East Asia

Southeast Asia

THE DECISIVE YEARS:
MEMOIRS OF VIETNAMESE SENIOR GENERAL HOANG VAN THAI
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Dear Readers,

The great victory of the spring of 1975 concluded our people's long resistance war against the U.S.-imperialist aggressors.

After U.S. troops were sent to the South, at the beginning of 1966, I was sent south to disseminate the resolution of the 12th Plenum of the Party Central Committee in Military Region 5 and the Central Highlands theater. Then, in accordance with a decision by the Political Bureau, I remained there to participate in guiding the B1 (Military Region 5) theater. In October 1967 I was sent to work with the Central Office of South Vietnam (COSVN) in guiding the B2 (Nam Bo) theater. After the Paris Agreement was signed I, along with my colleagues in the B2 theater, went north to report on the situation and participate in the 21st Plenum of the Party Central Committee, after which I remained in the north to work at the General Staff until the South was completely liberated.

On the occasion of the 10th anniversary of Great-Victory Spring, the People's Army Publishing House, implementing a resolution of the Political Bureau on organizing the major anniversaries during the 1984-1985 2-year period, requested me to write these memoirs. By means of this book I would like to introduce to readers the activities of the Political Bureau, the Central Committee, the Party Military Commission of the Party Central Committee, and the strategic staff organs of the party during the last years of the war, from 1973 to 1975. I hope that this book will help its readers more clearly realize our party's strategic skill in the phase which decided the final victory of the enterprise of national liberation.

The outstanding development of the party's war guidance art in the 1973-1975 period was one of the decisive factors which led to the Great-Victory Spring.
After the Paris Agreement was signed, in view of the plots and acts of the United States and its lackeys, which openly and brazenly sabotaged the agreement, our party analyzed the situation in an objective, scientific manner in order to correctly determine the path of advance of the revolution in the South. Throughout the 1973-1974 2-year period our party led the army and people in both resolutely defeating the U.S. puppet pacification and encroachment plan and resolutely creating a new status and a new strength which were increasingly advantageous to us, in the great rear area in the North, on the strategic transportation route, and especially on the great front line in the South. With the new status and strength that had been prepared to await a strategic opportunity, at the beginning of the 1974-1975 dry season the party very adroitly discovered that a new factor had appeared on the battlefield and affirmed that the strategic opportunity was ripe. It therefore promptly made an accurate strategic decision and boldly accelerated the formation of a high tide of general offensive on all battlefields if the South. During the spring of 1975, especially after the Buon Ma Thuot victory, in a common strategic situation that was developing in an increasingly advantageous manner, our party continually supplemented its strategic decision to win the greatest possible victory as rapidly as possible. Fully understanding the decision of the Political Bureau and the Military Party Commission of the Party Central Committee, the leadership and command echelons on the battlefields guided the fighting, the annihilation of the enemy, and the liberation of the localities, while concentrating elite forces and making extremely urgent preparations to strike the final strategic war-deciding blow, liberate Saigon, and completely liberate the South. Under the wise, responsive, and timely collective guidance of the Political Bureau and the Military Commission, the localities, battlefields, and units took the initiative, were creative, rode forward on the crest of victory, and oriented all actions toward the slogan, "miraculous speed, boldness, surprise, and certain victory." With the results of mobilizing the great manpower and materiel resources of the entire nation, by means of three strategic war-deciding blows (the liberation of the Central Highlands, the liberation of Hue-Da Nang, and the liberation of Saigon and the Mekong Delta), our soldiers and people outstandingly fulfilled the 2-year strategic plan within a period of 2 months, won complete victory in the enterprise of liberating the South, and unified the nation.

Because of limited ability and time, and because the book concentrates on the activities of the general headquarters in the phase of concluding the war, it deals in only a general way with activities on the battlefields and other activities on a nationwide scale.

On this occasion, I would like to sincerely thank the war recapitulation and military history research organs at the central level and in Military Region 5, the Southern Military History Department, and many other comrades who provided documents and contributed many valuable opinions in the process of preparing and writing this book.

Also because of limited ability and time, and because the topic, although limited, is still very large, it is certain that the book cannot be free of deficiencies and weaknesses. I eagerly await comments from readers.
Chapter One

The Battlefields Were Not Yet Silent

During the final months of 1972, the work atmosphere in CDSVN and the Regional Command was truly urgent and tense. We in B2 (1) were continually receiving communiques from the Political Bureau, the Military Commission, and Sau Tho (2) and Xuan Thuy in Paris, informing us of each development in the diplomatic struggle between ourselves and the enemy.

We and the United States agreed on 31 October 1972 to initial an agreement to which the two sides had agreed.

The Political Bureau also directed us with regard to the direction for organizing the four-party and two-party military commissions and reported on the role of the International Commission of Control and Supervision and the National Council of Reconciliation and Concord, made up of three equal components, while also giving direction on tasks that had to be carried out and prepared in order to implement the Agreement.

As everyone knows, the U.S. side reneged and refused to sign at the designated time. After Nixon was elected to a second term the United States demanded the amendment of many points of real substance in the agreement to which the two sides had agreed. They continued to demand "the withdrawal of troops to the North."

Clearly, it was necessary to step up military activities in the spirit of the message Ba (3) had sent us in August, not only in order to back up the negotiations but also to create an advantageous position when the Agreement was signed.

In a message sent to COSVN and the Regional Command on 8 November 1972, Van (4) reminded us of the Political Bureau's observation on the two possibilities (the war could continue for years or could conclude at a rather early date). We had to prepare for both of those possibilities.

They had foreseen that sooner or later the U.S. side would have to sign the Agreement, and that under those conditions the most complicated problems would be the ceasefire and determining the two sides' areas of control and procedures for receiving troops. The message also brought our attention to specific matters about which we should think and report for consideration by the Political Bureau and the Military Commission of the Party Central Committee.

At the end of November 1972 we were monitoring the battlefield and had been informed by the General Staff. It was becoming increasingly clear that during the past 2 months, the United States had been trying to strengthen the puppets' forces and was reverting to sending weapons and war equipment to South Vietnam (5). They were providing support so that the puppet troops could step up
their encroachment and terror activities, in order to improve their position. Clearly, the United State was in a situation of having to withdraw its troops from South Vietnam, but wanted to conclude the war from a position of strength and wanted their lackeys to stand firm and become stronger.

A few days later the Political Bureau affirmed that in actuality the United States was plotting to maintain its involvement in a new form and was strengthening the puppet forces so that they could be superior to ours, while endeavoring to weaken our forces. And even before we and the United States had reached accord on the Agreement, the United States had the Thieu administration to prepare to sabotage it.

On 27 November 1972 the Military Commission of the Party Central Committee informed us that it was very possible that the enemy would resume their attacks on the North to an even more serious degree, including the use of B52's to carry out mass attacks on Hanoi and Hai Phong. A week later the Political Bureau directed us that immediate preparations had to be made to cope with the contingency of the United States foolishly resuming its attacks in the North and the negotiations again being interrupted.

We learned that Sau Tho had returned to Hanoi at about the same time we learned that the United States had sent B52 bombers to bomb the North.

In fact, even then we were very confident that we would win, but were not completely certain what the capabilities of our soldiers and people in the North to counter the enemy's strategic air raids were. A number of propaganda-training cadres were assigned responsibility for monitoring the Voice of Vietnam and news of the fight against the enemy's B52's by our air-defense troops and air force.

During the first 2 days (18 and 19 December) we felt that the broadcasting station was at times experiencing difficulty. Worries we had 25 years ago resurfaced in our minds. Then, at the end of 1947, the enemy used 20,000 troops to attack the Viet Bac base area, in which the Voice of Vietnam radio station was located. Uncle Ho directed the High Command to, by all means, protect the station and ensure that the voice of the resistance war was not interrupted. The Viet Bac campaign concluded victoriously. The broadcasting station personnel ensured the station's continuous activity.

Now, during those memorable final days of 1972, we were very moved when our worry passed and we continued to hear the familiar, clear voice of the announcer coming from Hanoi. "This is the Voice of Vietnam, broadcast from Hanoi, the capital of the Democratic Republic of Vietnam." The news that on 18 December eight enemy airplanes had been shot down in the skies of the North, including three B52's, two of which had been shot down on the spot, and that seven enemy pilots had been captured alive, moved everyone.

The atmosphere at the Regional Command organ became much more animated. The Superfortresses of the U.S. Air Force had received well-deserved punishment as soon as they penetrated the great rear area. Newspaper articles and photographs attacking the prestige of the U.S. Air Force were posted on the organ's bulletin board.
A few days later the U.S. AP news agency admitted that "The number of U.S. pilots who were lost during the first 5 days (between 18 and 22 December) was equal to 13 percent of the total number of pilots now being held in North Vietnam." Then the English news agency Reuters commented: "Military observers in Washington estimate that at the present rate at which B52's are being shot down the United States may run out of them within the next 3 months."

The U.S. side had begun to lower its voice. Nixon had to announce the cessation of bombing, shelling, mining, and the blockade by sea north of the 19th Parallel. Kissinger once again set out for Paris to continue the negotiations, an admission of defeat of the plot to exert the greatest possible pressure against us.

However, considerable difficulties were still being encountered in the diplomatic struggle. After holding a private meeting with Kissinger and the two sides had essentially agreed on a draft agreement, which was to be signed on 23 January 1973, Sau Tho sent a message to Pham Hung and CDSVN, informing them that "It is necessary to foresee three major problems arising in implementing the Agreement in the South:

1. Militarily, the puppets will surely continue to demand "the withdrawal of troops to the North.

2. Politically, there is the matter of setting up the National Council of Reconciliation and Concord.

3. The releasing of prisoners captured by the two sides."

We thought about and exchanged opinions about those problems.

During the last months of the year, in accordance with the policy of CDSVN, a group consisting of Nguyen Huu Tho, Huynh Tan Phat, Tran Buu Kiem, and myself, along with a number of aides, were responsible for concentrating on studying and preparing to set up the National Council of Reconciliation and Concord, and for determining the members of our contingent in the three-party coalition government, in the spirit of the draft agreement agreed to by we and the United States, and estimating which members of the third-force component could cooperate with us. We studied the organization and function of each echelon of the governmental system, in order to maintain and develop the forces of the revolution in the governmental administration and the mass organizations, build up the mass organizations, win over the intermediate component and the progressives to the side of the revolution, and create for us a superiority in the balance of forces between ourselves and our adversaries.

During the period before the Agreement was signed and in the months to follow, we persistently struggled towards the aim of forming a tripartite coalition government after the United States withdrew its troops. News of the visit to
Vietnam by Chou Enlai demonstrated that China did not support us in negotiating and signing the Agreement and in forming a coalition government.

On the formation of a joint military commission, COSVN exchanged opinions and made recommendations to the Political Bureau. On 9 January comrade Nguyen Duy Trinh, a member of the Political Bureau of the Party Central Committee and Minister of Foreign Affairs, sent a message informing us that in the opinion of the Political Bureau the coming struggle could be difficult and complicated. Therefore, COSVN should name Lt Gen Tran Van Tra, in his status of Deputy Commander, to head the delegation of the South to the Four-Party Joint Military Commission. When the two-party military commission was set up he would head the delegation of the liberation armed forces in the South in that commission. Two comrades could go directly from Paris to South Vietnam to assist Tra by serving as deputy heads of the delegation. All necessary organizational matters and the operational guidelines of the delegation were urgently debated, for in only a few more weeks, i.e. on 28 January, our delegation would have to face people whom, we knew in advance, were not of good will.

On the basis of the guidance message from the Political Bureau, in the course of many debates and discussions in COSVN we came to realize that the key problem confronting us was to find a way to end the U.S. involvement: all U.S. and vassal troops had to withdraw from the South. To fulfill that requirement would be to create a basis on which to advance the revolution in the South another step forward.

According to a draft agreement to which we and the United States had agreed, there would continue to exist in the South two administrations, two armies, and two areas of control. For the enemy's part, the puppets had an advantage in that they still controlled the cities and the strategic roads. The United States was still holding on to the Thieu regime to carry out its neocolonialism. We controlled the jungles-and-mountains region and important rural areas, had an extensive political organization among the masses, and had rather strong armed forces which stood their ground in many areas. However, the population of the liberated was not large and the armed forces were not uniformly developed among the various areas. For example, in the Mekong Delta our political and armed forces were rather strong and had moved up close to the enemy positions prior to the signing of the Agreement, but in some areas our armed forces were still weaker than those of the enemy. Many of our troop units had fought continuously since 1972 and had not been consolidated organizationally or supplemented with troops, equipment, and weapons. That comparison of forces shows that although we would have many advantages during the coming struggle we would also have a considerable number of difficulties and the struggle would be very complicated.

We agreed with the opinion expressed by Sau Tho, who in a message sent from Paris on 17 January stated that it was necessary to be on guard against the situation of the war being resumed by the enemy in certain areas, and even spreading. Therefore, in addition to the political, diplomatic, and legal struggles, the struggle for time to consolidate and build forces, especially in the base areas and liberated areas, would be expedited in order to maintain readiness to cope with the contingency of the return of war. In the immediate
future, the enemy could concentrate their forces in launching attacks to gain an advantageous position before the Agreement was signed. Maintaining combat readiness, actively retaliating against the enemy, and maintaining our base areas and liberated areas, as well as making good use of the opportunity and rapidly building and developing the rear services-technical bases were extremely important matters which had to be fully understood down to the basic level.

Thanks to positive preparations to carry out the "opportunity plan of the High Command," during the last days of January 1973, before the Agreement was signed, COSVN and the Regional Command guided the battlefields in wiping out, or forcing the surrender or evacuation of, hundreds of outposts, won control of hundreds of hamlets in a number of advantageous areas, expanded to many important areas, cut and gained control of many segments of strategic roads, and cut off the enemy in many areas that were deeper and larger than the past.

