization, educated and trained their troops and turned themselves from an element of the former colonialist army into a revolutionary armed organization. Almost all of them had received a dedicated thought education and had showed a profound and sharp change in understanding, viewpoint and behavior. This fact was easy to explain because the majority of the soldiers and officers/junior of the sects were peasants or laborers. Due to their origin, they had good relations with the people despite the fact that previously they had taken part in crimes committed against the compatriots, also due to their origin, they were able to engage in the extremely difficult and protracted struggle. A number of them had become later good cadres of the liberation troops. A number of the sects' leaders had
later taken part in the founding of the National Liberation Front of South Viet Nam such as Lieutenant Colonel Vo Van Mon, Major Huynh Thanh Mung (Cao Dai).

The armed units that fought the dictatorial regime since the years 1955-1956 had taken actions in support of the political struggle of the people in the villages and hamlets, killed the cruel tyrants, opposed the enemy sweep operations and defended the bases areas.

As for the sects' armed units, in order to demonstrate their strength and break the enemy's military operations into the war zones, they mounted attacks against a number of enemy military positions and politico-economic centers around the base area. The Hoa Hao troops mounted scores of attacks around the U Minh forests. In one such attack on the Cai San road (in April 1956) they wiped out an entire enemy company. The Binh Xuyen and Cao Dai troops carried out armed propaganda activities on the axes of roads 13 and 14 and mounted resounding attacks such as the one in Dau Tieng on October 9, 1956 in which they captured many prisoners and a large quantity of weapons.

The sects' units also coordinated with the people's armed forces to fight battles of a larger scale. The attack against the Ben Cu plantation on October 29, 1956, with the participation of units of Tu Long, Ba Som, Ba Hung, wiped out nearly one enemy company and captured a large quantity of booty and food which helped solve a number of immediate difficulties.

At that time, in order to give a legal status to their activities, the armed forces of the people also operated under the name of the Cao Thien Hoa Binh Alliance.

The birth and existence of the armed forces at that time had a great effect. They encouraged the people's political struggle in the villages and hamlets, strengthened the people's confidence in the revolution when the troops and administration had been regrouped (to the North). On the contrary, the puppet army and administration at
the base level were scared and hesitant. The existence of the armed forces mentioned above, combined with the masses' political strength and the effects of the troop and enemy proselyting activities, created in a number of regions an advantage to the revolution in the balance of forces. In Western Nam Bo, it can be said that as of mid-1956, the force supremacy belonged to the people and thereby the possibility of uprising for seizing power at the village, district level and in a number of provinces.

This objective reality further confirmed the revolutionary violence viewpoint of the key leaders of Nam Bo at that time. From that reality came into being a document of a historic nature titled "Discussion on the revolution in South Viet Nam". That document pointed out the direction and method of struggle for the movement, while citing a number of experiences of activities bearing the nature of violence both in the armed and political fields. That document produced a strong effect in the Central and Southernmost part of Trung Bo. In the last part of December 1956, in a base area, a number of Nam Bo leaders met to assess the situation and decided that for the local movement to survive and develop it was necessary to step up the political struggle while at the same time organizing step by step, depending on local conditions, the armed struggle to support the political struggle.

II

The turning point of the movement, the consolidation and development of the armed forces (1957-1958)

