Uncle Ho and the Party Central Committee sent Thanh south in mid-1964, 10 years previously. Although he operated on the southern battlefields only 3 years, he made a deep impression on cadres at all levels as being a leadership cadre with seething revolutionary enthusiasm and a far and broad strategic outlook.

He was sent south when the U.S. war of aggression was changing from a "special war" strategy to a "limited war" strategy. The first U.S units were present on the battlefield. The resistance war was facing an increasingly stronger developmental tendency. That explains why, on the basis of assimilating the guidance thoughts of Uncle Ho and the Party Central Committee, in the though there took form at an early date an awareness of great strategic importance: it was necessary to develop the armed forces into strong units to meet the increasingly greater requirements of concentrated combat, in addition to the increasingly greater development of guerrilla warfare. That also explains why command cadres who had much experience in concentrated combat, such as Le Trong Tan, Tran Do, Hoang Cam, Nguyen Hoa, etc., accompanied Thanh to the battlefield.

The people who worked closely with Thanh noted that he always weighed all aspects, military and political, in Vietnam and abroad, in order to reach correct conclusions regarding our status and strength, the comparison of forces between ourselves and the enemy, the battlefield situation, and the developmental tendency of the war. When he heard battle communiques and reports during briefings or conferences, he was concerned about the specific figures, regarding, so that he could think about and evaluate, the losses of the enemy and ourselves, the ratio of U.S. troops compared to puppet combatants and annihilated on the battlefield. Something that he concluded at an early date, and stressed again and again, was that the U.S. troops came to South Vietnam in a status of defeat, so the question that was posed was how we should build up our armed forces, especially the main-force troops, to create additional condition for developing our strategic offensive status, especially during the last 6 months of 1965, when more and more U.S. troops were pouring in.

As soon as he reached the B2 theater Thanh and the theater's leadership and command cadres persistently and urgently guided the development of the main-force troops from a low level to a high level, and from small units to increasingly larger units. With those newly built-up main-force units we won victories in the Binh Gia (winter-spring 1964-1965) and Dong Xoai (sumer 1965) campaigns.

From then on our victories in the South more or less had the characteristic of the main-force fists which Nguyen Chi Thanh contributed to creating at the beginning.

In July 1967, when working in Military Region 5, I was extremely moved and saddened when I was informed by the Central Committee that Thanh had passed away immediately before returning to the battlefield with a new strategic decision by the party. His passing was a great loss for the party, the armed forces, and the people, especially at a time when the resistance war was entering a decisive phase in both regions of the nation.
Seven years had passed quickly between Thanh's death and mid-1974. Our soldiers and people had passed through another phase that was full of challenges, and forced the Americans to withdraw, and were preparing a plan to attack to cause the collapse of the puppets.

The army's guidance and command cadres will always have profound recollections of comrade Nguyen Chi Thanh. Everyone saw in him, and emulated, his ardent enthusiasm, his creative dynamism, and his thoughts and actions. When in contact with cadres, with an open and sincere attitude he always listened to everyone's opinions, held democratic discussions, distinguished clearly between right and wrong, reached clear-cut conclusions, and with confidence in his echelon and the lowe echelon won the confidence and respect of the cadres at all echelons.

Let us to return to the matter of creating a new status and new strength on the battlefield in mid-1974.

The consolidation and development of the strategic transportation routes east and west of the Truong Son were pursued at an urgent pace, especially after the 21st Plenum of the Party Central Committee, along the lines of preparing for large-scale combat. The fact that the enemy had to cease bombing in Laos and the dry-season weather between the end of 1973 and mid-1974 were favorable for us to accelerate the development and completion of the two strategic routes east and west of the Truong Son range the east-west and detour route the campaign routes, and the oil pipeline deep into the main battlefields. We consolidated and expanded 5,920 kilometers of north-south roads; 3,930 kilometers of east-west roads, and 4,830 kilometers of detour roads, which could fulfill detour roads, which could fulfill the motorized transportation requirements in all weather.

In addition to building additional roads, there was the matter of sending aid to the battlefields. The requirement that has posed was to concentrate all aid on the Central Highlands, Nam Bo, and Cambodian battlefields.

In the first phase of the transportation campaign, from November 1973 to May 1974, the strategic rear services organ and Group 559 surpassed their norms by from 105 to 169 percent, transported nearly 100,000 troops south, took nearly all of the wounded and ill troops to the rear area, and brought south 25 tank, armored, and artillery units and hundreds of thousands of tons of military and civilian cargo, while drafting plans to prepare supply depots and plans to transport more than 500,000 additional tons of cargo to stockpile for plans for future years.

The second phase of the transportation campaign was being carried out urgently and there are prospects for surpassing the plan norms, including supplementary plans for our country and the two neighboring countries.

A whole series of supply depots and technical rear services installations were set up between Route 9 and eastern Nam Bo. The transportation routes east and west of the Truong Son were like two parallel arteries which connected the
rear area with the great front line and created a great source of strength for
the battlefields.

In expanding the strategic transportation network, we at the same time
combined the short-range and long-range missions, the mission of being
prepared to fight on a large scale and the mission of comprehensively building
up force the national defense, economic, military, and civilian missions, the
ethnic minority mission and international obligations, etc.

In addition to the 100,000 reinforcements sent to the battlefields in 1973,
80,000 troops were sent during the first 6 months of 1974. Many front-
line units were brought up to full strength (main-force battalions, 400 to 500
men, regiments 1,800 to 2,000 men, and local battalions 300 to 350 men), and
the number of concentrated troops increased to about 400,000 (our main-force
troops--on the battlefield--approximately equalled that of the puppet main-
force troops). At the same time, conditions were created for the battlefields
to have on-the-spot reserve forces. A new feature in the troop transfers in
1974 that was worthy of attention was that the number of troops delivered
attained a higher ratio and a faster rate than during any previous period. If
in mid-1973 the highest of troops delivered was 95 percent, the minimum was 83
percent, and the average was 91.8 percent, the ratio during the first 6 month
of 1974 was 99.3 and many battalions attained 100 percent. Furthermore, the
reinforcements sent to the battlefields during the last part of 1973 and the
first part of 1974 included all kinds of forces, including infantry battalions
and complete technical combat arms, which had undergone basic training for the
full training period and with comprehensive contents, along the lines of
large-scale combined arms combat.

Working with the state planning organs made us very enthusiastic because the
people in the North of our country were making all-out efforts and had
achieved many important accomplishments in overcoming the serious consequences
of two wars of destruction waged by the enemy. After only a year, the total
social output in 1973 was already greater than in 1965, and the total value of
industrial output was 12 percent greater than in 1972.

Our state was also investing large amounts of manpower, facilities, and
materials in economic and cultural construction and development in the
liberated areas in the South.

When we reviewed the contents of the work of creating a new status and new
strength which the General Staff had discussed with the general departments
and Group 559 to submit to the Military Commission of the Party Central
Committee in 1974, we were pleased to learn that research by the strategic
staff organ to help the upper echelon make strategic preparations in all
respects had improved and was in greater depth.

The outstanding efforts on the part of our troops and people at the front and
in the rear during the past year had caused the comparison of forces between
ourselves and the enemy to undergo a clear transformation and the situation on
the battlefield to undergo a transformation that was increasingly to our
advantage.
The soldiers at the front resolutely counterattacked and attacked the enemy's pacification, land-grabbing, and siege-relief operations, created a new strategic status in many key areas, and forced the enemy into a status of passive resistance. As soon as the liberated area was expanded it was solidly consolidated. Notable results were attained in developing the economy and building rear-services bases in the liberated areas and along the strategic route.

The system of strategic and campaign roads, both east and west of the Truong Son, developed rapidly and became increasingly complete, extending from western Tri Thien to Route 14 and the western parts of the lowland provinces of Military Region 5, and from west of Sa Thay to Duc Lap, O Rang, and Bu Gia Map, causing the enemy to be interdicted strategically, and giving us the capability of motorized transporation in all weather, in order to move close to the strategic objectives in many areas.

[9 Apr 86]

[Text] Important results were attained in building up the armed forces. They included the overfulfillment of troop recruitment norms by the localities in the North; the development of the local, militia, and guerrilla forces in the South, which had begun to undergo a transformation in some areas; the creation of many new units and the development of the strategic reserve main-force units to the scale of many corps, in addition to the technical combat arms which were being built up and trained along the lines of large-scale combined arms combat; the sending of reinforcements to the battlefields to rapidly strengthen the forces at the front, etc. The actual situation during the 1974-1975 dry season demonstrated that the development of those forces on a large scale would result in the development of strong strategic fists in many important areas during the first part of 1975, and the formation of large columns which would advance into the enemy's lairs during the final strategic war-deciding campaign.

With regard to military science and art, the staff organ made new advances in studying methods to attack the enemy. On the basis of grasping the enemy's new plots and organizations—the "Phoenix" organization, the militarization of the control system at the village level, the strengthening of the system of subsectors and district seats, the pacification operations, and the pacification and land-grabbing operations, which increasingly had a combined nature, and the enemy's increasingly large-scale siege-relief operations. The General Staff coordinated with the battlefields in reaching correct conclusions about our main-force troops' fighting methods, and on coordination among the forces and the three spearheads, in order to completely defeat the pacification scheme which Thieu regarded as the number-one, central mission of the Saigon army in 1974.

When we reviewed all aspects since October 1973, and especially since the Military Commission Conference in March 1974, we felt extremely enthusiastic. For the first time, within a short period of time, we had created a new strategic status, which was increasingly to our advantage, and a new force which was becoming more and more powerful, before beginning the 1974-1975 dry season.
The new status and new strength that had created at the front and in the rear area proved that Resolution 21 of the Party Central Committee and the March 1974 resolution of the Military Commission, which had been approved by the Political Bureau, were entirely correct. That new status and new strength were the combined results of the heroic, resolute, intelligent, and creative combat by the armed forces and people on the great front line in the South, who confronted the enemy troops night and day, and were also the combined results of the revolutionary will and spirit of sacrifice of the people in the great rear area in the North, who continually contributed manpower and materiel to the heroic great front line.

That new status and new strength were also a very important basis on which the staff organ drafted its strategic plan for the next few years and the 1975 strategic operations plan.
Chapter Four
The Strategic Plan

Once we had the factors for studying, drafting, and putting the finishing touches on the basic strategic plan, we and the Central Team of the Operations Department reviewed the draft plans that had been prepared in advance. The first questions that were posed were when, how, in view of our subjective capabilities and objective demands, could we make a final decision, and how could we achieve the element of strategic surprise and win the greatest possible victory?

During the past several years there had been various coincidences: every four years, on the occasion of the U.S. presidential election, we had launched a major strategic offensive on all battlefields in the South (1968 and 1972). This time should we select the year 1976? Some people were of the opinion that we should not follow that fixed pattern, for the enemy could take precautions and make advance preparations. But if we moved earlier, i.e. in 1975, could we complete our preparations in time? And if we waited until 1977, would it be too late? The question was how to create the strategic opportunity when it arose. It was necessary to grasp the objective situation and step up our subjective efforts in order cause the strategic opportunity to ripen.

While discussions were continuing, on 20 July the secretariat of the Party Central Committee informed us that the General Secretary, who was resting at Do Son, had invited us to "discuss the situation and coming mission—remember to bring along maps." We understood his intention as being to discuss the strategic plan, a matter about which the members of the Political Bureau were thinking in order to prepare for the coming conference in September. Le Trong Tan and I made the trip, along with comrade Vo Quang Ho, deputy head of the Operations Department. During the meetings held by the Political Bureau and the Military Commission of the Party Central Committee, Ho was responsible for serving as the recording secretary, and then, on the basis of the resolution, participating in drafting the plan.

We traveled in separate vehicles at different times to avoid the "curious" eyes of the enemy. During the last years of the war foreign spires had monitored every movement of the key cadres of the strategic staff organ.

Before we set out, Van contributed several additional opinion that should be reported to Ba.

On the morning of 21 July we arrived at Do Son. As we traveled along Route 5 that morning the sun seemed to rise earlier and shone directly on the hood of our car.

After we arrived and met with him, we were clearly aware of his intentions. We had guessed correctly; he wanted to contribute and exchange opinions for
consideration by the staff organ, to help prepare and draft the strategic plan. The working method was still to pose questions and exchange opinion so that we could report fully on the situation and understand strategic his strategic thinking and prepare a report to be presented at the coming Political Bureau conference.

He posed three major problems:

1. Evaluating the situation of the enemy and ourselves, in the past and at present, in Vietnam, Laos, and Cambodia.

2. Our strategic direction in 1975 and for the next few years in the South.

3. The matter of building and defending the North.

On the basis of the matters he had brought up, we reported on the major tasks that were being carried out, monitored, and guided. The staff organ had just held a conference on isolating experiences regarding attacks against pacification, and was carrying out two activity campaigns on the battlefields, including preparations for the Thuong Duc battle in Military Region 5 and the second phase of the strategic transportation campaign by Group 559, which would conclude in September 1974. We reported on all aspects of the strategic preparations—building rear services bases in Tri Thien, the Central Highlands, Military Region 5, and Nam Bo—and on the results attained in recruiting troops, building up forces, and carrying out the first military training cycle, and the results attained in aiding the battlefields during the past 6 months. All of those preparatory tasks were aimed toward the requirements of large-scale combined arms combat.

Before reporting to Ba on the political infrastructure and movement in the cities and their outskirts, especially on winning control of the population in the Mekong Delta and the summer campaign in Military Region 5, which was coordinated with the Central Highlands front, we reported on the general situation, with accompanying maps, and clearly proved that the enemy's pacification and land-grabbing campaign (which Thieu regarded as their central, number-one mission for 1974) was being defeated by us, step by step, on the battlefield, and that our soldiers and people had created an increasingly advantageous status and strength on all fronts.

We reported on the political struggle movement in Saigon. A new feature was an alliance among 200 trade unions in all sectors and circles in a "General Federation of Labor," which struggled against lay-offs and U.S. violence. However, because the enemy had strengthened their control apparatus, the organization of political bases in the cities and the outskirts was still developing slowly.

