

the peace-keeping provisions. Shipler wrote that Ambassador Martin and the United States did nothing to prevent those foolhardy acts and did nothing to persuade Thieu to carry out the Paris Agreement."

Thus it is clear which party violated the agreement and deliberately stepped up the war. It was essential that the violator be punished.

CHAPTER THREE

Punishing the Agreement Violators

After the Political Bureau meeting we met with the Military Commission of the party Central Committee to discuss the specific implementation of the Political Bureau's Resolution. On 1 June 1973 the B2 delegation met to discuss the contents of a preliminary guidance message to be sent back to our theater and make preparations for our return. I still had a lot of specific things to do with the General Staff, the Political General Department, the Rear Services General Department, and the combat arms commands, so that they could clearly understand the actual situation in our theater, listen to our opinions, and give their specialized guidance, and to obtain their valuable assistance with regard to planning, materiel, and technical matters. I then hastily prepared to set out.

I was about to return to the green jungle, the battlefield aflame with combat, and my combat units after a period of absence. I felt very anxious and happy. That spontaneous happiness enabled me to discover a feeling that had long been inside me: I regarded the base as my home, the battlefield as my home area, and the cadres and men of the organs and combat units as my relatives. When I was assigned the mission of leaving the battlefield to go to Saigon and participate in the Four-Party Joint Military Commission I thought that I wouldn't return and I felt anxious and nostalgic, as if sadly bidding adieu to my home area. Now that I was about to return to the base and the battlefield, I was as happy as if I were about to return to my old village and my loved ones. Perhaps the decades I had lived on the battlefield, in the wide open spaces, with constantly changing scenery, the jungle birds, and the fish, had conditioned my soul to respond only to the green jungle. Or perhaps I had yearned all my life for independence and freedom and had pledged to take up arms and fight until the final objective was attained, so my life had been tied in with the battlefield. That was not entirely the case. Even as I take pen in hand to write these lines I understand even more clearly the nostalgic reason for the life and society of soldiers during many long years of war. How beautiful and how noble is the sacred comradeship for the goal of liberating the homeland and the people. During the difficult days of hunger and thirst we shared each piece of jungle root, and each bit of firewood and custard apple, and shared with one another each drink of spring water we had brought from the other side of the mountain. On the Truong Son route, every year, after months of carrying heavy burdens, climbing mountains and fording streams to the point of exhaustion, we shared each spoonful of sugar or bit of salt, or offered one another our last quinine tablet to help one another reach the objective. Each human life was precious and the homeland needed every soldier, but we regarded our joys and sorrows. If one heard that the other won a battle and did a better job than he did, he would enthusiastically study the other's example. If one heard that the other had been defeated he would be worried and seek ways to help out. Everything was for the common cause. Everything was for the revolution. One for all, all for one. Such was life in the "green jungle." Such was life among comrades in arms in two wars of resistance, in the Duong Minh Chau, War Zone D, Dong Thap Muoi, and U Minh Forest bases. Love for one's

comrades and fellow unit members, the jungle, and the streams were immense and unlimited. That was love we learned from Uncle Ho, from his immense love for the nation and for the workers and fighters. That love transcended space and time and was the same everywhere and at all times.

Anyone who had lived such a life would be indulgent and nostalgic. It was not that the battlefield had captivated me, but that my heart and morality made me attached to it.

All along the Truong Son route during that trip south there was much less enemy bombing and shelling. All activities became much more pleasant and animated. From one troop way-station to another and from one segment to another there was specialization and efficiency was many times higher than in the past. The men were happy when they met our delegation traveling south from Hanoi. Everyone wanted to know whether there was anything new with regard to lines and policies. Had the Political Bureau issued a resolution on the new situation and missions? The cadres in charge of the units and stations whispered in my ear, "What does B2 intend to do?" and "What are the prospects?" They promised to do all they could to aid the battlefield. I was very moved. Those comrades would give us their all-out assistance and support the battlefields, but that area itself was a battlefield. They were not only aiding the battlefields but were also fighting heroically under fierce bombing and shelling, no less so than at the front. They had a truly noble spirit of thinking only of their comrades and the total victory of the revolution. The same was true all over the country during wartime. Millions of people acted as one, believed in the party, and worked, fought, and sacrificed everything for victory, for the success of the revolution in the South, and for the unification of the homeland.

Of course, it was unavoidable that certain backward elements would violate discipline in a cowardly* manner: some were afraid of dying and sought ways to avoid going to the front, but they were a small, insignificant minority.

During that arduous, dangerous trip I dreamed of the battlefield. After the victory we would have a country extending from Lang Son to the Ca Mau Peninsula, from the border to the islands, with an immense sky and immense seas. We would have 40 to 50 million Vietnamese who lived new-style lives. We would build a new society, a socialist society, and would create the new socialist man, just like the society and people the heart and morality of which had formed me. It was necessary to eliminate the bad customs which the way of life of selfish individual competition in the artificially prosperous society and consumer society left behind by U.S. neocolonialism. We had to put an end to thankless habits and vile individual desires which resulted in husbands mistreating wives, children abandoning their father, and friends being changed depending on one's needs of the moment. The new society had to be a society in which there is no oppression, exploitation, or injustice, in which everyone is able to develop their talents and participate in building the nation and

* That is, fearing death and remaining in the rear, or transferring to other, less dangerous units.

in a free, well-off, happy life for everyone. The new man must be exemplary, virtuous and talented.

Virtue is manifested in behavior between people, between the general and the specific, in the family and in society. Everyone must love and respect each other, and be faithful, sincere and loyal. Such people have nothing in common with people who smile cordially in one's presence but betray one behind one's back, who "stabs you in the stomach with a dagger while praying to Buddha." It must be Vietnamese morality and communist morality, which combine to form the virtue of Ho Chi Minh.

Talent is manifested in the specific results of completed tasks and missions, not in superficial boasting and exaggeration. If words are not accompanied by action they have no value, theory not demonstrated by reality is only empty theory. Every individual must be exemplary in study, work, combat, production, and one's way of life, and life in an exemplary, close-knit family and an orderly, harmonious society. If we are not exemplary no one will listen to us, and if families are not harmonious and exemplary there is no way to create an orderly, just society. I think that our society of the future must be a pure society made up of pure people. That society differs from the Maoist society described by comrade P.P. Vladimirov in his book "Yanan Diary":

"The principled nature of the party is replaced by reverent minds, a personality cult, and a self-effacement of the individual. The self-effacement had, in general, become a characteristic of life in Yanan. While trying to avoid making waves at any price, and keep one's position, or even rise higher, people appear to have gone crazy. Honor, virtue, friendship, etc., are forgotten."

Such people clearly are not communists. Such a society is not a socialist society.

I had a dream about a road. I had an enthusiastic exchange with the comrades in the Command of Group 559 at the Group's headquarters. We decided that once the revolution succeeded and our country was unified we would develop that Route 559, the eastern Truong Son route, the famous "Ho Chi Minh Trail," into a truly modern Ho Chi Minh road. It would be a highway running north-south along the Truong Son, following the old 559 route, which would be improved, broadened, and meet standards. Along the way there would be erected monuments to commemorate the feats of arms of each segment of the road, of the heroic martyrs, so that future generations could always know about the backbone road of the homeland which passed down the length of the nation, a road that unified the nation even then. That backbone extended from Hanoi, the nerve center, and from the socialist North to the South, which was engaged in a life-and death struggle. In the future, if we were capable of doing so, we would also build a parallel railroad. The Ho Chi Minh highway and the Ho Chi Minh railroad would in fact be backbone routes for a country that was developing strongly. All of our dreams would become reality. We were sacrificing ourselves in combat to achieve success so that future generations could continue to build a rich and strong state so that our people can have a civilized, happy life.

At the end of June the water level of the Sekong River had risen and the current was flowing swiftly. Two well-built boats of Group 471 (under the 559 Command) took us downstream through many rough rapids. Each time we passed through a rapids my entire body shook. A soldier sat in the stern, his hand on the tiller and looking ahead intensely. Another stood imposingly on the bow, his two hands clutching a long pole, prepared to push the boat away from dangerous boulders sticking up out of the water or submerged below the surface. Meanwhile, the boat continued to rush along with the swift-flowing current. Many times I thought it was about to be smashed to pieces against a rock. We got out of a vehicle and boarded a boat, then left the boat and resumed the journey by land. On each occasion we were greeted warmly and given all-out assistance, and the partings were reluctant. It is impossible to remember all of the people along that wartime route. They included cadres and enlisted men and there were females and males. They were all alike: they had calm expressions in the face of danger and had bright smiles and loved their country, and had a will of iron. We became friends immediately after we met, and parting was difficult.

