II. CONTROL AND DIRECTION OF THE WAR AFTER 1960

Hanoi's support of the insurgency in the South expanded rapidly after 1960. The North was not only the external base for direct military and logistic support to the developing conflict as described in Chapter III, but was also the fountainhead for the expanded political apparatus of the Viet Cong, namely, the People's Revolutionary Party (PRP) -- the southern subsidiary of the Lao Dong Party -- and the National Front for the Liberation of South Vietnam (NFLSV). The Front was established by the Vietnamese Communists and has remained tightly controlled by the Communist Party, initially under the traditional party apparatus in the South, and later under the cover of the PRP. The chronological process in the establishment of the Front and the PRP, together with their interlocking links, is described below.

The National Liberation Front

In his speech to the 1960 Party Congress, Le Duan declared that "we" must "help create" "a broad national united front" in South Vietnam with the "worker-peasant alliance" -- i.e., the Communist Party -- "as its basis." Other speeches and documents at the Congress imply that Hanoi was, at the time, already issuing orders behind the scenes for the Front's formation. Such thrusts as this

...
Front must rally..."; "The Front must carry out..." were used in discussing the impending organization.

We now have reason to believe that the decision to launch a new front organization had been made in Hanoi well before the Party Congress, and that Le Duan's statement and others on the Front at the Congress were probably designed mainly to prepare the rank and file of the party and the populace for the new structure. A prisoner of war, for example, has recounted a lecture given in North Vietnam by General Nguyen Van Vinh, chief of the party "Reunification Committee," in which Vinh stated that the 15th Resolution of the Party's Second Central Committee adopted in early 1959 had included a directive to "organize a National Liberation Front under the leadership of the Central Office" with the mission of conducting a "political struggle backed by an armed struggle."59 Other Communist prisoners have also testified that the "Party" established the National Liberation Front.60

The formation of the NPLSV was a logical step for Hanoi, since the Communists in Indochina have persistently operated under the cover of a large "front" movement. While resisting the Japanese during World War II, Ho and his comrades functioned behind the facade of the old Viet Minh league. In 1946, they formed the Hien
Viet, or Vietnam United Front, to conceal Communist direction of war against France. When the focus shifted to South Vietnam after the French War, the North Vietnamese organized the Vietnam Fatherland Front to garner support for "reunification" with the South. This organization, headquartered in North Vietnam, had little success in luring public backing in the South, and thus Hanoi sought to build a new front organization, ostensibly independent and based in the South, with more appeal to the South Vietnamese populace. The North Vietnamese also hoped that the new front, which quickly began to operate in some foreign countries, would serve to bolster the international prestige of the insurgents.

The theory underlying the Communist front movement in Vietnam has been to establish very broad, general objectives which can be accepted by the majority of people, and then to attempt the enlistment of support from every section of the population in an all-embracing political organization. This theory is implicit in the North Vietnamese treatise on revolution in Vietnam, People's War, People's Army, written by Hanoi's minister of defense, Vo Nguyen Giap, and in the earlier work, quoted above by Truong Chinh.

The first public announcement of the formation of the NLFV was made by the insurgents in the South on 20 December 1960. In order,
apparently, to sustain the fiction that the NFLSV was the product of an indigenous band of patriots in the South, Hanoi itself gave no publicity to the new organization until January 1961. Later that month, a Hanoi radio broadcast first aired the Front’s ten-point political program -- a procedure suggestive of Hanoi’s guiding hand in the formation of the organization. On 11 February, Hanoi again broadcast the program using a text which contained significant changes. These changes eliminated material the NVN, apparently on second thought, believed would tend to undercut potential support for the new organization in South Vietnam. Some passages which suggested Communist origin or objectives were altered or deleted. The term “agrarian reform,” for example, was dropped. Vicious and bloody excesses earlier carried out under this slogan in North Vietnam had caused widespread revulsion in the South.

Partly because the Front program concentrated on the political aims of the insurgency, and also because early Front propaganda primarily stressed the political activities of the NFLSV, the impression was created that Hanoi intended the new organization to serve mainly as the overt “political arm” of the Viet Cong. In fact, Hanoi intended that the NFLSV provide a facade covering all facets of Viet Cong activity in South Vietnam, military as well.
as political. Shortly after the Front's formation, for example, it was publicly announced that all the insurgent forces had been organized into the "Liberation Army of South Vietnam" under the leadership of the NFLSV. Today, the Communists attempt to carry out as much insurgent activity as possible in the name of the Front.

No precise estimates are possible on the number of South Vietnamese who have been enrolled by the Communists in the Front, or who should be considered NFLSV members because of occasional participation in the activities of some Front organ. Current estimates, based on fragmentary figures in captured documents, place the number of Front members and active sympathizers at between 700,000 and 800,000. Probably over eighty percent of these are residents of rural areas where the Viet Cong are in firm control or the government presence is very shaky. It should be noted, however, that a substantial portion of the followers living in contested and GVN-controlled areas, as well as a significant number of those participating from Communist-dominated areas, are individuals who are not necessarily attracted to Communist goals in South Vietnam, but who have developed grievances of one sort or another against the Saigon government and who see alliance with the Front as the best means of opposing government policy. These are the people the Communist, using the Front, are avidly seeking to attract.
Behind the scenes, front activities are tightly controlled by the Communists. Several enemy documents have been captured, for example, which describe in considerable detail the role of the Communist Party in organizing and directing the Liberation Army (LAF). A training bulletin of the LAF obtained in Vinh Long Province in 1964 discusses in full the "birth, nature, methods, and tasks" of the Army for the benefit of military cadre. Following are some of the statements from the document:

-- "Since 1959... the Party has pushed the people to arm themselves... and has sparked a fiery revolution."

-- "The Party has guided the Liberation Army in successive stages... in fighting and organization."

-- "The Party directly led the Liberation Army and organized the three Branches." (i.e., regular, local, and guerrilla forces)

-- "The Party set up political cells... committees and the political action system in the Liberation Army."

-- "The Party indoctrinated and trained the Liberation Army unceasingly."

As to the goals of the Liberation Army -- ostensibly a "nationalist" group according to NDLSV propaganda -- the document, probably written in 1962, has the following to say.
"Immediate goal: Overthrow My-Diem (the U.S. and the Diem government in South Vietnam), bring about peace... preparatory to peaceful unification of the country."

"Long term goal: extermination of the depredatory classes... ultimately a socialist, Communist state."

The document notes finally that, "when one refers to the organization of the Army, one has to concern oneself with the organization of the Party."