Meanwhile, in the Mekong Delta our status and strength were developing well. In Military Region 8, although we had not regained all of the enemy's Military Region 4 we had repulsed the enemy from the center of Dong Thap Muoi and set up many new penetration bases in My Tho, Ben Tre, Sa Dec, and An Giang, and especially had moved up to destroy the enemy's resettlement area in Dong Thap, and taken a large area around Cho Gao. Military Region 9 was...
outstanding. Within a period of 6 months we had knocked out of action 41,000
of the enemy (11,000 of whom were disintegrated, wiped out five battalions, 50
companies, 1 battle group, and 1 river boat squadron, inflicted damage on 6
battalions and 1 river boat squadron, destroyed 148 vehicles (83 M113's), sank
78 ships, destroyed 59 artillery pieces, wiped out 228 positions, forced the
surrender of 9 outposts, used the three spearheads in the villages and
hamlets, with the support of main-force troops, forced the abandonment of 562
posts, and caused mutinies in 8 posts. Of the 807 posts we took, the enemy
could retake only 330. We liberated 312 hamlets (seven villages were
completely liberated) and 280,000 people, thus increasing the number of people
in liberated and contested areas to 1,110,000.

On the basis of those actualities, we had a basis on which to report to Ba the
conclusion that had been drawn by COSVN in June, with which we agreed, that
the enemy had been defeated in their plot to grab highly populated areas and
consolidate the areas under their control, especially around Saigon and in the
Mekong Delta, and that we still held the base areas and guerrilla enclaves in
eastern Nam Bo and around Saigon, had regained nearly all areas occupied by
the enemy since the agreement, and had restored the status quo existing prior
to 28 January 1974, while at the same time adding new liberated areas in Go
Cong, Cho Gao, My Tho, Bac Lieu, Soc Trang, the central area of Dong Thap,
which connected the liberated areas south and north of Route 4, the U Minh and
Nam Can bases, and the central parts of four provinces along the Hau River
(14).

One thing that could be affirmed was that during the recent dry season we had
won victories and were developing in an upward direction, while the enemy had
been defeated and were on a downward slide. During the current rainy season
we had many advantages and capabilities to win victories greater than during
any previous rainy season, and perhaps even greater than during the recent dry
season.

Although the weather was about to become more difficult, we had to make
greater efforts to step up our activities in all regards, and to create a new
status and a new strength, with regard to both material and morale conditions,
so that we could begin the 1974-1975 dry season with greater spirit and
stronger forces.

We reported on the situation in the localities implementing Resolution 21 of
the Party Central Committee and the March 1974 resolution of the Military
Commission, which had been approved by the Political Bureau: the party
committee echelons and command cadres were very pleased and believed that
those resolutions were "very accurate and timely," and the resolutions were
rapidly passed down to the localities and units.

In implementing the above-mentioned resolutions, an outstanding feature was
the utilization of the struggle slogans and modes under the specific
conditions of each area, and the use of local political forces and armed
forces. The main-force troops taking turns building up, training, maintaining
combat readiness and fighting, and were resolutely attacking and
counterattacking the enemy, defeating their pacification and land-encroachment
schemes, winning and maintaining control of the population, and defending and expanding the liberated area.

[10 Apr 86]

[Text] During the summer months, the fighting strength of our troops increased to an important degree in comparison to the first of the year. Those results reflect a process of victorious struggle in the consciousness and internal thought in some localities, to arrive at unanimity, do a good job of resolving the relationship between fighting the enemy's pacification and land-grabbing in the immediate future and building forces in the battlefield position in both the short range and the long range. On the basis of the results of the extremely great contributions of the people and the positive aid of the departments, sectors, and state organs, of the organs of the Ministry of National Defense and Group 559, which made all-out efforts to correctly carry out the plan to transport cargo to battlefields and the plan to build strategic roads, including the campaign roads which went deep into each battlefield. The conference convened by the General Staff to isolate experiences regarding anti-pacification attacks clarified many matters regarding our guidance, slogans, modes, and fighting methods, especially the combining the three spearheads in the villages and hamlets.

Ba contributed the opinion that it is necessary to study what fighting method to disintegrate the enemy's administrative apparatus. In the lowlands, it was necessary to use brigades or divisions to attack to break off whole segments and open up whole areas. Since Saigon was the enemy's center, it was necessary to enable our forces to isolate it.

After listening to reports during the afternoon of the 21st, Ba expressed his thoughts about matters relevant to his thoughts about matters relevant to the strategic plan and the strategic opportunity, and especially the situation in the world and in Southeast Asia relevant to our resistance war in the South. In general, he said the following:

In considering Vietnam, it is necessary to consider all of Indochina and Southeast Asia. If in the past we thought that the United States was sending troops into South Vietnam only to add another link to the strategic chain surrounding our camp in the Far East, now the matters of Vietnam and Indochina were becoming more prominent in southeast Asia, a region in which many countries, including China and Japan, were competing for influence. At one time they thought that the United States could use military means to dominate South Vietnam. But now the United States had been defeated and had to withdraw its troops. The Vietnam war had clearly weakened the United States. Meanwhile, the other nations with designs on Southeast Asia were not yet strong or ready. They were very afraid that the three Indochinese countries would be victorious and would become stronger. The problem that was posed for us was how to create the opportunity to win victory earlier, before those countries were prepared to intervene. Although they did not openly say so, they met one another in a nefarious plot toward Southeast Asia. China was revealing more and more clearly its aspiration to advance south, especially after the United States was defeated and had to withdraw its troops. China feared that if we won and became stronger we would impede its advance down
into Southeast Asia. In its status of defeat, the United States was also willing for China to expand south, in hopes of stopping the other large countries from gaining influence. The Paracel Islands affair in January 1974 was an example. Therefore, at that time, when those countries were not yet able to carry out their ugly designs, the matter of creating, and taking advantage of, an opportunity to win complete victory, was becoming increasingly urgent. When the South was liberated, and our 50 million people were independent and unified, those countries would no longer be capable of carrying out their designs on Indochina in particular and on Southeast Asia in general.

We had to adopt a fighting method that would allow as to win a big victory quickly, so that they puppets could not react in time and the countries inclined toward intervention could not intervene in time. If that was to be accomplished it was necessary to prepare to launch a final general offensive—general uprising within a month or two after a strategic opportunity arose.

If we were to fight on a large scale and rapidly, and win a big victory, we had to create new strength and use corps to annihilate enemy divisions. Many countries thought that that we were incapable of organizing large, highly mobile forces, i.e. that we were incapable of fighting on a large scale. We had to think about how to win a decisive victory within a short period of time. We would thus have the element of surprise not only with regard to the puppets and the United States, but also with regard to the other counties which had ugly designs on Indochina and Southeast Asia.

When he took a break to take a drink of water and do some thinking, we reported in greater detail on our strategic main-force reserves, which were being strengthened, on the two strategic routes that were being expanded east and west of the Truong Son, on the mechanized mobility capabilities of the strategic units, etc.

Ba continued:

"That is good. We have a basis on which to study large-scale annihilation fighting methods on the campaign and strategic scales. It was necessary to organize the strategic reserve forces into strong, highly mobile corps which could annihilate enemy divisions and combine annihilating battles with routing large numbers of enemy troops. With regard to the organization and use of forces, it was necessary to develop combined strength. That is a mathematical exercise the answer to which must be have a higher practical and theoretical basis.

"With regard to the concentrated troops of the military regions, it is necessary to organize full-strength, strongly equipped battalions into very rapidly moving spearheads (15) to penetrate deeply behind enemy lines. At the same time, divisions or brigades equipped with artillery and mortars must be sent to fight in the lowlands.

"If, during the coming year (1975), the urban movement becomes stronger and we control the rural areas, the United States will have to replace Thieu in order
to salvage some of the clauses of the Agreement which are still advantageous to them.

"You must study and thoroughly understand that direction, and must make preparations so that in 1975 we can give rise to a new spirit and a new strength."

After the break, Tan reported on the primary intentions of the General Staff with regard to each theater:

In the Mekong Delta, all-out efforts must be made to take more than posts, and 2,000 more in 1975, in order to create integrated segments. As for winning control of the population, we would increase the population of the liberated areas to 3 million, and 2 million people in the contested areas. If that was to be accomplished, it was necessary to annihilate battalion-sized subsectors and wipe out two or three battalions, or an enemy regiment, trying to relieve them. That would ensure the opening up of corridors from the border down to military regions 8 and 9. The Supreme Command planned to reinforce Ben Tre and Tra Vinh with a regiment each, and to, during 1974, reinforce the Mekong Delta with a total of 10,000 troops, send additional weapons to attack posts, armored vehicles, river boats, and airplanes. The local armed forces had to simultaneously operate and fight, to attack the outposts and attack the enemy troops going to relieve them. We felt that it was necessary to strengthen the organization and command of combined campaigns in each area, organize additional sapper units, and attack more strongly attack the bases and supply depots in enemy-controlled areas.

In Military Region 5, it was necessary to annihilate the enemy and expand the mountainous region in western Quang Nam. The Supreme Command had just been informed that we had wiped out the Nong Son strongpoint and annihilated four enemy battalions, including a Ranger battalion. It was necessary to wipe out the remaining strongpoints in the mountain region. In 1975 we had to expand into the lowland area and liberate an additional million people.

In the Central Highlands, we had to eliminate the isolated strongpoints in the north and the remaining strongpoints in the west, in order to control the jungles-and-mountains areas, consolidate the strategic route, and create a corridor connecting the southern Central Highlands with eastern Nam Bo.

In the eastern Nam Bo theater we had to expand the area above Route 14 and move down to connect with the Bien Hoa and Military Region 6 areas to form an integrated base area. We had to keep and expand the contested areas around Saigon to surround it, move close to it, ad infiltrate the city, while interdicting Route 1 between Saigon and Phan Thiet and Route 20 between Saigon and Da Lat.

With regard to the strategic reserve forces, the High Command was studying the corps' mobility capabilities and organizing additional corps on the spot.

With regard to fighting methods, in addition to gaining experience in fighting, pacification and studying the experiences in attacking subsectors and district seats, the General Staff assigned the Military Science Institute the task of
cooperating with the High-Level Military Graduate School in studying the art of campaigns and large-scale combined arms combat under the present conditions. In 1974 the training of main-force troops would also be oriented toward meeting the requirements of combined arms combat and large-scale annihilation battles.

Following Tan's presentation, I added the following:

Between then and the end of 1974 we would go all-out to wipe out six or seven subsectors and five or six battle groups, add 3 to 3.5 million people to the liberated areas in the South, and about 5 million people in the contested areas. If we did so the situation would undergo a major transformation and in 1976 the theaters would have many capabilities to develop and create a new, very solid status and strength.

A matter worthy of concern at that time was the urban movement. Its political base was still weak and the political campaign had not yet developed strongly. But we were confident that military victories would impact strongly on the political movement, and that if the urban movement was advanced in 1975, it was certain that in 1976 the situation would undergo a very great transformation. At that time we would be able to advance rapidly and decisively within a few months.

Ba added:

It was necessary to make preparations so that in 1975 we could fight on either a medium scale or a large scale and wipe out enemy divisions. We had to fight in such a way as to both annihilate the enemy and cause their forces to disintegrate. Whenever there were conditions for winning a big victory we had to do so. But we had to realize that that is a complicated matter, not a simple one. We had to take the enemy by surprise and cause them to weaken and disintegrate within a brief period of time. If that was to be accomplished, with regard to our battlefield position we had to pay more attention to interdicting the enemy and expand our activities behind their lines. With regard to forces, we could send in additional forces from the North to do economic work, build roads, and at the same time serve as reserve forces.

Ba devoted the remainder of the time that afternoon to making additional comments about the political proselytizing work. He believed that the enemy in Saigon had never been as weak politically and economically, or had as many internal contradictions, since 1954. During the Diem period the enemy had been strong because we had withdrawn our forces. When we became stronger, Diem fell but the Americans came in immediately, so the enemy remained strong. Now that the U.S. troops had withdrawn the puppets could not grow weaker. There existed in Saigon not only our forces but also the third force, which included well-known progressives. If we were skillful we could develop those forces and promote the movement. In 1975 we definitely had to strengthen the urban movement. The situation in the United States was very chaotic: it was possible that Nixon would fall and be succeeded by Ford, who would seek ways to work toward a settlement with us. We had to strengthen the urban movement to help create a new status and a new strength. In the urban movement at present, we had to pay attention to combining both forms of activity: secret
and open. Secrecy was a condition for preserving the party's existence and openness was a condition for developing the movement.

He stated that he agreed with us that the political movement was always affected by our military forces and was also stimulated by internal contradictions created by the enemy, i.e. by the objective situation. For example, Nixon falling, Ford succeeding him, the enemy replacing their lackeys, etc.

A very busy day passed very quickly.

Something that remained deeply imprinted in my mind after a day of discussion and thought was Ba's opinion about strategic opportunities. Clearly, the situation demanded that we act more urgently. The next few years would be a critical time and also afford the most favorable opportunity for winning a decisive victory. The longer we waited, the more complicated the situation would become. We had to have determination and make plans to fight on a large scale, to win victory rapidly so that the United States and the puppets could not react in time and so that the countries which schemed to do so could not have time to intervene.

[14 Apr 86]

[Text] On the following day, Ba had a good deal to say about economic construction in the North, on the socialist economic laws of advancing from small-scale production to large-scale production, on balancing industry and agriculture in the sphere of the district and on a national scale, on combining national defense with the economy and the economy with national defense, on the army participating in economic construction, etc.

But then, only a little later, he returned to the matter of the revolution in the south, for that was a very urgent, very great matter which continually attracted the thoughts of everyone who was responsible to the party, the people, and the fatherland.

We made further reports to Ba about a problem that had not yet been comprehensively and solidly resolved: the matter of heavy artillery shells. Large-scale combined arms combat and attacks on the cities and the enemy's large bases would require heavy artillery shells if we were to meet the requirements regarding large-scale annihilation battles. At that time we had only about 100,000 shells left. We were recovering the shell casings so that they could be repacked, and were improving production as much as we could. We recommended that Central Committee make efforts to obtain aid from the fraternal nations.