As soon as I came ashore I met comrade Cuu (Colonel Huynh Van Cuu), deputy head of the Regional Protection Bureau, accompanied by several others, who had brought several "command cars" to take us back to the base. Cuu was a cadre who specialized in organizing our official trips and visits to the battlefield. He was very experienced in insuring safety and rapidity. I hugged him and firmly shook hands with everyone. He looked me over and said, "You look thinner but are still firm. When we heard that you were returning we were all happy. I thought that I wouldn't have the opportunity to escort you again!" "Did you think that I would remain in Saigon?" I asked, "In fact I wanted to stay there, as a member of the Four-Party Joint Military Commission and Concord, if it were set up. But the enemy wanted no part of it. They don't want peace, but only war, so I had to return to the green jungle with you."

Our convoy arrived at the base at dusk. Over a period of half a year many things had happened, but the scenery, the land, and the sky at the base were practically the same.

Comrade Tam Hoa, i.e. Nguyen Xuan On, the chef de cabinet of the Regional Command, along with comrade Le Van Xup, a bodyguard who had been an aide since I first returned south, and Misses Xuan Thu and Huong of the military medical team, and Lien and Tam of the mess team, ran out to the gate to give me a rousing reception.

When I entered the house I looked around. In the rich green garden there were fresh greens, fruit trees, bananas, grapefruits and luxuriant pink plums. Comrade Chin Dung, who was old and had served with the old 309th Battalion during the anti-French resistance, and now diligently tended the garden, boasted to me about his accomplishments and observed, "For a long time now the enemy have reduced their bombing and strafing here, so the vegetation is healthy. When peace is achieved this entire denuded jungle area will become fruit orchards and fields of green vegetables. I will be able to return to my home village of Cam Son in My Tho and live out my old age." Chin Dung

turned around and continued his introductions. "This is the young man Tai and this is Miss Thao. The secretarial team will prepare for their wedding so that we can drink some wine in celebration.

While Thao and Tai were blushing and trying to hide their smiles, Kien Chien, the deputy chef de cabinet, and the youths Diep, Cach and Luu of the Civil Affairs Team laughed aloud and shouted encouragement. Everyone crowded around asking all sorts of questions. I didn't have time to respond adequately to any of the questions. It was truly moving, as if we were a family. I suddenly asked comrade "Five Poison" (i.e. Nguyen Van Hoanh), my secretary, to take from the car the gifts I had brought from Hanoi and distribute them to everyone. He was called by that name because his name was Nam [Five] and he was a chemical corps cadre, and to distinguish him from comrade "Five Red Medicine," a military medical doctor who also worked at the organ. The gifts didn't amount to much, a package of "Capital" cigarettes for the men and needle, thread and hair clasps for the women. They had only sentimental value.

As if suddenly remembering something pleasant, brother Tam Hoa pulled me to one side and asked, "Do you know that the puppets have openly complained, demanding that you return to Saigon? It's so funny. They said that Hanoi had placed you under 'house arrest,' and that Hanoi must return you to them!" "It's nothing but a psychological warfare trick," I said. Tam Hoa continued, "When brother Hai Khiet,* a member of the Joint Military Commission, reported that you had gone to Hanoi for good they became enraged. They threatened our delegation that if Lt Gen Tran Van Tra did not return they would send vehicles to take away our entire delegation. They may really do that, for the puppets have stopped at no vile act in the past. Thus our comrades there must have plans to fight to defend themselves. The tense situation has lasted several months. I'm really concerned about them."

I replied, "We will struggle to force them to observe the Paris Agreement. They won't dare do anything to our people, for we are strong legally, politically, and militarily."

After I rested a few days COSVN held a meeting to disseminate Resolution 21 and organize its implementation. Toward that end, a conference of military administration cadres from all over the B2 theater was held in September 1973 in an attractive bamboo grove in the base area. In attendance were large numbers of leadership cadres of the provinces, military regions, mass organizations, and regiments and divisions. The discussions were very seething and enthusiastic. Those comrades reported on the actual situations in the localities and units, our good points and deficiencies during the recent period, related them to theory and to the resolution, and evaluated what was correct and what was incorrect. The main features of the situation--the question of whether we or the enemy were stronger, whether there should be two areas, whether our forces should be consolidated on the spot or withdrawn to, how we should retaliate, etc.--were analyzed. The discussions were very specific

*Bui Thanh Kiet, a senior colonel and deputy head of the military delegation of the PRG of the RSVN to the Two-Party Joint Military Commission.

and dealt with each detail and aspect, so that implementation could be correct and in order to avoid leftist or rightist deviation. Especially, those comrades spent a good deal of time discussing the military proselyting policy after the agreements. According to one view, we had to stress political struggle and military proselyting should be our strategy; it was necessary to use many military proselyting stratagems by the masses to paralyze the enemy's military operations, and that was a form of attack. We had strong military forces but we would avoid using them, for using military forces would be very entangling and would cause a lack of mutual confidence and tension. We had to dare achieve national conciliation and eliminate enmity.

Such one-sided views were based on our subjective thoughts and desires and did not take into account the actual plots and acts of the enemy, and would cause the lower echelons to have pacifist, rightist thoughts and cease to fight. One cadre said of the lower echelons, "The men have been fighting for decades. Isn't that enough? Now we must "be green on the outside and red on the inside," promote military proselyting, and transform supporters of the enemy into our supporters." According to another, "We still have troops, weapons, and ammunition. We can take what we need from the United States and Thieu and we will not have to worry about insufficient supplies, etc." Although they dared not say so openly, in their hearts the lower echelons wanted to say to such cadres, "We don't want to keep on fighting merely to satisfy our personal desires. We want the country to be at peace and for the killing of the people to cease. But if the enemy launches sweeping and land-grabbing operations and shoot at us, and plot to eliminate the revolutionary gains we have made recently, what are we to do? Put up our hands and shout the slogan 'Peace forever'?" No. We sincerely did not want a recurrence of the grievous naivete of the 1954-1959 period. In my heart I still mourn the many comrades who fell in battle--with weapons in hand but not daring to fire--during that period, and mourn the many local movements that were drowned in blood. Because they were afraid of being criticized and of acting contrary to the (military proselyting) policy, the guerrillas in My Tho had to attack on the sly (without the knowledge of the upper echelon) the enemy outposts that had been set up illegally in their base area. In Mo Cay and Ben Tre, where our troops had to retreat continually in the face of enemy land-grabbing operations and not retaliate against them, they lamented, "How could we sink any lower?" and ultimately were able to recover the district's base area by retaliating on their own accord.

After the conference of military administration cadres, I met with the military cadres to discuss the details of the military plan for the 1973-1974 dry season, the first full dry season since the signing of the agreements. In essence, the plan reconfirmed our explicit attitude of observing and defending the agreement, and thus punishing the violator. We endeavored to do what we had declared we would do: resolutely and actively punish the enemy, even in the places from which they launched the agreement-violating attacks. If we were to carry out that plan we had to be strong politically, legally and militarily, and strong not only with regard to forces but also with regard to our deployment of the various kinds of forces in the various areas, in accordance with a strong strategic posture which provided for all contingencies. We had to consolidate and rectify our armed forces on the spot and had to develop

the position and strength of the revolution in all three areas: our area, the enemy's area and the contested area. All localities had to use all political forms to proselytize and win over the enemy troops, and force the withdrawal of or wipe out the outposts and positions illegally set up in all areas after 28 January 1973. It was necessary to insure the democratic rights of the people--their right to travel and earn a living--and their right to dismantle the strategic hamlets and return to their old village if they so desired. We had to annihilate all forces launching attacks, carrying out sweeping operations, robbing the people, or interfering with the people's livelihood. All such activities were illegal. We informed our delegation to the Two-Party Joint Military Commission of our plan so that it could coordinate its struggle at the conference table.