There was happiness in COSVN and the Regional Command at the end of January and the first part of February 1973 over the victory that had been won in Paris: the U.S. side had to sign the Agreement and would have to withdraw all troops from the South of our country. Thus, after more than 100 years, the day was near when there would be no foreign aggressor troops on our soil. That was the happiness of a new spring, of preparing to celebrate Tet before seeing off the delegation headed by Tran Van Tra and entering into a new struggle.

According to information we received, after the Paris Agreement was signed the puppet army and administration were terrified. Because they had been defeated and stalemated in their war of aggression in Vietnam, their U.S. masters had gone over Thieu's head to sign an agreement with us against the wishes of their lackeys.

In many places in which our movement was strong and the enemy troops were vacillating, we relied on the legality of the Agreement, promoted the political struggle and military proselytizing, and won new victories. The thing the Saigon puppets were most unhappy over was that the United States did not "force the withdrawal of northern troops from the South," so the puppet troops would have to singlehandedly cope with our troops on a "leopard skin spots" battlefield with interspersed positions, a situation which Thieu did not want and of which he was very afraid.

But then the United States and its puppets set aside their disagreements to carry out a plot to which they agreed: one hand signed the Agreement while the other hand sabotaged it. Following orders by the Americans, the lackeys in Saigon had prepared in advance, and began to carry out, the Ly Thuong Kiet 1973 plan to send out troops to implement a plan to "grab land" all over the South.

In the B2 theater, the focus of the enemy attacks was the Mekong Delta and the provinces around Saigon. Between the end of January and the first part of March 1973, in the Mekong Delta, the enemy spread out their regular troops to coordinate with the regional and popular forces to carry out extremely fierce encroachment, flag-planting, and land-grabbing at Cai Lay and Cai Be (My Tho),
Tan Chau and Hong Ngui (Kien Phong), and in Chau Doc, Chuong Thien, Phong Dinh, and Ba Xuyen in western Nam Bo. In eastern Nam Bo, the enemy contended fiercely with us in Long An, Hau Nghia, Binh Duong, Gia Dinh, and Bien Hoa. They used main-force troops, with air support, to launch strong attacks in areas bordering the Phuoc Vinh-Dong Xoai, Loc Tan (Binh Long), and Xa Mat (Tay Ninh) liberated areas, and used rangers and regional forces to set up blocking positions in the Bu Prang area and at the Tuy Duc intersection, in hopes of blocking our corridor. In Military Region 6 the enemy used infantry, supported by tanks, artillery, and air power, to attack many places in Binh Thuan, Ninh Thuan, Binh Tuy, Lam Dong, and Tuyen Duc, and used artillery to shell the contiguous areas to stop us and relieve besieged positions.

Within a little more than a month after the Agreement was signed, the enemy relieved sieges and grabbed land in many areas, especially around the cities and towns and along the important roads. They retook nearly all of the 394 hamlets which we had liberated prior to the signing of the Agreement.

For our part, after the Paris Agreement came into effect, although we had foreseen that the enemy would sabotage the Agreement, there were still many shortcomings in our political, ideological, and organizational work. A rather widespread ideological tendency was to believe that the Agreement could be implemented, to believe in the role of the International Commission of Control and Supervision and the Joint Military Commission, and to believe in the possibility of setting up the National Council of Reconciliation and Concord and the tripartite coalition government, etc. But the actual situation demonstrated that because of the open, brazen acts taken by the enemy to sabotage the Agreement from the very beginning, the battlefields had not yet fallen silent:

In Military Region 8 alone, between January and March 1973 the enemy grabbed 24 villages, 120 hamlets, and 287 outposts. Essentially, we consolidated the areas we had opened up prior to the signing of the Agreement, and expanded a number of old liberated areas. Only after COSVN made adjustments, beginning in April, was that distorted situation corrected, and only then was the situation gradually transformed in a good direction.

In Military Region 9, before and after the signing of the Agreement there also appeared the rather widespread phenomenon of pacifist thought and a lack of vigilance. The party organization of Military Region 9 promptly stopped that negative tendency. Less than a week after the Paris Agreement went into effect, on 3 February, the standing committee of the Military Zone Party Committee held a plenary conference. The conference evaluated the great victory of the signing of the Agreement. The masses were very enthusiastic, the movement had been imbued with a new spirit, the morale of the puppet army fell, and the "three spearheads" movement was capable of advancing. The conference foreseaw as follows: faced with that situation, it was certain that the enemy would sabotage the Agreement, and their first scheme would be to continue to carry out pacification and land-grabbing. They would counterattack to retake the areas that were lost after 27 January, especially in places where our guard was down, while at the same time using fascist methods to prevent mass uprisings. The conference unanimously recommended to COSVN that we rigorously maintain our offensive status and resolutely
retaliate against the enemy's land-grabbing and pacification, while at the same time promoting the political struggle and strengthening the military proselytizing work, in order to maintain the gains made by the revolution and continue to advance the movement. Once the enemy were willing to implement the Agreement, and especially the articles regarding the cease-fire and the exercise of democratic rights, we would place the political struggle and military proselytizing in the forefront, while making appropriate use of the military offensive prong, depending on the specific situation.

[17 Mar 86]

[Text] The conference affirmed that the offensive mode was to attack in such a way that the enemy could not denounced us; attack to win the sympathy of the puppet troops, isolate the bullies, and win the support of the people; attack to create conditions for promoting the political movement of the masses and the military proselytizing work, and win over additional people; and attack so that the enemy suffered blows, without affecting our diplomatic struggle. The principal direction of attack would be in the contested areas, in areas controlled by the enemy, and in highly populated, prosperous areas, in order to gradually transform the contested areas into liberated areas and areas under enemy control into contested areas.

Because they were agile with regard to strategic guidance and promptly and accurately evaluated the plots and schemes of the enemy and the strengths and weaknesses of the enemy and ourselves, determined correct operational slogans and modes, provided specific guidance and command, were unified from top to bottom, and their forces coordinated their activities harmoniously, the soldiers and people of Military Region 9 won one victory after another, defeated the enemy's pacification and land-grabbing plans, and defended the liberated areas.

The guidance experiences of Military Region 9 were a lesson in grasping the viewpoint of violence, fully understanding the offensive concept, and taking the initiative in counterattacking and attacking the enemy to protect the gains made by the revolution.

After a period of intensive work with Nguyen Huu Tho, Huynh Tan Phat, and Tran Buu Kien on the work of the political administration, after 20 January 1973 I returned to the military work. During the time I was assigned by COSVN to work with the Provisional Revolutionary Government, which was the responsibility of Tran Van Tra, the deputy commander, and Tran Do, the deputy political officer. At that time, Tra was urgently preparing for his departure. On 28 January 1973 the head of the military delegation of the South was present at Tan Son Nhat.

I continually reported on the situation and studied the guidance opinions of the Political Bureau on the struggle slogans and modes and attentively listened to the experiences of military regions 8 and 9 and the communiques of the upper echelon on the situations in the Military Region 5 and Central Highlands theaters. We prepared for a meeting of the standing committee of COSVN in mid-March.
During those first days of 1973 there was a truly heavy work load. Everything, from carrying out an "opportunity plan" to winning additional victories prior to a political solution, and closely monitoring developments on the battlefields in order to reach accurate conclusions and determine proper operational modes, to moving the leadership organ closer to the front so that it could promptly guide the localities in organizing struggle, guiding the return of enemy POW's and the receiving of our people, etc., was carried out with great urgency.

One month after the Agreement was signed, on 27 February, we analyzed the situation and reviewed all aspects of guidance in order to report to the Political Bureau and the Military Commission of the Party Central Committee, while holding discussions to achieve unanimity in the COSVN standing committee determining the direction for guiding the localities in applying the struggle slogans and modes, and applying experiences in fighting the enemy's pacification and land-grabbing, protecting the people, and consolidate and develop the revolutionary forces.

Directive 02 of COSVN, which manifested the spirit of the above-mentioned exchange of opinions, helped the localities have a basis on which to determine struggle modes in the new situation.

On 2 March 1973, at a local military conference held at Bu Dop which was attended by representatives of all provinces and a number of districts, on behalf of COSVN I relayed the spirit of that directive, which affirmed the victory of historic significance won by our nation after nearly 20 years of fighting the United States; the new plots of the United States and its puppets; the special characteristics and developmental characteristics of the situation; and our struggle stands, slogans, and modes in the new situation.

The matters we debated most vigorously were how to use the armed forces as appropriately and effectively as possible, under the conditions of our endeavoring to consolidate peace while the enemy were openly sabotaging the agreement, and how the legal struggle should be carried out to bring into play combined strength, maintain the offensive under the new conditions, etc. The conference unanimously agreed to oppose two negative tendencies: acting as if there was no agreement and doing as we wished, or not daring to take up arms to fight the enemy when they attacked us or restrict ourselves to the articles of the enemy, which the enemy themselves had sabotaged from the beginning.

On 7 March I returned from Bu Dop to the Regional Command and learned that a message had been sent ordering me to go to Hanoi to attend a meeting. I was very pleased because during more than a month of implementing the Agreement many new problems had arisen which needed to be discussed and debated, and it was necessary to request the opinion of the Central Committee to affirm the path of advance in the new situation, in which the United States and its puppets were openly and brazenly violating the Agreement.

Thus after 4 years I had an opportunity to go north. Throughout 1972 I had seldom been affected by malaria, I was in good health, and my blood pressure was relatively stable, so I would work continuously.
There was little time to prepare for the trip. We held a meeting of the
organs of the Regional Command, recapitulated the military situation in 1972,
and discussed a work plan for the coming period.

A plenary meeting of the standing committee of COSVN was held on 16 and 17
March, before we set out. After approving the 1972 recapitulation report, we
entered deeply into evaluating the situation, confirming directions, and
preparing opinions to report to the Political Bureau.

A matter with which we were especially concerned was evaluating our status and
strength on the battlefield and comparing the forces of ourselves and the
enemy. The United States and its vassals had withdrawn all of their troops
but the puppet forces were still large, they were still able to hold down the
people and conscript troops, and still received military and economic aid from
the United States. In places where we were strong, the puppet troops were
conciliatory. In places where we were weak and vulnerable, they concentrated
n encroachment.

The problem that was posed during that conference was how to evaluate the
development of the revolution in the South. Would the enemy accept the
formation of a tripartite coalition government or continue to sabotage the
agreement?

Analyzing the thought of the cadres and people during the past several months,
we noted two distinct tendencies. The first was overconfidence in the
capability to implement the Agreement, which led to relaxing vigilance,
allowing the enemy to encroach, and not defending the gains made by the
revolution. The second was not fully realizing the significance of the
victory of signing the Agreement, and not knowing how to rely on the Agreement
to apply struggle slogans and modes that were appropriate to the conditions of
each place and time.

We concluded that it was necessary to provide timely guidance so that the
localities could overcome the distorted manifestations between peace and war,
and affirm determination to employ all forms of struggle to maintain and
develop the victory of the Agreement, while resolutely retaliating against the
enemy's encroachment and pacification. It was necessary to guide the
localities and units in correctly evaluating the general situation and the
specific situations in each area, and correctly foresee the plots and schemes
of the enemy, and the strengths and weaknesses of ourselves and the enemy,
in order to apply appropriate forms of struggle, while continually consolidating
and developing our actual strength, adding troops, equipment, and weapons and
ensuring that the armed forces were prepared to fight under all circumstances.

Finally, two matters were agreed upon by the conference and summarized by Pham
Hung: 1) In the immediate future, the localities would be guided in, on the
basis of the actual situation, appropriately reorienting the struggle and
combining the military, political, troop proselytizing, and legal aspects in
order to transform the situation; 2) In the long range, the situation could
develop in one of two ways: either the enemy would agree to carry out the
agreement and set up a tripartite coalition government, or they would sabotage
the agreement and the war would be expanded. It was necessary to prepare
politically, ideologically, and organizationally so that we could take the initiative in either eventuality.

The official conference of the standing committee of COSVN concluded in the afternoon of 17 March. But after the evening meal we continued to discuss things until late at night. Those discussions included a number of people who had not attended the standing committee conference during the past 2 days. We exchanged opinions and there were intimate conversations between those who were about to set out and those who would remain behind.

The situation was undergoing complicated changes and it was quite possible that the war would take place on an increasingly larger scale. We were determined to maintain and develop the revolutionary accomplishments that were achieved during nearly 20 years of resistance war against the US imperialists, in order to win complete victory. As for the enemy, they obstinately continued on the path of "Vietnamizing the war" and tried to keep Vietnam within the neocolonial orbit of the United States. It was inevitable that there would occur a life-death struggle between revolution and counter-revolution. That was also the course we intended to recommend to the Central Committee and the Political Bureau, while also recommending that the sectors follow it during the coming months.

The B2 cadre delegation going to attend the Central Committee meeting included Nguyen Van Linh, Deputy Secretary of COSVN in charge of the Saigon-Gia Dinh Zone; Vo Van Kiet, Secretary of the Military Region 9 party committee; Tran Nam Trung, in charge of the Eastern Nam Bo provinces; Nguyen Minh Duong, Secretary of the Military Region 8 Party Committee; and myself, Deputy Secretary of COSVN and commander of the B2 front. The Political Bureau called to the meeting people of all categories.