In mid-1956, when the US-Diemists definitely rejected the election in view of unifying the country, stepped up the communist denunciation campaign, launched fiercer attacks, the struggle of the people of South Viet Nam as well as the people of Nam Bo was facing a great challenge. In early 1957, when the entire South Viet Nam, for subjective and objective conditions, was compelled to
continue the political struggle, the revolutionary masses began to show worries, their struggling enthusiasm decreased, the scope of their struggles was reduced. The puppet army commanders, the puppet administrative leaders at the base level who had feared a sudden development of the situation and who had gradually leaned toward the people's side now changed their attitude and showed their opposition to the movement. For this reason, the US-Diemists further stepped up their communist denunciation campaign and unreservedly terrorized the people with the intention to destroy the revolutionary base and snuff out the people's will to struggle for the unification of the country. By the fall of 1957 and the beginning of 1958, thinking that they had uprooted the revolutionary organizations in Central Trung Bo, the US-Diemists switched their "communist denunciation" central effort toward the Kekong delta where they had gathered little success in their previous attack and destruction campaigns. They brought in their able henchmen, with most experience in Trung Bo, to work closely with the local reactionaries in launching a campaign for "eradicating the undercover communists" with the aim to "destroying communism at its roots". Dinh Tuong province (by Tho) was chosen as a principal target from which the campaign would spread to other provinces. Not only detention and imprisonment were multiplied many folds, tortures and killing in the medieval style were also widespread: people were disemboweled, buried alive or had their livers removed. A large number of revolutionary bases were destroyed. Some provinces which after 1954 had been successful in consolidating 50 leadership organizations at the village level now had only one or two such organizations left. One large province, province B, had only one leadership organization left at the village level, in an ethnic minority area. As for the leadership organs at the district level, their loss was 80 per cent in some area and 100 per cent in other areas. The leadership organs at the provincial level suffered heavy losses and were paralyzed in many areas. A reflux period was
taking place. Even in some places of the U Minh base area the enemy was able to muster the compatriots who, marching in horizontal formation, set out to hunt our cadres. The darkest period of the history of the Nam Bo revolution was here.

Because the movement in the villages and hamlets was heavily affected by enemy terrorism, the rural self defense organizations also gradually disappeared. However, many cadres and youths fled from the villages and hamlets to the base areas where they either joined the existing armed units or set up new units. As of mid-1957 in the U Minh base area there still were cadres and people, whose number sometimes reached one thousand, who carried out the struggle under an illegal form. However, as of 1958 the concentrated armed units were no longer able to maintain their existence. In Western Nam Bo, five or six such companies were compelled to disband themselves in order to carry out secret activities. The base area of the Plain of Reeds was under heavy pressure. Many units in this base were compelled to disband themselves, a number of the most resolute cadres were compelled to flee to bases in Eastern Nam Bo which at that time had become the center of the armed struggle. In this situation, the sects' armed forces also suffered a definite disintegration and were compelled to reduce their sizes and activities; a number of them abandoned the struggle.

When the people's armed self defense organizations and the armed forces were weakened, the enemy continued to push forward, the local cruel tyrants were committing more crimes. The key leaders in Nam Bo were learning more "blood-and-bone" experiences which made them more resolute in pursuing the path of violence and they were adjusting the movement accordingly.

On the one hand, the forms of self defense in the hamlets and villages were restored gradually. The killing of cruel tyrants was considered as a major task for preserving the movement. During this
period there were about 20 cases of killing tyrants every month in the delta area which were known to the public. From 1958 onward the killing of tyrants and suppression of traitors had become widespread, especially in the Western Nam Bo area (7). Noteworthy was the fact that a number of prominent cruel tyrants were punished: they included Nguyen Trung Long, a district chief in My Tho province, Le Phu Nhunh, district chief of Dam Doi, Ca Mau province, Le Nhat Huu of O Mon, Can Tho province, Major Le Quang Phong, province chief of Kien Giang, Huynh Van Quy, police chief of Tram Liem district, etc...

On the other hand, the people's armed units and especially the armed units of the sects were consolidated in time. A small number of opposition officer and soldiers remaining in Central and Western Nam Bo were regrouped to Eastern Nam Bo where they joined the sects' troops. Re-orientation courses were conducted successively to prop up their combat spirit which was seriously affected by the sweeping actions of divisions 3, 25, 7 and 13 of the Saigon puppet army, and a severe shortage of food: salt and jungle roots were strictly rationed. The reorganization resulted in the formation of four companies with a command staff. By mid-1957 leadership organizations composed of three to five members were implanted at the base level in each company. The quality of the sects' troops also changed completely.

The Cao Dai units under the command of Major Le Hoang were also
addition of men coming from the provinces, a new concentrated armed unit, unit 250, was formed in War zone D to serve as a core element for the people's armed units. By mid-1958 the Command of Eastern Nam Bo was formally set up which coordinated command action with the sects' command staffs.