A review of the situation since the agreement was signed showed that there had been many changes in the B2 theater. Between January and April 1973, in all military regions and provinces the enemy had used all types of troops to attack and encroach upon our areas, and endeavored to achieve pacification, herd the people, conscript recruits and clear terrain. Especially around Saigon they used bulldozers to flatten the people's houses and gardens, and used soldiers and prisoners to cut down vegetation, clear out mangrove trees, set up additional outposts, and sent out "Phoenix" spies to uncover, arrest and kill patriots they called "Viet Cong infrastructure." After May 1973, thanks to the close guidance of COSVN and the Regional Command, and of the local leadership echelons, we retaliated fiercely so the enemy forces were stopped and were gradually repulsed. Outposts which had illegally been set up were wiped out, surrendered, or were withdrawn, increasingly larger numbers of enemy troops deserted, and the enemy's regular and local units were hit hard and revealed weaknesses and suffered increasingly larger losses in the various areas.

The situations of our side and the enemy developed in two increasingly contrasting directions. For our part, the cadres, enlisted men, and people realized that the United States had been defeated, the puppets had weakened, we were victorious, and our status was improving, and were enthusiastic and confident and participated positively in all tasks of opposing the enemy. For the enemy's part, the officers and enlisted men of the various kinds of forces realized the truth--that the United States had been defeated--and were tired of the war, were afraid the war would continue, and wanted peace. When carrying our military operations they did so perfunctorily, and sometimes did not carry out the operations at all but falsified their reports (this happened at the regimental and battalion levels). The number of draft-dodgers and deserters increased steadily. The forces controlling the people were also negative and relaxed their control. Therefore, the people struggled and engaged in livelihood increasingly far from home, and one by one returned to their old villages and our liberated area. At the same time, the upper-echelon Americans and puppets, who were very obstinate and subjective, drafted one plan after another and ordered the lower echelons to implement them. Thieu instructed the sector (provincial) echelon as follows:

1. Expand your territory, gain control of the population, maintain the area under your control, maintain security, and do not lose a single village or

hamlet. (The overall norms were to control 11,000 of the 13,000 hamlets in South Vietnam, and that by February 1974, 65 percent of hamlets must be Class A--tightly controlled--hamlets.)

2. Take and defend all strategic lines of communication.
3. Annihilate the enemy armed forces and supply and transportation forces in all areas, especially those crossing the border.
4. Isolate and blockade the enemy economically, and sabotage and destabilize the enemy's base areas and liberated area.
5. Step up monitoring, espionage, and the use of airborne reconnaissance commandos to grasp the situation, study objectives, and draft contingency plans while awaiting the opportunity to retake the areas we held prior to 29 March 1972.

He also issued specific instructions to each area:

1. In the areas under our control and the cities, wipe out the seeds of uprising and prevent uprisings by patrolling, ambushing, eliminating the Viet Cong infrastructures, tightly controlling the people, stepping up psychological warfare, organizing the people, consolidating the governmental administration, normalizing the people's lives and creating conditions for economic restoration and development.
2. In the consolidation area (i.e. the contested area), made up of the Class and Class D hamlets, push back, stop and annihilate the Viet Cong political and military forces; restore and consolidate the governmental administration, raise the level of security, expand the area under our control, and use political and economic means to bribe the people, but rely principally on military means. The territorial military forces will gradually be concentrated to carry out attacks in that area.
3. In the Viet Cong mopping-up area (i.e. our liberated and base areas), concentrate on attacking the transportation corridors to achieve an economic blockade, and on reconnaissance and intelligence activities. Depending on the situation, use air power and artillery to attack supply depots and transportation facilities, win over the people, maintain a government in exile, and create instability. Maintain military activities and draft plans to retake the area.

With regard to their pacification plan, they stated that it was necessary to launch many pacification campaigns in each sector and military region, as well as nationwide, and increase the density of small unit operations; set up many additional outposts; and bulldoze the terrain in the contested area and our liberated area. In 1973 alone their norm was to destroy 12,000 hectares. In areas under their control, they were to relocate the people, set up hamlets, clear wasteland, and encroach upon our liberated area. Their 1973 plan called for the relocation of 100,000 people and the establishment of 20 hamlets in the provinces of Long Khanh, Phuoc Tuy, Binh Tuy, Lam Dong, Kien

Phong, Ninh Thuan, and Dac Lac. Expenses would total 50 billion puppet South Vietnamese piasters.

The enemy made the following national objectives: taking and holding as much territory as possible; endeavoring to control the people, especially the peasants; and increasing actual military and political strength. Military Region III and Military Region IV constituted the enemy's heartland. On 6 March 1973 Thieu met with the Military Region commanders and province chiefs and said, "I place the life-or-death struggle on the shoulders of the high-ranking commanders of those two military regions (Military Region II and Military Region IV).

Thus the puppet Thieu regime not only ignored the Paris Agreement but took advantage of it and of the honesty of its adversary, which believed in peace, stability and national concord, and endeavored to consolidate and develop their forces, step up their land-grabbing attacks, and eventually completely eliminate the liberation troops and the PRG of the RSVN. If we were not vigilant, if we were rightist and gave ground, the puppet forces would become increasingly strong and their position would improve, and the situation would have developed differently. Clearly, after the end of April we reacted and retaliated, while the enemy revealed weaknesses and deficiencies, were stopped and retreated. Following the Political Bureau conference COSVN, in a spirit of debate, guided opposition against the enemy more resolutely and the situation on the battlefield developed increasingly to our advantage.

Even in the period from January to April, when we were losing much of our land and population on the other battlefields, in Military Region 9 (western Nam Bo), where the enemy concentrated the largest number of troops and which they regarded as the center of their land-grabbing attacks--especially in the Chuong Thien area and the area between Can Tho, Soc Trang, Ca Mau, and Rach Gia Provinces--we held our ground. We were able to do so because comrade Sau Dan (Vo Van Kiet) at that time secretary of the Military Region 9 Party Committee, agreed with the military region command, headed by comrade Le Duc Anh, that the enemy would never willingly observe the agreement, that war was still war, and that nothing had changed. Therefore, the main-force regiments of the Military Region remained in place and, along with the local forces and guerrillas, operated as usual, attacked resolutely, retaliated fiercely, and annihilated entire enemy battalions (the 3d Battalion of the 16th Regiment of the puppet 9th Division and the 86th Ranger Battalion). That clearly did not indicate that our forces had weakened and the enemy forces had become stronger since the agreements, as some comrades imagined.

By means of those activities, Military Region 9 liberated an area 20 kilometers long along the Nuoc Duc Canal in southern Chuong Thien, and a number of other areas. The population of those newly liberated areas amounted to 600,000, in 11 villages and 152 hamlets, not counting the people in the contested area who returned to our area to produce. At the same time, Military Region 9 wiped out all of the land-grabbing outposts illegally set up by the enemy, after which the garrisons of some enemy outposts that had been established prior to the agreements also fled in panic. The heroic actions and brilliant specific results of the soldiers and people of Military Region 9

were outstanding and unique in comparison to the other military regions, and were praised by the Political Bureau and set an example for the other battlefields. But surprisingly those specific acts were completely contrary to a whole series of policies at that time, just after the signing of the agreement: that we should urgently stabilize the situation, create two zones, one controlled by us and the other controlled by the enemy, withdraw our forces to the rear so that they could be consolidated, and not use troops rashly but struggle politically, principally by military proselyting. Using military proselyting, using the masses to paralyze the enemy's military operations and neutralize the enemy's outposts, were types of attacks, as mentioned above. Especially, the actions of the military forces of Military Region 9 were based on the viewpoint that there had been no agreements, that nothing had changed, and that it was necessary to keep on fighting. That was an incorrect understanding of the Paris Agreement and the new strategic phase. But it was correct in that it correctly evaluated the obstinacy and perfidy of the enemy, just like during the Geneva Agreements period, and resolutely retained the revolutionary gains that had been made. It was in accord with the actual situation and was not illusory and utopian. "Luckily," that was a distant battlefield, so upper-echelon policies were often slow in reaching it and the rectification of mistakes was often not prompt. Let us here mention one point: reality is extremely valuable, whether it is the reality of something mistaken or something correct; it is the basis of theory and of policies and lines. Any theory, policy or line not based on reality is mistaken.

In one of their long-range plans the enemy intended to:

"Between February and August 1973, endeavor to occupy and control the major part of the territory of South Vietnam.

"Between September 1973 and February 1974, endeavor to consolidate the gains that had been made and defend them solidly.