On the way north we still had to take a round-about route through Cambodia. We set out during the night of 18 March and on the 19th reached Kratie (6), the last troop station of the 470th Division of the Truong Son Corps. The next day we reached troop station 53 in southern Strung Trang (7). We met At and Tuyet, the troop station commanders, and learned that they had received a directive from the High Command and Dong Si Nguyen (8) on arranging for the B2 cadre delegation to travel north. After the Paris Agreement, the United States continued to attack our strategic route from Kratie to the Laotian border. We asked about the situation along the route and our supply shipments. Supplies were continuing to flow south regularly. They were informed that a unit of several thousand new troops would soon be sent to reinforce the B2 theater.

We were very pleased. The sending of supplies and troops south not only fulfilled the requirements of the battlefield but also allowed one to discern the strategic intention of the upper echelon in the new situation.

During the past several days, enemy aircraft had been very active along the Mekong River and Route 13 in Cambodia, especially in the area where the Sekong and Srepok rivers converged near Strung Teng. We had to remain there two nights because the enemy attacked continuously and we could not assemble a ferry. Taking advantage of the time we had to spend waiting in the bunker
the military engineers had constructed for visitors, about three kilometers from the ferry landing, I tried to complete the military report. At the beginning of March the High Command had requested that recapitulation reports be sent, including a recapitulation report on the Nguyen Hue campaign (9), but we hadn't had time to complete it.

Not until the night of 22 March could we cross the river safely. All along the route the enemy continued to attack incessantly. Traveling by vehicle at night was very tense.

On the night of the 23rd our convoy arrived at Ta Ngau, near the Laos-Cambodia border, where the headquarters of the 470th division was located.

The division's mission was transportation from southern Saravanne to Phi Ha. From there, one branch split off in direction of the B2 theater and another went to Ta Xeng in the B3 theater (10), for the northern and southern Central Highlands. Our delegation met Col. Nguyen Lang, commander of the 470th Division, and many old friends, and was briefed on the situation on the route for which the division was responsible.

[18 Mar 86]

[Text] We were very enthusiastic when we learned that the transportation and support forces had been reorganized and strengthened, and were much stronger than in past years. The water-borne transportation, communications, air defense, and military engineer forces had all been consolidated and supplemented. Supplies were quite ample. Furthermore, after the Paris Agreement the enemy had attacked less often in Laos, so we had been able to organize the growing of greens. The living conditions of the troops of the units along the route had been greatly improved in comparison to the past. Their health was good.

Nguyen Lang arranged for me to meet and speak with cadres of the division command organ. On behalf of the cadres and men of the B2 theater, I spoke of the gratitude of those on the battlefield for those on the strategic transportation route, who had contributed their efforts and sacrificed to increase the fighting strength of the soldiers and people in the South. I also described what that route had been like 7 years previously, when I went to the Central Highlands. At that time the route was being developed and was still narrow, but now it had become a broad route, an artery along which the strength of the great rear area was relayed to the great front line, to the Zone 5, Central Highlands, and Nam Bo fronts, and to our friends on the Cambodian battlefields. When discussing the battlefield situation during the several months since the Paris Agreement, and the plots and schemes of the enemy, and the requirement of strengthening our forces and maintaining combat readiness, I expressed hope that they would continue to make all-out efforts in guiding transportation and fulfilling the plan for the great rear area to aid the great front line. One of the matters to which I directed their attention was the necessity to restrict attrition to a minimum, and especially the necessity to avoid wasting manpower and materiel on the transportation route.
The next day, 24 March, we arrived at troop station 37 at the Phi Ha intersection, which was regarded as a "strategic intersection" with regard to transportation, not because it was near Ta Xeng (at the borders of the three Indochinese countries) but because it was a point at which transportation routes diverged: the southwestern route went to the B2 theater and the eastern route went to the B3 theater. I remembered that in 1966, when I went to the B3 theater, I had also stopped at that location, which at that time was still thickly forested, and met a group of medical cadres headed by Vu Van Can, head of the Military Medical Department, which had been sent south by the Military Commission to study and resolve the malaria problem in the B3 theater. At that time, the health of troops in that theater was a hot topic. Since then Phi Ha had become an open space; the entire area had been thoroughly plowed up by U.S. bombs.

Traveling north from Phi Ha, we did not go by way of the Bac ferry landing, but followed a new route by crossing the Sekong River and going north to Saravane. That route was more hidden and was not attacked as much by the enemy, so we could travel by day. On the afternoon of the 24th we crossed the Sekong. After crossing the river, while waiting for the other vehicles to cross I met with Laotian comrades, members of the Attapeu provincial party committee, who were also traveling that route. We held a conversation, inquiring about one another's health and about the situation. They were very happy and optimistic. One of them spoke Vietnamese rather fluently. After the locality was liberated the governmental administration was consolidated, but the bandits continued to operate rather strongly, especially in Bolovens Plateau area. I was truly moved when I met with our comrades in arms on that Truong Son route, the route which tied together the three fraternal Indochinese peoples in the struggle against the common enemy.

After bidding adieu to our friends, we continued our journey and during the night of the 25th reached the Xe Noi troop station in the foothills north of the Bolovens Plateau. Meticulous preparations had been made to greet the Sihanouk delegation, which traveled from the north of our country to the liberated area in Cambodia after the Paris Agreement was signed, and was now used as a camp for a military engineer road-building unit. The housing area had been built on a hill with tall, large trees which were sparse but provided very good coverage. The natural setting was very attractive. The houses were constructed of bamboo and wood but were quite spacious. There were electric lights at night.

After more than a week of continuous, rather tense travel we decided to remain there a day to rest. The men at the camp organized a hunt and shot a deer. That day we were able to take a leisurely bath and were treated to a meal of fresh venison, so we were greatly refreshed. The unofficial exchanges of opinions within the B2 cadre delegation, which had taken place over the past several days, continued, sometimes between two people, sometimes among three people, and sometimes by the delegation as a whole. The battlefield situation, the tasks that faced us, and the matters about which we would report and request the opinion of the Central Committee, etc., continually dominated our thoughts.

In the South, was the present situation one of war or peace? Clearly, warfare
was not taking place as in the past, but it was not that no gunfire could be heard on the battlefield. What would be the most accurate way of evaluating the situation, in order to recommend the most appropriate guidelines, missions, slogans, and modes during the coming important conference of the Political Bureau?

During a discussion in the morning of 26 March, Vo Van Kiet and Nguyen Minh Duong provided additional information about the situation in the Mekong Delta, especially the enemy plot in Military Region 4 (11).

After spreading a map on the table, they spoke of the enemy plot in Military Region 4. On the basis of a comparison of forces that was still favorable to them (in some places the enemy outnumbered us five to one), the enemy were implementing a policy characterized by Vo Van Kiet as the "three prevents" (preventing the masses from arising, preventing the puppet administration from collapsing, and preventing the puppet army from disintegrating). At the beginning of March we learned that they had drafted a specific plan to pacify Military Region 4 in 1973. It had the following goals: 1) Occupying 85 percent of the land and controlling 95 percent of the population; 2) Restoring the situation to the way it was prior to March 1972. They hoped to complete that plan within a year, i.e. by the end of February 1974. The enemy had divided their plan into three phases. During the first phase (March to May 1973) they would pacify and occupy the Chuong Thien area. During the second phase (June to September) they would pacify and occupy U Minh. During the third phase (October 1973 to February 1974) they would pacify southern Ca Mau and consolidate the newly occupied areas. Among those areas, the enemy regarded Chuong Thien as the foremost objective. Chuong Thien consisted of the districts of Vinh Thuan and Go Quao, and parts of Giang Rieng (Rach Gia), Long My (Can Tho), and Ngang Du (which the enemy called Nieu Thien), in Bac Lieu. It was an area of mobile operations situated in the midst of the Hau River provinces. The enemy hoped to use that area as a staging area for attacking the U Minh base, and as an area for blocking and defending the city of Can Tho, which they called the capital of the Mekong Delta.

After an exchange of opinions, we predicted that the enemy would concentrate large forces, including supporting technical combat arms to, first of all, attack and occupy the Chuong Thien area, then enter the U Minh base area and more down into Ca Mau, to attain the land and population control goals that had been set.

The soldiers and people of Military Region 9 were directed by CCSVN to draft a plan to prepare to fight the enemy and defeat the enemy's plan to attack and occupy the delta region.

The more we exchanged opinions and analyzed the battlefield situation, the more we came to realize the enemy's insidious plot and to realize that the effort to achieve the first possibility—maintaining peace—would be an extremely complicated and difficult struggle.

We wanted to carry out the Agreement, but the enemy continually violated it and sabotaged it with increasing brazenness.
Would it not be difficult to prevent the warfare from spreading?

That afternoon I leisurely visited the segment of the route I had traveled in 1966, when following the Truong son route south to the Tay Nguyen and Zone 5 theaters. At that time new branch routes were being extended south of the Bac River by military engineer troops under the command of Nguyen Van Nhan, and although they were hastily built military roads the enemy discovered them and used airplanes to attack them continuously, night and day.

The military engineer troops and Assault Youth who build the Truong Son route during the initial phase of the anti-U.S. war had a much more difficult time than when they were building the Tay Bac route. They lacked food and drink, they had malaria, they worked urgently, and the enemy attacked fiercely. If they had not had the very ardent patriotism and very strong fighting will of a revolutionary army, and a spirit of "splitting the Truong Son to save the nation," how could they have overcome the difficult challenges facing everyone every day and every hour?

The banana plants along the road became more and more tattered. Some troop units passing that way had to eat banana shoots dipped in salt or cooked with dried fish paste and stream water. Sometimes there was not enough rice to eat and there was not enough salt to be tasted. Many troops who contracted malaria along the way had to be left behind. Even when we went south some of our guards had to be left behind. Even some of the strong, healthy youths could not endure the attacks of jungle malaria.

Only a few years later the appearance of the Truong Son route north of Loc Ninh had changed completely. The enemy attacked with increasing ferocity. They attacked with all kinds of airplanes, including B52's, and used chemical poisons to defoliate the trees and napalm to burn the jungle, dropped various kinds of lethal mines, used electronic equipment to detect facilities and people passing by, etc., but with no effect. We continued to expand the route, and in addition to the main roads we built many detours and alternate roads. There was two-way movement of motorized traffic. Trucks going south carried supplies and troops and those going north carried the wounded. The trucks obtained gasoline near the road. The oil pipeline reached Ban Phon in southern Saravanne.

The route connected the great rear area with the great front line. By the sweat and blood shed on that route, the soldiers and people of the south and north, with the assistance of the fraternal Lao and Cambodian people, worked shoulder-to-shoulder to overcome the months and years that were difficult and arduous beyond imagination to attain the victories of today. Between then and the day of total victory, that miraculous route—the Ho Chi Minh trail—which had constantly been praised by the world press as roads in a fable, would continue to be an artery which endlessly nourished the battlefield.

On 27 March we resumed our journey and stopped at the headquarters of the 471st Division in a sparsely forested, secluded area at the foot of a hill in the southern part of Muong Noong district, through which as crystal-clear
stream flowed. Our group was well provided for and that night viewed the color film of the popular opera "Tran Quoc Toan Goes to Battle".

From that point on the road was safer. We were able to travel more by day.

On the afternoon of the 28th we reached K.94, a troop station under the direct control of the 471st Division. It had received a visiting delegation of the Cambodian government the previous month. That night the political officer of Group 559 arrived there from the north. He had been assigned to the Truong Son route after the Paris Agreement was signed. We had known each other for a long time. During the anti-French resistance he was at Ta Ngan and then was assigned to the Operations Department. Before being assigned to the Truong Son route he was the political officer of the Air Defense-Air Force branch. He was always optimistic, life-loving, and close to the cadres and troops, and knew how to bring collective strength into play to fulfill missions. Everyone loved and respected him because he was good-natured and open. He liked the arts and knew how to sing popular opera and write poems. Along the Truong Son route the drivers often recited his poems, including one they called "Covered With Dust":

"I salute the heroic convoys,
The drivers on the Truong Son!
Their heads are young but their hair is white
Because of layers of road dust!
I salute the convoys of steel horses
Whose bodies are covered with the
Green camouflage leaves of the Truong Son.
But their hair is still white!"

[19 Mar 86]

[Text] He told us about the situation in the North, about the "Dien Bien Phu in the air" above Hanoi, and the situation along the route from the north.

Something I did not suspect was that only a few days later, when our group reached Hanoi, we learned that he had been killed when his car struck a mine on Route 23 en route to Saravanne. A helicopter brought his body back to Hanoi. I visited him and tried to hold back my emotion as I stood by the coffin of a close, beloved, very loyal and ardent comrade who had a very strong sense of responsibility.

On the 29th we left K94 and continued our northward journey. The road became very broad, especially the segment from Muong Noong to Ban Dong-Route 9. Some segments which had been concealed from the air and were continually attacked, but had been repaired and widened into depot areas or had become level, straight road segments board enough for three vehicles.

Between Ban Dong and Lao Bao we stopped several times to listen to our guides talk about our counterattack which defeated the "Lam Son 719" operation, involving more than 70 enemy battalions, in the spring of 1971. At that time, Nixon and Thieu regarded that offensive as "having a decisive nature." The enemy hoped to "cut the throat" of the Viet Cong," i.e. to cut our strategic
supply line. But within a period of only 2 months, we won many large battles and the enemy had to retreat with heavy defeats. Along a stretch of road nearly 20 kilometers long, we saw many wrecks of enemy tanks and armored vehicles, the tracks of which had rusted.