The General Secretary said that it was clear that China was attempting to pressure us. We would have to request aid from the fraternal nations, but still did not exclude China, if it would continue to give us aid. We would continue to reload the shells, improve production, and discuss additional ways to overcome the problem if we encountered difficulties in seeking aid.
During the last hour of the morning session that day (22 July) the meeting became a discussion revolving the matter of the decisive opportunity. It was foreseen that in 1975 there could appear a high tide, and the same time we foresaw a new development in 1976, prior to the U.S. presidential election. By means of a decisive "coup" in 1976 we could force the enemy to accept a tripartite government. We foresaw that during the next few years we would definitely have to unify the nation. But we always had to prepare, if the unexpected happened, to step up the pace. Ba said, "If we could win a decisive victory during the next few years, that would be good, very good."

That afternoon, before we returned to Hanoi, Ba instructed us to "draft the strategic plan in such a way as to create a strategic opportunity, and be prepared to immediately exploit that strategic opportunity."

As soon as our vehicle left Hai Phong and the sea breezes, my attention was again drawn to the No 1 problem: finding the necessary elements so that I could, along with my comrades in the organ, draft and complete the strategic plan. I concentrated my thoughts on several variables, and had to find answers to them.

One was the possibility of U.S. intervention when we attacked on a large scale and the puppet army and puppet administration were threatened with collapse? We had many times thought that because the United States had withdrawn its troops and was in a state of chaos politically, economically, and socially, it was unlikely that would intervene again, especially with ground troops. But what was the possibility that it would intervene by using its air force and navy, at least along the coast? Something very worthy of concern was the possibility that it would intervene to a degree that would not be decisive but would cause us difficulties, a possibility we could not ignore.

Second, there was the question of whether a mass uprising should be coordinated with attacks by our main-force troops. We spoke of bringing into play the three strategic blows—by the main-force troops, in the rural areas, and in the cities—and coordinating them to create combined strength. But although the main-force troops were strong and had prospects for becoming even stronger, the political movement was still experiencing difficulties. In the rural areas, the enemy were militarizing their control apparatus in the villages and hamlets. We had to step up our military activities and develop our political forces in such a way as to create conditions for the masses to arise. Winning control of the people to achieve mastery and winning mastery in order to gain control of the people was something with which we were always concerned. In the cities, the mass force and the third force were not yet strong, so we had to find ways to expand them extensively and make preparations so that the industrial workers would know how to take over the enterprises, so that the merchants would know how to take over the shops, and so that the civil servants would know how to take over the public offices, and be prepared to coordinate when our main-force units attacked on a large scale and when the peasants in the lowlands arose to create the strength to overthrow Thieu. Both theoretically and practically, it was necessary to pose the question of whether there should be a general offensive and general uprising or a general offensive and uprisings.
Third, there were the problems of the material-technical bases in general and artillery shells in particular. Heavy artillery shells were very necessary to fight large annihilating battles but we still had very few of them. Reloading them was only a stop-gap measure and did not meet technical standards or provide the quantities needed for large-scale combat. Economical use was also a measure: while fighting on small and medium scales we should not hastily fire many heavy shells, but should same them for the decisive periods. We also needed to capture guns and ammunition from the enemy and use them against the enemy. But by doing so could fulfill the need for artillery shells to fight large-scale battles?

In addition to those questions there was the question of when the opportunity would arise to win a decisive battle. As Ba said, that opportunity would arise when the main-force "fists" were ready and the political forces were sufficiently strong to master the rural areas and in the cities were prepared to carry out coordinated uprisings. In our previous draft plan we had estimated that we would win a decisive victory in 1976, and did not eliminate the possibility that we would not do so until 1977. Ba now recommended that we should win such a victory as soon as possible, for the longer it was delayed the more difficult the situation would become. What objectives would we have to attain to win victory step-by-step, and how should we prepare to take advantage of the strategic opportunity?

After Tan passed along Ba's guidance opinions to the members of the members of of the Central Team drafting the plan, I discussed all the things I had been thinking about with the team members and found that many of our thoughts coincided.

We began to review the old draft plan and supplemented and adjusted it so that it could be appropriate to the newest developments of the situation and Ba's recommendations.

During that period we received two important bits of information practically at the same time: we had taken Nong Son-Trung Phuoc and Que Son in western Quang Nam, Thuong Duc in western Quang Da, Minh Long and Gia Vut in western Quang Ngai, and Deo Ngang and Phu My in northern Binh Dinh; and Nixon had resigned and had been replaced by Ford. That information helped us reach important conclusions relevant to the supplementation and completion of the strategic plan.

During the fall of 1974, in July and August Military Region 5 would launch a campaign in five areas (Nong Son-Tien Phuoc, Thuong Duc, Que Son, Minh Long-Gia Vut, and Deo Nhong (Phu My).) In those five areas the General Staff would especially pay attention to attacking the Nong Son subsector and the Thuong Duc subsector and district seat.

The enemy forces at Thuong Duc and the key position occupied by that district seat reflected its role as a gateway to the Da Nang base complex. In addition to Nong Son, Tien Phuoc, and the other areas, our forces' annihilation of Thuong Duc and defeat of the counterattacks by the mobile airborne division, the backbone of the puppets, allowed us to affirm that the balance of forces on the battlefield had changed and our troops could attack the enemy in.
fortified positions, wipe out clusters of enemy strongpoints and district seats, and defend the newly taken objectives. After the Thuong Duc battle we noted that the enemy troops were clearly becoming increasingly weak, their air and artillery support had declined, and the mobile troops had to be dispatched on a patch-work basis and drop-by-drop, and moved primarily by road. Thus they responded slowly and the morale of both the main-force and local troops had declined. A puppet major captured during that battle admitted that the Saigon army did not have sufficient airplanes to transport its troops, and its reinforcements were not only in short supply but had to move by land. In sum, after the Nong Son and Thuong Duc battles we could conclude that our mobile main-force troops had become superior to the enemy's mobile main-force units. That conclusion had a close relationship to our strategic intentions.

As we had foreseen, the internal ranks of the ruling circles in Washington had become increasingly split and divided. After the U.S. troops had been brought home and the wave of protest against Nixon over the Watergate affair had subsided for a time, another wave of protest arose in U.S. public opinion. The rejection of supplementary aid for the puppets, Thieu's appeal for the puppet army to "fight a poor man's war," the decline in their air support, artillery support, and mobility facilities, Nixon having to bitterly leave the White House, etc., were a string of events which clearly showed that the ability of the United States to intervene was becoming increasingly limited. However, it was necessary to continue to monitor the activities of Ford. The most recent announcements of the new president showed that the White House continued to adhere to the Nixon Doctrine without Nixon, and that the United States had not yet abandoned Thieu.

In the process of reviewing the draft strategic plan, the members of the Central Team, led by Le Trong Tan and then Can Van Khanh, quickly and unanimously evaluated the enemy and ourselves, as well as the international situation. The most energetic discussions revolved around several major matters, especially our strategic intentions and course of action. We discussed in detail goals, requirements, contents, and time frame of each step, foresaw the development of the situation, capabilities that may arise as each step was being taken, the implementation and methods of implementation, etc. Then we entered deeply into discussing the specific 1975 plan and the direction of the 1976 plan.

A requirement posed for 1975 was to achieve the element of surprise and wage a large, extensive offensive in order to:

1. Essentially defeat the enemy's pacification plan and gain control of additional land and population in the rural lowlands;

2. Reduce the enemy's total troop strength to a level of strategic significance;

3. Destroy and importent part of the enemy's material reserves and attack their strategic routes;

4. Consolidate and fill out the liberated areas and base areas;
5. Build up our forces in all regards;

6. Expand the strategic corridor and network of strategic roads, and create staging areas near the municipalities, cities, and key bases;

7. Accelerate the movement in the cities, especially Saigon;

8. Essentially complete all preparatory tasks in order to take the initiative in carrying out a general offensive-general uprising should a strategic opportunity present itself early.

We gave specific instructions to each area with regard to the above requirements, along with the goals that had to be attained. We foresaw that 1975 would be divided into three activity cycles which would have specific goals, a primary direction, and a coordinating direction.

The process of carrying out the three cycles would be a process of building and developing our forces in the cities (especially Saigon, Da Nang, and Hue), stepping up military proselytizing, preparing strategic mobile forces, completing the plan to transport aid to the battlefields, and extend strategic roads to eastern Nam Bo and the campaign roads.

With regard to the direction of the 1976 plan, we foresaw three eventualities and struggle directions in each eventuality, to serve as a basis on which to draft a specific plan in the future. That plan would have to be based on the victories that would be won in 1975. Those three eventualities were:

1. The enemy would obstinately continue the war.

2. The enemy would agree to retreat a step and implement the agreement.

3. The opportunity for uprisings in the cities would arise early, in 1976.

The draft plan was completed on 26 August 1974. It was the seventh draft plan drafted by the Central Team (16) since the resolution of March 1974. However, it did not stop there. The draft plan was sent to the members of the Political Bureau and the standing committee of the Military Commission of the Party Central Committee, so that they could study it and offer recommendations. In August, the Chief of Staff returned from vacationing abroad. After listening to the report, he contributed many opinions in the course of completing the strategic plan. The Central Team continued to monitor the situation on the battlefields and listen closely to the initial opinions of the leadership cadre to make the necessary supplementations, after we had discussed matters with them and reached agreement.

[16 April 86]

[Text] Also during that time, during the last half of September, the General Staff received much information about the enemy, noteworthy among which was a report from the puppet General Staff to Thieu regarding projections in 1975.
According to that information, the puppets believed that if U.S. aid amounted to 1.4 billion dollars they would be able to control all the South; if the aid amounted to 1.1 billion dollars they would lose the northern half of Military Region 1; if the aid amounted to only 900 million dollars they would lose all of Military Region 1 and a few provinces in Military Region 2; if the aid amounted to 750 million dollars they would lose all of Military Region 1 and Military Region 2; and if the aid amounted to only 600 million dollars they could only control only the half of Military Region 3 south of Bien Hoa, and Military Region 4. The enemy also admitted that as of September 1974 they had about 1,000 aircraft which were inoperable because of shortages of fuel and spare parts.

According to that document, there were about 1 million enemy troops, including more than 150,000 noncombatants (and about 100,000 "ghost soldiers"). The troop conscription was becoming increasingly difficult to fulfill.

Because of the difficulties regarding military personnel, the puppet Joint General Staff planned to withdraw 25 to 30 percent of the isolated outposts which were difficult to supply and could not be held if we attacked.

Politically, there was information that the United States intended to work with a number of other large nations in convening a conference of relevant nations to seek a political solution for South Vietnam, to bring the third force (organized by the United States) onto the political stage in Saigon, and carry out a number of important provisions of the Paris Agreement.

We verified that information and reported it to a conference of the Political Bureau and the Military Commission so that they could have additional research material during the process of discussing and improving the strategic plan.

Before the conference began, the Operations Department posted the recent information on the combat situation on large maps, which were hung in the meeting room, including our attacks which wiped out the Nong Son strong point and the Thuong Duc district seat, and turned back the counterattacks of the enemy airborne brigades.

The conference of the Political Bureau and the Military Commission of the Party Central Commission took place between 30 September and 8 October and was divided into two parts: during the first 2 days the participants listened to reports, then they met again on 5 October to discuss matters and issue a resolution. On that occasion Vo Chi Cong, who was then in the North, also attended the conference.

I reported on the situation during the past 9 months. Tan reported on the 2-year draft strategic plan and the 1975 strategic operations plan.

With regard to the enemy's situation, our situation, and the situation on the battlefield, the report of the General Staff, stated that the enemy forces were still large and although their air and artillery support were limited they were still strong, and their control apparatus was still able to dominate the people in areas they controlled.
In the course of 9 months of fierce fighting between ourselves and the enemy, the actual situation on the battlefield had clearly demonstrated that the "Iy Thuong Kiet--74" plan of the enemy was imperiled by bankruptcy. After April 1974 the battlefield situation had changed rapidly. The enemy were no longer capable of coping with our attacks and counterattacks. By means of specific data, the report attested to the fact that an important part of the enemy had been annihilated or disintegrated and an increasingly larger number of outposts had been annihilated or forced to surrender or evacuate. The enemy forces had been stretched out, were resisting passively, and no longer had mobile troops to support pacification and encroachment. Our liberated area was expanding rapidly and was being further consolidated in all theater, from Tri Thien and Military Region 5 to eastern Nam Bo and the Mekong Delta. Our network of strategic and campaign roads was becoming increasingly complete and had created an interdicting status which directly threatened the enemy-controlled areas.

The economic and financial difficulties of the Thieu puppet regime had clearly affected the military plans and morale of the puppet troops. Furthermore, due to the influence of our military activities on the battlefield and our correct and clever front policy, because we flexibly applied the struggle modes, and because of the enemy's brazen terrorism and suppression, dissatisfaction and opposition to the United States and Thieu on the part of many strata of people in the cities gradually developed. The CIA plotted to plant people to control the movement but could not achieve the desired effect.

With regard to evaluating the puppets' capabilities, the General Staff was of the opinion that they were not "saving their strength" but that their actual capabilities were very limited. They wanted to continue to strongly attack our strategic transportation routes and regain the areas they had lost, but were no longer able to do so. If the United States further reduced its aid the puppets would weaken even more rapidly. The sum of more than $1 billion in aid which the United States intended to provide was regarded by the puppets as being too little in comparison to the needs of more than 1 million troops. Even if the United States added hundreds of millions of dollars it could resolve none of the basic problems.

With regard to the possibility of intervention by the United States, the Political Bureau had observed that the United States was no longer capable of sending in land forces, but we could not eliminate the possibility that they would intervene by using their air force and navy. But such intervention could not prevent the puppets from collapsing. That observation was still correct.

For our part, the past 9 months had demonstrated that although our troops' fighting methods had improved they were not yet good enough. It was necessary to further raise the level of large-scale combined-arms combat and our ability to attack enemy troops in fortified positions. During the Thuong Duc battle we attacked a district seat with many strong fortifications and although we annihilated the enemy on a rather large scale we did not do so very effectively.
In its report, the General Staff clearly presented the results of aid with regard to the troops, equipment, and materiel sent to the battlefields, for that was a matter which very much needed to be fully analyzed, with regard to both the recent results and future capabilities, to create a basis on which to draft the strategic operations plan and determine the goals that had to be attained during the next several years, especially 1975.