During this period, the building of base areas was also carried out with urgency. The Binh Xuyen force in Bien Hoa and Cao Dai force in Tay Ninh had built two base areas in the North-East and North-West. The North-East base was divided into four zones protected by four units. Production of food was also undertaken with urgency to help the troops achieve self-sufficiency in food. Later, when more people fled the provinces to join the base areas, many soldiers' farms were set up throughout the base area of the North-East.

Like in the anti-French resistance period, prior to 1957 our armed forces were sticking around the little space of War zone D. Now the North-East base area was stretched to the North toward the three-border area, that is today's Phước Long, Bình Long, until the border of Trung Bo which was the area our troops had never reached before. The task of proselyting the ethnic minorities was also carried out to win their active support. It was thanks to the broadening of the base area that later Nam Bo was able to establish a liaison corridor with the armed forces of Central Trung Bo and Southernmost Trung Bo.

Thanks to the consolidation of their forces, the broadening of the base area, the people's armed forces and the sects' forces were able to successfully counter the enemy's sweep operations. Since 1957 the enemy already used combined forces of division strength to attack the North-East base from many sides. At the end of 1957 they launched the Trương Tấn Bửu campaign and at the same time swept the Plain of Reeds and Việt Nam-Cambodia border areas. In mid-1958, they launched a strong attack into the South-West area of Bình Dương province and simultaneous sweep operations in Central and Western Nam Bo, especially in the Plain of Reeds, U Minh, Long Châu Hau, Long Châu Sa. At the
end of 1958 they again vigorously swept the North-East (Bien Hoa) and North-West (Tay Ninh) base areas. The people's armed forces and the sects' forces fought back with courage and flexibility. They fought when they had favorable conditions, when they didn't, they eluded the fighting. During the years 1957 and 1958 thousands of enemy troops were killed. On the contrary, they were able to preserve their forces, make their preparations and attack the enemy where he showed his weaknesses. This fact was demonstrated by the following outstanding victories in the years 1957 and 1959:

Linh Thanh (in Thu Dau Mot province), on August 10, 1957 the revolutionary force wiped out the puppet troops and police, seized control of the town and economic center, captured a large quantity of weapons, ten GMC trucks, a large quantity of booty, food and money. These helped the revolutionary force develop its size.

Trai Be in Bien Hoa (September 19, 1957). This was a large lumber yard owned by Tran Le Xuan (that is Madame Ngo Dinh Nhu --transl.) This installation had a military character, it barred all penetration toward the South and served as a base for attacks into the war zone. Attacked by surprise, the enemy ran away, we seized the yard, captured more than 80 armored vehicles and enough weapons to equip more than a platoon. We carried out armed propaganda activities among the yard's workers with considerable effect. Many of these workers later left the enemy area to join the base area where they worked with our troops in the production of food.

Lo Than (charcoal kiln), in Bien Hoa (December 1957): we ambushed an element of an enemy battalion on a sweep operation, we neatly wiped out an enemy company. From then on the enemy rarely ventured into the base area.

With these victories, the troops' spirit was clearly heightened. The armed strength was effectively increased. The sects' units had improved qualitatively. The people's armed units developed quantita-
tively. Unit 250 from company size had grown into a battalion. Other scattered units also received reinforcement. Some of these units had grown into company size. Gradually, with the setting up of the Eastern Nam Bo Military Command and the sects' Command Staffs which operated in good coordination with one another, combat direction was clearly defined. By the end of 1958 these forces fought some significant battles:

Attack on the Dau Tieng district seat in Thu Dau Mot province (October 10, 1958): We used a force composed of a battalion of infantry and a company of special action to mount a direct attack on the district seat center and military command headquarters, we wiped out all enemy troops and forced them to surrender, then we intercepted and smashed an enemy rescue battalion. We destroyed the enemy military and administrative installations, held the place for one day and one night and captured 200 weapons, a quantity of military equipment and food. We carried out armed propaganda activities among the population. Discipline on civilian proselyting was strictly observed by the sects' troops, as a result, our proselyting activities were greatly effective. The foreign plantation owners also agreed to pay taxes to the revolution. After this attack the enemy withdrew from 20 isolated posts in the district to avoid being attacked and annihilated.