When we reached Huong Hoa it was still light. We went to see the Khe Sanh battlefield, the center of which was the Ta Con airfield. The names Khe Sanh, Lang Vay, and Ta Con were at one time the titles of songs by many musicians and were daily topics in the U.S. and Western press during the spring and summer of 1966. The U.S. generals could not keep their promise to their president and were forced to send Marines into the jungle to "live or die with Khe Sanh." But then the U.S. troops had to abandon that strongpoint after 5 months of being attacked and besieged to "avoid a second Dien Bien Phu." The Khe Sanh battle, and the battle in which the Lang Vay strongpoint was annihilated, which marked the first time our tanks had appeared face-to-face with U.S troops on the southern battlefield. The armored combat arm won the first battle it fought.

The Ta Con airfield was still in good condition. The troops both defended the airfield and managed the supply depot, one of our major "customers," which was defended by the air defense troops, so that oil could be "poured" to the battlefield.

At that time the Quang Tri provincial party committee was located north of Route 9, between Cam Lo and Dong Ha. We arrived at the provincial party committee headquarters at dusk on 30 March. Than, who was previously secretary of the Vinh Linh party committee and was now secretary of the Quang Tri provincial party committee, and Binh, head of the provincial unit, waited by the roadside to greet our delegation. They informed us of the situation in the liberated area since the signing of the Agreement. From the very beginning of the conversation something that attracted our attention was the division of territory, especially in Quang Tri-Thua Thien, where the land area was small and the puppet forces were still large. Clearly, if the lowlands were left to the enemy, while we remained in the contiguous areas and in the jungles-and-mountains areas, that would only benefit them. It was necessary to maintain, by all means, the interspersed "comb teeth" status both west and east of Route 1, although in the lowland we only had small enclaves, our forces were still weak, the mass movement had not yet developed, and the legal struggle was still difficult. But that was a very important matter if we were to achieve an advantageous position and maintain and develop the movement.

They spoke of the prolonged days of anxiety when the enemy counterattacked the Cua Viet port. The enemy launched four large sweeping operations called "Song Than" in an effort to take the port on the border of the two regions, an important port with regard to aid for our great front line. We knew that our comrades in Hanoi could not enjoy Tet because of that prolonged struggle. During the final battle the Military Commission of the Party Central Committee sent Le Trong Tan to take direct command, after which we annihilated most of the enemy armored brigade. Victory was ours.
The next morning our vehicle turned onto Route 1. Dong, the secretary of the Vinh Linh party committee, came to the Hien Luong bridge to greet our delegation.

I tried to restrain my emotion when I set foot on the bridge, a temporary pontoon bridge which permanently linked the two regions of our country. During the past 20 years the enemy had wanted to destroy the Hien Luong bridge to isolate the Ben Hai River, permanently divide the nation, and divide North and South. But our nation was one and our people were one. The iron-like determination and resolute will of the people of the North and South connected the spans of the Hien Luong Bridge and the two banks of the Ben Hai River.

We passed through the town of Ho Xa. Throughout a 10-year period that small town had every day and every hour braved the bombs and shells of the enemy. The streets and buildings were obliterated and there remained only pile of broken bricks and fallen reinforced cement columns. On the two sides of the river and along the road from the Hien Luong bridge to Ho Xa, here and there a new thatched-roof house had been erected.

While spending the night in stalwart Vinh Linh, we listened to stories about steadfast Vinh Linh and heroic Con Co.

Over the course of many days of the most fierce enemy attacks, the cadres, troops, and people of Vinh Linh continued to resolutely hold their ground. Since the beginning of the year, some old people and children who had evacuated had begun to return. The green rice had headed. The fields were gradually reassuming their unbounded, fresh green appearance.

In a spacious, reinforced bunker a few kilometers from the town of Ho Xa, which had long been the party committee headquarters and the forward headquarters of the Vinh Linh zone, we conversed with the local leadership cadres until very late at night. In recent years, the combat order and news of victories that had been sent out from that bunker had mobilized the fighting will and stalwart spirit of unyielding Vinh Linh and heroic Con Co. In the past, we had only learned about the victories of the soldiers and people of Vinh Linh and Con Co from the radio and newspapers, but now we sat and listened to the local leadership comrades and military commanders tell stories. We felt even more emotion and admiration. In June 1968 Uncle Ho sent a letter congratulating Vinh Linh for shooting down the 200th U.S. plane. He also sent a letter congratulating Con Co for shooting down there enemy airplanes in an hour. Speaking of the immediate immediate tasks, they noted that the missions of that front-line area of the great rear area were still very difficult. The tasks of filling in bomb craters, building schools and clinics, consolidating armed forces, maintaining combat readiness, continuing to play the role of being the front line of the great rear area in the north vis-a-vis the great front line in the South, etc., had been set forth and were being urgently carried out, with the goal of enabling the lives of the people and soldiers to rapidly return to normal.

Early the next morning we continued our trip and arrived at the headquarters of Group 559. Dong Si Nguyen was away on assignment but we met with Pham Khac
By and command staff, and listened while they spoke in a general way about he strategic transportation route.

Fourteen years previously the route had been begun, when the Military Commission assigned comrade Vo Bam the mission of commanding a unit to construct the route, many segments of which followed in the footsteps made during the previous resistance war. The route became an increasingly clear reality, both on maps and in fact. The resolute combat life of hundreds of thousands of outstanding children of the Fatherland, who came there from all parts of the nation to survey, build roads, transport supplies, and fight to defend the route, contributed to building that important strategic project and contributed to determining victory for the great undertaking of liberating the South and the revolutions of all three Indochinese nations.

From the initial footsteps of a commo-liaison unit, recently organized road transportation units, and nonmotorized transportation (back packs, pack bicycles), with requirements of absolute secrecy, of "leaving no tracks, cooking without smoke, and speaking without words," the strategic transportation route was no longer what the enemy had called a "trail." Since the beginning of 1965 the had enemy attacked continuously and we had built continuouly. The route had become a network of motor roads, foot trails, river routes, pipelines, a network of warehouses and supply depots, and a network of firepower and infantry positions to defend the route--manned by hundreds of thousands of cadres, enlisted men, and Assault Youth--which connected northern Indochina with southern Indochina.

Speaking of the units which built and defended that route, General Secretary Le Duan affirmed that "The great victory of the revolution in the South cannot be separated from the activities of Group 559. The victory of the South and the activities of Group 559 are two great accomplishment of our people."

The troops defending the route gained more and more experience and fought back against the enemy resolutely and effectively, so by 1972-1973 the ratio of enemy bombs hitting the road had dropped to only 0.18 percent.

The road network continued to be extended toward the battlefields. By that time (1973) we had many north-south and east-west branch road and alternate roads to the battlefields which totaled more than 10,000 kilometers.

The results of building an increasingly more complete road network and sending increasingly larger quantities of supplies and number of troops t the battlefields proved our increases strength with regard to both status and forces, from the rear area to the front. The enemy had to admit the defeat of their bombs and shells, electronic reconnaissance aircraft, and the various kinds of bombs dropped all along the route by the steadily growing strength of that miraculous route. Referring to the strong vitality of that route, the U.S. press had to admit that "We can only slow down their transportation of supplies and force them to pay a high price, but it is certain that we cannot stop them." (The U.S. magazine NEWSWEEK, 31 March 1969).

Bidding adieu to the Command staff of Group 559, at 1400 that day (1 April) we went to the Dong Hoi airfield. An IL.14 aircraft was awaiting us.
It was afternoon. Looking down from aboard the airplane, we could clearly see the bomb craters, especially along the roads and at ferry landings. But the dominant sight was still the immense greenness of the spring rice under the early summer light. That greenness was also the immortal greenness of the nation. In two resistance wars the U.S. imperialists had been defeated by our troops and people. Its wounds of war were still oozing blood but it would definitely not "return to the stone age," as the U.S. warmongers desired. On the contrary, because they expanded the war to the North the U.S. ruling circles were condemned by all mankind, which caused the United States to "become a nation which has lost much support, and one of the most hated nations in the world," as Montgomery, the English Marshall, observed in the NEW YORK TIMES (5 July 1968).

At 1700 hours our airplane was flying over Hanoi, a Hanoi that was heroic, resolute, intelligent, and creative, a Hanoi that was very beautiful and lovable, the capital and heart of the entire nation.

[21 Mar 86]

[Text] One of the foremost aspirations of the B2 cadre delegation was to soon be able to visit Uncle Ho. Preparations were being made to begin the construction of Uncle Ho's tomb. His corpse was being protected and cared for by doctors at a location outside Hanoi.

A few days after we arrived at the capital we had the honor of Vu Ky arranging for the entire delegation to visit Uncle Ho. As I sat in the car I remembered the last two times I had seen Uncle Ho in the past.

The first time was at the beginning of 1966, when I was preparing to set out for the Military Region 5 theater to pass along the resolution of the 12th plenum of the Party Central Committee. Many members of the Political Bureau were also present that day at the modest house where Uncle Ho worked. He enquired about my health and about the arrangements that had been made for my family in the rear area. He instructed me about my trip and then assigned me my mission and sent greetings from himself and the Party Central Committee to the cadres, soldiers, and people in the South. Then he suddenly turned to ask the Political Bureau members, "I have many times stated my desire to go south. Why have you not made arrangements for me to go? Many other cadres, such as Uncle Thai here, have gone, so why won't you let me go?"

I still remember that Uncle Ho expressed disagreement when they said that the reason was his health. That year Uncle Ho was 76 years old. The second time, in April 1969, when I was going to work in Nam Bo, Pham Hung and I were summoned to participate in a plenary meeting of the Political Bureau to brief it on the situation and firmly grasp the leadership stand of the Central Committee toward the enemy's new strategic plot.

One day Uncle Ho called the two of us in. He was much weaker than he had been three years ago. The members of the Political Bureau admonished us that to maintain uncle Ho's health we should not let him work, that when we met with him we should limit our report to an hour, only report good news to him, and
avoid making him sad and have to worry. We strictly obeyed that instruction. During our first meeting with him, he thoughtfully received us and enquired about our health, about our trip, and about the situation of the people and troops in the South.

Before we returned to the battlefield, Uncle Ho again called us. We ate a meal with him. During meal Uncle Ho ate a full bowl of rice. Seeing that made us very happy.

Before we left Uncle Ho shook our hands and suddenly asked the same question he had asked several years previously, "When can you arrange for me go South?"

We looked at each other. We were moved and didn't know how to answer him. We understood that he had grown much weaker. That Uncle Ho could go south was an aspiration shared night and day by the 14 million people of the north. We also understood that Uncle Ho's question had the significance of being a mission entrusted by the Central Committee and Uncle Ho to the soldiers and people of the South: to make maximum efforts to fulfill at an early date the mission assigned them by the Central Committee and Uncle Ho, to "Fight until the Americans get out and the puppets collapse," and complete the enterprise of liberating the South so that the people could soon be visited by Uncle Ho.

Finally, Pham Hung passed on that thought to Uncle Ho, who expressed his pleasure, advised us to take care during our trip, and encouraged us to fulfill our mission and did not forget to remind us to relay his greetings to the cadres, people, and soldiers of the South.

We would never have thought that after returning to the battlefield, just after the first phase of the 1969 Binh Long campaign concluded (May 1969), Uncle Ho wrote his Testament. At the end of the second phase of the campaign (at the end of August 1969), we received a telegram from the Secretary the Military Commission who informed us that Uncle Ho had weakened. According to the message, Uncle Ho had enquired how the Binh Long campaign was going. Members of the Military Commission informed him that the troops of eastern Nam Bo had fought well. At the beginning of September, while the Regional Command staff and I were commanding the third phase of the campaign, COSVN received news that Uncle Ho had passed away.

How could we describe the emotion we felt? We had lived close to Uncle Ho, saw both his greatness and nobility and his simplicity and love, and had met with him only recently. I went to meet Pham Hung, who was ill. After informing him of the sad news, we sat silent for a long time. Who would have thought that our meeting with Uncle Ho in April would be our last meeting with him?

Hung told me to work with the Propaganda-Training Department of COSVN in drafting a telegram to send to Hanoi. Never in my life had I held a pen while feeling such strong emotion inside. When we completed the draft we submitted it to Pham Hung and the members of COSVN and the Central Committee of the National Liberation Front of South Vietnam for approval. The telegram included the following passages:
"During this painful and moving time for the entire nation, the South is
regretful that it had not yet victoriously complete the enterprise of national
liberation so that it could receive a visit by Uncle Ho, satisfy his long-held
ambition of all people, cadres, and troops who, responding responding to the
sacred appeal of Uncle Ho, have heroically and persistently fought for more
than 20 years....

"In order to be worthy of the immeasurable merit of President Ho and be worthy
of his concern and care, and to realize his noble ambition and follow the path
he delineated for our entire population and army, the 14 million people of
the South promise their 17 million compatriots in the North that they will
unite closely, millions as one, to transform sorrow into strength. They are
determined to persevere and promote the resistance war, and are determined to
fight and win, fight until all U.S. troops have to withdraw, fight until the
puppet administration and army collapse, and until liberate the South, defend
the North, and advance to the peaceful unification of the Fatherland."

The NFLSV and the PRG selected Nguyen Huu Tho to head a delegation of
softhem cadres to attend Uncle Ho's funeral.

On the battlefield, the troops had transformed sorrow into strength and were
winning one shattering victory after another during the third phase of the Binh
Long campaign.

The past 4 years rushed past my mind. This time, when we went north we would
not be able to take Uncle Ho's hand and listen to his thoughtful, warm words,
but could only revere our beloved uncle. He still had a high forehead, fresh
facial features, and rosy skin. We stood there a long time. None of us was
able to hold back his tears and we felt regret over not being able to achieve
Uncle Ho's long-time dream.