With regard to the coming struggle, the General Staff outlined two plans that were appropriate for two contingencies. The first was to overthrow Thieu, then set up a coalition government and gradually advance to winning complete victory. The second was to use military forces to strike a decisive blow and develop the attack until final victory was won.

The clear determination the contents of the various steps, and the development from one step to another, within those plans was very important because it would be the basis on which to make strategic decisions.

With regard to strategic measures, the General Staff recommended the following:

1. Continuing to disrupt pacification and expand the areas under our control by means of combined campaigns.

2. Launching main-force offensive campaigns to annihilate enemy regiments and divisions and expand the liberated area.

3. Interdicting the enemy at the strategic and campaign levels, by combat and by attacking roads, surrounding the enemy, military proselytization, and causing the enemy to disintegrate or separate themselves.

4. Stepping up the urban struggle to a high level and create conditions for bringing the third force into the open. If Thieu fell, we could form an alliance with them.

5. Cleverly carry out a diplomatic strategy to take advantage of internal contradictions within the enemy and restrict the United States militarily.

Finally, I reported additionally on the specific results of our efforts with regard to strategic preparations during the past 9 months in all regards: building up the liberated and base areas; expanding the system of strategic and campaign roads; capabilities for transporting aid to the battlefields; and building up the armed forces of both regions, especially the creation and training of mobile strategic units along the lines of large-scale combined arms combat.

So that the Political Bureau could have a basis on which to plan the coming troop mobilization and recruitment campaign, I reported on the situation regarding the over-all troop strength and the troop strength on each battlefield, the forces not engaged directly in combat (disabled and ill soldiers, people, recently released by the enemy, troops engaged in production and economic construction, and the Route 559 forces), troops undergoing training as replacements, etc. With regard to capabilities for recruiting
troops in the near future, the report pointed out that the population of the North as 23.8 million, including 984,000 youths between the ages of 17 and 25. In order to have strategic reserve forces, I recommended that the Political Bureau draft 150,000 additional troops during the latter part of 1974 and 60,000 during the first part of 1975.

Tan reported additionally on the specific contents of the 2-year strategic plans and especially the 1975 strategic plan which had just been drafted by the General Staff. When making his report, he referred to the opinions which the members of the General Staff and the Military Commission of the Party Central Commission had expressed concerning the draft strategic plan.

With regard to strategic decisions, the General Staff recommended that the liberation of the South be completed during the 1975-1976 2-year period (not eliminating the possibility that it would have to be delayed until the first part of 1977).

In order to carry out that decision, the basic strategic plan had two basic steps:

Step 1 (1975): Achieve the element of surprise and launch large-scale and extensive attacks to:

1. Essentially defeat the enemy's pacification plan and annihilate and disintegrate an important part of the enemy troops (reduce the enemy troop strength to a strategically significant level, and liberate and master most of the rural areas in the Mekong Delta, in the outskirts of Saigon, and in the lowlands of Military Region 5 and Tri Thien).

2. Extend the strategic corridor from the western Central Highlands to eastern Nam Bo and to the three provinces in the southern part of Military Region 5, from Tay Ninh to Long An and the area southwest of Saigon, and from Kien Tuong to My Tho, and set up base areas and staging areas close to the municipalities, cities, and key bases.

3. Destroy an important part of the enemy's war facilities and economic potential and interdict their lines of communication.

4. Further the development of the urban movement.

5. Build up our forces, consolidate the libertated area, prepare the battlefield, and prepare conditions for Step 2.

Step 2 (1976): Carry out a general offensive and general uprising and completely liberate the South.

The 1975 strategic plan was divided into three phases:

Phase 1: From December 1974 to February 1975, a limited offensive. The primary activities would be in the Mekong Delta and eastern Nam Bo (the other theaters would be in the rainy season).
Phase 2: The primary phase. Between March and June 1975 a large-scale campaign would be carried out in the western Central Highlands theater, along with coordinating campaigns in eastern Nam Bo, northern Military Region 5, and Tri Thien. In the Mekong Delta we would continue to carry out attacks and uprisings, expand the liberated areas, and attack pacification.

Phase 3: Between August and October 1975. It would be the phase in which we would develop our victory by stepping up activities in Tri Thien and Zone 5, while also consolidating our forces and being prepared to carry out contingency plans.

With regard to the strategic direction and missions of each theater, the General Staff made the following recommendations:

Tri Thien-Quang Da would be a coordinating theater and would draw in and stretch out the enemy main-force units and cut Route 1, while attacking pacification and expanding our liberated areas in the Tri Thien lowlands and in the outskirts of Da Nang.

The lowlands of Military Region 5 (especially the provinces of Quang Nam, Quang Ngai, and Binh Dinh) would be a theater in which we attacked pacification, liberated most of the rural areas, and carried out a strategic interdiction.

[17 Apr 86]

[Text] The Central Highlands (the focal point of which was the southern Central Highlands) were the primary theater of the main-force troops, one in which we would annihilate the enemy forces.

Nam Bo: the Mekong delta and the hinterland of Saigon were the primary battlefields, in which we would attack pacification in order to surround and isolate Saigon. Eastern Nam Bo was a main-force theater in which we would stretch out, draw in, and annihilate the enemy forces, expand the liberated areas, win control over the people, open up the Tay Ninh corridor, and coordinate with Military Region 8 in opening up the Kien Phong-Kien Tuong corridor and in creating staging areas near Saigon and My Tho and creating conditions for stimulating the urban movement.

In its draft, the General Staff also set specific objectives for 1975, and the missions and operational plans of each theater and phase.

With regard to the strategic opportunity, the General Staff foresaw that it could occur in three situations: 1. When we launched our strongest attacks, especially during the second phase of 1975; 2. During the rainy season in Nam Bo; 3. During the final months of the year, when the puppets were organizing their presidential election.

The process of guiding activities in each phase was a process of monitoring the puppets' ability to resist and the U.S. response, so that we could promptly grasp the strategic opportunity and win the greatest possible victory.
After listening to the report of the General Staff, the Political Bureau very profoundly and comprehensively analyzed the possibility of U.S. intervention, the strengths and weaknesses of the puppets, the results of strategic preparations, our new status and strength, etc., on the basis of which to make strategic decisions. The conference concluded that the United States had been defeated in its war of aggression and had to withdraw its troops, which was a major military defeat and a basic defeat of the Nixon Doctrine.

The U.S. administration was beset with many political, military, economic, and financial difficulties, both at home and abroad. They did not suspect that the Watergate affair would lead to the fall of Nixon and his replacement by Ford, who became president without having to stand for election. The economic and financial difficulties of the United States were also very great. Inflation had risen to 12 percent. The lives of the working people were still threatened, which caused them to struggle against the administration resuming its involvement in Vietnam. On the international scene, the United States had fallen behind the Soviet Union with regard to many types of strategic weapons. The contradictions between the United States and its allies were becoming increasingly sharp. The anti-U.S. movement was continuing to develop in many places in the world. The United States was imperiled by a new general crisis.

Truong Chinh was of the opinion that with regard to Vietnam the United States was faced with two choices: either replace Thieu with someone else and rely on the Agreement to limit our victory, or continue to intervene to a certain extent to save the situation. We needed to take advantage of the opportunity provided by the United States encountering many difficulties to win a decisive, certain victory.

Phan Van Dong presented proof that the United States had accepted defeat. In 1973, when meeting with Kissinger, he said, "The Vietnamese people thrice defeated Yuan armies. After defeating them we gave them food and horses so that they could return home. As for you, how many times can you fight us?"

Kissinger held up one finger. Pham Van Dong said, "I don't believe you!"

After concluding his story about his meeting with Kissinger he continued, "I only said that. The United States is very much in disarray. It doesn't dare become involved in Vietnam again. Even if offered candy the U.S. troops wouldn't dare return to South Vietnam. It would be difficult for them to intervene with ground forces, and if they intervene with their air force—as a fire brigade—that cannot be the decisive factor on the battlefield.

After the discussions, the conference agreed unanimously that the United States, having been defeated in its war of aggression in Vietnam, had been weakened but the U.S. imperialists had abandoned their intentions toward the Southeast Asian region and still had potential. We still had to be on guard against someone who was "weak but insane" (as analyzed by Nguyen Duy Trinh). The United States was no longer capable of intervening directly with ground forces, but we still had to have a plan to guard against the eventuality of their intervening with their air force and navy. The conference affirmed that
no matter to what degree it intervened, the United States could not reverse the situation and could not save its lackeys from collapse.

As for the Nguyen Van Thieu clique, the conference concluded that they still had the strengths of large military forces and much equipment, and were still capable of holding down the people, conscripting troops, and defending the municipalities and cities. But they also had very basic weaknesses: they were isolated politically, the army's morale had declined, and they were entirely dependent on the United States both economically and militarily. If U.S. aid were to be reduced the fighting capability and morale of the puppet troops would decline.

Never before had we been so strong and the enemy so weak, and the inevitable development tendency was for us to become increasingly strong and the enemy to become increasingly weak.

In 1973 and 1974 our soldiers and people in all theaters operated regularly and suffered few losses. We achieved good results in our strategic preparations in all regards, at the front, in the rear area, and on the strategic route. We had created an advantageous battlefield status, had built up powerful strategic reserve forces, and created the necessary material factors to win a decisive victory within a few years.

After analyzing all aspects of the situation, the conference unanimously approved the basic 2-year strategic plan and the 1975 strategic operations plan, as well as the troop recruitment norm recommended by the General Staff. We understood that the Political Bureau had made an initial decision so that the Central Military Commission and the sectors and echelons, especially the organs of the Ministry of National Defense could promptly carry it out. The Political Bureau decided to convene be attended by the theater commanders and would discuss matters further and make official decisions.

Then the conference further analyzed a number of points requiring attention in guiding the implementation of the above-mentioned strategic plans.

Both 1975 and 1976 would occupy very important positions, but 1975 would be the pivotal year and would create conditions for winning final victory in 1976. We would begin 1975 by an attack in the southern Central Highlands, combined with an offensive in the lowlands, to connect the Central Highlands with eastern Nam Bo. It was necessary to do a good job of carrying out the 1975 strategic plan in order to prepare for 1976, while paying attention to continuing the task of making strategic preparations (building forces, completing the network of strategic and campaign roads, reinforcing the battlefields, etc.).

We had to be active, take the initiative, be flexible, create the element of surprise, and decide upon strategic surprises that could lead to rapid developmental steps.

It was necessary to make greater efforts and take more effective steps to overcome the weaknesses of the urban political bases not being strong, the on-the-spot armed forces not yet being devoped, the large-scale annihilation
battle methods of the main-force troops not yet being truly efficient, coordination among the battlefields not yet being truly good, the three offensive spearheads not yet being closely coordinated in many places, etc.

As regard the United States, we had to cleverly combine a strong military position with diplomacy to limit the possibility of U.S. intervention, while having a plan to counter the eventuality of their intervening by use of their air force and navy, especially when the lackeys were facing the peril of collapse.

We had to have a policy to take advantage of opportunities, especially when Thieu fell. We had to be prepared in all ways to exploit such opportunities to the maximum. No matter what the circumstances, we could not pass up strategic opportunities.

With regard to the strategic direction, the main-force troops had to prepare for both directions: the Central Highlands—the focal point of which was the southern Central Highlands—a very important strategic area, and eastern Nam Bo, ultimately the decisive area. It was necessary to ensure secrecy and surprise when sending forces down into the Mekong Delta, as well as in preparing for and carrying out a strategic attack in the southern Central Highlands.

In order to fight large-scale annihilating battles and disintegrate large enemy forces, the main-force troops had to improve their organization, ensure that their units were at full strength, ensure that the ranks of cadres were at full strength and that the cadres had good moral quality, and were capable of organizing and commanding combined arms combat. In using forces, it was necessary to know how to combine mobile forces with local forces and to have reserve forces.

With regard to the strategic and campaign fighting methods, it was necessary to combine the three strong blows (main-force, rural, and urban, to combine the three offensive spearheads, and to fight the enemy in all three strategic areas. It was necessary to organize war-deciding battles by main-force units and to fight large-scale annihilating battles in the jungles-and-mountains theater, combined operations, and battles to take subsectors and district seats and expand our liberated areas in the Mekong Delta and in Military Region 5. We had to carry out strategic interdictions, cut line of communications, carry out military proselytizing, and foment military uprisings and defections.

Attention would have to paid to political-morale mobilization and to enabling the party, the armed forces, and the people to fully understand the strategic decisions and clearly understand the significance of the strategic opportunity, focus all thoughts and acts on winning victory in the final test of strength, and on that basis mobilize, organize, and bring into play the combined strength of the entire population and the entire army to overwhelm the enemy both militarily and politically, bolster the troops' fighting spirit, and continually press forward until final victory was won.
On the morning of 8 October, Ba concluded the first phase of the Political Bureau conference.

He directed the General Staff to take notes about the concluding report so that they could be sent to some people in the theaters for study before the Political Bureau resumed its conference.

In beginning the report, Ba said, "Our Political Bureau has agreed unanimously to complete the people's democratic national revolution in the South. That is an extremely important event and a very brave--indeed bold--decision. That decision resulted from the collective intelligence of the Political Bureau and from thoughts that had been under consideration for a long time, and from carefully weighing the pros and cons. It was based on experience that had been concluded over a period of several decades of combat, on the revolutionary actualities on the battlefield, and on the comparison of forces in our country and in the world."

After analyzing why the United States intervened in the South in 1954 and ultimately--in 1973--had to withdraw troops, he said, "The United States intervened because it thought it was strong and we were weak, and that it would win and we would lose. Now the United States has had to withdraw because we are strong and we are weak, we have won and have taken every long step forward while it has been defeated and has taken a very grave step backward."