Attack on the U.S. Military Assistance Advisory Group (MAAG) headquarters in Bien Hoa (October 25, 1958). At that time there was among the people and armed forces a certain inclination to admire and fear the Americans. Meanwhile, the aggressive advisors behaved arrogantly in the sweep operations. The Command of the revolutionary forces decided to mount an attack right into their den for the purpose of smashing their prestige and heightening that of the movement. We had selected as target the MAAG headquarters in Bien Hoa where there were 36 advisors from the rank of major and above who lived in a concentrated area which showed many weaknesses
(in the defense system). With the assistance of the people and the local leadership organ which provided favorable conditions for its action, a small unit succeeded to sneak into the MAAG headquarters. Attacked by surprise while they were watching a movie show, 13 American officers were killed on the spot, 6 others were wounded and had to be evacuated to the Philippines and Japan for treatment. Later, the US aggressors at the Pentagon confirmed these losses (6).

Activities in killing cruel tyrants and puppet rural officials and the resounding actions of the concentrated armed forces placed the enemy in the face of a danger: the re-emergence of the forms of armed struggle of the people and the growth of the armed forces. None other than the US ambassador E. Lurbrow, then in Saigon, had cried aloud that "the communists and remnants of the religious sects' forces have gathered together and intensified actions". (9)

So, from their darkest days, the political struggles, supported by self defense armed forces, were confirmed in their direction, the armed forces were also reorganized, reinforced in quality and leadership. Not only were we able to frustrate the US-Diemists' plots to sweep and destroy our bases and people's armed forces, we were also able to mount successful offensive attacks. All these factors had created conditions for the outstanding development of the movement in the later period.

III

The period of outstanding development of the armed struggle and armed forces: the 1959-1960 general uprising

From the end of 1959 onward, the period of temporary stability of the Saigon regime was over, a period of serious crisis began. This was the period when the enemy carried out the most barbarous schemes

(8) The Pentagon Papers --p.75
(9) Bernard Fall : The Two Viet Nam --p. 377
to stop the development of our people's revolutionary movement.

Law №10/1959 was promulgated which gave free rein to the shooting and killing. The herding of tribal people into concentration camps in the highlands, the coercion of peasants to move into the aggrovilles or rural development centers in the highlands were carried out with urgency. The US-Diemists also divided the territory into military sweep operation zones and openly carried out the anti-revolutionary war against our people. This was also the period when they dispatched to the rural area of Nam Bo, especially the Mekong delta area, many units of cruel troops such as the "striped uniform" troops (the Rangers --transl.), the commando troops to commit crimes, set up reactionary organizations in the rural area such as the communist-eradicating youths, the "rural self-defense" organizations which carried out terrorism and fierce destruction activities in the villages and hamlets. In Ca Mau, 600 people were killed in a six-month period, in the same period, Can Tho suffered 500 sweep operations.

From the people's extreme hatred of the enemy rose up the revolutionary hurricane of South Viet Nam. There was a seething movement of political struggle demanding freedom, democracy, improvement of the people's living condition, unification of the country, and opposing enemy terrorism. In Western Nam Bo, to counter enemy terrorism, more than 2,000 large scale struggles broke out in the first semester of 1959, with nearly 50,000 people participating. In Eastern Nam Bo, where there was killing and arrest of people there were demonstrations, rallies of people who denounced the enemy crimes and staged face-to-face struggle against the puppet administration. In Tay Ninh thousands of people demonstrated against the enemy pressganging activities. A woman went so far as to slap the face of a province chief. In this period, the masses' organizations, and particularly the leadership organs were re-established at the province and district levels and in a majority of villages, hamlets.