The nation's people and soldiers had fulfilled only one of the missions
assigned them by Uncle Ho. They had "fought until the Americans withdrew,"
but had not yet "fought until the puppets collapse." It was necessary to
travel the remaining distance to fulfill Uncle Ho's ambition prior to his
death, and so that the people of the South could soon go north to visit him.
On route back to Hanoi, we were silent for a long time. Everyone wanted to
remember Uncle Ho's image and think about the future course of the revolution
in the South.

With the encouragement and support of the United States, the puppet army was
carrying out a policy of "a ceasefire without a cessation of firing." The
agreement had been signed but the enemy were committing more and more crimes.
The blood of our people and comrades continued to flow. The sound of gunfire
on the southern battlefields had not ceased, but was clearly tending to
increase. Correctly determining the path of advance of the revolution in the
South had become a very urgent problem.
Two days after we reached Hanoi, Ba (Le Duan) met with the B2 cadre delegation. Ba and the other members of the Political Bureau wanted to hear the opinions of the cadres on the battlefield so that preparations could be made for the conference to be held the following month.

When we arrived, Ba warmly shook everyone’s hand and inquired about their health. He said that that meeting, on the morning of 3 April, was not an official one. Many major problems would require time for thinking, exchanging opinions, and carefully debating in order to make correct decisions. Therefore, he would only bring up a few matters so that we could think about them and make preparations before officially beginning work the following week. Many of the matters he brought up coincided with those about which we were still concerned and had discussed with one another during the past month, especially during our trip north, in trying to find solutions.

Ba got down to business immediately and spoke frankly about matters he intended to bring to our attention so that we could think about them and prepare opinions. In general, he said the following:

First of all, how should we evaluate the Paris Agreement? It was a victory, an accomplishment of a long resistance war against the United States. The United States agreed to sign it and were forced to withdraw troops. But Thieu was still in power, the puppet army and puppet administration still existed, the enemy forces were still large, and they still had much equipment. What, then, were the intentions of the United States and Thieu? What were their strengths and weaknesses? What were our strengths and weaknesses? There should be full reporting on the basis of the actual battlefield situation. Even the 1968 Tet Offensive and Uprising should be carefully evaluated, both the victories and the deficiencies.

Second, had the revolution in the South shifted over to a new phase? If so, what would be the content of the next phase be, and what slogans and struggle modes would be appropriate?

Third, on that basis it was necessary to consider what problems had to be resolved by the line of the national democratic revolution in the South, especially in the coming period, to arrive at ultimate victory?

Fourth, what are urgent immediate problems with which leadership had to be concerned? Were the most important matters to win control of the people, win the right of mastership, build up the village bases, and build up the districts? Militarily, was it necessary to consider how the local forces should be built up, how the main-force troops should be built up, and what the main-force troops’ TO & E should be so that they could be sufficiently strong to fight. They had to be resolutely reorganized so that they could become an elite force.
First of all, the units had to be at full strength, from the squad level up to the battalion level. If that was to be accomplished, was it necessary to reduce the number of units to bolster the remaining units, and reduce the number of cadres so that they could be sent down to the basic level to do mass proselytizing work and assist the movement?

He added that the April meeting of the Political Bureau had not yet been held. Its members were continuing to consider opinions, think, and prepare the contents of the next meeting, to be held in May, after which, around June, the 21st Plenum of the Party Central Committee would be held. Before leaving, he admonished us to think things over carefully and meticulously prepare our opinions, so that during the following week there could be an exchange of opinions and discussions.

I noted that Ba's work style was very flexible and dynamic, and encouraged the cadres to think, then discuss matters carefully, find the truth, and achieve unanimity.

That working method helped the Central Committee and the Political Bureau more firmly grasp the situation on the battlefields, on the basis of which to adopt correct policies and advance the revolution in the South.

Our delegation met the next day to assign individual members responsibility for concentrating on preparing certain matters, and decide which contents needed to be discussed collectively and which needed to be further clarified by the Ministry of National Defense.

The General Staff provided us with additional information about the situation of the enemy, of both the United States and its lackeys, and in both the United States and Southeast Asia, and about the meeting between the United States and China, China's intentions, and the troop recruitment results.

[24 Mar 86]

[Text] The comrades at the Rear Services General Department needed to inform us about the supply situation during the first 3 months of the year and the remaining months of 1973. I also worked with the Political General Department and briefed it on the political-ideological situation of the cadres and troops after the Paris Agreement and find out about capabilities to send additional cadres to the battlefield.

We used the radio station of the General Staff to exchange opinions with Pham Hung, Secretary of COSVN, and the comrades who "remained at home," about the essential matters, and to learn more about the situation on the battlefield since we left.

Thus with the persuasive opinions expressed by Ba, and the opinions expressed by the organs of the High Command to the comrades in the South, we had a basis on which to carefully discuss the matters that should be reported to the Political Bureau. Although there were some matters about which complete
agreement had not been reached, exchanges and discussions within the
dlegation began to help us clarify many important matters.

On 4 April we received a message from Nguyen Chuc, in charge of the Operations
Department, then a message from Le Duc Anh, commander of Military Region 9,
who gave a summary report on the situation in March. In the military region
the enemy launched more than a thousand company and battalion sized
operations, concentrated in the Chuong Thien area. Thus in comparison to the
previous month the number of puppet operations increased by 50 percent but
there was less use of air and artillery support and the effectiveness of the
operations also declined. The soldiers and people of Military Region 9
resolutely counterattacked and attacked the enemy, forcing them to contract.
The number of outposts we took was greater than the number taken by the enemy.

On the basis of that actual situation, and in view of the matters brought up
by Ba, the problem that was posed for us was what the struggle slogans and
forms should be to be appropriate to the situation on the battlefield, at a
time when the enemy were violating the Agreement more and more openly and
stepping up pacification and encroachment.

Beginning on 12 April Ba and a number of members of the Political Bureau
worked with our delegation. Those work sessions did not have the nature of an
official conference. The listened to our reports and contributed opinions,
inquired about nearly 2 million hectares and produces 8 to 10 million tons of rice a year. If fully utilized, it could attain 15 million tons of paddy,
which would provide about six or seven million tons of commodity rice, double
the present commodity rice output (in 1985 the Mekong Delta supplied more than
3 million tons of commodity rice--more than 70 percent of the nation's commodity rice output).

According to calculations by agricultural scientists, because of the natural
limitations of the Red River Delta (its limited area, which has already been
almost fully developed, and a relatively high population density), the rice
production of that area in the coming period cannot grow by more than 8
percent a year. But the Mekong Delta can attain a rate of 10 to 15 percent
(the highest rate of increase of rice output in the world at present is 6 to 8
percent). Before the liberation the Mekong Delta had about 8,000 large
tractors, 15,000 small tractors, and more than 500,000 other agricultural
machines imported from foreign countries. The remaining facilities were
various kinds of improved machines and labor tools, most of which were
supplied by industry in Saigon. But more than 10 years after the liberation,
although the state has invested more than 5,000 large tractors most of the
tractors have broken down because they have been used too long and there were
no spare parts, so only about 4,500 tractors are still usable, and only about
5,000 small tractors, and fewer than one-tenth of the agricultural machines
are still in operation. There is an increasingly serious shortage of labor
implements. According to a survey taken in 1985, in the Mekong Delta and in
the rural areas around Ho Chi Minh City, the peasants do not have sufficient
implements with which to produce. For every three workers there is only one
hoe, there is only one sickle for every two workers, there is one narrow scythe
for every four people, and there is one scythe for every two households. Seventy
percent of the workers still thresh rice by hand and winnow it by using woven
mats and straw hats. During the summer and fall of 1984, because there was excessive rain and high humidity, and because there were no drying machines, a shortage of granary space, and a shortage of transportation facilities, the summer-fall rice mildewed and was swept away by the rain. Nearly 300,000 ton of paddy (nearly 30 percent of the seasonal output) was lost. That amount of rice is sufficient to feed everyone in the city for 6 months. From the point of view of the structure of investment in a hectare of rice by peasants in the Mekong Delta, to produce only enough to eat, on each hectare they need to spread 100 kilograms of area and 50 kilograms of phosphate, and need cultivate the soil only twice. But if they want to produce commodity rice, i.e. practice intensive cultivation, and to increase output by 30 percent, the amount of fertilizer invested must double and the soil must be cultivated an additional time. If they want to increase output by 50 percent, the amount of fertilizer must increase by 350 percent and the land use ratio must double. That applies to the fresh water areas along the Tien and Hau rivers. From that it can be seen that agricultural production in the Mekong Delta depends to a very great extent on assistance from industry in Ho Chi Minh City and in the nation as a whole.

Over a period of more than 10 years industry has developed in the localities and in Ho Chi Minh City, but industry serving agriculture had developed slowly and its organization is not yet rational, which both wastes the capacities of the equipment and does not effectively meet the requirements of production. With regard to the capabilities and technical equipment of industry in Ho Chi Minh City, it is possible to refurbish and manufacture the various kinds of essential tractor parts, such as high-pressure pumps, innersubes and tires, cog wheels, etc. Regretfully, however, no functional organ has stepped forward to organize those activities. Nor has the state assigned norms and supplied materials and capital so that the city can produce them. As a result, thousands of tractors have broken down because of a lack of spare parts and the same is true with regard to agricultural machines. According to an initial survey in the precincts and districts of the municipality with regard to industrial capability, if the state provided sufficient steel, energy, and capital, and part of the technical equipment, Ho Chi Minh City could meet 80 percent of the need for machinery spare parts for agricultural production in the Mekong Delta and the nation as a whole. It could thus provide jobs for tens of thousands of workers. One of the deficiencies that has recently caused very great harm has been the dispersal of the industrial sector's capital. Over a period of more than 10 years the state has built more than 1,000 large and small installations, some of which have been very large, but none produce fertilizer and factories for agriculture. For those things, which are essential for the nation's agriculture, we must depend entirely on foreign countries. Distribution to the localities in a mechanical manner has disrupted the distribution of labor and the development of the economic areas that had previously been formed, has led to the situation of territorial division, has broken up the economic areas, and has caused chaos in production. Many materials and much energy and equipment have been distributed unevenly among the localities, which has resulted in the situation of many localities not needing or using all of them, so they sell them or allow them to break down, while the city has factories and workers but no jobs. In addition, the policy of "impeding the flow of commerce" has caused many agricultural products intended to serve the lives of the people and
provide raw materials for the city's industry to be in short supply, and has harmed not only local agricultural production but has also exacerbated the economic situation and social life of the city and the nation as a whole.

We must implement the resolution of the Fourth Congress of the Municipal Party Organization and the new spirit of the draft resolution of the Sixth Party Congress on building an agricultural-industrial economic structure and orienting the industrial sector toward serving the requirements of agriculture. The key to the problem is renovating thought on developing the economic sector. Special attention must be paid to assigning plan missions and reorganizing the industrial sector in Ho Chi Minh City, in order to develop the city's industrial capability to the maximum to serve agriculture in the Mekong Delta and the entire nation. It is necessary to end the situation of breaking up territorial economic areas and create favorable conditions for industry in the city and in the localities to develop rationally. For the city's part, it must rationally reorganize its industrial sector, concentrating on industries which serve agriculture. The city's industry should manage the principal, important products, such as the various kinds of equipment and spare parts for tractors and the other kinds of agricultural machinery. The precinct echelon should be assigned responsibility for managing labor implements, but it should intensify its product quality inspections. Industries processing and producing machinery to process agricultural products should be more strongly developed to meet the needs of agricultural production in the future.

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Chapter Three

Creating a New Status and a New Strength

One of the things that made us proud of the party was that throughout the course of leading armed uprisings and revolutionary war, over a long period of time, it had always known how to create opportunities and actively take advantage of strategic opportunities to advance the revolution to decisive turning points. Each of those victories is characterized by a correct, timely strategic decision by the party.

After the resolutions of the Sixth Plenum of the Party Central Committee (November 1939) and the Seventh Plenum (November 1940), and especially the Eighth Plenum (May 1941), when President Ho returned to Vietnam to guide the revolution, our party clearly delineated the path of struggle to win political power for the people and build up the political and armed forces to await strategic opportunities.

Prior to and during the August Revolution, following the directive of 12 March 1945 on "The Fighting Between the Japanese and French and Our Actions" (launching a high tide of resistance against Japan and preparing for a general uprising), and when Japan surrendered to the Allies, the party decided to take advantage of the opportunity to launch a general uprising and quickly take power all over the nation.

During the anti-French resistance war the resolution of the conference of the Political Bureau of the Party Central Committee (September 1953) led to the 1953-1954 winter-spring victory, the high point of which was the historic Dien Bien Phu campaign.

In the anti-U.S. resistance war, by means of Resolution 15 (1959) our party decided to launch partial armed uprisings, beginning with a high tide of "simultaneous uprisings," and then defeating the "special war" strategy of the U.S. imperialists and their lackeys step by step. When U.S. troops began to pour into the South, with Resolution 12 (at the beginning of 1986) the party decided to continue to develop our strategic offensive status and gradually defeat the enemy's "limited war" strategy. In mid-1973, only 5 months after the Paris Agreement, Resolution 21 of the Party Central Committee (12) affirmed the continuation of the path of revolutionary violence, the continuation of counterattacks and attacks against the enemy, and the defeat of the new U.S.-puppet strategic plot, and opened the way for the final victory of the enterprise of liberating the south. Resolution 21 had a special importance: it determined the correct course for the revolution in the South during the final phase of nearly 20 years of resistance war against the United States for national salvation and 30 years of liberation war.

On the basis of that actual situation, it is possible to affirm that in every phase of the long struggle the party always correctly evaluated the situation, took the initiative in keeping a step ahead in strategic preparations, and mobilized the combined strength of the entire population, in order to promptly create a new status and a new strength, and win increasingly greater victories.
That was one of the outstanding features of our party's strategic skill in leading armed uprisings and revolutionary war.