With regard to our strategic intention when we signed the Paris Agreement, Ba said that "Although we say that the United States had to withdraw because it was defeated and was weak, we know that it still has great potential and many insidious plots. We are never subjective and believe that they are powerless. Although we are winning one victory after another, we are still encountering many difficulties. At this time the aid provided by our camp is as ample and timely as we would like, the reconciliation and collusion of the United States and China have caused additional complications for our resistance war. Under those circumstances we had to create a solid tendency of upward advance and a strong position. That is why we signed the Paris Agreement. For our part, the important thing about the Agreement was not that it recognized two administrations, two armies, and two areas of control, and called for the formation of a tripartite government, but essentially that the U.S. troops had to withdraw while our troops remained, the north-south corridor remained intact, and the rear area was joined with the front to form an integrated and unified area. Our intention was to maintain unchanged our status and strength in the South so that we could continue to attack the enemy." He then spoke of our struggle method: by means of the Paris Agreement, struggling against the enemy, rallying the mass forces, dividing the lackeys, and isolating the enemy. No matter which way the situation developed, we were determined to advance to winning complete victory.

With regard to the strategic opportunity to completely liberate the South, Ba said that "We have an opportunity now. Only after 10 years of fighting could we create that opportunity, so we must grasp it to lead the enterprise of national liberation to complete victory."
He analyzed the plots of the U.S. imperialists toward our country and Southeast Asia, after North Vietnam was liberated. At that time the United States wanted to monopolize Southeast Asia, but was defeated. The United States switched over to compromising to share benefits and areas of influence with a number of other powers which also plotted to achieve hegemony in that region. They regarded a Vietnam that was unified and independent, and was allied with two independent and unified countries—Laos and Cambodia—would be a major obstacle to their expansionist plot. Therefore, they sought ways to impede the progress of Vietnam and prolong our country’s separation. The United States hoped to use China to exert pressure and force us to come to a halt after signing the Paris Agreement. Their plot was very dangerous, but at that time no one was prepared or able to carry it out.

In view of the above, we affirmed that that was the most favorable opportunity for our people to complete the liberation of the South and win complete victory for the national democratic revolution, while also helping the Lao and Cambodian revolutions complete their national liberation undertakings. Except for that opportunity, there was no other. If we delayed for 10 or 15 more years the puppets could revive, the aggressor powers could recover, and the expansionists could become stronger, so the situation would become extremely complicated.

When making that strategic decision, the key matter was determining whether or not the United States would return to the South. In choosing that strategic opportunity, we decided that the United States was incapable of returning. But we also affirmed that even if the United States intervened to a limited degree they could not reverse the situation and we would still win.

The problem that was posed was that we had to decide upon the best way to fight and win victory. That opportunity demanded that we work quickly, efficiently, and definitively, but that we be clever. Only thereby could we achieve surprise, so that the enemy could not react in time. Could we do so? We agreed unanimously that we had to act and were determined to act.

After analyzing dialectical the comparison of forces between ourselves and the enemy since the Paris Agreement, Ba said that "it must be emphasized that it is necessary to clearly understand the great capabilities and forces we require and can mobilize, to create combined strength with which to win victory in the final test of strength with the enemy.

"Our strength is above all the strength of mastership by the people and the strength of the entire nation fighting the enemy, from North to South and in the rear area and at the front.

"Our strength is the strength of the two banners of national independence and socialism, which are tied in closely with the three revolutionary currents the epoch.

"Our strength is the strength of people's war."
All conference participants listened attentively and were enthusiastically in agreement. Ba very happily began the concluding part of the report. He affirmed the following:

"Our determination is to mobilize the greatest possible efforts on the part of the entire party, army, and population in both regions, launch a final general offensive and uprising, develop revolutionary war to the highest level, annihilate and disintegrate the entire puppet army, occupy Saigon, the enemy's central lair, and all other cities, overthrow the puppet administration at the central level and at all other levels win political power for the people completely liberate the South, complete the people's national democratic revolution throughout the nation, and advance to unifying the nation." From then on, it was necessary to carry out all preparatory tasks very urgently and create he most ample conditions and material bases to attack strongly and rapidly and win a complete victory during the 1975-1976 2-year period.

"We are undertaking the greatest and most difficult historical mission ever. But never before have we been so enthusiastic and happy as at present. Our entire party, army, and population, and our entire nation, both the North and the South, must be determined to fulfill their missions. The people all over the nation and our friends all over the world are awaiting our victory. This opportunity does not allow us to be half-hearted or hesitant."

After the enthusiastic hand clapping in response to the conclusions of the General Secretary, the Secretary of the Military Commission of the Party Central Committee said:

"Ba has concluded the conference, an historic conference which made many historic decisions to complete the liberation revolution in the South. Ba, on behalf of the party, has assigned a mission to the army. The army will fulfill, by all means, the historic mission entrusted it by the party."

The conference concluded with enthusiasm and confidence in the great victory that was to come.

We urgently carried out all tasks necessary to implement the Political Bureau resolution. A large number of urgent tasks were posed for the staff organ: supplementing the 1975 strategic plan and the plan to recruit troops and increase our troop strength, combat training, the recalculation of material needs, specialized research on the enemy with regard to the contingency of Thieu collapsing, in which case we would have to take advantage of the strategic opportunity in a timely manner, etc.

In the process of supplementing plans, a matter we continued to discuss was how to fully implement the decision of the Political Bureau, draft and implement basic plans and prepare contingency plans, be prepared to act in a positive and flexible manner, and not miss strategic opportunities, especially in the event of a sudden political upheaval in the South.

On 28 October the 2-year plan was approved by the Military Commission of the Party Central Committee.
The plenary conference of the Political Bureau was not held until December. While awaiting the conference, in accordance with the Military Commission, the General Staff communicated to the battlefields the decisions and plans that had received initial approval and provided guidance on making preparations in accordance with those plans.

For our part, we had to urgently begin and complete a large number of preparatory tasks necessary for the 1975 strategic plan.

Beginning in October, after the Political Bureau conference, the work atmosphere in the General Staff became strangely animated.

Many staff emissaries were sent to the localities and units. They were sent to Nghe An to assign a mission to the 316th Division, to carry out a troop reinforcement plan so that 1st Corps could be prepared to move south after completing training maneuvers at Sam Son, to the armed forces branches and combat arms to oversee the preparation of the technical units that had been the preparation of the technical units that had been assigned the mission of being prepared to move south to the Central Highlands theater when so ordered, etc.

With regard to the theaters, a whole series of tasks had to be carried out urgently: the supplementation of forces, the strengthening of the organization of 4th Corps and technical combat arms reinforcements for the B2 theater, the rectification of forces of the Tri Thien Military Region and 2nd Corps, the building of additional roads southwest of Hue, preparing artillery bases in order to interdict important enemy airfields and ports, reinforcing the main-force and local troops of Military Region 5 with troops and technical military equipment, supplementing the equipment of the 968th Division, which had just returned from lower Laos, etc. The General Staff and the general departments coordinated in carrying out those tasks very urgently.

A requirement that was posed was to, under any circumstances, reinforce the South with sufficient forces to win victory. The results of the two troop recruitment cycles in 1974 were very favorable conditions for fulfilling the requirements of the battlefield at the beginning of the dry season. Many families sent their fifth or sixth son off to the army. Some parents allowed both a son and a daughter to set out for the battlefields. Youths had peace of mind when they set out because villages and cooperatives helped and watched out for their families.

We and our comrades at the Rear Services General Department needed to review the battlefield preparations. The Truong Son troops were going all-out to complete the strategic route prior to the dry season to ensure transportation to Loc Ninh during both seasons. Each battlefield was urgently developing the campaign roads to the designated objectives. The system of supply depots and rear services stations was being completed in the strategic corridor from Route 9 to La Bang Khe and the system of oil pipelines and storage tanks was being extended from lower Laos to Bu Gia Map.
Group 559 was urgently fulfilling its plan to transport hundreds of tons of cargo of all kinds, as required by the 1975-1976 2-year plan, and some of the reserve supplies for the next year.

The manpower and materiel that were mobilized for the front reflected the unity of the entire populations and the will of the North, the great rear area, which was determined to go all-out to, along with our kith-and-kin on the great front line in the South, attain the final goal of the enterprise of national liberation.

During the last months of 1974, something that caused us concern has how to ensure that the quality of training during the second cycle was as good as that of the first cycle. Objectively, the training conditions during the first cycle were more difficult. Thanks to the rectification of organization, the cadre situation was unstable and the training time was shorter, but the requirements of the battlefield were more urgent. The Military Training Department, under the guidance of comrade Vuong Thua Vu, Deputy Chief of Staff, went all-out, along with the military regions, corps, armed forces branches, and combat arms, to enable the reinforcement battalions to complete their training programs, so that the cadres could receive supplemental training in the principal tactical and technical contents, and in the organization of command, prior to receiving their missions. Since the anti-French resistance war, Vu had been a diligent, devoted, loyal cadre with much experience in combat command and troop training, especially experience in training units for large-scale combined arms combat. In November 1974 the General Staff sent emissaries to the military regions, corps, armed forces branches, and combat arms with directives to carry out supplementary training in time to fulfill the 1975 mission requirements, while also relaying the newly recapitalted experiences regarding combined campaigns in attacking municipalities and cities and in attacking and wiping out subsectors, district seats and in wiping out enemy battalion and regiments going to relieve seiges, and also to pass on the results of research on coordinated combat arms fighting to annihilate enemy divisions. With regard to the 316th Division, because it was preparing to move urgently to the battlefield the General Staff, along with the general departments, sent a delegation to assist in all ways so that the unit could get underway in time. Because there was insufficient time for doing so before the division set out, it was not briefed regarding experiences in attacking subsectors and district seats until it reached the Central Highlands theater.

The enthusiastic, urgent, and serious working spirit of all elements of the General Staff organs, and their strong sense of responsibility, contributed to enabling the units and theaters to begin the campaign season with forces that were more ample in all regards and with an increasingly higher operational level. Those accomplishments were quiet feats of arms of the cadres and men in the rear which, along with the glorious feats of arms of the cadres and men at the front, with determination to transform the correct, wise strategic policy of the party into actual victory on the battlefield.

The urgent, heavy work local caused everyone to feel that the 2 months passed by very quickly.
The second session of the Political Bureau, the Military Commission of the Party Central Commission, and the comrades leading and guiding the battlefields took place in mid-December, 12 days after the first phase of the 1975 offensive began in the Mekong Delta.

Pham Hung, Tran Van Tra, and Phan Van Dang of Nam Bo, and Vo Chi Cong and Chu Huy Man of Military Region 5, had been present in Hanoi since the beginning of the month.

As had been the case with regard to many other conferences in the past, several days prior to the official meeting the Political Bureau and the Military Commission met individually with the representatives of each battlefield and heard them report on the situation. This time they also reported on the operational decisions and plans in their areas.

Pham Hung and Tran Van Tra reported on the situation in the B2 theater between mid-1973 and the end of 1974. Especially noteworthy was the fact that we had fought well during the recent rainy season. They reported on the regional plans, including the plan for the Route 14-Dong Xoai area.

Vo Chi Cong and Chu Huy Man reported on the enemy's situation and our situation, and the results of the fighting during the past 2 years, outstanding among which were the expansion of our liberated areas and the sending of many forces to put pressure on the enemy in the delta, the building or restoration of 840 kilometers of roads, the receiving of supplies from the great rear area, the results of self-sufficiency production, and the results attained in annihilating the enemy.

Because preparations had been made since the first round of meetings, during the second round the especially important matters received additional thought and were debated enthusiastically. How should the transformation in the comparison of forces between ourselves and the enemy be analyzed in relation to the general situation and in each theater? What objectives should be attained in 1975? In what theater were the enemy most vulnerable and in which theater would our primary attack be launched? When would the strategic opportunity arise? What could we do to take advantage of the strategic opportunity in a timely manner?

During those meetings the Political Bureau and the Military Commission set aside much time to listen to opinions from the battlefields. In the process of debating, the members of the Political Bureau and the Military Commission spoke of many matters which had received additional thought since the October meeting. The problems that had arisen with regard to many different aspects were deeply analyzed by the collective intelligence of the participants so that unanimous agreement could be reached in the end.

Van Tien Dung stressed that the use of military forces and the application of fighting methods had to be manifested immediately in drafting and developing plans. Le Duc Tho analyzed the situation with regard to the United States, the opportunity, the balance of forces, the basis of which to make decisions.
for the 2-year period, attacking pacification, annihilating the enemy main-force units, building up the localities, and the military proselytizing work. Pham Van Dong analyzed the strategic operational method in the coming phase, the use of a combined strategy, the preparation of material-technical bases, and the training of new recruits. Truong Chinh discussed the special characteristics of the situation, the missions of the two regions, and the strategic fighting method, and agreed to the selection of the Central Highlands and Buon Ma Thuot. Tran Quoc Hoan, Le Van Luong, and Nguyen Duy Trinh spoke on the strategic measures, the requirement of combining the military, political, and diplomatic aspects, etc.

Throughout the course of the conference, every day, and sometimes twice a day, the Operations Department reported on the newest developments on the battlefield, and the reactions of Washington, Saigon, and the puppet battlefield commanders. Practically every time there was a report on the fighting we were provided with very valuable living documentation which affirmed that our status and strength were on the rise and those of the enemy were on the decline. The Phuoc Long victory was exemplary of that.

The process that led to the Phuoc Long victory was a process of mutual exchanges between the General Staff and the comrades in the B2 theater. We reached a greement on the Dong Xoai and Phuoc Long objectives, although at first Phuoc Long was not proposed. The exchanges did not arrive at a conclusion as to whether or not to attack, but which objective would be attacked first, which objective would be attacked second, and which forces would be used in the attacks.

Until the final days of 1974 perhaps our greatest worry was still the matter of ammunition, including tank shells and heavy field artillery shells.

In a message sent to the General Staff in mid-August 1974, Tran Van Tra sounded an "alarm" about the shortage of heavy artillery shells in the B2 theater. He predicted that by the end of the year the main-force units and supply depots in the theater would have only about 4,800 120mm mortar shells; 1,190 160mm mortar shells; 6,500 122mm rockets; 300 105mm rockets; 7,800 130mm artillery shells; etc. At the end of the message Tra wrote, "As we begin 1975 we will experience difficulties with regard to the above types of shells. I recommend that the General Staff make all-out efforts to accelerate the sending of some heavy shells to the B2 theater by the beginning of the season.

In comparison to the B2 theater, the B1 theater (18) was experiencing an even greater shortage. In the first part of September, in a message to the General Staff, Phat, the deputy chief of staff of Military Region 5, estimated that by the end of 1974 the B1 theater would have only 1,100 120mm mortars shells, 80 160mm mortar shells, 1,000 85mm artillery shells, 4,500 130mm artillery shells, and 469 122mm rockets.