A copy of the Communist high command's "Regulations for the Party Committee System in the South Vietnam Liberation Army" was captured in III Corps in March 1966. It leads off by noting that the "Liberation Army" is "an instrument for the Party" to "liberate" South Vietnam. "Therefore various Party committee echelons from the village to the top authorities in the South "are responsible for the leadership in every field of various armed and paramilitary forces placed under their supervision." The document goes on to detail the responsibilities for operations and coordination of the Party committees at each level in guiding the LAF.

Communist control of the Front also extends comprehensively through its political sections. This is indicated both by captured documents and by prisoner statements. A Communist captured in 1962,
for example, disclosed that "Front committee leadership at all echelons included a number of Party representatives who directed the implementation of the missions assigned to the committees." He added that, "while in theory" the Front committee in his area "assumed the directing role for the zone's military, political, economic, cultural and social affairs, in reality it did not enjoy very much authority. Its principal activity was that of conducting overt propaganda campaigns among the masses."

A document captured in 1963 described the commanding party role in the affairs of the Front in the Saigon area. It said that the "Front is a national organization under Party leadership" established for the purpose of uniting together all elements opposed to the Government of South Vietnam. Party members, it state, "should be thoroughly acquainted with the Front" and should carry out the "activities of the Front" in such fields as propaganda proselytism.

Perhaps the most accurate statement on the reality of the National Liberation Front was offered by a North Vietnamese naval officer who was captured in a naval action in the Tonkin Gulf in 1966; he is a second generation Communist Party member. According to the lieutenant, "once South Vietnam has been liberated, the NLF/SV will suffer the same fate as the Viet Minh did in North Vietnam after independence was
gained from the French. The Front will atrophy and quickly disappear."

The Communist Party, he indicated, would be the only survivor of all
the Front organs and appendages.65

The People's Revolutionary Party (PRP)

Over a year after the Front was formed, Hanoi decided to give the
party apparatus in the South the appearance of independence by osten-
sibly setting it up as a new party, following the tactics applied in
1951 with the Indochinese Communist Party and the Lao Dong Party. In
January 1962, Hanoi radio announced that a conference of "Marxist-
Leninist" delegates had formed the PRP after a meeting in South Viet-
am.67 The conference decided that "workers, peasants, and laborers
in South Vietnam need a vanguard group" to serve as a "thoroughly
revolutionary party." The PRP, according to the broadcast, had
"volunteered" to join the National Liberation Front.

Despite the efforts of the Vietnamese Communists to portray the
PRP in public as an independent entity, they have readily admitted
in private that the organization is nothing more than a cover name
for the existing Lao Dong Party. A Communist document captured in
1962, for example, contained instructions from a provincial party
in the South to district committees concerning the PRP.68 In
regard to the "cover" of the PRP, it said, its creation "is only
a matter of strategy." In order to "deceive the enemy," it was necessary that the new organ be given the appearance of a "division of the Lao Dong Party into two and the founding of a new party."

Actually, said the document, "our party is nothing but the Lao Dong Party of Vietnam, unified from North to South, under the direction of the Central Executive Committee of the Party, the chief of which is President Ho." The tactic was very similar to that used when the Vietnamese Communist Party publicly remerged in 1951.

A 1966 party directive captured in the delta told cadre the correct party line to take during the annual celebration of the founding of the Indochinese Communist Party. It stated that "on this occasion, the masses who have good sympathy towards the Party should be well informed that the Lao Dong Party and the People's Revolutionary Party are one party headed by the Central Committee with Chairman Ho at the head." The same point was made by the captive North Vietnamese naval officer described above, who had belonged to the party for a number of years. "The Lao Dong and the PRP are one and the same organism," he stated. When North and South Vietnam are united to form one country, "the PRP and the Lao Dong will emerge into the open as one party...under Ho's authority."

Other captured party members in South Vietnam have also described the Lao Dong and PRP as identical.
The organization of the PRP was clearly an effort by Hanoi to further the propaganda image of the insurgency in the South as an indigenous patriotic movement. It also permitted the Communists to gain an open and readily explicable voice in the NFLSV. Front conferences attended by affiliated non-Communist organizations in the Front, for example, could be more easily manipulated through the use of the PRP operating openly at the meetings. There is good evidence that Hanoi wished to avoid, in so far as possible, the connection of NVN with the insurgency in the South, when it was necessary for party spokesman to issue orders or to control the actions of non-Communist sympathizers. A Communist directive captured in 1965, for example, stated that a party unit had recently made a "true copy" of a message signed by Pham Ngoc Thac -- now Hanoi's minister of health -- which bore the line at the top: "Ministry of Public Health, Democratic Republic of Vietnam to the Civilian Medical Section of South Vietnam."

The directive called on the party unit to avoid such disclosures in the future and to disguise the origin of directives received from the North and passed on in the South.70

Similar deceptive practices to cover the NVN role were also called for in another document from a provincial PRP chapter to lower levels written in April 1966.71 This document noted that "recently, the
Liberation news agency and radio referred much to Uncle Ho, party leadership, etc." Such propaganda is "not appropriate," said the document, which added that the "Central Party Committee" directed instead that the "role of the National Liberation Front" should be "praised." Party flags and portraits of Ho, it further stated, could "only be hung in conferences held by party chapters." The "Front flag and portrait of Nguyen Huu Tho" (Chairman of the NPLSV) should be hung at other conferences.

The Organization of the Control Lines from Hanoi

Through the analysis of prisoner statements and captured enemy documents, it is possible to reconstruct the organizational apparatus set up by Hanoi to control the insurgency in South Vietnam. This is a wiring diagram of the insurgency, so to speak. The mechanism includes a party control channel and direct military control over some NVA units by the military high command in Hanoi.

The primary control link, and the one to which all others are ultimately subordinate, runs from the policy-making Central Committee and Politburo in the Lao Dong Party in Hanoi to its top echelon in the South -- the Central Committee of the People's Revolutionary Party. According to one high-level defector -- a colonel from the
the Viet Cong's 5th Division -- the PKP's Central Committee is made up of some 30 to 40 high-ranking Communists. The size and the composition of the committee, which may include representatives from lower echelons, varies from time to time as individuals rotate to and from the North and or within the regions within South Vietnam. Within this committee, the real decision-making power resides in a select group of its highest ranking members, a standing committee commonly known as the Central Office for South Vietnam (COSVN).