The masses' struggling stance was heightened day after day, its
revolutionary violence character showed more clearly, it strongly hit the puppet administrative organizations at the base level. Hardest hit were the puppet administrative organizations in Western Nam Bo. Since the beginning of 1959 in every district and province struggles broke out under many forms; in those struggles, the people demanded the resignation of the puppet administration personnel or the dismissal of the lackeys. In six months there were 300 instances of overthrowing the "legal" rural puppet officials. In Bac Lieu, Ca Mau, Rach Gia, there were from 30 to 40 such cases every month. In Eastern Nam Bo, in Bien Hoa, Thu Dau Mot, Tay Ninh, hardly one day passed without a henchman of Diem being overthrown. From this situation the destruction of cruel tyrants and puppet officials through armed action was increasingly developed. The US aggressors had to admit that just within the first four months of 1959 there were 119 cases of their henchmen being punished (10).

By the beginning of 1959, when suggestion came from the superior leadership organ on preparations to switch the movement into simultaneous political and military struggle, the people's enthusiasm was already at a high tide. Many uprisings broke out, especially in Western Nam Bo where the people killed the cruel tyrants, destroyed the puppet administrations and made themselves masters of the places. Since June, 1959 the leadership organs in these areas issued appeals urging the peasants to rise up to smash the organs of oppression and kill the obdurate cruel tyrants. In Eastern Nam Bo, during October 1959, the peasants of Chau Thanh, Duong Minh Chau, Ben Cau districts of Tay Ninh province rose up in three successive nights to destroy through armed action the major part of the organs of oppression in the villages and hamlets. The uprisings were spreading from Western and Eastern Nam Bo to Central Nam Bo where a typical example was the uprising of Ben Tre peasants. Here, there were no armed forces to support the uprising, the peasants organized themselves.

(10) The Pentagon Papers - p. 77
equipped themselves with arms, used tricks to seize the enemy post, kill the puppet officials and set up a self-management organ as well as a self-defense guerrilla force for the purpose of countering enemy sweep operation and counter-attack.

Paralleling the masses' uprisings, the military organs at the province and district levels emerged one after the other. Those villages which rose up to destroy the puppet officials also set up their own military commands.

At the end of 1959, in order to step up the general uprising movement and to obtain more weapons for the purpose of rapidly developing the forces, the leadership organ of Nam Bo decided to destroy a large force of the enemy. Tua Hai (Tower 2) was chosen as target.

Tua Hai was the name given to a former military post of the French, it was also known as the Nguyen Thai Hoc fortress, a large army camp of Diem, an advance base guarding the Viet Nam - Cambodia border, it was located 5 km north of Tay Ninh town. This was a large base measuring one kilometer on each side dotted with 24 watch towers manned by one battalion whose personnel took turn to maintain a 24-hour-a-day vigil. Enemy force garrisoned here included two regiments composed mostly of new recruits undergoing military training, a squadron of armored vehicles, one artillery company, all of them were elements of division 13. On January 16, 1960 approximately one battalion of the people's armed force and one battalion of the sects' troops coordinated action in an attack on the base camp. Taking advantage of the enemy's lack of vigilance, as they were busy preparing for the traditional Tet festival (it was the 27th day of the 12th lunar month), and helped by a number of patriotic soldiers, a unit of our special action troops was able to infiltrate the camp and mount an attack from within in coordination with the attack launched by our large force from outside. The enemy was driven into confusion. The new recruits quickly
surrendered. Only a few enemy troops resisted but they were quickly wiped out. We promptly opened the arm depots to seize about 2,500 weapons of all kinds which we used the enemy armored vehicles to carry away. After they realized that our force was small, a number of obdurate officers sent out their units to counter attack and the fighting became a seesaw battle. At this moment a rescue unit of the enemy had arrived from Tay Ninh. Our outer support unit was not able to stop it. It intercepted our convoy and recaptured part of the weapons we were taking away. However, we succeeded to take 1,200 weapons to our base. In this battle, the enemy lost 400 killed including one colonel and one lieutenant colonel; 500 enemy troops were captured who were later released.

After the battle of Tua Hai, the puppet army command staff had to erase the designation of division 13. The political effect of this battle was very great among the people and gave a tremendous push to the development of the general uprising movement. The puppet administration in the villages and hamlets was collapsing on a large scale. The disintegration rate was 50% in one area and 75% in another. All operations were paralyzed, almost all puppet rural officials fled their posts, worked perfunctorily or sided with the people. The quasi totality of the aggregovilles were destroyed.