In the other theaters the situation was similar. At Thuong Duc, when we attacked and took the district seat a message was sent from the battlefield which informed us that "After more than a month of activity our forces ahve
declined. We are short of ammunition and mechanized artillery shells and DKZ rounds are sufficient for only one low-level offensive."

Against that background, the B2 theater comrades favored attacking Dong Xoai first, while we at the General Staff favored attacking Bu Dang-Bu Na (farther north on Route 14) first. The reason was simple: Bu Dang-Bu Na should be attacked first because they were small objectives (sub-sectors) and victory was certain. There was also the possibility that we would capture artillery shells which we could use to attack Dong Xoai. Because the Bu Dang, Vinh Thieu, and Bu Na victories we captured four 105mm artillery pieces and 7,000 shells. We continued to develop the Dong Xoai attack, and as the 27 December 1974 message from Le Duc Anh, deputy theater commander, stated that on 26 December our troops had wiped out the complex of strong points at Dong Xoai without using tanks, although we had a tank company in reserve.

Having captured artillery shells at Bu Na, Bu Dang, and Dong Xoai, the General Staff agreed to develop the attack by attacking Phuoc Long, and in a separate meeting Ba and the members of the Military Commission agreed to allow the B2 theater comrades to use a 130mm artillery company in the Phuoc Long battle.

On that day, 6 January 1975, after 26 days of continuous fighting, news of the victory of the eastern Nam Bo troops in the Route 14-Phuoc Long campaign flew into the conference room of the Political Bureau and the Military Commission and signalled a spring season with many good prospects.

How would the enemy react? It was learned that 3 days previously Thieu had convened a special meeting of his cabinet to evaluate the situation. He ordered the awarding of 3.2 million dong to the troops who had defended Phuoc Long to the death. When the fate of the more than 6,000 troops at that important position had been decided, the Saigon press tried to make a big deal out of the news that the aircraft carrier Intrepid, the cruiser Long Beach, and many U.S. destroyers and oilers had left the Subic Bay base in the Philippines and were headed for the coast of Vietnam, and news that the U.S. 3rd Marine Division in Japan had been put on alert. But then the Saigon administration was disappointed when a White House spokesman said that "President Ford has no intention of violating the (Congressional) prohibitions regarding the use of American military forces in Vietnam." Thieu's exhortation to "retake Phuoc Long" was soon replaced by an appeal to "set aside 3 days of mourning and prayer for Phuoc Long."

In the Mekong Delta, the situation had undergone important transformations. The rural areas that had been liberated to one degree or another were steadily expanded, the corridor was connected, the offensive staging area was consolidated, our local potential was developed, and the enemy's were becoming increasingly limited.

On the afternoon of 6 January, after the conference's rest period, we and the heads of the operations and intelligence departments and the Central Team exchanged opinions on the developments during the first phase of the 1974-1975 dry season, and especially the Phuoc Long victory. We quickly reached agreement on the following points:
1. The situation on the battlefield was changing advantageously and was developing more rapidly than expected, especially in Military Region 5 and eastern Nam Bo.

2. The Phuoc Long battle was a new event signified a new step forward in maturization with regard to our combat operational level and affirmed the decline of the puppet army and the ability of the United States to react, which was already very limited.

3. The secrecy of our strategic stand and strategic operational plan was still ensured. Because of the sense of responsibility of the communications and cryptoanalysis troops, the enemy guessed wrong and evaluated us incorrectly, with regard to the strategic objectives, the main line of attack, the time when the offensive would be launched, the operational scale, the level of our main-force troops, etc.

4. The Phuoc Long battle was a new factor which allowed us to look far ahead with regard to prospects for implementing the strategic operational plan. In the second phase, we would be capable of liberating larger areas. Therefore, a problem that was posed for the General Staff was to study, and recommend the supplementation and adjustment of, the objectives of the next steps of the strategic operations plan, so that it could be appropriate to the new situation and to the guiding thought of the Political Bureau: to win greater and more rapid victories.

5. The shortage of large-caliber shells, which had always been a direct concern of the staff and rear services organs, had begun to be resolved. The artillery shell ammunition depot we captured at Phuoc Long was initial capital we could use to obtain returns many times greater. We would capture the Mai Hac De supply depot at Buon Ma Thuot, the military base complex at Da Nang, the Long Binh central supply depot, etc. The greater the victories we won and the more artillery shells we had, the more relieved the staff and rear services personnel became. Once again the slogan of "capturing from the enemy to fight the enemy and arming as we fought," which had been set forth by the party, had once again been transformed into reality on the battlefield by our soldiers and people. The brave, resourceful troops at the front had overcome a major difficulty which the strategic organs in the rear could not resolve.

We synthesized those observations and the next day presented them at the Political Bureau conference.

In the course of 20 days of very urgent, seething, and enthusiastic work all matters that were discussed were illuminated with a high degree of unanimity.

On 7 January 1975, Ba concluded the second phase of the Political Bureau conference. I noted that he was happier than usual. In beginning the concluding report, he said:

"In the previous conference, the Political Bureau agreed unanimously on the strategic direction to lead the anti-U.S. resistance war to complete victory. In this conference the Political Bureau further discussed matters with our
comrades in the South. The comrades in charge of the Military Region 5 and Nam Bo theaters are all present. We have evaluated the situation since the Paris Agreement, evaluated the comparison of forces between ourselves and the enemy, acknowledged the strategic opportunity, made the strategic decision to complete the people's national democratic revolution in the South in the 1975-1976 2-year period, and determined the missions, goals, and steps in carrying it out.

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[Text] "My concluding report at the previous conference dealt with those important matters. Today I will not touch on everything but will only recapitulate the matters about which you have expressed additional opinions, in order to confirm once again the determinations of the Political Bureau and the Military Commission of the Party Central Committee."

After mentioning the factors of victory and the new capabilities brought about by the Paris Agreement, Ba analyzed the strong new position we had created in many respects: initiative on the battlefield; an integrated strategic position that extended from north to south and had been consolidated and completed; the mobile main-force units had been built up and strengthened; strategic reserves had been concentrated in the important areas; the situation in the rural lowlands had been improved and staging areas had been created in areas near the large cities; especially, a large number of main-force units had been created in the Nam Bo lowlands, something we could not accomplish in the past; political struggle movement had been launched under the slogan of peace, independence, and national conciliation; and we were continuing to win the sympathy and support of the revolutionary force and progressive people of the world.

We still had a number of deficiencies: in building up the main-force and local troops we had not attained the requirements regarding numbers, quality, equipment, organization, and cadres, and their ability to engage in large-scale combined arms fighting over a long period of time. In the rural areas, we had not yet closely combined the three offensive spearheads, in many places the militia and guerrilla forces were still weak, and we had not yet created a basis on which the masses could struggle. In the cities, the political struggle had not yet become a truly deep and broad mass movement. In sum, during the past 2 years, because of deficiencies in guidance and command we were still limited in fully utilizing the factors of victory and the new capabilities.

As for the enemy, they also had certain strengths. For example, the puppet army still numbered nearly 700,000, with 13 regular divisions; the enemy still controlled all of the large cities and many highly populated and wealthy rural areas; they were still aided militarily by the United States; and they were still commanded by U.S. advisors. However, the enemy's status was becoming increasingly weak and their forces were on the decline. That situation was manifested in the following aspects: the enemy troops, both regular and local troops, were on the defensive; the local troops, such as the regional forces and popular forces, were less able to control the people; the puppet army's ability to coordinate had weakened because its forces and equipment had
declined; the puppet troops; morale had seriously declined; the area under enemy control had been divided and the "pacification" plan was becoming bankrupted; and the political and economic situation, especially in the cities, had never been so difficult and chaotic.

In view of that military, political, and economic situation, it would be difficult for Nguyen Van Thieu to remain in power.

After many years of difficult, arduous struggle, the Vietnamese revolution in general and the south in particular had brought about that important transformation in the comparison of forces. Never before had the military and political struggles had such favorable conditions or the ability to unite to form a high tide of offensive as at present. The situation was far different from that in the past. The United States had suffered one defeat after another and had to withdraw its troops. The puppet army and administration no longer had a source of support. Our army was at full strength and was present all over the South. The popular masses in the enemy areas were starting to arise and had a new spirit.

In 1974, while our status and strength grew rapidly, the enemy increasingly went down-hill militarily, politically, and economically. We attacked strongly and were certain to create new sudden transformation the enemy's downward slide.

On the basis of the evaluation made at both conferences, we could see with greater accuracy the historic opportunity and actual capability to win the final war-deciding victories and lead the anti-U.S. resistance war for national salvation to complete victory. We agreed on the necessity to prepare in all ways to victoriously conclude the national salvation war in 1975 or 1976.

Our mission for the coming period would be to grasp the historic opportunity and launch one combined campaign after another to win decisive battles and decisively conclude the anti-U.S. resistance war, complete the popular democratic national revolution in the South, and advance to unifying the fatherland. Once the popular democratic national revolution was completed, we could then advance the entire nation to socialism. While fulfilling that mission, we would work with Laos and Cambodia and help them advance.

In order to decisively carry out those decisions, it was necessary to carry out specific missions and fulfill the following requirements: carrying out large scale offensives and uprisings, wipe out subsectors and district seats, defeat the pacification plan, gain control of most of the rural areas in the Nam Bo lowlands, the Military Region 5 lowlands, and Tri Thien, launch combined arms campaigns by our main-force troops to break the puppet's backbone, combined with attacks against the puppet regular forces and rural pacification, treaten the large cities, especially Saigon, develop the political struggle movement to demand peace and national conciliation to a large scale, promote military proselytization, and destroy the rear services abases and war facilities of the enemy. We had to fully understand that the goal was to create combined strength, advance to a general offensive and
uprising, and defeat the enemy in their lairs, especially Saigon, in order to conclude the war.

The waging of that final battle would above all the responsibility of the military and political forces in the Nam Bo theater, including the forces of Saigon-Gia Dinh, and would also be the responsibility of the soldiers and people, including the regional main-force units and the main-force units which would arrive from the other theaters to play the decisive role.

Ba reviewed the 1975 activity plan and the missions of each theater, while also orienting all activities of all theaters toward the strategic war-deciding battle in the enemy's final lair by the most rapid route. After speaking of the specific missions of the Nam Bo, Military Region 5, Central Highlands, and Tri Thien theaters, Ba discussed the necessity of having preparatory plans in both the South and the North, to cope with the eventuality of the United States resuming attacks by its air force and navy. although there was little chance that that would happen, we had to be on guard, for the United States still plotted to maintain their neocolonialism.

He then spoke of the mission of the great rear area in the North: "Here in the North, the Party Central Committee and the government will go all-out to strengthen their force and ensure that the material-technical needs of the battlefields are fully met, and regard that as a basic condition for winning victory. Another urgent and important matters are preparing strategic reserve forces, recruiting 300,000 new recruits, accelerating the training of troops, and firmly grasping cadre training. We must do a good job of carrying out the political-ideological work among the troops and the people, and mobilize the entire army and population to manifest a spirit of 'all for the front, all for victory'. We must cleverly use the diplomatic struggle weapon."

As he began the final part of his summary report, Ba was very enthusiastic about the complete unanimity of the conference about all matters. He said that after the conference there were still many tasks that had to be carried out very urgently—at the front and in the rear area. He stated that "The General Staff must continue to complete the offensive plan that has been outlined, and further concretize the matters regarding the organization of implementation, force building, battlefield deployment, and providing rear services support. The General Staff is an organ with very important responsibility in carrying out this very historic decision of the Political Bureau."

Finally, he stressed that "That strategic war-deciding battle is a great undertaking. It will lead our people's anti-U.S. resistance war for national salvation to complete victory, contribute to changing the situation in Indochina and Southeast Asia, and begin a new developmental phase in the revolutionary movement of the world's people. Our party is determined to fulfill its glorious historic responsibility toward the nation and its noble international mission. In the immediate future we will still experience many difficulties and hardships, but of we bring into play the tradition of heroic combat and limitless creativity of our army and people, we are certain to overcome all. We are certain to win!"
Immediately after the conference concluded, one of the first matters the General Staff concentrated on resolving was the completion of the 1975 strategic operations plan, in which the most attention was paid to the direction of the coming strategic offensive. I remember that when concluding the conference Ba spoke of that matter rather clearly: "In the Military Region 5 and Central Highlands theaters, use three main-force divisions to attack the Central Highlands, open up a corridor connecting the southern Central Highlands with eastern Nam Bo, and create conditions for the main-force troops to move quickly into eastern Nam Bo and coordinate with the regional main-force troops in attacking Saigon. The opening battles will be fought to take Buon Ma Thuot, break through to Tuy Hoa and Phu Yen, cut the Military Region 5 lowlands in half, and create yet another direction from which to rapidly advance south and put pressure on Saigon."

When I heard Ba speak I remembered that in July of the previous year, when working with him at Do Son, we had talked about the Central Highlands area. A few months later, Tan (at that time a deputy chief of staff and head the high-level supplemental military training school) posed the following question to his students: if the Central Highlands area was selected as the primary area of strategic attack, what should the first objective be?

A few chose Kontum or Duc Lap, but most of the students recommended that Buon Ma Thuot be selected. No one recommended attacking the northern Central Highlands directly. They all chose the southern part, an attack against Buon Ma thuot.

At a meeting of key General Staff cadres held to disseminate the strategic decisions and strategic plan that had been officially approved by the Political Bureau, as he listened to our deliberations at the end of the conference he recommended that the southern Central Highlands--more specifically Buon Ma Thuot--be selected. The members of the planning study element were very enthusiastic because the opinions of the leader coincided with their own recommendation. Thus from top to bottom it was Buon Ma Thuot.

In addition to guiding the adjustment of the 1975 operational plan, we and the members of the Intelligence Department discussed the enemy situation. What would be the capability of the puppets to react during the second phase in the key Central Highlands theater? What would be the U.S. reaction, and what were the chances that they would use their navy and air force to intervene to a limited degree, so that the puppet army could improve its ability to resist when we attacked on a large scale?