"Then, in 1974 or at latest 1975, there would be a political solution and a general elections to make things legal. There will be only one governmental administration (i.e. that of Thieu) and one strong army (i.e. the Army of the Republic of Vietnam). The war will wither away. The Viet Cong will only be an opposition party which engages exclusively in political struggle, nothing more and nothing less.

"Otherwise, we will use large-scale warfare to completely eliminate the Viet Cong in 1976 and 1977."

With regard to the economy, to accompany that political-military plan they drafted a long-range 1973-1980, 8-year plan which was promulgated on 20 May 1973. The plan was divided into three periods:

"1973-1974: restoration and rebuilding.

"1975-1976: development and consolidation.

"1977-1980: self-sufficiency and a reduction of aid."

The aspirations, plans and acts of the enemy were one-in-the-same from the very beginning.

On the basis of the actual developments on the battlefield between them and the middle of the rainy season, we could see what the schemes and actions of the enemy were. We studied the implementation of Resolution 21 of the party Central Committee and concretized it in the form of COSVN Resolution 12, on the basis of which we drafted the B2 theater's operational plan for the 1973-1974 dry season. After presenting the plan and obtaining the approval of COSVN, I reviewed the plan for the last time and approved it in September 1973 so that the staff and the battlefields could have time to meticulously organize its implementation and report to the Military Commission of the party Central Committee.

The main battlefield that was selected was the Mekong Delta, which the enemy had selected as the focal point for their pacification, land-grabbing, population-grabbing, and plundering activities. We had to stay the bloody hand of the enemy and resolutely punish them. We had to regain and retain the liberated area we had prior to 28 January 1973. In order to attain that goal we had to closely coordinate our activities with the other battlefields and not allow the enemy to make peace in places they were weak and at a disadvantage in order to concentrate troops to attack in places where they had the advantage and in places strategically important to them. We decided to strengthen the forces--both the manpower and weapons of Military Regions 8 and 9, the delta battlefield, so that those two battlefields could fulfill their mission of being the principal battlefields in that phase. At that time, a problem that was posed within the ranks of military cadres, as well as among the civilian cadres, was how the forces of the delta should be strengthened.

Since we had selected the delta as the main battlefield we had to deploy strong forces of all three types there in order to defeat the enemy. Thus many main-force troops were concentrated there.

In the short range as well as in the long range, the question was whether the two sides should continue to fight in the eastern part of the theater like two water buffaloes clashing with each other or whether we should surprise the enemy by selecting another area, i.e. the Mekong Delta, in which to concentrate our forces and attack.

Those who shared that opinion wanted to redeploy our forces and send the region's main-force troops to augment the rural areas in the delta. They thought that to liberate the highly populated, rich delta would be to win the war. In fact, that was not a new viewpoint but had persisted for a long time. According to that viewpoint, we had to liberate the rural areas before liberating the cities. It was contrary to our party's line regarding the anti-U.S. war. That was a strategy of attacking in all three strategic areas: the lowland rural area, the jungle-and-mountains area, and the cities. It was a strategy of attacking with both military forces and mass political forces, and of always combining offensives and uprisings. Therefore, the position of cities was very important. In that strategic offensive the main-force attack would be the decisive blow, but our increasingly well-equipped main-force

units could be concentrated to fight on a large scale in an open delta area with many rivers and canals and with marshy terrain. In that area the enemy held the lines of communications, which were defended by a system of strongly fortified outposts. The enemy also had fleets on the river and had complete control of the air. Our experience had shown us that when fighting the U.S.-puppet troops it was best if we concentrated troops in regimental units equipped with light military equipment. If divisions were organized, they had to be light divisions, and the method of command and tactics could not be the same as on the jungle-and-mountains battlefield. At the same time, we had to develop extensive guerrilla forces, large numbers of elite sappers, and strong local troops in order to wage marvelous, continuous, seething guerrilla warfare and revolutionary people's war, flexibly combine the three types of troops on all kinds of terrain, and in all kinds of weather, by means of the three combat columns, combined campaigns, and both military forces and the political forces of the masses. We were entirely capable of fighting in that manner, had large numbers of revolutionary people, had superiority and had experience. Each battlefield was different with regard to conditions, missions, objectives and capabilities. We had to have appropriate methods for organizing and deploying forces and could not be imitative, and certainly could not base our actions on our subjective desires.

The Regional Command had always affirmed that the eastern Nam Bo battlefield, including Saigon, the principal battlefield of B2, was the war-deciding strategic battlefield which would determine the outcome of the war. There we were capable of bringing into play the great role of main-force units. The terrain was favorable for the concentration and use of large main-force units and the use of all weapons and technical facilities. It was an area in which we were capable of organizing, deploying and stockpiling rear services facilities and materiel-technical support facilities for a large army and for major campaigns. That battlefield had an important strategic position. We could threaten the enemy, force the enemy into a passive defensive position, and annihilate much enemy manpower, combining lightning attacks with storm-like uprisings to smash the U.S.-puppet war center and ultimately knock out the enemy there.

The delta battlefield played a very important role throughout the course of the war, for both we and the enemy relied on the treasury of people and materiel there to build up military, political and economic forces and change the balance of forces between the two sides. At times we made it the main battlefield in that sense, but only at certain times in the course of the war, such as during that dry season and the rainy season of 1974 or, in the past, in 1962 and 1963. However, it was not the battlefield that would decide the war. Therefore, B2 had long made its strategic deployments and force deployments on the basis of the role and position of the battlefield, in a strategic offensive plan of a truly revolutionary war. It was vital that the eastern Nam Bo main-force units not be weakened; on the contrary, they had to be further strengthened. I remember that in 1965-1966, when the Americans were sending large numbers of troops into South Vietnam, a number of comrades in charge of the city of Saigon directly asked me, "The Americans are bringing in large numbers of troops and strong weapons, and are changing over to a limited war, so should we change our strategic line? Should we disperse

our main forces so that we can wage a protracted guerrilla war in order to defeat the enemy? I emphatically said no. I explained the passive, fire-extinguishing role of the Americans; that they had large numbers of troops but were not strong and we were still attacking them; and that we would not disperse them to fight as guerrillas but would organize many additional divisions--at that time only one division had been organized in B2--and advance to the formation of crops. There was absolutely no question of changing the strategic line, or of defeating the enemy by waging a protracted guerrilla war. However, that attitude did not die away entirely; the struggle against it was prolonged. A long time had passed since then. The Americans had to get out and the puppets were aggressive but that aggression was in its death throes, so the eastern Nam Bo main-force troops had become even more important. We had endeavored to strengthen the main-force units of eastern Nam Bo and decided to reinforce the forces in the delta by many different means. We would positively and quickly send many additional troops, weapons and ammunition, and facilities in order to promote the development of the three types of on-the-spot troops; assign to the regional main-force divisions the mission of urgently organizing and training a number of technical combat arms companies and battalions so that they could be sent down to the military alliance; send to Military Region 9 the 1st Regiment of the main-force 1st Division of the Region, which was operating in the Bay Nui-Ha Tien area; step up close guidance of plans and modes; and guide a plan for closely coordinating the battlefields, including those of the main-force units, so that the enemy could not concentrate on attacking in the lowlands as they saw fit.

During that dry season B2 carried out the task of protecting, consolidating, and expanding the communications-transportation corridors connecting the Regional base in eastern Nam Bo with the Dong Thap Muoi base, and on down to the U Minh Forest base, along three routes:

--The route along the Kampuchean border to Bay Nui, Ha Tien, Rach Gia and the U Minh Forest.

--The My Tho route through Ben Tre, Vinh Tra and Ca Mau.

--The river route via the Tien and Hau rivers.

At the same time we strengthened the route connecting eastern Nam Bo with the great rear area via the Truong Son 559 route. With the agreement and positive assistance of the Rear Services General Department, the Regional Rear Services Department worked with the military regions in urgently building up the materiel reserves of the region and the military regions, starting with the beginning of the dry season, so that they could continue to take the initiative and develop strongly.