Having also worked at COSVN headquarters during part of his service in the South, the defector is particularly knowledgeable on its organization. COSVN corresponds to a regional party secretariat in Communist organizational structure, and the highest ranking member of this elite group is the local party secretary. Since early 1965, this position has reportedly been held by North Vietnamese Senior General Nguyen Chi Thanh. As the highest southern command of the Communist military and political apparatus, COSVN has two major subdivisions -- a Military Affairs Committee (MAC) and a Current Affairs Committee (CAC). The MAC directs the Viet Cong military effort through two subordinate organizations -- a Chief of the General Staff, and a Political Department of the Army. Beginning in 1965 and perhaps even earlier, COSVN has been heavily weighted with prominent North Vietnamese general officers.
The MAC provides the general policy direction for Viet Cong military affairs; however, the NVA military high command in Hanoi has increasingly assumed direct control over some of the military operations in the northern provinces of South Vietnam, particularly since the introduction of entire North Vietnamese Army units beginning in late 1964. According to a North Vietnamese Army major, who was a training officer for Military Region V (MR V) and defected in early 1967, Hanoi, between mid-1965 and 1966, detached two subregions from COSVN's MR V and placed them under its own direct control. \(^7\) North Vietnam, he said, also exercised operational control over certain division-level elements in these two subregions and in the demilitarized zone (DMZ). The existence of special Hanoi control channels into MR V has now been noted by a large number of captured North Vietnamese Army soldiers from the area.

The second major COSVN subdivision, the Current Affairs Committee, controls the political and administrative apparatus of the insurgency. It has never been possible to identify precisely the CAC's Communist leaders, since they use pseudonyms and code names extensively. It functions through some ten internal subdivisions which encompass social and economic support activities as well as security, communications, and proselytism. Knowledgeable defectors report that it is
CONTROL LINES TO THE VIET CONG

LAO DONG PARTY
CENTRAL COMMITTEE

MINISTRY OF
PUBLIC SECURITY

CENTRAL
RESEARCH
BUREAU

CENTRAL
POLITICAL
BUREAU

PEOPLE'S REVOLUTIONARY
PARTY CENTRAL COMMITTEE

MINISTRY OF
NAT'L DEFENSE

REAR
SERVICES

NVA
HIGH CMD

CENTRAL
INTELLIGENCE
AGENTS

LOGISTICS SUPPORT
ECO/MIL SUPPLIES

CURRENT MILITARY
AFFAIRS COMMITTEE

CIVILIAN
PROSELYTIZING

MILITARY
PROSELYTIZING

NATIONAL FRONT
FOR THE LIBERATION
OF SOUTH VIETNAM

PROPAGANDA

SECURITY

ECONOMIC

LOGISTICS SUPPORT
ECO/MIL SUPPLIES

COSVN

MILITARY
AFFAIRS
COMMITTEE

LIBERATION
ARMY

DIRECTLY SUB.
MAIN FORCE
UNITS IN
MR I-VI

"COMMANDS" AND REGIONS IN
NORTHERN SVN DIRECTLY CONTROLLED
BY HANOI

"OPERATION
FRONTS"

2 SUBREGIONS
"THUA THIEN"
"WESTERN"
this "civilian proselytizing" department which provides the main organizational channel between the Communist hierarchy and the Liberation Front.\textsuperscript{74} The highest publicly identified PRP member, Vo Chi Cong, is reliably reported as head of the CAC's civilian proselytizing department, and apparently, is the party man chiefly responsible for directing the Liberation Front.

Regional and Local PRP Organization

Under COSVN, the PRP is organized into zonal or regional, interprovincial, provincial, district, and village committees. (There are numerous captured documents and prisoner interrogations now available which describe the lower echelon organizations of the PRP.)\textsuperscript{75} There are special zonal-level committees for Saigon and possibly other cities. These regional and local committees follow the COSVN structure and operate similarly, serving ultimately as the bridge between COSVN and the village. For example, the regional committee consists of the heads of its military and political sections plus the provincial committee leaders under its jurisdiction. The provincial committees are similarly organized. Judging from captured documents, the party structure seems quite well fleshed out at higher levels, but neither village nor district committees exist universally, particularly in NVN-controlled or in disputed territory.
One of the most important functions of the regional committees is to oversee activities by military units under their aegis and to build up local and main force units. Although the number and types of units under their control vary considerably, regional committees usually supervise regiments, provinces supervise battalions, and districts supervise independent companies. One COSVN directive spelled out the lines of party control over the military for party organizations below COSVN. The regional committee would set up a Military Committee formed of members of the regional Current Affairs Committee and other personnel, perhaps drawn from the military units as well as associated party committees. The committee was to follow orders from the COSVN Military Affairs Committee in cooperation with regional political authorities. Coordination with nonmilitary organizations for military operations was to be done through the regional Current Affairs Committee itself -- another method of insuring complete party control.

In the countryside, the party chapter or cell (chi bo) is the basic organizational unit of the PRP. It is composed of no fewer than three persons. A village committee is usually formed from the membership of local party chapters. The size of the village committee apparently varies with the number of chapters it controls. Its
function organization and duties will also vary considerably, in large measure depending on the degree of Viet Cong control or influence in the local area. In theory, the fully developed village committee will be a miniature of the district committee organization. The village party committee, with main power vested in its Executive Committee, develops and supervises all party and "popular" i.e., (NFLSV) organizations and, when feasible, the administrative organizations in the village.

Party chapters operate clandestinely in villages under the control of the government of Vietnam and attempt to organize secret youth, peasant, and women's organizations in the name of the NFLSV. These organizations seek to involve their participants in anti-government activities, both to undercut governmental control and to build an organization of persons responsive to PRP direction who have been compromised or feel genuinely committed to the Viet Cong cause.

The Overt Viet Cong Leadership

In order to support their assertions that the insurgents represent many shades of popular opposition to the Saigon government, the Vietnamese Communists studded the ostensible leadership of the NFLSV with a number of "progressive" South Vietnamese who could not be
positively identified as card-carrying Communists. These men were to run the day-to-day activities of the Front's public administrative apparatus, while remaining fully pliable to hard-core Communist direction in the background. The objective was to give the Front the appearance of broad representation among workers, religious orders, soldiers, farmers, and intellectuals in South Vietnam. The Viet Cong also attempted to select persons who would add prestige to the NFLSV and who would be capable of winning active public support.