It was also in that period that the uprising movement of our ethnic minority compatriots in the base areas had strongly developed and had culminated in the Tra Bong uprising. In the coastal plain and in the Western highlands armed actions aimed at killing cruel tyrants and destroying puppet rural administrations were also stepped up.

After the attack on Tua Hai, the armed forces of Eastern Nam Bo underwent a change: they were placed under a unique command, the Eastern Nam Bo liberation armed forces Command. Local forces
in the provinces were also set up with urgency. The base area was urgently consolidated in all aspects to serve as seat for the leadership organ of both Nam Bo and the entire South Viet Nam. Efforts were stepped up to establish a liaison line to Central Viet Nam. The armed forces again mounted repeated large scale attacks destroying large enemy units, army posts, military subsectors or district seats such as Dong Xoai, Long Binh, Phu Rieng. The enemy shrank back considerably. Our base area was broadened and strengthened. All preparations were made for a historical event: the birth of the National Liberation Front of South Viet Nam, right in the Northeast base area, on December 20, 1960. The revolution of South Viet Nam stepped into a new period. The people's armed forces of Nam Bo, under this banner, also achieved outstanding development steps. In Western and Central Nam Bo, the military commands were set up urgently. The concentrated armed units were preserved during the dark years and the armed forces emerged from the villages and hamlets. These were important contributions to the formation and growth of the armed forces of South Viet Nam as a whole.

On February 15, 1961, in War zone D took place an important meeting of the leaders of armed struggle movements and commanders of armed forces throughout South Viet Nam. The meeting was presided over by Mr. Hai Hau, alias Tran Nam Trung, then chief of the military section of the Front, and now Defense Minister in the Provisional Revolutionary Government of the Republic of South Viet Nam. An important decision resulted from the meeting: the unification of all armed forces under a common command: the Liberation Armed Forces Command of South Viet Nam. Thus the 15th of February 1961 entered history as the day of the unification of all liberation armed forces of South Viet Nam.

The birth of the National Liberation Front of South Viet Nam, the establishment of the Command for all liberation armed forces, and the general uprising high tide which enveloped the Mekong delta,
the base areas of former Interzone 5 and began to rise in the low
lands of Central Viet Nam and the Western highlands, had given a
tremendous push to the development of the liberation armed forces
in the entire Nam Bo as well as in Eastern Nam Bo. This development
step was marked by the victorious attack on Phuoc Vinh, provincial seat of Phuoc Thanh province on September 18, 1961.

This place was an administrative and military center of the
enemy lying close to our base area, serving as a rear base for enemy
sweep operations into our Northeast war zone. The enemy force here
was composed of units protecting the enemy agencies, the security
forces, the commando force, several units of popular force, one batta-
ron of civil guard (i.e. Regional Force --transl.) and one Ranger
battalion. Relying on our superior morale, bringing into play our
tactic of combining infantry troops with special actions troops, we
used a smaller force to mount a surprise attack against the enemy.
In the first 30 minutes, we nearly wiped out the entire Ranger batta-
ron, killed and wounded nearly 200 enemy troops, wiped out the
leaders of enemy key control organs (including three majors: one
was province chiefs, one was deputy province chief, one was commander
of the rural pacification campaign), two captains and captured 100
others. The Civil Guard battalion stationed near the town which
came to the rescue was intercepted and put out of action. Our troops
were master of the situation the entire day following the attack;
we captured 400 guns, including one 105 mm cannon, five heavy machine
guns, 20 machine guns, five armed vehicles and released 600 compa-
triots who had been detained by the enemy.

This was a big victory of the liberation troops after Tua Hai
which caused a resounding effect because it was the first time that
an enemy provincial seat was attacked and occupied. The US aggressors' leaders were scared. Later, the Pentagon secret papers confirmed: "The
largest attack which had the effect of stirring up Saigon was the
attack which overran Phuoc Thanh, a province located 55 miles from
Saigon. The Viet Cong occupied this town a whole day, publicly beheaded the province chief, then withdrew" (11). In the face of the situation where "the security of Viet Nam was seriously collapsing in the year 1961", Washington decided that "the Military Assistance Advisory Group be replaced by the US Military Assistance Command (USMACV) on February 9, 1962" (12). This event marked the new step of US intervention and aggression: the special war. Seen from the position of the armed forces of Nam Bo, the victory of Phuoc Thanh marked the culminating point of the development of military strength which was born and grew up entirely in the local area. Afterward, the first main force regiment was of Nam Bo was formed which, along with the armed forces of the whole Nam Bo, was waving high the victorious banner and vigorously advancing on the anti-US path for saving the country.