The weapons and equipment supplied by the General Staff to B2 in 1973 were being received and transported efficiently. But there was as yet no upper-echelon distribution plan to transport and stockpile the supplies for 1974 early and positively. If we waited for a decision, we would lose transportation time and slow things down, and if unexpected obstacles were encountered, the stockpiling plan could be upset. I had been thinking about that problem

since I attended the plenary meeting of the Political Bureau in Hanoi in May, but could find no solution to it. I went to meet with comrade Dinh Duc Thien, then head of the Rear Services General Department. Comrade Thien was straightforward and enthusiastic; enthusiastic toward his friends and comrades and toward the common endeavor. A large man, he was a person who dared to think and to do, was open, kind, easy to get to know, and especially was good-natured. The military cadres of the north and south, the old revolutionary cadres who had been active in the past, both men and women, and the enlisted men, knew about and sympathized with his good nature and folksy "obscenity." After I explained the problem and expressed my concern that I had not been able to resolve it, he laughed it off and said, "There's no problem. Why can't a battlefield commander think out the solution to such an easy problem?"

I was surprised and looked at him inquisitively. After hesitating a moment he said very slowly, with a very sympathetic expression, "Let me be the chief of the general staff for an hour. I will immediately sign an order giving B2 several thousand additional tons of weapons, then I will sign similar orders for the other military regions."

I burst out in laughter when I realized that he was joking. I joked with him in turn, "If I had unlimited powers, I'd let you be the 'Son of Heaven' for 24 hours so that you could be granted all your wishes and marry a beautiful princess just like Hassan did. But I won't assume responsibility if you, like Hassan, are sent to an insane asylum and receive 50 lashes a day!"*

We laughed together merrily. But then he presented a plan: "If you agree, I'll lend you in advance 2,000 tons of weapons of various kinds from the total to be distributed to B2 in 1974."

I was extremely happy. We had reached agreement about a loan. He did not forget to emphasize, "Later I will deduct what supplies I'm sending you in advance. Tell your men to take good care of them. If you use them up and demand more, I'll have you all thrown in jail."

There remained the problem of transportation. I was certain in advance that the people responsible for transportation would be prepared to take on that additional difficult task. That turned out to be the case.

It was a dry season in which the two sides were trying to gain control of the land and the people. The enemy's objective was to gain control of the areas they controlled prior to 29 March 1972. They acted as if the Paris Agreement did not exist. Our objective was to retake the areas under our control prior to 28 January 1973. That objective was legally in accord with the Paris Agreement. The central focus of Military Region 9's plan was to punish the enemy troops for encroaching on our U Minh base area and retaking the highly populated areas in Go Quao and Giong Rieng in Rach Gia, and in Vinh Long and Tra Vinh, which made up a strategic area between the Tien and Hau Rivers. The central focus of Military Region 8's plan was to punish the

* From a story about a dreaming youth in the book "A Thousand and One Nights."

enemy for occupying the heart of our Dong Thap Muoi base and retake the highly populated Cai Be and Cai Lay areas in My Tho Province, which lay astride strategic Route 4, the backbone of the delta, along with areas in Ben Tre Province which bordered Vinh Long and Tra Vinh in Military Region 9. Another objective of those dry season activities of the two sides was to control rice. On 24 August 1973 Thieu convened in Can Tho a so-called Rice Conference. The quota they set for that dry season was stealing 1 million tons of rice. On 29 August 1973 the puppet general Vinh Nghi, commander of Military Region IV, directed the 16 province chiefs in the delta to steal and turn over more than 400,000 tons of husked rice (equal to 1 million tons of paddy) by the end of 1973. We had to combine punishing the enemy with breaking up that rice-stealing plan, protect the people's property and build up our stocks. Military Regions 8 and 9 were not the only ones fulfilling that mission. Military Region 7 (eastern Nam Bo) and Military Region 6 (southwest Trung Bo) also had to combine retaliation with gaining control of the rice harvest so that they could have rice stocks and readily available rice.

During that dry season the regional main-force units also had a rather difficult mission. In addition to gaining time so that we could build, consolidate and organize, especially the combat arms, step up tactical and technical training and improve our ability to carry out coordinated combat arms operations, and support the localities, the 9th and 7th divisions were deployed along the enemy's intermediate defense line of Saigon in the provinces of Tay Ninh and Binh Duong to coordinate with those provinces and help them fulfill their dry season missions. The principal missions of those two divisions were to threaten the intermediate line and inner line (the outskirts of Saigon) of the enemy's Saigon defenses and to pin down the 5th, 25th and 18th divisions, and the ranger groups of the puppets' III Corps, so that they could not withdraw to reinforce the delta or launch attacks in other places, and so that they could not complete and strengthen the defenses of their capital.

More must be said about the enemy's plots and acts in the Saigon area, as part of their general strategic scheme, after the agreement. Prior to 1972, Saigon was protected by three solid defense lines. With our "Nguyen Hue" campaign and our 1972 dry-season military operations throughout the region we smashed the outermost defense line and penetrated the middle defense line, so that only the inner line remained intact. Thus the defenses of Saigon were rather thin and unreliable. After the Paris Agreement was signed the Saigon puppet regime launched sweeping operations to occupy the contested areas and our liberated area, and consolidated and filled out the areas under their control. Especially, they paid all-out attention to bolstering the defenses of Saigon, their nerve center. They continually launched large and small operations to wipe out our political and guerrilla infrastructure in the outskirts of the capital. After launching those sweeping operations they used bulldozers to flatten the gardens and houses of the people in such areas as Cu Chi, Hoc Mon, Thu Dau Mot, etc. They used deserters from their army who had been captured to cut down the vegetation in the Lai Thieu and Thu Duc areas and the nipa palm groves at Binh Chanh, Nha Be, Can Duoc and Can Giuoc. They set up additional outposts, placed obstacles, laid mines and dug antitank trenches in the Bien Hoa area in order to further strengthen the capital's inner defense line.

In places they did not control, such as our long-established guerrilla bases around Saigon, including the six maquis villages at Thu Duc, the Rung Sat Zone, Duyen Hai, An Son, Lai Thieu, Tan My, Binh Ly, Hoc Mon, and the three villages of southern Ben Cat--which they called the "Iron Triangle"--Vuon Thom, Ba Vu, Tam Tan, Binh Chanh, the Can Duoc area, Can Giuoc, Nha Be, etc., they bombed and shelled day and night, pursued a scorched earth policy, created a "free fire" area, and tried to eliminate those guerrilla bases. The puppets' 1973-74 dry season plan was to take 60 of our liberation base enclaves in eastern Nam Bo, especially around Saigon. They plotted to restore the middle defense line by retaking Route 2 at Ba Ria, the Dat Cuoc area north of Tan Uyen, the Dau Tieng, Long Nguyen, and Thu Dau Mot areas, the Boi Loi area in Tan Ninh, Ho Bo, An Nhon Tay and Cu Chi. They launched a large, division-sized operation in the Long Nguyen and Dau Tieng areas, which were in our liberated area and were gaps in their middle defense line to the north. But we defeated them, wiped out entire puppet battalions, and prevented them from attaining their objective. But strengthening the defenses of Saigon was still a matter of life and death, so they still did not abandon their plan to occupy our areas so that they could restore their defense lines.

Our plan was to not only hold on to the liberated areas, stop their encroachment, and annihilate the troops carrying out the sweeping operation, but also to prevent them from completing their defenses of Saigon according to their plan to form a strategic enclave, thus forcing the puppet III Corps forces to always be passive and on the defensive in an unstable battlefield position, and to always worry that the Saigon defense line would be penetrated. Furthermore, their very skimpy strategic reserves could not withdraw to the other battlefields. That created an additional fierce contradiction for the puppet troops with regard to Thieu's stupid strategic line of spreading his troops out to defend every place, in order not to lose a single village or hamlet, thus forcing them to always be passive strategically and tactically, and to have no way of escape from that entirely disadvantageous situation.

The Regional main-force 5th Division directly supported the delta by counter-attacking the enemy troops encroaching in the Kien Tuong area along the Kampuchean border, and expanded the corridor connecting eastern Nam Bo with the delta via the western part of Tay Ninh Province. Meanwhile a small main-force detachment, along with sappers, punished the enemy in the Bu Bong and Tuy Duc areas in Quang Duc Province to protect the corridor connecting with the Truong Son 559 route, while also supporting the soldiers and people of Military Region 6, in which enemy troops were encroaching in the Binh Thuan and Binh Tuy areas.