After participating in the initial phase of the 21st Plenum of the Central Committee, I prepared to return to the battlefield to work with our comrades there in preparing for the COSVN conference that was scheduled to be held around September.

The army doctors recommended that I undergo a physical examination before setting out. During the past 3 months, since I arrived in the North, my health had been good, which put me very much at ease. But there was an unexpected development. The doctors gave me an examination and concluded that I had a myocardial infarction in the past and needed a gall-stone operation. On the recommendation of the medical council, the Organization Department of the Party Central Committee decided that I should undergo treatment in the German Democratic Republic. It was estimated that at least 4 months would be required for treatment and travel.

I was undecided so I exchanged opinions with the members of the standing committee of the Military Commission and sought the opinion of Pham Hung. They recommended that I undertake the treatment. "The war will continue for a long time."

I spent another half-month working with the organs, continued to resolve essential problems for the B2 theater, and sent a message to COSVN which set forth my personal opinions on implementing Resolution 21. On 13 July I set out for the GDR.

I returned to Vietnam in November, bringing along profound, fine impressions of the fraternal friendship and devoted care of the GDR doctors, and of the economic construction and development and lives of the people of that fraternal nation.

[2 Apr 86]

[Text] The war had been over in that country for nearly 30 years. The spirit of selfless labor of the people of the GDR during the past several decades had brought about a steadily improving standard of living. I thought about that a good deal and compared the GDR to the prospects for our country after it was unified, when we would advance the entire country to socialism by passing over the period of capitalist development under the conditions of an agricultural nation with small-scale production which also bore the consequences of two devastating wars and of the old-style and new-style colonialism left behind by the French colonialists and U.S. Imperialists.

After returning to Hanoi I reported by telegram to the members of COSVN and the Regional Command. The dry season had arrived. I worked urgently with organs of the Ministry of National Defense to gain full understanding of the aspects relevant to the coming prepared to set out on the return trip to the theater.
The members of the standing committee of the Military Commission of the Party Central Committee informed me of the newest decisions regarding the operational policies, the equipment and troop reinforcements, the cadre work and the direction of the political-ideological work, etc. I was confident with regard to the capability for fulfilling the theater's missions during the dry season and the succeeding phases.

In mid-December I telegraphed a reply to Pham Hung, Tran Van Tra, and Tran Do regarding the plan to reinforce the theater in 1974:

"I received your message enquiring about the troops and equipment the High Command will send to the B2 theater during the coming year. As for the number of troops, the final figure approved by the High Command for reinforcing the B2 theater is 26,000.

"A new development that pleases me very much is that the Rear Services General Department and Group 559 will transport those troops by truck and will complete that task during the first 3 months of the year. They will be fed en route at the way stations of Group 559. Thus the troops will arrive more quickly and in better health. This time the reinforcements will be better trained. The training cycles will last about 6 months. In addition to infantry and combat arms, the High Command will also send a rather large number of specialized personnel (cryptanalysts, communications specialists, reconnaissance specialists, and rear services-technical specialists).

"I recommend that you direct the organs to prepare a plan to receive the reinforcements and distribute them in a timely manner, to avoid bottlenecks.

"My requests for cadres to set up an Air Defense Command and for a number of 57mm anti-aircraft units for the B2 theater have not yet been acted upon.

"With regard to military and civilian cargo, in 1974 the central echelon will provide the B2 front with a total of 22,000 tons, including 12,000 tons of military cargo (two-thirds of it weapons and ammunition). The Rear Services General Department plans to complete the shipment of that cargo to the B2 front during the first 4 months of 1974. It is not yet possible to fulfill my requests for 57mm anti-aircraft ammunition and A72 weapons and ammunition. I have also requested (outside the plan) other anti-aircraft guns and DK 82 guns, along with various kinds of ammunition.

"I would like to take the opportunity report to Pham Hung and the members of COSVN on my health situation. On 5 December the physicians' council reexamined me and concluded that my heart beat was still not very stable and that I required an additional period of treatment. The doctors have agreed to make all-out efforts to complete my treatment by the end of January 1974 so that in early February, prior to the lunar new year, I could set out. I will do as Hung said in his message and make all-out efforts to get well."

Intending to return to the B2 theater during the Chap Dan Tet period, I bought Tet gifts and sent them in advance, so that during the trip I could travel light and more rapidly.
At the end of January 1974, when preparations had been completed and I was going to say good-bye to the leadership comrades and the members of the High Command, once again there was an unexpected development.

When I met with Sau Tho he informed me than the Organization Department of the Party Central Committee had recommended to the Political Bureau that I should remain in the North, and it had agreed.

"Why?"

"The physicians' council has just recommended that because you have just undergone a major operation and your heartbeat is not yet very stable, your health cannot be guaranteed, especially during a long trip."

"I recommend that you allow me to go to. I promise to take good care of myself."

"That will not do. We know that you have completed all preparations, but the doctors have discovered your health plan. If we allow you to go to we will be responsible if anything should happen and we would always regret it. You should remain in the North and work with the General Staff to prepare for the decisive phase. The Military Commission of the Party Central Committee and the staff organ must be bolstered so they can assist the Political Bureau and the Party Central Committee."

I knew that the odds were against me. The Political Bureau members agreed with the Organization Department's recommendation that I remain to work with the Ministry of National Defense. The upper echelon also decided to send Tran Van Tra to replace me as commander of the B2 theater. I shook Tho's hand and returned, full of concern and worry, with my thoughts and intentions since the 21st Plenum, and my enthusiastic preparations to return to the battlefield. I thought of each of the members of COCVN and the Regional Command, of the times we had held meetings and exchanged opinions, and of the seething struggle sessions, which we sometimes heated when disagreements arose, in order to arrive at unanimity and solidarity in working together in the fierce test of strength with the enemy troops. I sat for 3 straight hours writing an eight-page letter to report on the situation and my thoughts to Pham Hung and the members of COCVN, and recalled the times we had worked together and our warm comradeship, which I would never forget.

Because I would have to remain in the North, I met with Van and Dung to enquire about my responsibility. They said that the Political Bureau discussed the matter and had just decided that I would be the first deputy chief of the General Staff. They assigned me direct responsibility for guiding reinforcements for the battlefields and for providing operational guidance.

Thus I would resume my previous work with people with whom I had worked in the past. I decided to take things easy so that I could begin work immediately.
At that time the organ was concentrating on helping the upper echelon guide the battlefields in carrying out the dry-season plan. The envoys had returned from the battlefields, bringing back reports on all aspects the situation and recommendations regarding the strategic direction in 1974, in accordance with the spirit of Resolution 21 of the Party Central Committee. I reserved much time for listening to the departments and the envoys report on the situation and on the work of the General Staff. I also worked with Song Hao and Dinh Duc Thien in order to unify coordination of the common tasks of the Ministry of National Defense in carrying out Resolution 21.

On that occasion Le Duc Anh, commander of Military Region 9, also reported to the Political Bureau and the Military Commission of the Party Central Committee. On our recommendation, he sat aside 4 days to report to the General Staff so that we could share experiences about the situation in Military Region 9 since the beginning of 1973. The experiences of Military Region 9 in fighting pacification were still a very important matter about which the strategic staff organ wanted to be fully informed.

Even before the Agreement had been signed, beginning on 11 January 1973, the enemy sent the 21st Division to attack southwest of Long My, while sending many other forces to encroach upon many liberated areas in the military region. The soldiers and people of Military Region 9 fought back against the enemy while reorganizing their forces and preparing to implement a "contingency plan" in accordance with the directive of COSVN and the Regional Command. After more than a week we had defeated the enemy’s operation and expanded the Bac Long, My, and Phung Hiep areas.

In March the enemy used the 21st Division, supported by the 9th Cavalry Regiment, to launch an offensive regiment, to launch an offensive campaign in the Chuong Thien area, with the goals of "filling in" our liberated enclaves southwest of Long My, set up a blocking line between Ngang Dua and Vinh Cheo, isolate the U Minh area, and pushing our forces out of that important area. Fully understanding the spirit of the 3 February resolution of the standing committee of the military region party committee, the local soldiers and people resolutely retaliated against the enemy. The first phase of the enemy’s offensive in Chuong Thien was defeated.

On 5 June the enemy launched the second phase of their strategic campaign and were once again repulsed. They concentrated more than 60 infantry battalions, four river squadrons, a six M113 squadrons to carry out a large-scale, long-term operation to take the Ba Ho and Lat Hieu areas. The soldiers and people of Military Region 9 resolutely held their ground and the three types of troops continually counterattacked and attacked the enemy, closely coordinated the three offensive programs, and fought the enemy in the key areas, while drawing in the enemy and stretching them out in the various areas. During a period of 2.5 months (from 15 June to 30 August 1973) the the soldiers and people of Military Region 9 fought more than 200 large and small battles, knocked out of action more than 5,000 of the enemy, defeated the largest enemy offensive in the Chuong Thien area, defended the U Minh base, and created a battlefield position that was advantageous to us.
We concluded that the lessons of Military Region 9 were staunchly defending the area and the battlefield, being responsive in leadership and guidance, correctly evaluating the plots and schemes of the enemy; taking the initiative in resolutely retaliating against the enemy, without being hesitant or indecisive; employing slogans and modes correctly and creatively; closely coordinating the forces and localities; and fighting the enemy continuously and causing the large enemy forces to be stretched thin to cope with us in many areas, be struck with painful blows in the key areas, not be able to attain their objectives, and suffer heavy losses.

Comrade Le Duc Anh also briefed as about the Military Region 8 theater. By the end of 1973 we had essentially retaken the areas and enclaves the enemy had occupied since the end of 1973 north and south of Route 4 and in the "20 July area" (13), Ben Tre, and Kien Tuong, and had expanded many key areas at Mo Cay Nam, Giang Trom, and Mo Cay Bac. We had forced the enemy to abandon more than 50 outposts and retaken 126 hamlets with 45,000 people. In My Tho we had retaken three areas and an enclave and liberated six villages and 12 hamlets with nearly 90,000 people.

Le Trong Tan and Cao Van Khanh, the heads of the operations and militia departments, and I discussed the experiences of the Mekong Delta, especially those of Military Region 9, and agreed to recommend that the High Command convene a conference in May to exchange opinions on guiding anti-pacification measures. The militia and operations departments coordinated in preparing for the conference.

The secretary of the Military Commission said that it would meet in March to review the situation and issue a resolution on the major tasks that must continue to be carried out in the spirit Resolution 21 of the Party Central Committee, especially to concretize the operational slogans and modes for the coming period. We exchanged opinions and agreed to assign Tan the task of preparing an agenda to submit for approval by Van, Dung, and the leading comrades of the General Staff before reporting to the Military Commission conference.

[3 Apr 86]

[Text] When exchanging opinions in order to prepare for the draft resolution of the Military Commission, a matter with which we were especially concerned was that recommendations the General Stall would make to the Military Commission and the Political Bureau regarding the direction for creating a new status and new strength before beginning the 1974-1975 dry season. A whole series of preparatory strategic tasks which were already underway needed to be urgently accelerated in order to essentially complete them by the end of 1974; step up the activity cycle at the end of the 1973-1974 dry season and during the current rainy season, in order to create an increasingly advantageous battlefield position; complete the first phase, and begin the second phase, of the plan to transport supplies and reinforcements to the battlefields; guide and oversee the building up of the local and armed forces in the South; complete the strategic and campaign road network and extend the oil pipeline deeper into the South; guide and control the building of on-the-spot rear services along the 559 route and in the liberated areas; fulfill the 1974
troops recruitment plan and the first plan of the 1975; consolidate themain-force troops, especially the strategic mobile main-force troops in the North, including the technical units, including the preliminary recapitulation of the first military training cycle, carrying out the second training cycle, etc.

by completing those preparatory strategic tasks we could not only create a new status and strength in both regions, especially in the South, in order to win a big victory in the coming dry season but also make active preparations to take the initiative should a strategic opportunity arise.

The time I spend working with Tan and Khanh in preparing an agenda to present to the Military Commission, and with the general departments of the Ministry of National Defense, the departments of the General Staff, and the envoys who had just returned from the battlefields, helped me understand the work of the General Staff and the situation on the battlefields.

During 1973 the enemy made very great efforts and we attained a number of results.

They had taken a number of liberated base enclaves consisting of nearly 400 hamlets, set up more than 700 outposts, prevented the puppet army and puppet administration from disintegrating, held down the masses, and further consolidated the areas under their control, especially in the lowlands of Military Region 5.

But they failed to attain their primary goal of eliminating the "leopard spot" status. Since September they had been repulsed in Military Region 9 and stopped in Military Region 8. Although they had grabbed a number of areas in Military Region 5, they had also been brought to a halt there.

The puppet army had been strengthened to an important degree. With aid from the United States, the number of puppet troops had increased (the number of local troops tripled). The puppet army could maintain a small or medium scale of fighting, but it was not sufficiently strong to cope with a large-scale offensive, such as the one we launched in 1972.

Thieu had made progress in consolidating the puppet regime, especially by militarizing the control apparatus at the basic level. But they were highly isolated politically and were encountering economic difficulties.

An outstanding feature was that the morale and combat strength of the puppet army had clearly declined, their strategic deployment had been dispersed and stretched out, and in places in which we resolutely retaliated, such as the Mekong Delta, the enemy were confounded and passive.

The U.S. imperialists were encountering many difficulties in their own country and in the world. They were beset with severe internal contradictions. Although they had not yet abandoned their nefarious plot with regard to South Vietnam, they were more constrained and restricted than in the past.