IV

Some preliminary ideas

1. The development of the revolutionary movement in general, of the armed struggle movement in particular, demonstrated the correctness and success of the revolution of Viet Nam's line. Chairman Ho's teaching said: "In the hardship-filled struggle against the enemy of the class and of the people, it is necessary to use revolutionary violence against counter-revolutionary violence, to seize power and preserve that power" (13). This was a truth which has been confirmed by the reality. However, our leaders also pointed out that to speak of revolutionary violence is not to stress only on armed struggle. Revolutionary violence has two principal forms: political struggle and armed struggle aimed at uprising for the

(11) The Pentagon Papers --p. 93
(12) Bernard Fall: The Two Viet Nam --p. 377
(13) Ho Chi Minh : The great August Revolution opened the road of liberation for all the peoples.
It is necessary and possible to use both forces of violence, the political force of the masses and the armed force of the people, to smash the ruling machinery of the imperialists and their lackeys, establish the people's revolutionary power. However, the utilization of these forces must be flexible, there is time when we must use the form of political struggle, time when we must use the form of armed struggle, and time when we must use a combination of both. The form of struggle is decided by the attitude of the enemy. After 1954, implementing seriously the Geneva Agreement, our people was ready to accept a political struggle to achieve the peaceful unification of the country. On the contrary the enemy had forced us to take up arms. In South Viet Nam, the talented leaders had firmly grasped the revolutionary violence viewpoint, clearly seen the brutal nature of the enemy, foreseen the two possibilities (peaceful struggle and violence), and had made preparations to timely cope with all eventualities. The document "Discussion on the revolution of South Viet Nam" showed a thorough and creative understanding of Viet Nam's revolutionary violence viewpoint as applied to the realistic situation of Nam Bo at that time.

2. The liberation armed forces of Nam Bo were born from the internal conflicts of the dictatorial, fascist, family-ruling regime, a tool of US neo-colonialism. Principally, it was the conflict opposing our people to the US imperialists and their lackeys; besides, there was the conflict between the opposition forces and the US-Diemists. Due to the US-Diemists' brutal attitude, there was no other way to solve these conflicts than the use of violence: the revolutionary violence against the anti-revolutionary violence. It was for this reason that right in the period of decisive political struggle there emerged in the rural area the forms of armed struggle and armed self-defense forces, the formation of concentrated armed forces in the base area. This fact also proved that for the religious sects to survive, they had to open fire against the Diem clique.
and stand on the side of the people whose support they needed in order to carry out a protracted struggle.

It was also for this reason that the armed struggle of our people and the armed forces of Nam Bo bore the deep mark of the national people since their emergence. This reality denied all distorted propaganda words of the enemy. The leaders of the US aggressive war machinery had admitted that "in the years prior to 1959 the Diem regime was almost successful in wiping out the communists (i.e. the patriots and former resisters --author) because the latter were compelled to refrain from fighting back. However, they began to fight back, out of anger, in the period from 1956 to 1957" (14).

3. The birth and formation of the liberation armed forces of Nam Bo showed that the army of the Viet Nam revolution was the offspring of the people, the product of the people's unified front which was constantly consolidated and developed. The liberation armed force was born from the seething revolutionary struggle movement which was spreading from the rural area to the cities and was constituted by the most positive elements of that struggle movement. It was in their struggle for survival that the patriots and former resisters and other elite sons of the people were able to rally the anti-US, anti-Diem, country-loving elements of the Cao Dai, Hoa Hao sects and the Binh Xuyen organization, as well as other elements opposing the Saigon regime. It was this alliance in that particular situation that made positive contribution to the establishment of the National Liberation Front. It was their presence, at an early date, in the ranks of those who opposed the US imperialists and their lackeys that demonstrated the national reconciliation and concord capability of the Vietnamese revolution. It was the supreme interest of the people and the interest of individuals and

(14) The Pentagon Paper --p.73
factions that brought the opposing people together in a spirit of
tional reconciliation and concord, in a common love of the country,
to struggle for a common ideal. It is a significant fact that today,
after so many years, the representatives of these religious sects
still remain in the Central Executive Committee of the National
Liberation Front of South Viet Nam.