Bu Bong was an enemy strong point near the Kampuchean border. The enemy troops stationed there continually launched sweeping operations and attacks in the surrounding villages, raided our transportation corridor, and used artillery to interdict that corridor day and night, which created considerable difficulties for the transportation of supplies to us. In order to punish the enemy at the point of origin of their violations, and to begin the 1973-74 dry season campaign, we used the 429th Regiment, a strong sapper regiment reinforced by an infantry detachment, to take that 4 November 1973. Then we expanded the liberated area around Bu Bong and took the Tuy Duc intersection,

thus insuring that our transportation corridor was unimpeded and safe. Just as we had hoped, the puppets sent the 22d Division of their II Corps, along with three Regional Force regiments, and an armored regiment which was land-grabbing in the Ninh Thuan-Binh Thuan coastal area to attack us, in hopes of cutting our transportation corridor. We retaliated fiercely, wiped out part of their manpower, held on the entire liberated area, and created conditions for our forces in Military Region 6 to effectively oppose the enemy in western Phan Thiet.

Also in order to carry out our warning that we would punish the enemy where their attacks originate, on 5 and 6 November we used artillery of the 13th sapper regiment to shell Bien Hoa AFB and destroyed a number of aircraft and installations at the air base. For a long time enemy airplanes had taken off from that base to bomb such places in our liberated area as Loc Ninh, Bu Dop, Lo Go and Ka Tum, and the enemy used the Rang Rang airfield, which was situated in the midst of one of our base areas (War Zone A), for target practice. At those places we shot down 30 enemy airplanes between October and December 1973. Beginning in November 1973, every time the enemy bombed and strafed our liberated area we shelled, or carried out sapper attacks on, enemy airbases. Furthermore, we inflicted even more painful blows by destroying enemy fuel depots no matter where they were located. On 2 December 1973 the Nha Be gasoline depot, the largest fuel depot in South Vietnam, was infiltrated by sappers of the 10th Regiment who blew up a large number of tanks. Millions of liters of gasoline and oil were destroyed and smoke and flames rose hundreds of meters into the air, lighting up the Saigon sky. That resounding feat of arms of the 10th Sapper Regiment let the enemy know that we would do what we said, and warned them to watch out. That tank farm on the outskirts of Saigon was surrounded by a thick network of marshy rivers and canals. It had been attacked many times in the past, so the enemy had taken very careful precautions. They increased their forces, changed their defensive employment, placed obstacles and laid mines, used dozens of German Shepherd dogs and used radar, etc. Before the attack I personally reviewed the plan and all details had been prepared. Bay Uoc (Colonel Le Ba Uoc), political officer of the 10th Regiment, reported that "The unit selected to carry out the attack, made up of more than 10 cadres and enlisted men, entered the depot area for a first-hand inspection and inspected each fuel tank. We guarantee that the attack will be victorious."

The sappers' tradition was to penetrate through to their target and win a certain victory. The men of the 10th Regiment made good on that pledge.

Thus at the beginning of the rainy season we and the enemy were both very active all over the B2 theater. We achieved rather close cooperation among the military regions and between the local and main-force units, stretching out and pinning down the enemy everywhere, and winning many victories. In the Mekong Delta the enemy had to change the focal point of their activities. Between the signing of the agreement and the end of the 1973 rainy season the enemy took the Hau Giang area in our Military Region 9 and concentrated the entire 21st and 9th Divisions, a number of ranger and Regional Force units, and river patrol boats in order to carry out land-grabbing operations. Because

they met with fierce retaliation, the enemy could not achieve their objectives and suffered heavy losses. Although they set up a number of additional outposts in such places as Bay Nui, Ha Tien, and Song Trem in the U Minh Forest, in many other places we expanded our liberated area and the enemy's plan to take the area which included parts of four provinces was completely defeated. At the beginning of the dry season they had to send some river patrol boats from Can Tho to Cat Lai in eastern Nam Bo and send the 9th Division to Kien Tuong and some ranger battalions to III Corps, leaving behind in the Hau Giang area only the weakened 21st Division and a number of ranger battalions and Regional Force troops. They concentrated their troops in the Tien Giang area of our Military Region 8 principally to encroach upon Dong Thap Muoi and the Kampuchean border area, interdict our transportation corridor to the Mekong Delta, and cope with our 5th Division. By concentrating troops there they intended to hold the area southwest of Saigon, a very important area between Saigon and the Mekong Delta, so that Saigon would not be isolated and so that the puppet regime could have a base that was strong socially, politically, militarily and economically. That clearly demonstrated the U.S.-Thieu scheme to closely combine Military Region III and Military Region IV (the old Cochinchina) into the vital strategic area of all of South Vietnam. They strengthened those two military regions in all regards so that they could advance to defeating the enemy or, if necessary, withdraw into a strategic enclave there in order to continue to exist. But that scheme was carried out only half-heartedly, with a lack of spirit, by a greedy and blind strategy: "Under all circumstances it is necessary to hold on to everything and not lose a single village or hamlet to the Viet Cong." That is usually the case: people who lack actual experience and are short on courage and boldness think one way and act another. As they act they are scared to death, even in their thoughts.

The overall strategic design of the B2 Command at the beginning of the 1973-74 dry season may be summarized as follows: keeping the pressure on Saigon, keeping the enemy pinned down, and forcing them to passively defend their capital--their nerve center--so that we could take the initiative in effectively punishing them for violating the agreements, expand our rear area and the highly populated areas, and create an unimpeded supply corridor so that we could stockpile material-technical means. We would improve our position and strength and change the balance of forces in a manner favorable to us in all regards. We deployed the 9th and 7th Divisions and the sapper and commando forces (I will say more about them later) around and close to Saigon, and even inside the capital, along with the local forces, guerrillas and popular mass forces, to struggle against and punish the enemy in order to lay siege to Saigon and prevent the enemy from acting freely. We deployed the 5th Division and sappers in Kien Tuong to draw the enemy in that direction and prevent them from concentrating their attacks in our highly populated Hau Giang area. We opened the Bu Bong-Tuy Duc corridor to connect the 559 route with the corridor in western Tay Ninh, the eastern Nam Bo route, the Mekong Delta route, and the other routes, in order to transport supplies to and build up reserves on the various battlefields for that important strategic period.

We expanded our rear area so that our bases and liberated areas could be integrated, support one another and form a solid bloc, while in forward areas we actively developed the guerrilla forces, local troops and organized masses.

Having gained experience with regard to our method of attacking Saigon, and the enemy's defensive methods, during Tet 1968, we studied and drafted a contingency plan for a general offensive and uprising, if it should occur. For as stated above, the Americans and puppets had obstinately sabotaged the Paris Agreement, refused to observe the ceasefire, and launched increasingly larger military operations against us, so of course the war continued and developed and could end only with the victory of one of the sides. In diplomatic negotiations, on the basis of each other's strength the two sides should make concessions to and understand each other. But in war, to hesitate and be unprepared is to die. The enemy, furthermore, planned to completely annihilate us in 1976 and 1977. We had to prepare in advance for a general offensive and uprising so that we could win total victory. In 1968, on the basis of the situation, the terrain, and the key objectives within the enemy's capital, we delineated five offensive directions and deployed our forces in those directions. We used the method of coordinating military attacks with mass uprisings and outside attacks with inside attacks, with the inside forces being the revolutionary masses, the commandos, and the sappers, followed by the shock troops and local forces, and the outside forces being the main-force units. During Tet of 1968--a real, large-scale exercise--we won a great victory. It was not a complete victory only because the situation and balance of forces did not permit it. Now, the enemy's objectives had not changed very much. The basic changes were in the situation and in the balance of forces between the two sides. The forecasting of the situation and the planning strategic contingencies must be done early, for only then can we carry out some specific tasks of the strategic contingency plan. Such preparations require time and we cannot wait until things become too clear, which causes haste and prevents preparations from being made in advance, perhaps to the point that the opportunity is lost. In 1972, because we lacked foresight and did not prepare in advance, when we defeated them in Quang Tri the enemy left Hue practically wide open but we did not take full advantage of that favorable opportunity. Of course, in addition to lacking foresight and advance preparation we also lacked flexibility and failed to boldly exploit that opportunity. Strategic commanders must be able to think broadly and deeply, look far ahead, foresee how the situation will develop, and make preparations in advance. By his efforts he must create conditions for the lower echelons to win certain victory. By his dynamism he must propel and guide the situation in the direction of winning victory for us. By his daring, he must act promptly when an opportunity arises.