It appears that the Communists had a good deal of difficulty in securing enough suitable personnel for all of the top public posts in the Front. Although the first NFLSV Central Committee announced in March 1962 reserved places for 52 members, it contained only 31 names, most of them unknowns even in South Vietnam. The second Central Committee, announced in January 1964, had only 41 members. Of the 31 who had served on the first committee, only about half retained their posts, suggesting that a number of the original appointees proved incapable of fulfilling their duties. Despite Hanoi's efforts to conceal the Communist domination of the Front, a number of those chosen to fill the top public posts in the NFLSV have known Communist associations.
Most of the top NFLSV leaders are known to have long histories of cooperation with Viet Minh. The chairman of the NFLSV "Central Committee" and the Front's major public spokesman, Nguyen Hau Tho, is a lawyer who has been involved in pro-Communist agitation in Vietnam since the late 1940's. In 1949, for example, Tho was identified as the editor of a clandestine, Viet Minh-supported newspaper in Saigon. He was also active in inciting the rioting in Saigon in 1950 when U.S. warships visited the city. One high-ranking Communist defector has labeled Tho "a straw man," with "no real power." 79

Nguyen Van Hieu, the first secretary general of the Front, was a leftist journalist who had spent most of his career propagandizing in favor of the Communists and North Vietnam. In 1948, for example, he worked in Saigon for Giai Phong (Liberation), the clandestine propaganda organ of the Communist Lien Viet Front. After the Geneva settlement in 1954, Hieu apparently concentrated on propaganda activities in behalf of the Viet Minh in educational and literary circles. A 1955 report listed him as active in the training of Viet Minh cadres for the Saigon area. He was arrested by the South Vietnamese government in 1958 for pro-Communist activities, and released a year later. He apparently moved to a jungle base of the insurgents at that time. In 1963, Hieu relinquished the post of Front secretary general and
went to Prague where he directed the NFLSV's activities in Europe until he was recalled to Vietnam in May 1966. Hieu terms himself a socialist and is chairman of one of the "socialist" parties affiliated with the Front.

Huynh Tan Phat, the present secretary general of the NFLSV, has long been under North Vietnamese tutelage. A native of the South, he was active in the Saigon area during most of his revolutionary career, which began during his student days in the 1930's. In 1944, he was a founding member of the Democratic Party. This organization, set up under the covert leadership of the Indochinese Communist Party as part of the Viet Minh, is still extant as a component of Hanoi's Fatherland Front. In 1947, after a term in French jails, Phat began to be identified directly as a leader in various Viet Minh organizations in the South, mainly as a propaganda official. He was reported present at several meetings attended by Le Duan and other top Communist leaders in the South. He may be a secret Communist.

Tran Buu Khiem, the head of the Front's "Foreign Affairs Commission," is reported by several sources to have been a former chief of security of the Communist apparatus in South Vietnam. He made a short visit to North Vietnam in 1949, probably for training in insurgent operations. In 1954, he apparently went to North Vietnam for several years, returning
to the South with the first waves of infiltrators around 1960. Before his emergence as a Front leader, reportedly, he was in charge of the organization of paramilitary forces in the Saigon area. It is very likely that Tran Buu Khiem is a secret Communist.

Vo Chi Cong, one of the vice chairmen of the Front Central Committee, is even more closely linked with the top Communist leaders in the South. A number of Viet Cong defectors and prisoners have identified Cong as a key figure in the leadership of the party command in the South. He is usually pinpointed as an official responsible for the civilian proselytizing activities of the party. The details of Cong's background are shadowy, although he is known to have been active in Communist front causes since the 1930's and in Viet Minh activities since 1945.

Tran Nam Trung, the name used by another high-ranking member of the Front, is actually the alias of a top Communist leader in the South. Knowledgeable Viet Cong prisoners and defectors during the past several years have consistently identified Tran Nam Trung as Lieutenant General Tan Van Tra, who, as noted earlier in this study, has been active as a top Communist military commander in the South during much of the period since the war against the French. Tra is an alternate member of the Lao Dong Central Committee in Hanoi. He has not appeared in
the North since October 1963 when he apparently reinfilt rated the
South and is now said to be deputy commander of the insurgent armed
forces in the southern section of South Vietnam. It is interesting
that Tra, alias Trung, does not travel abroad or give interviews as
do some other prominent Front leaders like Nguyen Van Hieu. To do
so would doubtless reveal Trung's true identity.

Officers from the North

Aside from the formal mechanism of control exercised through the
chain of command from Hanoi, a more extensive and far reaching informal
control at all levels has been achieved by Hanoi with the infusion of
a large number of North Vietnamese officers into most command levels
in the Communist organization in the South. At present, North Viet-
namese officers have been detected at all levels in the provinces
north of the Saigon area. In the densely populated provinces south
of Saigon, the Communist forces have been able to rely almost entirely
on local cadre and officers. Parts of this area have been virtually
unchallenged Communist preserves since the Viet Minh era, and the
party's political and military apparatus is particularly well entrenched.

A January 1966 document, giving detailed personal history state-
ments of key personnel on the military staff of Communist Military
Region I (MR I), comprising eight provinces northeast and northwest of Saigon, lists 47 officers and senior noncommissioned officers who had been selected to attend a party meeting. Some 30 of the officers listed, ranging from the chief of staff through the heads, deputies, and assistants in such departments as artillery, personnel, and signal service, infiltrated South Vietnam between 1961 and 1965. Seven of those listed, all holding very high posts in the regional command, were born in North Vietnam. Several had arrived in the South in 1961. Dang Huu Thua, for example, who was born in Nam Dinh Province in the North and had been a party member since 1948, was chief of the regional operations and training staff. He had held many military positions in the South with the Viet Minh, had regrouped to the North after the French War and served with the NVA 330th Division before coming South again in 1961. He had been involved in training operations in MR I since that time. Another captured document, which described the party chapter in the training section of MR I, strongly suggests that all the battalion commanders in the section and many of the company commanders were infiltrators and party members in 1965-66.

We know from a high-level enemy defector who had served with the Viet Cong 165A Regiment, an important military unit which operates in the districts around Saigon, that at least 8 of the 20 top officers
at the battalion level in this regiment were infiltrators from North Vietnam as of 1965. Two of them were battalion commanders. Statements by defectors and prisoners who served with other Communist units outside the Mekong River delta indicate that this is not an unusually high percentage. Probably at least one-third of the top leadership at battalion level in the regular Viet Cong units is composed of regroupes and ethnic North Vietnamese who have infiltrated from the North.