For our part, our number-one, central mission was to smash pacification and oppose land-grabbing. The struggle to gain control of the people and win
mastership for them was extremely fierce, especially in the lowlands of military regions 5 and 8. By that time we had control of about 4 million people, including 1.2 million in the liberated areas.

Operationally, with the policy of counterattacking and attacking, while infiltrating forces into the enemy's rear, we had maintained and stepped up people's war in the localities, especially since September.

The casualty ratio during the past year was 5:1 in our favor, but that ratio was still too high.

The local armed forces had begun to be supplemented and forged and had made progress, especially in the Mekong Delta.

During the past year the North had sent to the battlefields nearly 100,000 troops, so the average combat strength of the battalions had increased from 350 to 400. The units were able to engage in training and combat on a rotational basis. The numbers of technical weapons (field artillery, anti-aircraft artillery, tanks, etc.) had been increased. By the end of 1973 about 15,000 tons of weapons had been sent south via the Truong Son route, but difficulties were still being encountered in transportation to military regions 6, 8, and 9, and to the southern part of Military Region 5.

The tasks of building up the liberated areas and the mountain region bases and assisting Laos and Cambodia, had been carried out actively and urgently.

After grasping the situation in all respects, I thought about it, exchanged opinions with the General Staff members, and noted there were still several weak aspects which we had to make all-out efforts to overcome:

Militarily, the development of the local troops, militia, and guerrillas in the South had still not kept up with the requirements of the strategic missions.

Politically, the urban movement had not made progress, our actual strength at the basic level in enemy-controlled areas was still thin, and our staging areas in the border areas and the corridors connecting the bases were not yet solid. The open legal movement of the third force had not yet develop.

Military aid, especially with regard to offensive weapons and artillery shells, was not as great as in the past.

We assigned the task of resolving those problems to the Operational Department and recommended that the Rear Services General Department recalculate its weapons and equipment and ensure that the operational plans for 1974 and the next several year be on the scales of medium-scale fighting in 1975 and large-scale fighting in 1976, and draft a plan to overcome problems (if there are insufficient heavy artillery shells).

I reported those thoughts to Van, Dung, and the other deputy chiefs of staff, when they were approving the military agenda prepared by Tan.
During the March conference of the Military Commission, Tan, on behalf of the General Staff, presented the agenda. After reviewing the all aspects of the situation in 1973, the report of the General Staff recommended a strategic direction and activity slogans and modes for the next several years, in the spirit of Resolution 21.

The conference of the Military Commission of the Party Central Committee discussed matters, and issued a resolution, consisting of the following principal points:

1. The central, No. 1 mission was still to defeat to an important degree the enemy's pacification, land-grabbing, and delineation of areas plan, win control of the people, win mastership in the lowlands and the outskirts of the large, wealthy cities.

2. It was necessary to gradually advance the movement in the cities, while at the same time preparing basic-level forces and preparing conditions and an opportunity to give rise to a high tide of revolution.

3. The main-force troops would simultaneously fight and build, gradually increase the scale of their annihilating battles, and simultaneously fight and monitor the enemy's reaction in order to take timely steps to cope with them.

4. Consolidate, build, defend, and complete the liberated areas and base areas in the South, accompanied by endeavoring to restore and develop the economy in the North, build up the North economically and with regard to national defense, and be prepared to defeat the enemy's plots.

All of those things were intended to change the overall comparison of forces to our advantage, while at the same time creating opportunities, being prepared to coordinate the three strong fists (the main-force units and the rural and urban forces, unexpectedly and rapidly change the situation, prevent the enemy from reacting, and win the greatest possible victories for the revolution.

In order to carry out that policy, the Military Commission emphasized the following:

1. An urgent, basic requirement during the next several years would be to win control of the people, win mastership in the lowlands, liberate, and gain firm control of, the mountain region, set up small enclaves in enemy-controlled areas, gradually win mastership in the cities, develop the status and strength of the revolution in the South, and cause us to grow stronger and the enemy to weaken.

2. It was necessary to firmly grasp the offensive strategic concept, resolutely counterattack and attack the enemy, and take the initiative in all regards. It was necessary to apply the slogans and modes flexibly, on the basis of the specific condition in each period of time and in each area.

In the highly populated lowlands, where the enemy were pacifying and land-grabbing, we had to attack and counterattack to defeat them, emphasize the
offensive, and make the areas temporarily occupied by the enemy to gradually transform the contested areas into liberated areas, and advance the enemy-controlled areas to contested or liberated areas.

In the mountain region, we would launch counterattacks and attacks and defeat the enemy's land-grabbing attacks, while attacking and wiping out the remaining strong points, expanding the integrated land areas, and solidifying the liberated areas.

In the areas behind enemy lines we had to take the initiative in attacking to destroy airfields, supply depots, rear-area bases, staging bases for military operations, and the roads used by the enemy to attack us.

3. It was necessary to closely combine several operational modes:

Maintaining and developing people's war in localities in highly populated, prosperous lowland areas, fight on a small scale, on a medium scale, continuously, and extensively, and organize combined campaigns on small and large scales, in order to fulfill the central mission of destroying the enemy's pacification and land-grabbing plan, win control of the people, and win mastership in the highly populated, prosperous areas.

Stepping up medium-scale and large-scale combat by the main-force units to annihilate part of the enemy regular forces and coordinating and creating conditions for people's war to develop in the lowlands. The main-force units would simultaneously fight and build, and be prepared to fight large scale annihilating battles when the opportunity arose.

Encouraging the development of the urban movement and advance to tightly surrounding the important cities and towns, especially Saigon.

We needed to make outstanding efforts and coordinate those three operational modes in order to, in future years, form three strong fists (the rural areas, the urban areas, and the main-force units). When the strategic opportunity arose, when the comparison of forces between ourselves and the enemy underwent a fundamental change, when the United States was encountering many difficulties at home and abroad, when our preparations had been completed, etc., we would, depending on the specific situation, determine the level necessary to win victory.

The Military Commission conference also decided upon a number of major tasks to carry out the strategic policy in the new phase, oriented toward the requirement of large-scale combat. It was necessary to strengthen the armed forces, especially the strategic mobile reserve force. The great rear area in the North would have to restore and develop the economy, while also positively mobilizing manpower and material for the great front line in the South. We had to pay attention to the political-ideological work, the table of organization, and training, in order to continually improve the all-round fighting quality of the armed forces.

When disseminating the resolution of the Military Commission to the leading cadres of the General Staff, after analyzing the revolutionary situation and
the new strategic policy, I emphasized the contents of the major tasks to which the strategic staff organ needed to pay attention (in addition to the permanent mission of guiding combat according to plan), with the goal of creating a new status and new strength before beginning the coming dry season.

In building up the armed forces, the General Staff needed to pay attention to transforming the main-force strategic mobile forces into strong corps which were organized and trained along the lines of large-scale combined arms combat, increase the battalions and regiments to full strength, send additional forces to the battlefields to serve as on-the-spot reserve forces, and increase the local forces by 150 to 200 percent.

[4 Apr 86]

[Text] In addition to the policy of actively building and consolidating the liberated areas and base areas in the South. The General Staff coordinated with the Rear Services General Department and Group 559 in consolidating the strategic western Truong Son route, extending the eastern Truong Son route, and building a system of supply depots and technical rear-services support bases for large-scale combat, and discussed with the Communications Command the development of a long-range telephone line connecting the battlefields with the Ministry of National Defense organs in the rear.

In the North, emphasis would be on consolidating Military Region 4, especially the southern part of it. All provinces had to prepare to mobilize and recruit troops, and it was still necessary to strengthen people's air defense, especially in the important military, economic, and political areas.

After the March 1974 resolution of the Military Commission of the Party Central Committee was approved by the Political Bureau, the General Staff quickly sent urgent messages to the military regions in the South. At the beginning of April 1974 the Military Commission convened an all-army conference of high-ranking cadres (primarily cadres in the North) to explain and study the organization of implementation.

It had been a long time since I had attended such a large and happy meeting. All of the leaders and commanders of the military regions, armed forces branches, corps, general departments, and important departments were present at the guest house of the Ministry of National Defense at 33 Pham Ngoc Lao, Hanoi.

The summer weather had just begun. The flamboyant trees along the streets of Hanoi had produced their first bright-red blossoms.

Having not met one another for a long time, we greeted one another warmly. We talked about combat, our work, and even our families. We recalled the past, spoke of the present, and also looked forward to the future, after the nation had won complete victory.

An atmosphere of enthusiasm enveloped the entire assembly hall. Everyone had recently listened to and discussed Resolution 21 of the Party Central Committee and were now being briefed on the situation on the battlefields, the
present military missions, the developmental capabilities of the situation, and the policy and measures which had been adopted by the Military commission in its March 1974 resolutions. Listening attentively and discussing enthusiastically, all localities, battlefields, armed forces branches, combat arms, units, and organs expressed complete agreement with Resolution 21 of the Party Central Committee and the resolution of its Military Commission, and determination to organize their best possible implementation, according to their functions and missions.

On the final day, Ba and Sau Tho attended the conference. They delivered speeches and further analyzed the situation, the missions, and many matters requiring further clarification, especially the intentions of some nations vis-a-vis Southeast Asia, the developmental capabilities of the revolution in the South, and the strategic measures that would lead to the winning of complete victory in the future.

Also on that occasion, the Military Commission of the Party Central Committee and the Ministry of National Defense announced the decision of the Political Bureau, of the Chairman of the Council of State, and of the Premier to promote a number of colonels to the rank of general and promote a number of general officers. President Ton Duc Thang attended the conference and praised the accomplishments of our army, praised the cadres, and admonished everyone to further increase their determination to complete the enterprise of liberating the South and unifying the Fatherland. During the break periods the assembly hall resounded with warm salutations and intimate handshakes among comrades.

Happiness was mixed with worry. There was happiness because there was complete unanimity with the party's resolution regarding the revolution in the South, but there was worry because there was too much work and too little time. While the battlefields were stepping up combat, building up forces, and creating a new status and a new strength, the rear area had to carry out rapidly and on time a whole series of urgent tasks of strategic importance: recruiting troops, developing, training for large-scale battles, building the network of strategic and campaign roads, building a system of supply depots and rear-services support bases, recapitulating combat experiences, building up and developing the ranks of cadres, etc., to take advantage of strategic opportunities in a timely manner.

To more fully understand the actual situation and create favorable conditions for fulfilling the responsibilities and missions that were assigned, at that time going to the units and localities had become an urgent requirement.

During more than 10 years on the battlefield, there were many new matters which had to be fully understood in order to expand knowledge, guide the units, and especially guide the armed forces branches and combat arms in accordance with our army's new developmental requirements, including the recapitulation of combat experiences against the enemy's war of destruction.

During the last part of April and all of May 1974 I sat aside almost all of my time to visit the units and military regions in the North to grasp the situation and make additional enquiries, especially in order to correctly
evaluate all aspects of their potential and create a basis on which to participate in drafting strategic plans for the next several years.

The days I spent visiting the main-force units and localities, working with the leadership and command cadres, and meeting with people were truly useful. I spoke with them about the situation on the battlefields, well-fought battles, the people's spirit of stubbornly holding their own, and the soul of the people and soldiers on the great front line in the South who looked to the great rear area in the North night and day with confidence that they could, by working together, lead the revolution to final victory. As a person who had experienced years of combat in Military Region 5, then in the B2 theater, on behalf of the men at the front I expressed their gratitude for the rear-area localities and units for having gone all-out in aiding the south so that it could win one victory after another. I was very moved when I found that wherever I went the localities were busily mobilizing and recruiting troops for the battlefields, and the units were urgently preparing for the day when they would set out to fight in the South.

The air defense-air force commanders briefed me on experiences in using the air force and missiles against the enemy's war of destruction. When I visited the air-defense units I was introduced to a new type of missile, the "SAM 3". In the past, when resisting two wars of destruction waged by the U.S. imperialists, we had only "SAM 2" missiles.

When I visited the Navy I listened carefully to accounts of actions by frogmen, was briefed about capabilities for sending aid to the South by sea, and discussed how we would use the puppet naval forces after we won.

When I visited the military engineers I saw them assembling a bridge to ensure mobility by large units. I spoke with them about the rivers-and-canals terrain in Nam Bo and encouraged them to study ways to use equipment that was appropriate to that special type of terrain, to ensure mechanized movement.

In addition to the artillery units with which I had been familiar before going south, we now had a large number of artillery units, including mechanized long-range heavy artillery brigades. Those strategic reserve artillery forces would provide the primary fire support during the major campaigns that were about to be launched.

At the Armored Command I attentively listened to briefings on coordinated infantry-tank attacks in the initial battle at Lang Vay and the battles during the Route 9—Southern Laos and Quang Tri campaigns.

When I visited the Sapper Command a conference was being held to recapitulate the well-fought battles. Many southern cadres whom I knew were in attendance. I attended the conference for 2 days and contributed many opinions.

No matter what combat arm or armed forces branch I visited I exchanged opinions with the comrades in charge regarding the requirements and capabilities vis-a-vis aiding the battlefields when so ordered by the Supreme Command.
During the period in which I surveyed the units, armed forces branches, and technical combat arms, something that caused me to be at ease and enthusiastic was the ideological situation of the troops and the units' enthusiastic spirit of waiting to set out, which were results of large-scale combined arms training and a large corps of command and technical cadres who had good political and ideological ability and grasped the capabilities of the combat arm's technical equipment.

But something that caused me concern was that we still had too few heavy artillery shells. Our reserve forces had a total of fewer than 100,000 such shells. Some of them had already been distributed to the units. Most had been sent to supply depots south of Route 9. There were practically none left in the rear echelon supply depots in the North. What could be done to have sufficient firepower for the large campaigns, especially when fighting enemy troops defending large bases, municipalities, cities, and towns. That problem needed to be reported promptly to the Military Commission and the Rear Services General Department so that they could work together in solving it.