Beginning in September 1973 the Regional Staff, along with the B2 strategic intelligence operatives who had been planted in the headquarters organs of the puppets and Americans, reviewed the enemy objectives we had to take, monitored the situation on a daily basis, and kept abreast of the enemy's plans and orders. It must be emphasized that during the war the B2 theater--which encompassed the jungle-and-mountains, lowland and urban areas, including Saigon, the enemy's capital--was an all-encompassing battlefield and one with the largest enemy forces and many important strategic and campaign objectives. All developments there affected the overall situation, so the upper echelon authorized the Regional (B2) Command to organize and guide its most important secret strategic intelligence element, which also aided the upper echelon.

That intelligence unit helped us learn the details of many U.S.-puppet plans and obtained from the enemy a number of valuable documents, so we were able to promptly assess the situation and take effective countermeasures. Our intelligence agents, except for a small number who became corrupted--it was inevitable that some would be--had a loyal revolutionary nature. Many of them heroically sacrificed their lives, many achieved merit, and many of them become Heroes of the Armed Forces. In accordance with the force organization and deployment that had been approved by the Regional Command, I assigned comrade Ba Tran the mission of withdrawing the 367th Regiment--one of our sapper-commando groups that had been responsible for the Phnom Penh (Kampuchea) battlefield to help our friends but for which there was now little need--in order to reinforce Saigon. We had completed the organization and deployment of our commando and sapper regiments inside the capital and in the outskirts. At the B2 level we organized a Sapper Command--called Group 27--headed by comrade Dang Ngoc, who called himself "Phong." Si was a robust, sincere cadre who was ready to struggle in defense of justice and was not afraid of personal danger, which was a precious virtue, especially at a time when there were unwholesome phenomena in society. Si himself was a sapper cadre who had matured in combat. He was calm, resolute, said little but did much and finished what he began. On 30 November 1973, when I inspected the 27th Group, it had more than 6,000 cadres and men who were trained and experienced in combat. In addition to the headquarters organ the group consisted of forces which engaged directly in combat and were deployed in the various areas in the outskirts. North of Saigon there were the 115th and 119th sapper regiments; east of Saigon there were the 116th Regiment at Long Thanh and the 10th Regiment at Rung Sat; west of Saigon there was the 117th Regiment and the 113th Regiment, which was responsible for Bien Hoa. We were forming an additional regiment south of Saigon. Group 27 also directly controlled a sapper regiment that had achieved many feats of arms: the 429th Regiment. With regard to commandos, within the city there was organized Group 316, commanded by comrade Nguyen Thanh Tung (i.e. Muoi Co). It was organized into many "Z," each of which was responsible for an important objective. The sappers and commandos were deployed by area or objective. They had the missions of continually consolidating their organization, training in combat skills, studying and grasping the objectives they had been assigned to take, perfecting their operational plans, and training the cadres and men on the terrain and around the objectives for which they were responsible. They also had to immerse themselves in the masses, understand the people in the area they were operating, and create a political base to serve as a source of support from them. On 15 December 1973 comrade Dao, the political officer of the Sapper Command of the High Command, who had come south to inspect the sapper situation in the B2 theater, said, "The B2 sappers have developed and matured, have participated in combat and campaigns with good results, and at present have been assigned missions and organized and deployed in accordance with a new strategic status. That is due in part to the guidance of the Regional Command, which drafted a strategic plan early and has specific guidelines and modes. Furthermore, the sappers have a tradition and have much combat experience." He also contributed many valuable opinions regarding the organization and training of B2 sappers.

During the 1973-1974 dry season there was another problem that was no less vexing for us: the defense of the Loc Ninh liberated area, the regional base.

For a long time the enemy had continually threatened and attacked that area by air, and was determined to prevent us from stabilizing our base area, despite having to pay the price of losing many airplanes to our anti-aircraft forces. The puppet III Corps had a plan to use strong forces to take Loc Ninh and were only awaiting the opportunity and order of its supreme command and U.S. master. Aware of that, we had to prepare a plan to stop and defeat them in order to hold on to our base area. The questions were what forces we should use, how many troops we should use, what our fighting method should be--defensive, counteroffensive or offensive--and whether we should fight on a small scale or a large scale? When could the enemy attack? Should we deploy forces in advance to await the opportunity to strike a lightning blow against them? If so, how long should we wait? Would we tie down our limited forces in a passive status? We had to think carefully about a whole series of such problems in order to make correct decisions at a time when the battlefield was in a state of flux.

The Military Commission of the party Central Committee sent us a message which emphasized that Loc Ninh was not only important militarily but had a great political significance in the present situation. Therefore, the enemy was continually plotting to take it. We had to hold it at all costs, immediately send a main-force division there, and draft a plan to counterattack and annihilate the land-grabbing enemy troops.

Carrying out the order of the Military Commission, we immediately convened a conference of staff, political and rear services cadres to study a plan to defend Loc Ninh. The discussion was quite animated. Everyone realized the importance of defending that base, as the Military Commission had just pointed out. It was also a matter of the honor and prestige of our Liberation Army.

We assessed the general situation in the B2 theater and in the region, reviewed the enemy's forces, and estimated their method of attack. Which forces could the enemy use? What would be the scale of the attack, what would be the points of origin? What were their other capabilities? We knew that in order to attack Loc Ninh the enemy would mainly draw their forces from III Corps, with the puppet 5th Division serving as the backbone, along with part of the 25th and 18th Divisions, a number of ranger units, and the 81st Airborne Brigade, part of their general reserves. It was certain that they would use Lai Khe, the base of the puppet 5th Division, as the starting point, and that the main line of attack would be along Route 13 through Binh Long, a city that had been heavily damaged. But the 5th, 25th, and 18th Divisions also had to concern themselves with defending Saigon and with mending its defense lines, which were then in tatters. Especially, the puppet 5th Division was responsible for defending Saigon to the north, a very important direction, and faced large enemy forces and our liberated area, which restricted its freedom of movement. They were also well aware that taking Loc Ninh would be no easy matter, and that one or two divisions alone would be insufficient. The experience of the clashes over a period of many years on the eastern Nam Bo battlefield, even when the U.S. troops were still there--the "Big Red One" 1st Infantry Division, the "Tropical Lightning" Division, the 1st Cavalry Division, their most modern division, etc.--which the puppet troops had often accompanied, could not escape smelling defeat. Could the enemy send additional forces from

the 1st, 2d, and 4th Military Regions? That would be very difficult, and not many forces were available, for if they were to carry out the "don't lose a single hamlet or village" strategy and grab land in order to become the masters of all of South Vietnam, as they aspired to do, where would they get the troops to concentrate in one spot?

Thus in order to attack Loc Ninh they would have to have a meticulous plan, make very careful calculations, use many forces and have skilled command--something even they were suspicious about. What then should we do? We reached the decision that we would, by means of a plan to gain the initiative, force the enemy to concern themselves with defending Saigon, tie their hands and feet, and prevent them from sending forces from Saigon to attack Loc Ninh. Thus we would not bring in a division to defend Loc Ninh but would, on the contrary, move up close to Saigon and prepare to strike at their heart if they adventurously set out to attack us. At Loc Ninh we organized a front made up of local guerrillas and headquarters guerrillas, combined with the regional anti-aircraft and mechanized forces there and a recently consolidated main-force regiment, the 201st Regiment, serving as the backbone. Those forces would appear everywhere, wear down and stop the enemy wherever they attacked, even on the fringes of the base. Meanwhile, our main-force units would, if necessary, leisurely concentrate at a predetermined assembly point and strike lightning blows to annihilate enemy units which we selected. That was the valuable experience of our counteroffensive campaign against the U.S. Junction City operation in northern Tay Ninh in 1967. Westmoreland was struck a painful blow in that operation, and after the dazzling blow of Tet 1968 he had to endure the disintegration of his military career, even though at one time he had been called "the most skilled U.S. general." Thus we carried out the order of the Military Commission creatively and in a manner completely in accord with the situation in the B2 theater at that time. We pressured the enemy, forced them to defend Saigon, struck them a mortal blow, and ended for all their plots to consolidate and complete the Saigon defense lines and to concentrate forces to attack and take Loc Ninh.