Captured prisoners and documents have also revealed that control of the top leadership of the Communist military apparatus in the South is in the hands of individuals from the highest political and military echelons in Hanoi. The presence of North Vietnamese General Tran Van Tra in the South at various times dating back to the French War has been described in a previous section. Several defectors in a position to know have indicated that he is still in the South at the COSVN headquarters where he holds the job of deputy military commander. During the past year, several high-level prisoners and defectors have identified the top Communist leader in the South as General Nguyen Chi Thanh, one of two men holding the rank of "Senior General" in the North Vietnamese armed forces. He arrived in South Vietnam in early 1965, after dropping out of sight in North Vietnam
in late 1964. Recently, a film was captured in the vicinity of COSVN headquarters in South Vietnam which depicted General Thanh in his role as commander of the insurgent forces. Instruction documents bearing Thanh’s name have also been captured in the South.85

Among the other top North Vietnamese military commanders in the South mentioned by defectors and POWs is Lieutenant General Tran Do, an alternate member of the Lao Dong Central Committee in Hanoi.86 He is reported to be at COSVN headquarters as a top political commissar in the insurgent armed forces. North Vietnamese officers who have defected in the I Corps Area indicate that top regional commands in the northern part of South Vietnam are held by General Hoang Van Thai, a deputy chief of staff in the North Vietnamese Army who has not appeared in Hanoi since March 1966 and by Chu Huy Man, a major general in the North Vietnamese Army and a full member of the party’s Central Committee.

Hoang Van Thai apparently has as his deputy, General Nguyen Don, who is also an alternate member of the party’s Central Committee. Don has been repeatedly identified over the past several years as one of the top commanders in the northern part of South Vietnam.87
Continuing Directives from the North

A series of documents captured during the last year has provided additional evidence to show that the Central Committee and the Politburo in Hanoi are still setting down the strategic and overall tactical guidelines on the war. These decisions are then disseminated to the rank and file, either in directives sent South or in instructions fashioned by the southern party command. Among the most revealing of the recently captured documents is the complete text of the letter over the signature of the Lao Dong Party First Secretary Le Duan, which was transmitted to the southern command and reproduced in early 1966 for lower echelons in the South.88.

The letter offers a detailed analysis of the South Vietnamese war situation. It was pegged to the secret 12th Conference of the Lao Dong Party's third Central Committee, which apparently took place late in December 1965, and to the important resolution -- designated Resolution 12 by the Communists -- passed by the Committee. Perhaps the most striking statement in the letter -- one indicative of where the Vietnamese Communist authority for decisions on war and peace resides -- is Le Duan's assertion that the "whole central headquarters has unanimously entrusted to the Politburo" the task of starting political discussions on the war "whenever necessary."
After noting that the war situation in South Vietnam had been discussed by the "Politburo and the central headquarters," Le Duan recapitulated the events since 1963 in South Vietnam and the various Central Committee directives guiding the insurgents during that period. Before the buildup of U.S. forces in the South, he stated, "we were very close to final victory." Resolution 12, he indicated, set forth the proper response to the U.S. buildup.

It called for continued protraction of the war using both guerrilla and large-unit tactics, but with emphasis on gaining victory in the shortest possible time by the concentration of main force units for offensive action. Resolution 12 had been adopted, it should be noted, after U.S. combat troops were beginning to inflict drastic losses on the Communist regular forces in the South. Some voices in the Communist high command, other evidence indicates, were questioning whether the Communists could successfully conduct massed attacks against the American units. These authorities preferred a more defensive posture by the regular forces and greater concentration on guerrilla tactics in order to tie down and sap U.S. offensive strength. The Central Committee, however, decided in favor of continuing the use of concentrated tactics.
Another document, containing a summary of Resolution 12, indicated that the Central Committee hoped to accomplish its strategy by continued large-scale introduction of North Vietnamese troops and their use as the main mobile striking force in South Vietnam. This document, produced in southern North Vietnam in April 1966, but captured in South Vietnam, cited Resolution 12 as the basic authority for the proper line on such tasks as the indoctrination and recruitment of party members. Other captured documents indicate that Resolution 12 was widely disseminated throughout the ranks in both North and South Vietnam, and that it provided the basis for specific tactical instructions to the troops by Communist leaders in the South. A 16 May letter from an unidentified military division in the North to party youth in the division, for example, stated that "led by our Party and instructed by Resolution 12," we have a "sacred appeal" urging us to "infiltrate into South Vietnam to fight." A document captured in the same area on 16 May contains a several page appeal for an "emulation" movement to defeat U.S. and South Vietnamese forces in "execution of the Resolution of the 12th Conference of the Central Committee."

Resolution 12 also provided the basic text for a series of speeches delivered by North Vietnamese military leaders in April and May 1966. For example, a notebook belonging to a COSVN-level cadre which contained
records of a briefing by a man named Vinh -- possibly Nguyen Van Vinh, a deputy chief of staff of the NVA -- was captured in February 1967. The briefing presented a thorough exposition of Hanoi attitudes, expectations, and intentions regarding the war, citing as its source of inspiration the resolutions of the Lao Dong Central Committee in Hanoi. Vinh reportedly admitted that there was a considerable discussion of the proper tactics in meeting the U.S. buildup in the South, but indicated that the Central Committee and the Politburo in Hanoi had resolved the situation and decided on the necessary response. It is possible at some point, according to the notes, that "the North will conduct negotiations while the South continues fighting, or that the South may also participate in negotiations while continuing to fight." However, the situation "is not yet ripe for negotiations." Deciding when it is, is "a task entrusted by the Party Central Committee to the Politburo," again an affirmation that final policy on the war resides with the very top levels in Hanoi.
III. HANOI'S ROLE IN THE SUPPORT OF THE PRESENT WAR IN SOUTH VIETNAM
III. HANOI'S ROLE IN THE SUPPORT OF THE PRESENT WAR
IN SOUTH VIETNAM

Early Support Activities in the North 1959-1963

Even before the early 1959 decision by Hanoi to expand the
military effort in South Vietnam, the North Vietnamese had taken
a number of steps to lay the groundwork for the infiltration of men
and supplies. After the decision, more extensive machinery for the
support of infiltration by land and by sea was authorized. Infiltra­
tion routes were laid out, training centers were established and an
orderly dispatching of infiltration groups was begun. Modern weapons
were introduced during the latter part of this period and the level
of military combat in the South increased markedly. By the end of
1963, the input of manpower and supplies from the North was already
forming an important component of the Communist regular military
structure in South Vietnam.