When I visited the Ta Ngan and Huu Ngan military regions, I sought to understand their troop mobilization capabilities. The number of recently mobilized troops was truly large. For example, the Ta Ngan military region's population was about 7 million, but during a 10-year period (1964-1973) the provinces sent nearly 560,000 troops to the battlefields, i.e. 8 percent of their population. That was a very significant figure which reflected the sense of responsibility and the strong spirit of sacrifice of the entire population and of each family vis-a-vis the sacred obligation of the great rear area toward the great front line.

The troop recruitment situation in the Red River delta caused me to think was the very great requirements of the battlefields in future years. What could be done to continue to mobilize troops to take advantage of the strategic opportunity in a timely manner, while the on-the-spot mobilization capabilities in the South were still very limited. Furthermore, the matters of winning control of the people and creating condition for the people to break the enemy's control in the South in order to mobilize large on-the-spot forces had become increasingly more urgent requirements which could, along with the forces sent from the North, fulfill the requirements of the rapid development of the revolution and revolutionary war in the South.

When I went to Military Region 4 I carefully studied troop deployments in the southern part of the military zone, and paid special attention to inspecting the coastal artillery positions of the military region and the localities. While returning via Tinh Gia District I went to inspect an alert exercise by a coastal artillery unit. The unit's command organization was quite good. The comrades in the district party committee had been very much concerned with building up the self-defense militia forces to coordinate with the main-force units in defending the coast.

When visiting the 1st Corps I sought to gain detailed knowledge of all aspects of the situation. That corps had been the first to be formed, 10 years previously. The formation of that original corps once again proved our party's wisdom and demonstrated the inevitable development of war and the
inevitability of large-scale combat. The actual situation in the 1971-1972 period showed that the form of organizing and using independent or dependent divisions was no longer appropriate, but that it was necessary to create and develop the role of fists that were stronger and larger than divisions, for only then could we fulfill the strategic mission of annihilating the large, well-equipped regular units of the enemy within a relatively short period of time. Those fists were the strategic reserve corps, with relatively modern equipment, great assault force, strong firepower and a high degree of mobility. The 1st Corps was the first corps, so it was not surprising that its units included some of our army's first main-force units: the 308th Infantry Division and the 45th Mechanized Artillery Regiment. I recalled the period of the anti-French resistance war, when the enemy closely followed the movements of those units. If they knew that the 308th Division was in a certain area they predicted that we would launch a large-scale attack there. We called the 308th the "steel division." It was awarded the honorific title "Vanguard Division," and the 45th Artillery Regiment was awarded the designation "Ever-Victorious Regiment."

[7 Apr 86]

[Text] During that time, under the guidance of Tran Van Quang, the operation and militia departments completed a recapitulation of anti-pacification experiences. On the basis of the actual battlefield situation during the anti-U.S. resistance period, especially since the Paris Agreement, including the experiences of the soldiers and people of Military Region 9, which had been presented by comrade Le Duc Anh in February 1974, the General Staff drafted a summary report which was rich in both practice and theory, and which would be presented at the coming conference. The report was approved by Van and Dung. Then the conference recapitulated the anti-pacification experiences that had been organized at the end of May 1974. Representatives of the southern battlefields came north to participate in the conference and contributed many additional very valuable and rich experiences. The lessons that were isolated by that important conference were the necessity of fully understanding the viewpoint of revolutionary violence and the strategic offensive concept; the necessity of continually ensuring that the armed forces were combat-ready under all circumstances; the necessity of continually organizing the mass forces and party chapters at the basic level, on the basis of which to develop the militia and guerrilla forces and add to the local troops; the necessity of, in each period of time, promptly discovering and correctly evaluating the new plots and schemes of the enemy, especially when the war was undergoing major turning points; the necessity of knowing how to apply appropriate struggle slogans and modes, depending on the specific local situation; and the necessity of continually developing the strength of both the armed and political forces and the strength of all three spearheads, and taking the initiative in counterattacking and attacking the enemy. All of these things were intended to defeat the enemy's pacification and land-grabbing plans.

The actual situation all over the South at the end of 1974 demonstrated the important significance and practical effect of that conference with regard to breaking up the enemy's pacification and opposing their land-grabbing, and to creating a new status and strength for us.
A mission of special importance to the General Staff before that advent of the dry season was to complete the basic operational plan to submit to the Military Commission of the Party Central Committee.

Immediately after the issuance of the resolution of the 21st Plenum of the Party Central Committee and the October 1973 resolution of the Military Commission, the Central Team of the Operations Department prepared a strategic plan titled "The Operational Direction for 1973-1975" to serve as a basis on which to prepare for the March 1974 conference of the Military Commission. After the Military Commission conference, in May 1974, the Operations Department completed a draft report titled "Outline Study of a Plan to Win Victory in the South."

After studying that outline and seeing the matters that needed to be added to be appropriate to the developing situation on the battlefields, on 18 July 1974 the Commander in Chief, on the basis of the guiding thought of the Political Bureau, directed me and the operations organ to study and complete the basic strategic plan so that it could be presented for approval by the Political Bureau at the end of September.

To help the organ understand the intention of the Political Bureau, he expressed a number of basic opinions on drafting the strategic plan:

1. It was necessary to review the development of the situation on the battlefields since the end of 1973. Because the battlefields had done a good job of applying the offensive concept and resolutely counterattacked and attacked the enemy, and because the rear area had stepped up the transporting of supplies and reinforcement to the battlefields, a new status and a new strength had clearly begun to take form. It was necessary to enter deeply into studying, analyzing, and evaluating the new elements that had been created, to create a basis on which to make strategic decisions.

2. On the basis of the initial changes in the comparison of forces and the battlefield situation, it was necessary to draft a two-phase basic plan.

In the first phase we would win a victory of decisive significance. During that period we would completely change the comparison of forces on the battlefields. We would become stronger than the enemy military and politically, control most of the rural and mountainous areas, and create the capability to set up a coalition government.

During the second phase we would, on that basis, develop to the level of a general offensive and general uprising and win complete victory.

3. With regard to selecting the strategic direction, during the first phase we should select two areas, the Central Highlands and eastern Nam Bo. Those two strategic areas were very important and decisive. The most decisive area was eastern Nam Bo, but only when we had certain conditions. In those two strategic areas we had to carry out feints, create the element of surprise, and not reveal too many of our forces too early, otherwise the enemy could
take defensive measures. For the immediate future the main-force units should operate only a moderate scale.

4. It was necessary to have a separate plan for the North, one that was tied in with the plan for the South. It should concentrate on two missions: mobilizing aid—both manpower and technical materials—for the South, and preparing for and being in on guard against a renewed war of destruction, while preparing an operatinal plan to cope with the eventuality of the enemy carrying out an amphibious landing on the coast in southern Military Region 4.

5. With regard to building forces, it was necessary to grasp the requirement of increasing combat quality, pay attention to resolving the problem of ensuring rational organization, determine a rational table of organization, determine a ratio among the armed forces branches and combat arms, to be appropriate to the actual number of troops and capabilities for mobilizing troops in the near future, and draft a plan to actively supplement the corps of cadres to fulfill the requirements of the strategic missions during the coming period.

6. With regard to fighting methods, it was necessary to disseminate more deeply and broadly the recently recapitulated anti-pacification experiences, organize study of the combat experiences of the main-force units in attacking the enemy subsectors, district seats, cities, and battle groups, and experiences inceating large units to fight large-scale combined-arms battles to annihilate enemy divisions.

7. It was necessary to study a plan to combine national defense with the economy, including organizing troops to participate in economic construction and preparing to restore the railroad line leading south from the southern part of Military Region 4.

My first thought after receiving the directive of the Commander in Chief was to grasp the newest, most comprehensive situation to create a basis on which to supplement and complete the strategic plan.

Dung was tired and was resting in a foreign country. Tan, the other deputy chiefs of staff, and I exchanged opinions, listened to reports by departments of the General Staff and, along with representatives to the Rear Services General Department, needed to evaluate the general situation during the past half-year. The answer that had to be found was a new status and new strength on the battlefield, on the basis of which to draft a strategic plan for the next few years.

A matter that arose after the recent 1973-1974 dry season activity cycle was the transformation in the comparison of forces between ourselves and the enemy and the beginning of a change in the war situation to our advantage.

Enemy documents show that at the beginning of 1974 were still subjective when setting the goals for their pacification and land-grabbing plan, for building up the puppet army, and for economic restoration.
The enemy forces were still large, they still had concentrated air and artillery support, and they still had many outposts in the rural areas, so they still controlled a number of highly populated areas, and were still able to plunder manpower and materiel for the war. But with regard to combat activities the enemy's weakness became increasingly clear. After we began our activity cycle, especially after March 1974, there arose a general situation on the battlefields of the enemy resisting us passively. Although the enemy army was still large, it had been stretched out and forced to spread its defensive forces thin, its ability to counterattack was limited, its ability to relieve seiges had weakened, it used troops drop by drop, and its mobility had declined. There was an increasingly clearer contradiction between using troops for pacification and land-grabbing and concentrating forces to relieve seiges. The actual situation had demonstrated that the enemy's morale and fighting strength had declined, and wherever we attacked strongly they fled, especially, their regional forces and popular forces.

During the first months of the year the enemy tried to take a number of areas in Tay Son Tinh, Tay Tu Ngia, Dong Mo Duc, Dong Bac Duc Pho, and Kien Tuong in Military Region 4, but the enemy could not realize their intentions. The number of outposts we took was double or triple the number the enemy retook, and the area controlled by the enemy steadily shrank. Their pacification and land-grabbing plan, which had a strategic significance, was facing the peril of bankruptcy.

With regard to building forces, although the enemy used all schemes to conscript troops, in hopes of approximately maintaining their 1973 level, and began to organize village military subsectors, the first half of 1974 showed that the enemy army was experiencing a rapid decline, its desertions were increasing, the total troop strength was tending to decline below that of 1973, the regular and local battalions were under-strength, and its strategic mobile reserves, which were already insufficient, were brought in and concentrated in Military Region 1.

A matter worthy of attention was that although the enemy still had much technical equipment, their ability to use it was limited because there were insufficient facilities to repair it, there was a shortage of technical personnel (the number of pilots met only 30 percent of requirements), the number of artillery shells used on the battlefields during the first half of 1974 decreased nine-fold in comparison to 1973, FOL declined by 50 percent in comparison to 1972, of their 1,800 airplanes, only 1,100 were usable, etc. That situation directly affected the morale and activities of the puppet troops on the battlefields. That explains why in June 1974 Nguyen Van Thieu had to appeal for the puppet troops to "fight a poor man's war."

The U.S. economy was encountering difficulties because of the consequences of the Vietnam war. U.S. aid began to decline, which strongly affected the economy of the Saigon puppet regime. Its 1973 budgetary shortfall was 168 billion South Vietnamese dong (i.e. 37 percent of the budget), and although Thieu had to print 200 billion dong, in 1974 there was still a deficit of 98 billion (18 percent of the budget). Industrial activities declined by more than 40 percent, the cultivated agricultural area declined by between 30 and 40 percent, etc.
For our part, beginning in 1974 we operated more regularly and strongly on all battlefields. In both regions we made preparations in all regards to create a new status and new strength with which to begin the 1974-1975 dry season.

Beginning with the spring-summer season, we took the initiative in counterattacking the enemy and gradually retaking the areas they had taken in 1973 in the Military Region 5, Central Highlands, and Nam Bo theaters. In many places we even took many additional areas and liberated hundreds of thousands of people. Especially, in the western Nam Bo theater, during a 3-month period (April to June 1974) the soldiers and people of Military Region 9 wiped out or forced the abandonment of nearly 600 outposts.

Although the political struggle movement in the cities was not yet sufficiently strong and did not yet adequately coordinate with the military activities, guerrilla warfare deep within enemy-controlled areas was still weak, the development of political forces and local armed forces was still slow in comparison to the requirements, etc., but in general the war situation in mid-1974 had undergone a transformation that was increasingly to our advantage. Essentially, we had taken the strategic initiative and had taken and expanded offensive staging areas in the important strategic areas.

[8 Apr 86]

[Text] The liberated area had been expanded, the people's lives were becoming increasingly stable, and security and order were ensured. The people in the old populated areas and in the newly liberated areas were at ease in producing and had sufficient grain, even in areas in which the enemy plundered the rice and imposed economic blockades (such as in many areas in the Mekong Delta), and the cultivated area in the areas we controlled increased in comparison to 1973 (in Military Region 8 alone, during the first 6 months of 1974 there was an increase of 13,000 hectares). However, there was tardiness in purchasing grain and only 40 percent of the plan was attained.

Important results were attained in building up the armed forces in both regions, especially in strengthening the strategic reserves. Following the formation of 1st Corps (October 1973), two other corps were formed (2nd Corps, in Tri Thien, May 1974 and 4th Corps, in Nam Bo, July 1974), with full complements of technical combat arms. We had additional strong strategic fists and were prepared to meet the requirement of fighting large-scale annihilation battles of decisive significance when major strategic opportunities arose. A problem which caused the General Staff to continue to think of methods of solution was the failure to attain the goals that had been set for troop recruitment and the development of local armed forces in the South.

Speaking of large and strong units at the beginning of the 1974 summer season, I recalled the difficult times when we were creating the first main-force units in the South during the anti-U.S. resistance war, and recalled Nguyen Chi Thanh, a member of the Political Bureau and one of the leadership comrades who had devoted much effort to building up the armed forces in the South.