Comrade Phan Ham, deputy head of the Operations Department, and the comrades in charge of the Military Manpower Department, coordinated with the Rear Services General Department and did additional work with the cadres and sectors of the state organs, so that they could jointly recalculate capabilities, supplement the plan to prepare forces and technical equipment, and be prepared to make all-out efforts so that greater victories could be won on the battlefield during the second phase.

Something that made a profound impression on me during the time we were implementing the Political Bureau resolution was that the Military Commission
of the Party Central Committee paid much attention to political education, ideological leadership, and organization, especially in the main-force units. I still remember that during the meeting of 9 January 1975, in order to discuss the specific guidance of the second phase of the 1974-1975 dry-season campaign, and especially to guide the Central Highlands campaign, which would begin with the Buon Ma Thuot battle, the standing committee of the Military Commission stressed the following points about the political-ideological work:

1. Creating determination to overcome all difficulties, fight continuously, not fear sacrifices of hardships, and determination to compete to win the greatest victory, and oppose all manifestations of subjectivism, self-satisfaction, and wanting to hold back.

2. Firmly grasping the thought of waging annihilating battles, and attacking quickly and wiping out the enemy effectively, while also being concerned with stepping up military proselytization and disintegrating the enemy's ranks.

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3. Manifesting a spirit of solidarity and cooperation among the units, combat arms, and areas, being prepared to accept the difficult missions, and creating favorable conditions so that their friends can fulfill the common missions.

4. Respecting battlefield discipline, and voluntarily and strictly implementing the policies toward the liberated area, POW's, and war booty.

5. Being concerned with training cadres even under actual combat conditions, and making ready the corps of cadres, especially the basic-level cadres, to ensure continuous combat guidance and command and supplement and develop new forces.

After the Political Bureau conference and the 9 January 1975 conference of the Military Commission of the Party Central Committee, all activities of the Ministry of National Defense were oriented toward the main battlefield--the Central Highlands--and Buon Ma Thuot.

The actual situation demonstrated that the extraordinary strength and limitless creativity of the masses on the great front line had accelerated the process of historical development beyond even the boldest estimates. After each experimental step on the battlefield, the strategic plan was continually supplemented and completed, especially during the test of wits of March 1975.
Chapter Five
The March Test of Wits

Ten years have past, but I still have vivid memories of the people and events of that memorable March. The bustling atmosphere in the strategic staff organ, the flood of messages from the battlefields full of news of victory, the enthusiastic briefings, etc. That is correct, all that is correct. But what made the deepest impression on me were the conferences of the Political Bureau and the Military Commission, meetings which delineated the path for our soldiers and people to advance from one victory to another in March and for our nation to win complete victory at the end of April.

A month after the Phuoc Long victory, on 5 February, Van Tien Dung set out for the Central Highlands. In accordance and the Military commission of the Party Central Commission, he and Dinh Duc Thien, head of the Rear Services General Department; Le Ngoc Hien, deputy chief of staff; and a number of cadres of the General Staff organs, the armed forces branches, and the combat arms were organized into a representative element—code-named Group A.75—of the High Command and the Military Commission. The group consisted not only of experienced command and staff cadres but also highly skilled communications and cryptographic cadres and personnel who had accumulated much work experience.

The General Staff monitored the group’s journey and was informed that on 13 February it arrived at the Central Highlands front command. Le Ngoc Hien had gone in advance to study the battlefield situation and prepare an operational plan.

While Group A.75 was en route, in order to maintain secrecy we did not communicate with it via radio. But so that Dung and Group A.75 could receive the most recent information, which was necessary for the upcoming discussions about the operational plan, the General Staff communicated with the radio communications station of the B3 command and continually communicated the most recent information, especially regarding the enemy and rear services transportation in support of the campaign, so that B3 could relay the information to Group A.75 when it reached the Central Highlands.

With regard to the enemy’s situation, by means of technical information, we paid special attention to the 18 February meeting between Thieu and the puppet generals in Saigon. Our attention was drawn to two conclusions reached by the puppet military leaders during that meeting:

First, they predicted that we would launch a spring-summer offensive in the near future, with the objectives of attacking pacification and gaining control land and population in the key theater, Military Region 2.

Second, Thieu admonished them to be on guard against our attacking Quang Duc,
Pleiku, and Kontum, the "primary" objectives, while Buon Ma Thuot, if attacked, would only be a "secondary" objective.

On 22 February, after a meeting of the General Staff organ was held to synthesize the enemy situation and our preparations in order to report to the standing committee of the Military Commission, we sent another message to B3 which included the newest information about the enemy that had been assembled and evaluated by the General Staff, covering the period from the beginning of the year to mid-February.

After bringing up the principal points about the over-all enemy troops strength and the two groups of enemy mobile strategic forces, in the southern part of Military Region 1 (Quang Nam-Da Nang) and the area around Saigon, the on-the-spot forces in each military zone, and the enemy's defeats in the "special simultaneous uprising" campaigns, especially in the key areas in Military Region 5, eastern Nam Bo, and the eastern part of the Mekong Delta, we spoke of the U.S. plot and the prediction of the puppet Joint General Staff about our strategic policy, especially information about the Central Highlands theater.

The U.S. government was urging the Congress to approve additional aid for the puppets. They sent additional U.S. military personnel to the South, including 340 Air Force personnel, secretly sent weapons and ammunition to the puppets, and increased the number of B52 bombers in Thailand. There was information that the United States had begun an airlift to take weapons directly to the Play Cu and Kontum airfields. At the Kontum airfield alone, every 3 days three or four C141 aircraft landed at night.

With regard to our strategic policy, the enemy thought we would launch an offensive larger than that of 1974 but not as large as that of 1972, and that we would take a number of additional subsectors and district seats and a number of towns and cities, but would try to avoid renewed U.S. intervention. We would attack in all four military regions, but the principal focus would be in Military Region 2, in order to liberate the cities of Play Cu and Kontum before the rainy season. The enemy had also discovered that we were making active preparations in the Quang Duc and Buon Ma Thuot. They predicted that we would send the 968th Division to Play Cu and the 320th Division to Dac Lac. The enemy also expected that we would operate strongly in the southern Tri Thien area and in the area south-west of Da Nang. Noteworthy was the fact that the enemy were still trying to understand our strategic intentions and our deployment of strategic forces.

With regard to the time of the offensive, the enemy predicted that it would begin at Tet and last until the end of June 1975. Therefore, before Tet they sent additional theater mobile forces to the northern Central Highlands and the area southwest of Da Nang. Their strategic mobile forces remained in their former positions.

We also sent information about enemy preparations and air forces in South Asia, about the coming maneuvers of SEATO naval forces, etc.

For our part, we provided a summary report on preparations in the northern...
Military Region 5, Central Highlands, and Tri Thien theaters, and information on the consolidation of forces and the results of troop recruitment, although before setting out Group A.75 had been informed about the initial results of that task.

Even in the first troop recruitment cycle there were favorable signs. During the last part of 1974 and the first part of 1975, when the strategic decisions of the Political Bureau and the results of the local military conference were disseminated to the military regions, the provinces in the North, and in all localities, from the lowlands region to the mountain region, there arose the most bustling troop recruitment movement ever. Many young men and women delayed their wedding dates, entrance to college, or study abroad so that they could enter the army during the year's first cycle. An atmosphere of "the entire nation enlisting" existed everywhere, in both urban and rural areas. It was a seething atmosphere of youths enthusiastically registering to enlist, including veterans who had completed their military service and went to the villages and districts to volunteer to return to active duty and the battlefield. The entire population had a high degree of unanimity toward the strategic decisions of the party. The hearts of the people in each village and neighborhood in the great rear area were night and day oriented toward the great front line. They were of one will and were determined to, along with their compatriots in the South, attain the goals of the last phase of the enterprise of national liberation.

Based on the data reported by the localities, the staff organ calculated that by the end of April the number of recruits needed for 1975 would have been recruited, and that during the last part of 1975 and the first part of 1976 the 1976 troops would have been recruited, so that there would be time to train them.

With regard to providing rear services support for the Central Highlands theater, after he arrived there Dung stated in a message that all requirements of the campaign had been fulfilled, that Group 559 had served the campaign very actively, and that our troops were well-fed, our forces were large, we had ample weapons, our morale was high, etc. Never, before had our troops been so strong or so highly concentrated as in the Central Highlands in 1975.

After that information was received, the staff and rear services cadres assigned the mission of preparing forces for the Central Highlands were very enthusiastic. They saw the results of their contributions to the key theater of the first phase of the offensive, which would begin in the following month.

On 17 February the General Staff received a message from Dung. At the same time, a liaison officer from Group A.75 arrived in the North to report on the operational plan.

Before Group A.75 set out, we had participated in an exchange of opinions between Van and Dung about the fighting methods to be employed in the Central Highlands campaign. There was agreement that it was necessary to boldly liberate Buon Ma Thuot first. If the enemy there were not on guard there we could win an unexpected victory, which we could rapidly exploit. Endeavoring to maintain a high degree of secrecy was emphasized, to ensure that the first
battle was a smashing victory. They also discussed the necessity to rapidly develop the victory in order to annihilate much enemy manpower, while also liberating important strategic areas.

It must be pointed out that in accordance with the basic strategic plan we intended to liberate the Central Highlands in 1975, i.e. in the first phase of the 2-year plan, accompanied with the elimination of a number of strongpoints in eastern Nam Bo, expanding the liberated area in the Mekong Delta, developing the Central Highlands victory, and expanding the liberated areas in Military Region 5 and Tri Thien.

In fact, the deployment of our forces in the Central Highlands differed from the plan of the strategic organ. When Group A.75 arrived on the scene, most of our forces were deployed between Duc Lap and Dac Soong, with goals of annihilating the enemy, capturing that segment of Route 14, and opening up the strategic transportation corridor to the B2 theater.

At the front, after the discussions it was realized that because our force deployment was askew and would be difficult to readjust (that would take time and it would be difficult to maintain secrecy), they decided to attack Duc Lap first, then the next day attack Buon Ma Thuot. Because we had established a firmposition and isolated Buon Ma Thuot, the enemy could not react in time. Only on the afternoon of 9 March, when we attacked Duc Lap, were the enemy alerted, but they did not determine our primary objective in time, and because we were firmly entrenched along routes 19, 14, and 21 the enemy could not reinforce Buon Ma Thuot.

[24 Apr 86]

[Text] In the city of Hanoi, if one had paid attention as one passed by the gate to Zone 4, one would have noticed, beginning with the first of March and especially after the 9th, an extraordinarily bustling atmosphere in the operations and intelligence departments, and in the communications, cryptanalysis, and other organs.

After our troops launched their attack on Duc Lap, the technical reconnaissance element of the Intelligence Department concentrated on closely monitoring all enemy movements. Office 70 of the Intelligence Department collected, selected, and analyzed secret information and open information from the VOA, the BBC, etc. The cadres of the operations and intelligence department were on duty 24 hours a day.

The briefing in the "Dragon House" area on the morning of the 10th took place in an enthusiastic atmosphere. We had received the first news that Duc Lap, Dac Soong, and Nui Lua (Military Region 5) had been taken and that the eastern Truong Son strategic route had been opened up. To the north, we had taken the Thanh An district seat. On Route 19, we had moved to the area west of Pleiku City.

It was customary that during the morning briefing that everyone listened attentively to news about the enemy's reaction. The same was true that time. We learned that at a meeting at 1100 on the previous day, 9 March, the enemy...
commanding generals in the Central Highlands still expressed belief that our attack on Quang Duc and threatening of Buon Ma Thuot were feints. Perhaps within the next few days we would concentrate and launch a strong attack against Play Cau and Cong Tum. Therefore, the principal task at present was to strengthen all capabilities to defend the northern part of the Central Highlands.

Thus the leaders of the puppet army continued to assess the situation incorrectly and therefore continued to react incorrectly. They even reduced their forces in the southern Central Highlands so that they could be sent to reinforce Play Cau, which caused Buon Ma Thuot become even more vulnerable and isolated. During the initial test of wits during the dry season in the Central Highlands theater, our correctness and victories, and the enemy's mistakes and defeats, became evident every day and every hour.

Several days previously, there were occasionally signs of worry in the staff organ. We learned that a few of our troops had been wounded and then captured, so that the enemy had picked up a number of items of individual equipment our troops had dropped on Route 14 as they were moving in the area south of Buon Ma Thuot. But by that day, thanks to the reports about the enemy's activities, we were no longer worried. Our activities to mislead the enemy had proved to be effective.

One thing that attracted our attention was that the enemy troops' morale had rapidly deteriorated, as manifested in their rapid collapse during the test of strength on 10 March. They could not resist our attacks on their subsectors and district seats. Therefore, we concluded that we had to boldly develop our offensive.

After listening to a report on the situation in the Central Highlands theater, Van carefully questioned us about the coordinating battlefields, especially the Mekong Delta. There was much evidence that the enemy were still making all-out efforts to strengthen the regional forces and popular forces, but because their troop recruitment capabilities were increasingly limited, the enemy forces at the basic level were declining. That situation attracted the attention of the members of the Military Commission. For our part, because we made meticulous preparations and closely coordinated the three offensive prongs, during the recent phase the activities of our forces in the Mekong Delta had achieved good results: many outposts were taken, many villages were liberated, thousands of families of puppet soldiers participated in the military proselytizing work, and when puppet troops deserted they were hidden by the people and taken back to their homes, there were thousands of face-to-face struggles against the enemy, and the people and guerrillas cut segments of Route 4.

The Intelligence Department and the operational duty team were directed to closely monitor developments in the Central Highlands and the coordinating battlefields. The Buon Ma Thuot battle began on the morning of 10 March. While we were listening to the daily briefing we received the first news that the battle was developing favorably. Each "heartbeat" of the battlefield was monitored by the operational duty team, and each advance of our troops was marked on the map. The fighting in the Central Highlands, the center of which
was Buon Ma Thuot, was the number-one concern of the Political Bureau and the Military Commission of the Party Central Committee, and the people with responsible positions in the General Staff and the general departments.

On the morning of 11 March, the members of the Political Bureau came to Zone A within the citadel to obtain first-hand information of the Buon Ma Thuot battle and to hold the first important meeting with the Military Commission since the beginning of the Central Highlands campaign, which was developing favorably.