The Establishment of Land and Sea Infiltration Routes

Although there is evidence that North Vietnam never ceased
sending agents, couriers, and individual cadre into the South after
1954, it was in 1958 that Hanoi took the initial steps to organize
the movement of men and supplies through Laos and across the
demilitarized zone (DMZ) into a coordinated and continuing effort. A captured Communist party member has revealed that North Vietnam was training mountain tribesmen native to Quang Tri and Thua Thien provinces for infiltration support work in early 1958 at a school in the southern section of North Vietnam. The tribesmen were taught how to establish and operate "secret" bases in the mountain region of Laos and South Vietnam. In March 1959, the prisoner and several other Communist cadres left on their first mission to establish such bases and to organize local units to help operate the installations. The prisoner made several such trips before his capture. He also checked on the status of previously established bases and participated in the construction of barracks-type installations in the forest which were to serve as future encampments for infiltrating troops.

Several other Communist prisoners have revealed that they were selected by the North Vietnamese authorities in early 1959 to participate in the organization of "special border-crossing teams" operating across the DMZ into Quang Tri and Thua Thien provinces. According to the prisoners, the teams were used to transport drugs, food, and other necessities to insurgent groups in the South.
More extensive machinery for the support of infiltration by land and sea was authorized and established by Hanoi shortly after the 15th Resolution had been approved by the Central Committee. In April 1959, according to a Communist prisoner who participated in the work, "the Party Central Committee ordered" the formation of the "559th Transportation Group" to "support the depleted Vietnamese Communist bases in the Vietnam." This organization took its designation from the date of its founding, 5 May 1959. According to the source, the "group was directly under the Party Central Committee and in close liaison with the Ministry of Security, the NVA General Staff and the Logistics Bureau."

One major subdivision of the 559th Group, according to another Communist prisoner assigned to the organization, was the "70th Battalion" set up in 1959 in North Vietnam and sent to the Laothian Panhandle as a field unit. This unit "received weapons, ammunition, mail and supplies from Hanoi" and transported them to "where they were turned over to the agency in charge of supplies" for the insurgents. Another function of the 70th Battalion, according to this source, was to "escort units infiltrating from North Vietnam into South Vietnam" and to transport sick and wounded personnel from Thua Thien Province back to North Vietnam.
Both of these organizations are still in operation in greatly expanded form. Numerous captives have described their assignment to the units for work in connection with infiltration. These prisoners indicate that the transport groups organized by Hanoi were capable even in the early period of channeling substantial assistance to the Communists in South Vietnam.

Hanoi also established an extensive seaborne infiltration apparatus beginning in 1959. A number of Communist sources have described the 603d Battalion, formed in June of that year, as the basic unit for clandestine maritime operations into South Vietnam. Cadre for this organization were drawn from North Vietnamese Army (NVA) units. The 603d Battalion was under the command of the NVA General Staff and was in effect a "regular NVA military unit." It was based initially near North Vietnam's Quang Xe naval base, but soon expanded to other ports. Over 250 men comprised the battalion when it was first organized. By December 1959, according to one prisoner's account, the 603d Battalion had 11 "infiltration cells" each supported by one battalion operating from several locations along the North Vietnamese coast. Over the next several years, the 603d Battalion, continued to expand its operations and facilities. A prisoner captured in 1961 had taken part in 11 maritime infiltration missions to the South since 1959.
Training for Infiltration

Apace with the establishment of the logistic apparatus, active preparations also began in North Vietnam for the training and infiltration of large numbers of personnel to assume cadre and command positions in the insurgent military units. By January 1960, a major training center for infiltrators was in operation by the NVA at a military base in Son Tay, northwest of Hanoi. Instruction was given on a variety of military and political subjects useful to personnel operating in South Vietnam.

Other infiltration training operations meanwhile, were simultaneously under development as Hanoi geared to support the developing conflict in the South. The NVA 324th Division was ordered to begin the training of infiltrators in early 1960 in Nghe An Province. This division subsequently trained a very large number of composite groups and integral military units for infiltration. The famous Xuan Mai Infiltration Training Center was also set up during this period southwest of Hanoi in the former barracks of the NVA 338th Brigade. A large number of captured infiltrators have described this school which, by 1961, appears to have been able to handle several 1,000-man classes at one time.
The Infiltration of Men and Supplies

With an understanding of the military and political structure of the North Vietnamese apparatus described in Section II, the real significance of the more than 18,000 persons confirmed by intelligence as having infiltrated into South Vietnam between 1959 and 1963 comes into focus. In addition to the rigid military standards employed to "confirm" the infiltration of the 18,000 men, a process which requires at least two prisoners, returnees, or documents from each group, there is substantial, but less complete, information from captured prisoners and documents indicating that at least 12,500 other infiltrators also moved south between 1959 and 1963. 103

Until late 1963, these infiltrators were virtually all ethnic southerners drawn from the pool of regrouped Viet Minh forces and supporters taken north after the Geneva cease-fire in 1954. According to Communist sources, the southern regroupes in large part were retained in military units in North Vietnam after the French-Indochina War, an indication that Hanoi was even then laying the groundwork for their redeployment south should the need arise. 104 They were formed into the 305th, 324th, 325th, 330th, and 338th Divisions of the North Vietnamese Army. From 1955 to 1959, these divisions were reported
to be composed entirely of South Vietnamese. Thus, most of the infiltrated southerners had already received extensive, disciplined military training for several years in North Vietnam prior to their movement south.

In 1959, after its decision to expand the insurgency in the South, Hanoi began to introduce northern-born soldiers into the divisions in North Vietnam composed of southern regroupes in order to replace the southerners sent south. According to one source, northern personnel in these divisions had increased to 50 percent by 1960 -- an indication of the substantial preparations Hanoi was making for infiltration.

From the interrogation of numerous captured infiltrators, it has been possible to ascertain the identity and composition of many of the groups and units sent south and thus to determine the overall parameters of the infiltration operation. The entry of at least 26 groups of infiltrators comprising some 4,500 personnel in 1959 and 1960 has been confirmed by the interrogation or two or more captured personnel from each group. Captured prisoners and documents have also provided information on the movement of some 75 groups into South Vietnam during 1961. The entry of over 4,100 men in these groups has been confirmed by the statements of two or more prisoners.
from each group. By the end of 1961, therefore, the infiltration of over 8,600 men from North Vietnam can be accepted as confirmed. There is, moreover, substantial, but less complete information from captured prisoners and documents, that some 2,200 other infiltrators also moved south between 1959 and 1961.