4. The armed struggle of the people of Nam Bo, a component of
the armed struggle of the people of South Viet Nam, is the continua-
tion and development of the political struggle movement which existed
since after 1954. Generally speaking, the liberation armed forces
of Nam Bo were principally issued from the masses' political forces.
In final analysis, these forces followed this course: from nothing
to something, from low to high, from small to large. This is the
general rule governing the emergence, existence and development of
revolutionary armed forces. However, the emergence and development
of the liberation armed forces of Nam Bo have the following particu-
lar features:

a) Right at the start, these forces emerged under diffe-
rent forms: the self-defense organizations of the people in the villages
and hamlets, the concentrated units in the base areas, the spontan-
eous units, the regular units of the religious sects which had
been reformed and reorganized. This was the result of the political
situation at that time in which our people was forced to resort to
all forms of resistance to cope with the enemy, it was also the result
of the internal conflicts of the Diem regime as mentioned above. On
the other hand, it was also due to the fact that our people have a
long tradition of armed struggle, especially the fact that our people
had just concluded a glorious resistance war which had given them
valuable experience on armed struggle and the building of armed forces.

b) The armed forces' development had not followed a
regular course. There was period when emerged many different types
of troops which were closely associated with the struggle movement
of the masses, there was period when these forces had to shrink back following the ebb of the revolutionary tide and to exist under hard and difficult conditions in the base areas which were being surrounded by the enemy. However, these forces were able to survive and develop even in the darkest period, because they were led by a correct line and viewpoint which commanded that they constantly relied on the people and served the people, that they endured difficulties and hardship and survived by their own means. The fact that the sects' forces succeeded to survive, develop and achieve victory is an eloquent proof.

4. The uprising of the rural people of Nam Bo which began in late 1959 and grew into general uprising in 1960 was the uprising of the masses which principally used political force in combination with armed force in the killing of cruel tyrants, destruction of the puppet rural administration, attack against enemy posts and counter-attack against enemy sweep operations. However, that general uprising broke out at a time when we had an armed force in the base area to support it and to speed up its development. Conversely, that general uprising also helped the armed forces mature in a short period and develop into large units capable of fighting large battles such as the battles of Tua Hai, Phuoc Thanh and making the enemy feel he was in danger.

That general uprising did not proceed in a relatively short period of time throughout the whole South Viet Nam and end in the seizure of power by the people as did the August Revolution. Rather, it proceeded in a long period of time and took place in areas where there were favorable conditions, its purpose was to switch the revolution from the period of political struggle to the period of simultaneous political and armed struggle. It passed through the process of continuous offensives and uprisings aimed at seizing power, countering enemy counter-attacks and sweep operations, protecting the power in the villages and hamlets, promoting the
people's war and guerrilla war on a broad scale against the aggressive war of the Americans and their lackeys.

Conclusion

The period of struggle filled with hardships and difficulties of the people of Nam Bo from 1954 to 1960, like the period of struggle of the people of the whole South Viet Nam, had entered history. Now, our people are entering a new period of struggle. South Viet Nam after the 1973 Paris Agreement is far different from the South Viet Nam after the 1954 Geneva Accord. However, the basic problems of the revolution, the lessons learned from experience are still burning realities while the Americans continue their military involvement and their lackey Nguyen Van Thieu refuses to implement the Agreement and continues to carry out the anti-revolutionary war against the people.

This document is not complete, it may present shortcomings. The thoughts presented above are not yet accurate or objective, they are only intended to help the readers who wish to study a period of our history which so far has been given only little attention.

December 1973