After listening to a General Staff report on developments during the first 10 days of the Central Highlands campaign and on the coordinating battlefields, the Political Bureau and the Military Commission exchanged opinions about the direction of development of the Central Highlands battlefield, a subject which had been discussed in the past.

They quickly reached agreement that the enemy's morale had deteriorated, their combat capabilities were limited, and they were isolated defensively while we were still at full strength, had rear services support, and had favorable weather. We had to rapidly consolidate the newly liberated areas, be prepared to fight enemy counterattacks, continue to expand our attack around the city after mastering Buon Ma Thuot and completely mastering Dac Lac Province, while at the same time developing in the direction of Cheo Reo, but not yet hastily developing it to the south.

The victories during the first 10 days of March pleased them very much and nearly everyone focused their thoughts and abilities on winning greater victories than originally anticipated.

Truong Chinh, Le Duc Tho, and Le Thanh Nghi realized that it was necessary to begin thinking about Hue and Da Nang. They realized that it was necessary to remind Tri Thien to step up its efforts: "when we move down into the lowlands the enemy will only run away."

Pham Van Dong and Vo Nguyen Giap brought up the new factors that were appearing. The situation on the battlefield was changing rapidly and it was necessary to quickly grasp the opportunity.

Finally, Ba made his concluding remarks. In general, he said: "Last year we also fought during the rainy season. We must consider whether or not that is a new way of working. We fought during the dry season and also fought during the rainy season. Something else that was new was that the Buon Ma Thuot victory was quick and efficient. That victory demonstrated that the objective situation demanded more rapid preparations in all regards. In the past, we drafted a strategy to liberate the South within 2 years. A short time ago was Phuoc Long, now there is Buon Ma Thuot. Can we accelerate things even more? Was Buon Ma Thuot the beginning of a general strategic offensive? We must think about that. We now have two corps in the South. In the North we have one corps. They must be used in a flexible and very concentrated manner and should not be dispersed. There must be strong fists so that when the opportunity arises we can launch a strong attack against Saigon."
That afternoon, the operations officer gave me a message. When I saw the expression on his face I assumed that the news was good. From the Central Highlands battlefield, Dung had sent a message which informed us that we had completely mastered the city of Buon Ma Thuot and the area from Duc Lap to Dac Soong. The enemy had been taken by surprise and had been struck a mortal blow. We captured nearly 1,000 POW's and a large amount of war booty, including 12 artillery pieces and nearly 100 tons of artillery shells. Our troops were developing their attack and wiping out the objectives in the vicinity.

I thought to myself, "Perhaps the comrades in the South are sympathetic toward one of the greatest worries of the staff organ in the North and have promptly informed us of the amount of artillery ammunition captured. The battle is not yet over, so by the time the Central Highlands campaign is over the amount of artillery ammunition we capture is certain to be even greater. Even so, 100 tons is a welcome figure."

Dung's message also informed us of preliminary intentions with regard to developing the campaign after the Buon Ma Thuot campaign.

That afternoon, Van sent a message to Dung.

After expressing happiness and enthusiasm over our troops great and smashing victories in both the main and secondary areas, the message which stated:

"This morning, before receiving your message, the Political Bureau and the Military Commission met, assessed the situation, and reached the following principal conclusions:

"a. The strategic and campaign plans of the Political Bureau and the Military Commission are accurate and the preparatory work has been carried out relatively well, so even during the first days we have won major victories.

"b. The victories at Buon Ma Thuot and Duc Lap, along route 19, and in the other areas prove that we are capable of winning great victories at a more rapid rate than we had foreseen. An outstanding feature is that the enemy's morale has deteriorated.

"c. In view of that situation, even in this phase, and in the succeeding phases of our plan, we must have an urgent and bold spirit. We must grasp the new opportunity and win a great victory."

After expressing complete unanimity with the position taken in Dung's message, and reiterating the campaign's direction of development, the message stated:

"The Political Bureau and the Military Commission ardently congratulate all cadres and enlisted men, and all party members, Youth Union members, workers, civil servants, and members of the local armed forces who, manifesting a determined-to-win, heroic, resourceful, creative, bold, and urgent spirit, have won great victories even during the first days of the campaign. We must grasp the favorable opportunity in a timely manner and win even greater victories."
The Intelligence Department quickly grasped the enemy's reactions. At first they made incorrect predictions, and now they were resisting passively.

At noon on 12 March, the High Command informed Van Tien Dung, Hoang Minh Thao, and the standing committee of the party committee of the Central Highlands military region that according to the latest information the enemy intended to use the remaining forces and positions in the outskirts of Buon Ma Thuot to, along with reinforcements that would be sent, counterattack in hopes of retaking Buon Ma Thuot. Information had been received that the 45th Regiment and the headquarters unit of the puppet 23rd Division had been sent to Buon Ma Thuot by helicopter at noon on 11 March, and that the puppet air force was being mobilized to a high degree. It was necessary to rapidly concentrate additional forces, quickly annihilate the enemy units and bases around Buon Ma Thuot, and annihilate their reinforcements. Those matters would have a decisive significance with regard to the campaign's development. It was necessary to monitor the situation and guide all activities in the developmental directions that had been selected (Cheo Reo, Play Cu, and Route 19).

At the same time, the General Staff informed Military Region 5, the 32nd theater, Tri Thien, and 2nd Corps of the observations of the Political Bureau and the Military Commission during the meeting held on the morning of 11 March, regarding the great victories won in our new offensive on all battlefields since 4 March, of the enemy's intentions after their defeat at Buon Ma Thuot, and on the direction of future activities on the battlefields. The message stated:

"During the present phase, and during our succeeding plan, we must be urgent and bold and take advantage of the favorable new conditions to win an even greater victory. We must pay all-out attention to annihilating truly large numbers of the enemy whether they are withdrawing or sending in reinforcements. At the same time, with the new momentum of victory, promptly develop the offensive in the pre-determined directions. On each battlefield we must, on the basis of the basic decisions that have been made, carry them out with a more resolute and bolder spirit."

[25 Apr 87]

[Text] During the briefing on the morning of 13 March, based on newly received information the High Command predicted that if a large part of the enemy manpower were annihilated, if Buon Ma Thuot and many district seats were lost, and if we carried out a strategic interdiction of Route 19, the enemy may concentrate their remaining Central Highlands forces at Play Cu, and may be forced to carry out a strategic evacuation.

We communicated that observation to our comrades in the 32nd theater, Military Region 5 and emphasized an opinion that had been agreed unanimously by the Military Commission: it was necessary to surround Play Cu with all kinds of firepower, including anti-aircraft artillery, to ensure
enemy's supply routes, and to make good preparations to annihilate the enemy under both contingencies: the enemy forming an enclave at Play Cu or evacuating the Central Highlands.

On the morning of 15 March the Intelligence Department reported that the enemy's intended reaction was clear. Thieu had directly ordered Gen. Pham Van Phu to make all-out efforts to hold the positions around Buon Ma Thuot in order to have a staging area from which the 21st Ranger Group and the 44th and 45th regiments of the 23rd Division, with the support of the 3rd Air Force Division at the Thanh Son airfield in Phan Rang, could launch an attack to retake the city of Buon Ma Thuot. The 7th Ranger Group had been sent from Saigon to replace the 23rd Division at Play Cu.

When the enemy began to implement their plan, we surrounded and inflicted heavy casualties on the 21st Ranger Group. On 13 March the enemy had to use more than 200 helicopters and support aircraft to land the 45th Regiment east of Buon Ma Thuot. But because of our strong pressure it was unable to establish a position and had to withdraw to the Phuoc An area. On the following day, 14 March, we annihilated two battalions of that regiment.

In addition to that information, during a briefing on the 15th the Intelligence Department reported that information had been received that the enemy believed that the major focus of our strategic offensive was the Central Highlands; had a rather good idea of our strategic forces in that theater, and believed that our activities in the other areas would be limited. Therefore, the enemy had taken the course of sending strategic mobile forces (the airborne brigades) and a number of armored brigades to carry out a relatively large operation (perhaps along Route 21) in hopes of retaking Buon Ma Thuot.

After exchanging opinions with Ba and Tho, Van informed Dung of that situation and emphasized that in the immediate future we would have to concentrate ample forces in the Buon Ma Thuot and its environs, rectify and firmly control our reserve forces, and urgently make good use of time to wipe out the enemy units, especially in the Phuoc An area, while being prepared to annihilate enemy reinforcements arriving by air or land. The next step would be to shift forces to the north to wipe out the enemy at Cheo Reo. The Buon Ma Thuot battle was developing into a large-scale battle in which about two enemy divisions had been wiped out.

The message had just been handed over to the cryptanalysts, who were encoding it, when the duty officer requested that it be handed back. Van added a paragraph:

"After writing this message I received your message No. 5. I agree with your assessments. We will complete the campaign far in advance of the planned timetable. We are studying the situation and making urgent preparations in view of it. At the beginning of next week, after receiving instructions from the Political Bureau, we will send you another message."

In the above-mentioned message No. 05 (dated 14 March), Dung stated that our comrades in the B3 theater were very enthusiastic over the spirit and policy
of the Political Bureau and the Military Commission toward developing the campaign: "We will endeavor to organize, guide, and implement in order to fulfill that requirement, step up the pace, and surpass the 1975 plan."

Dung added that the situation was developing very rapidly and in a very complicated manner, so the "strange" (20) work style of our cadres could not keep up with it. That situation had to be rapidly overcome.

In the course of monitoring the enemy's situation for several days in mid-March, we noted a new phenomenon on Route 1. A few days after the Buon Ma Thuot victory, the Intelligence Department reported that the enemy had shifted troops from Tri Thien to Da Nang. They sent Ranger Group 14 to Quang Tri to replace the marine division, which was sent to Da Nang. We saw that in addition to the firepower of the on-the-spot units it was necessary to send additional units with strong firepower, deployed in solid positions, to interdict Route 1 south of Tri Thien, especially to interrupt their troop movements. Doan Tue, the artillery commander, who had been detailed to work with the central team of the General Staff at the beginning of March 1974, was directed to immediately organize a group of artillery cadres, headed by comrade Luu Huong, to undertake discussions with Hoang Dan, deputy commander of 2nd Corps, to prepare artillery fire support bases in western Tri Thien, to keep pressure on the enemy along Route 1, and to interrupt their troop movements. After exchanging opinions and reaching agreement, Le Trong Tan directed the advance headquarters of the B4 (21) and B5 (22) fronts to attack strongly and annihilate much enemy manpower, strongly attack traffic on Route 1, and to regard those actions as very important missions for the immediate future.

In the Military Region 5 theater, on 15 March, in a message sent to the General Staff, Chu Huy Man also observed that the situation was developing rapidly and favorably. He recommended that after Buon Ma Thuot the campaign be directed northward, in the direction of Cheo Reo and Play Cu (to take them or to cut them off from their supply lines). In the coastal area of Military Region 5 we would wipe out the enemy at Tam Ky, Tra Bong, and Son Ha, and then develop the attack down to Route 1, essentially liberate northern Quang Ngai, isolate the city, and attack strongly in the south, along the border with Binh Dinh, after which Quang Ngai City would be liberated. In Binh Dinh, the 3rd Division was concentrating its forces to wipe out the puppet 42nd Regiment, after which it would develop its attack into southern Binh Dinh to immobilize the enemy's 22nd Division and create conditions for expanding the liberated areas and winning control of the population in the lowlands. Meanwhile, an element would take the positions around and surround An Khe, thus creating a decisive opportunity.

On the 17th, when in the Central Highlands theater our troops had essentially defeated two enemy counterattacks to retake Buon Ma Thuot, the General Staff received a directive to summarize the situation and prepare for the coming meeting of the Political Bureau and the Military Commission. We learned that that meeting would be an important follow-up meeting to that held on 11 March to evaluate the over-all situation and determine the direction of development of the strategic offensive after the Buon Ma Thuot victory.
After learning of that important meeting, on the 16th Dung sent a message to the Political Bureau and the Military Commission which presented a "summary report of the situation and advocating that we continue to win victories during the present dry season."

After mentioning the incorrect U.S.-puppet assessments, with regard to both the thrust of our strategy and our capability to fight on a large scale, and evaluating the great victories won on the Central Highlands battlefield and the remaining limitations of our troops, which had to be overcome, especially with regard to consciousness of the enemy and ourselves under the new conditions, and with regard to combat organization and command which was outmoded, cumbersome work styles, etc., Dung recommended several major tasks that should be carried out during the dry season:

1. Defending and consolidating the newly liberated areas.

2. Wiping out reinforcements and taking the remaining districts in Dac Lac and Duc Xuyen District, and retaining control of Route 21 so that the enemy could not send reinforcements.

3. Developing the attack against Cheo Reo, tightly encircling the enemy at Play Cu, and cutting off Play Cu from Cong Tum.

4. Recommending that B2 coordinate by attacking in the direction of Quang Duc, attacking and taking Nhan Co, and surrounding and taking Gia Nghia; that Military Region 5 attack and take An Khe and completely interdict Route 19; and that the B4 and B5 fronts cut Hue off from Da Nang and threaten those cities.

The Operations Department quickly made copies of Dung's message and immediately sent them to the members of the Political Bureau and the Military Commission, for the message arrived after the briefing on the morning of the 17th had concluded. A new matter that had arisen and was discussed during the morning briefing was that the enemy were forming strategic enclaves earlier than we had expected. In view of the coming development of our offensive, the formation of strategic enclaves by the puppets would continue, with concentrations at Saigon, Cam Ranh, and perhaps Da Nang. That was a major opportunity which had appeared earlier than we expected. The problem that was posed was in which direction to develop the campaign. We foresaw two contingencies.

In the first contingency, after the Central Highlands had been liberated, or essentially liberated, the offensive would develop in two directions: in the main direction, most of the B3 forces would develop down into eastern Nam Bo; the second direction would be to develop down into the lowlands of Military Region 5 with the existing forces, possibly reinforced by the 968th Division and technical equipment.

According to the second contingency, most of the main-force units in the Central Highlands would develop in the direction of the Military Region 5 lowlands, and liberate Binh Dinh, Phu Yen, and Nha Trang, only then developing down into eastern Nam Bo.