Between 1962 and January 1964, the infiltration of over 10,000 cadre and officers from North to South Vietnam has been confirmed by the testimony of numerous prisoners and captured documents. Less extensive, but persuasive evidence of the same type, is available on the infiltration of at least 10,000 other personnel from the North during this period. This was a major increment to the strength of the Communist forces already present in the South.

The numerical aspect of infiltration from the North, moreover, is only one element of the picture. Analysis of prisoner interrogation reports shows that the overwhelming majority of the infiltrators through 1963 were well-trained officers or senior noncommissioned officers who were placed in leading positions within the Communist structure in South Vietnam, commanding all types of military elements from regimental echelons down to the squad level and carrying out a wide range of political assignments. They thus formed the core, in many respects, of the insurgent regular military and political
apparatus and supplied much of the drive and continuity necessary for its growth into a formidable organization. The documents and prisoner interrogations of this period also strongly suggest that at least 50 percent of the infiltrators through 1961, although southerners by birth, were members of the Lao Dong Communist Party.¹¹⁰

One captured prisoner who attended an infiltration course at Son Tay, North Vietnam, in January 1960, in a class of 60, was sent south with his group in March.¹¹¹ All members of his group were experienced officers of NCOs who took leading positions in insurgent units when they arrived in the South. One became a company commander of a Viet Cong unit in Quang Ngai; another became political commissar of a battalion in the same province; another was deputy commander of the same battalion. Thus, Hanoi with veteran personnel retained in the North, was expanding its control over the insurgent units in the South as pace with the growth of the insurgent forces.

At the end of 1960, the strength of the Communist main and local military forces in the South was estimated at just over 5,000, or 10 battalions. By January 1964, these forces had been expanded to over 34,000 troops formed into 29 battalions.¹¹² Local recruitment and the inducement of Viet Minh veterans in the South to return to the cause no doubt accounted for many of these newly formed units.
The exact impact of the more than 18,000 infiltrators confirmed during this period cannot be quantified; however, considering the quality of the cadre who came south, it is certain that the input of manpower from the North was already forming an important component of the Communist structure in South Vietnam.

In the early years through 1961, the Viet Cong forces equipped themselves largely through the capture of weapons from ARVN units and outposts and from caches of old French and U.S. weapons left behind when the Viet Minh regrouped North. Local manufacture of crude hand guns and rifles also supplemented their needs. In 1961, however, Hanoi became more actively involved in Viet Cong supply needs. Modified versions of the French Mat-49 rifle began to appear on the battlefield. The chamber had been reworked to use the standard Communist 7.62 round of ammunition -- a technique requiring factory tooling that the Viet Cong were unable to do themselves, judging from the smooth-bore locally made guns in use at that time and later.

Chinese Communist weapons began to show up in 1962-1963 with the K-50 submachinegun and the Chinese "Red Stock" carbine among the first models to be captured. Those weapons, we know from captured prisoners, were being channeled to the Viet Cong through North Vietnam. Each infiltrator usually brought at least one weapon with him, and crew-served arms were also moved in.
By the end of 1963, approximately seven percent of the total captured weapons in South Vietnam were of Chinese Communist origin. The Viet Cong arsenal was approximately 80 percent composed of U.S. and French weapons which had been cached at the end of the Indochina War. The remainder were homemade guns.113

Expansion of Hanoi’s Support 1964-1965

Optimism in Hanoi was definitely warranted in 1964. The government of Ngo Dinh Diem had fallen in November 1963, and political instability in Saigon was deepening as 1964 wore on. The grim political situation was accompanied by declining effectiveness in the army and the disintegration of the rural hamlet program inaugurated under Diem. In short, the Communists had reason to believe that they were well on their way to victory in South Vietnam, and they made a decision to push for final success by a major step-up in the supply of manpower and materiel to the South.

This step up eventually far outstripped the magnitude of the earlier effort. There was a shift in emphasis in infiltration characterized by the dispatch both of ethnic northerners in great numbers and of entire North Vietnamese regular army battalions and regiments.
It is probable that the decision to inaugurate a further major increase in assistance from the North was at least tentatively made at the 9th session of the third Central Committee in December 1963 which, a captured document states, "assessed the balance of forces between us and the enemy and set forth plans and guidelines to win the special war." We know that Hanoi convened a "special political conference" in Marky 1964 to publicize the "new tasks" of the North to the populace. At the March conference, Ho Chi Minh called on "every person" in the North to "work as hard as two in order to compensate for our brothers in the South." Party leaders asserted that the war in the South was moving very favorably for the insurgents. "Our people," they said, "are currently engaged in a continuous attack." The "political crisis" in Saigon is becoming more severe and the "political authority" of the government is "steadily declining."

It is worth noting that the North Vietnamese decision to inaugurate a quantum jump in support of the war effort was taken and partially implemented well prior to the appearance of U.S. combat troops in South Vietnam in February of 1965. A North Vietnamese soldier who infiltrated in late 1964 said his superiors told him in the North before infiltration that "the South is now in a situation of turmoil"
and fever. Southerners are longing for the help of NVA soldiers to unify the country quickly. 116

Infiltration: A Shift in Emphasis

The decision to use ethnic Northern cadre rather than regrouped southerners for the big push was to some extent forced on Hanoi by the depletion of its pool of physically-fit regroupees. Many of those in fighting trim during the French War were no longer up to the rigors of the trek south and the subsequent campaigning. Analysis of POW statements and captured documents indicates that at least 50 percent of the infiltrators during 1964 were natives of North Vietnam. Many of these men were draftees, and it appears that Hanoi intended them for cannon-fodder in southern units, in contrast to the well-trained cadre sent south in earlier years.

Le Pham Hung, for example, a private first class, was captured in Thua Thien Province. 117 He was a native of Nam Dinh in North Vietnam. After service in the North Vietnamese Army, he came south in May 1964 with a group of 90 North Vietnamese draftees. Another prisoner from a Viet Cong regiment which operated in Quang Ngai Province stated that native North Vietnamese troops began to reinforce his unit in the early part of 1964. The first batch consisted of some 80 replacements. 118
During the first six months of 1964, Hanoi’s efforts to supply manpower to the forces in the South continued along previous lines with more than a thousand men a month coming south. However, at least some elements of the North Vietnamese Army regular units began preparation for infiltration as early as April 1964. Nguyen Van Dung, a deserter who was a member of the 23d Transportation Battalion of the 95th Regiment of the 325th Division, reported that his unit was recalled from duty in Laos to North Vietnam in April to begin preparations for the move south.

In August 1964, the first entirely North Vietnamese tactical unit, the 808th Battalion, left the North. It arrived in South Vietnam in November to take its place as an integral northern tactical unit fighting side-by-side with southern forces. This deployment was followed in the fall of the year by the movement of the first elements of the North Vietnamese 325th Division. The 95th Regiment of the division arrived in South Vietnam in December 1964; the 101st Regiment in February 1965; and the 18th Regiment in April 1965. Numerous captured prisoners have described the infiltration training of these units of the 325th Division, their trek South, and the retention in NVN of cadre personnel to form the core of new 325th Division regiments who would be sent south in a new cycle of infiltration by the division in the fall of 1965.
Typical of the captured prisoners from this first cycle of infiltration was Nguyen Van Giap, an assistant platoon leader in the 95th Regiment of the 325th Division.\footnote{122} He was captured in July in Phú Bôn Province. Born in Thanh Hoa Province in North Vietnam, he was drafted into the 325th Division in June 1963. He served first with his regiment in the northern Laotian Panhandle assisting the Pathet Lao in maintaining control over this key area. In April 1964, according to Giap, his regiment was ordered to leave Laos and return to North Vietnam "for preparation to infiltrate the South." In November 1964, the 95th Regiment began to move South after several months of special training on military and political tactics to be used in South Vietnam. Its infiltrating strength was about 2,000 men, the vast bulk of whom were ethnic North Vietnamese. Throughout early 1965, the regiment participated in several devastating attacks on the government's regular army units in the vicinity of Route 19 in Phú Bôn Province in South Vietnam.

Next to arrive in South Vietnam was the 101st Regiment which entered South Vietnam in February 1965 at a strength of around 2,000. According to Nguyễn Đức Xê, who was born in Hải Dương Province in North Vietnam and served in the South with the regiment, about 10 percent of the regiment's rank and file soldiers were party members.
Another 70 percent, however, belonged to the party youth group, which is routinely the first step into party membership for young cadre. The party youth are a highly indoctrinated, well-motivated and disciplined element of the populace in North Vietnam, highly sympathetic with Hanoi's objectives. According to Xe, the mission of the 101st Regiment was to "liberate the areas along National Route 14 in Kontum Province and occupy ARVN posts.\textsuperscript{123}

The final regiment of the 325th Division to arrive in the first cycle of infiltration was the 18th Regiment which entered the South in April 1965 with an estimated strength of 2,000 men. According to Nguyen Xuan Dai, a captive from the unit who was drafted into the army in November 1964, the unit left the North in February and arrived in April in Kontum Province. This source was wounded in an attack on government post in Binh Dinh Province in January 1966 and was captured after the battle.\textsuperscript{124}

Following the arrival of the three regiments of the 325th Division -- which numbered about 6,000 men -- additional service units to support them were prepared for infiltration. These included a transportation battalions as well as medical, security, signal, and engineer companies. According to Nguyen Ngoc Tri, a deserter who was a member of the 20th Transportation Battalion, these units began their infiltration in March 1965 and arrived in South Vietnam in June.\textsuperscript{125}
In addition to readying regular line units of the North Vietnamese Army for infiltration in the spring of 1964, Hanoi also formed separate regimental-sized units specifically for dispatch to the South. One of these, the 32d Regiment, was activated sometime in the spring of 1964. Its personnel were drawn from various North Vietnamese Army units. Draftees who received their training at Son Tay and Xuan Mai were also added to the 32d Regiment. The regiment began its infiltration in the fall of 1964, and all three battalions had arrived in South Vietnam by March 1965.

In July 1965, four more line regiments of the North Vietnamese Army were readied and sent south. According to a number of prisoners, the 22d Regiment and the 250th Regiment, each composed of about 2,000 men, left North Vietnam. They were followed by the 33d and the 66th North Vietnamese Army Regiments. All four of these regiments deployed to the northern portions of South Vietnam, adding about 6,500 troops to the force structure.

Later in 1965, four additional regiments were readied and sent South to augment the force structure in the northern half of South Vietnam. The 6th NVA Regiment was formed out of one Viet Cong battalion and two North Vietnamese battalions. The 21st NVA Regiment departed the North in August and arrived in Quang Tin Province in December, and the first two rebuilt regiments of the
original 325th Division, the 18B and 95B, began their treks south in December 1965, arriving in Phu Yen and Kontum provinces in February and March 1966.133-134

The overall effect of the infiltration of regular North Vietnamese Army units during 1964 and 1965 was an addition to 12 regiments with approximately 32 battalions to the combined North Vietnamese Army/Viet Cong force structure.135 The overall combined Communist military force structure in South Vietnam expanded from 29 battalions in early 1964 to 98 battalions in late 1965. At the end of 1965, the total main and local force structure, including those in North Vietnamese regular units, numbered some 84,000 troops. North Vietnamese regulars in organic units, such as the regiments of the 325th Division, accounted for more than 26,000 of these.

From a tactical standpoint, Hanoi apparently planned from the start to use the infiltrated NVA units as a mobile and flexible reserve, capable of contributing strongly to the classic concentration of forces relied on by the Communists before major attacks. By dint of their mobility, discipline, and military prowess the regular North Vietnamese Army units would help the Communists pose threats in widely separated areas of South Vietnam. The overall enemy strategy for 1964 appeared to focus on conducting widespread attacks which would force ARVN to thin out its general reserve of mobile forces in striving to
meet the assaults. The great bulk of ARVN troops were tied down on security missions throughout the country, and the general reserve was the only remaining flexible reaction force. By mounting large and widespread attacks during 1964, Communist forces managed to whipsaw the ARVN general reserve force from one end of the country to the other, each time reducing its fighting effectiveness.

By the fall of 1964, the Communists succeeded in forcing ARVN to commit the last of its general reserve to security roles in the Quang Ngai area. In December, the Communist apparently decided to move in for the kill, setting the stage for the Binh Gia battle which marked the opening of the third phase of the war, a campaign of maneuver with multi-regimental operations.

Communist forces maintained their pressure throughout the country during early 1965 with four battalion-size attacks through the end of February. In March, however, with the arrival of the first regiments of the 325th Division in the Central Highlands, the Communists shifted their emphasis to this area, and began a fierce campaign.

During March and April, the first elements of the North Vietnamese units clashed with ARVN. The 101st NVA Regiment engaged an ARVN ranger battalion northwest of Kontum City in Kontum Province, and the 18th and 95th NVA Regiments, deployed in Binh Dinh Province, conducted major actions against the ARVN near Qui Nhơn in April.