That was in May 1974, when the puppet III Corps was eager to take An Nhon Tay in order to link up with Ben Cat along Route 7 and across from Thai My-Go Noi (Trang Bang)-Provincial Route-15 An Nhon Tay to Rach Bap-Ben Cat. Their plan was to make the Rach Bap post a fortified bridgehead on the eastern bank of the Saigon River. A post that would be placed on Provincial Route 15 at An Nhon Tay would serve as a bridgehead on the western bank of the Saigon River and connect with Route 7, Go Noi, and Trang Bang. Thus they would create an intermediate defense line which, although it contracted a bit in comparison to the old one, would form a continuous, solid defense line north of Saigon. Once that plan was fulfilled, the forces of III Corps would be relatively free to concentrate in order to attack Loc Ninh or some other place. In order to carry out that plan, in March and April they assigned a number of additional ranger battalions and armored squadrons to the 25th Division, which attacked from Dong Du to Trung Lap along Route 2 past Cu Chi and Trang Bang, and Go Noi on Route 7, setting up outposts in order to encroach on our liberated area and clearing away vegetation. They used forces stationed at Jinet and Rach Bap to attack north in the direction of Bung Cong in a coordinated, mutually supporting operation. Having grasped the enemy's plan,

we resolutely retaliated against the land-grabbing and smashed the enemy's plot to complete their defense line along Route 7, east and west of the Saigon River.

West of the river, the independent 16th Regiment, under the direct control of the Regional Command, along with the "Determined To Win" Battalion of the Saigon Military Zone, and the local forces and guerrillas of Cu Chi, fiercely retaliated against the puppet 25th Division and successfully defended the An Nhon Tay liberated area east of the river. In mid-May our 9th Division, which was stationed at Long Nguyen in Ben Cat District, deservedly punished the enemy at Jinet, wiped out that post, and isolated the Rach Bap post, the garrison of which was forced to flee in panic. We liberated a segment of Route 7 east of the river from Rach Bap to Kien Dien and directly threatened Ben Cat. Meanwhile the 7th Division, coordinating with the 9th Division, attacked and heavily damaged the Phuoc Hoa base on Route 16 near Tan Uyen, wiped out some enemy manpower and armored vehicles, and forced the abandonment of a number of illegal land-grabbing outposts. Thus the enemy was unable to carry out its plan and was unable to take An Nhon Tay to extend its area of control west of the Saigon River. On the eastern side of the river we took a 10-kilometers-long area, pushed the enemy farther from the river, and connected our Long Nguyen base north of Route 7 with our An Thanh base, i.e. the three villages south of Route 7 in Ben Cat District, the famous "Iron Triangle." The northern doorway to Saigon was not closed, but was opened wider, and the enemy's defense line was not completed but was further breached. The enemy responded vehemently to that development. They concentrated there most of the III Corps forces, the entire 3d Armored Brigade, and strong air and artillery support, and launched one counterattack after another over the course of several months but each time was defeated. The enemy was able to concentrate such forces in part because of the insufficiency of the activities of our 7th Division in the area of Phuoc Hoa in Tan Uyen District. It was unable to draw in and disperse the enemy in order to reduce the burden on the 9th Division. But our liberated area there was kept intact. Thus in May and June just one of our divisions--the 9th--effectively coped with practically all of the forces of the enemy's III Corps in an extremely fierce, heroic and resourceful manner, stood its ground, maintained the liberated area, inflicted heavy losses on the enemy and created a great strategic advantage for us.

By the spring of 1975, only 9 months later that area had been further expanded to the rear and became the starting point of one of our important offensive columns in the Ho Chi Minh Campaign. Our 9th Division had been worn down because it had to fight continuously for nearly 2 months with an enemy force that was more than three times larger, but the campaign and strategic value of those battles, as well as the political significance of their effect on the morale of the puppet troops and the psychology of the people in Saigon, were very great. Frank Snepp, a CIA specialist stationed in Vietnam, where he was responsible for strategic research and analysis and for drafting "field evaluations" for the CIA to serve the drafting of policies by the U.S. Embassy in Saigon and in Washington, wrote of those battles during the summer-fall fighting as follows: "Although the North Vietnamese troops only launched probing attacks to the north and northeast of Saigon and had themselves recently been battered, the South Vietnamese 5th and 18th divisions suffered heavy

losses, especially in the "Iron Triangle," and were now exhausted and no longer capable of fighting."*

At that time there was some criticism of those battles, that it was unnecessary to suffer such losses and that it was a mistake to select that area for the battles. That was because such people did not fully understand the significance of destroying the enemy's ability to defend the Saigon enclave during the final strategic phase, and the significance of forcing the enemy to assume a passive defensive position and tying their hands so that we would be free to act on the critical battlefield during that decisive period. The accomplishment of those objectives required a process of resolute struggle, resourcefulness, and bravery, especially at a time when there was not much difference in the balance of forces between the two sides (although if we had not been strong we would not have been able to accomplish that). That our strength was able to overwhelm the enemy was as clear as day, so what's the use of arguing." That was also an important test for better understanding of the enemy on that strategic battlefield, of their strength and capability, and how they reacted.

Evaluations of different battles only express the evaluation of a strategic period and the role of each part of the battle. But the battlefield commander must have specific and actual understanding of our position and strength and those of the enemy. He must seek every way to place the enemy in an unfavorable position and place ourselves in an advantageous position. He must promptly and correctly evaluate each strategic period and know what must be done to promptly prepare for the successful war-deciding battle on his battlefield, especially when that battlefield will play the role of ending the war. With regard to strategy, unlike tactics, he waits until the final hours before breaking through.

In June 1974, the Regional Command reviewed all aspects of the situation in B2 after a dry season of challenges, challenges to the actual strength of both sides on the battlefield and to the will of both sides and the implementation of plans they drafted in the 1973 rainy season, with both sides trying to win victory. The beginning-of-season rain poured down in torrents, foreshadowing a season of heavy rainfall, like every other year in B2. The enervating mid-day heat of summer had given way to a comfortable coolness. Here and there the green jungle was sprinkled with the gold of ripe "gui" fruits. The soldiers of eastern Nam Bo were familiar with the bittersweet taste of the "gui" fruit. Since there were deficiencies in all regards, and meat and fish were scarce, "gui" fruits were valuable foods to our main-force troops. How delicious were the pots of soup consisting of wild green and ripe "gui" fruit. It was a sweet-sour soup which cooled one's insides. During operations in the mid-day heat of summer, when they were carrying heavy loads, if the troops drank a small glass of "gui" juice during their 10-minute break they would have enough energy to reach their destination. During the meeting held to review the situation, everyone was able to drink pleasing "gui" juice, but what was the most pleasing were the brilliant results of our dry-season activities in all parts of the theater, at a time when the enemy had entered the threshold of a period of essential defeat. We had completely bankrupted their insane

*From the book "Decent Interval," by Frank Snepp. Published by Random House, New York and Toronto, November 1977.

plan to retake all areas they held prior to 29 March 1972, an excessively greedy plan which regarded the enemy lightly and was the clearest evidence that they were trampling the Paris Agreement. They were defeated in their plan to pacify the highly populated areas and the areas under their control were not only unstabilized but were reduced. They were unable to steal the planned amount of rice from the people and to blockade the enemy economically. Except for the Dong Thap Muoi base of Military Region 8, which they took and in which they set up nine large and small outposts, they failed to take or destabilize 60 "Viet Cong" guerrilla enclaves in eastern Nam Bo and around Saigon. They remained intact although the enemy caused trouble at times. Not only was the enemy unable to mend their lines defending the capital, but those lines were further penetrated, both to the north (Route 7 at Rach Bap in Ben Cat District) and to the east (Route 2 at Ba Ria), which caused the enemy's defensive position to become even more vulnerable and unbalanced. They could never gain the initiative on that battlefield, even though Thieu had told his military region commanders that that battlefield--Military Regions III and IV--was "of life or death importance to all of South Vietnam." Furthermore, they had become bogged down in a defensive position and their forces were spread out all over. They wanted to take and pacify the highly populated coastal areas in Binh Thuan and Ninh Thuan, but had been drawn to and suffered losses in the mountains and jungles of Quang Duc. They wanted to expand their control and plundering of rice in the rich Hau Giang area but they were drawn to Kien Tuong, along the Kampuchean border, by the enemy and tied down there. Afraid of exposing its western flank, III Corps had to send six task forces to attack the Queo Ba and Duc Hue areas, so it had to accept the loss of Route 2 at Ba Ria, thus shattering the middle defense line of Saigon at that point, while we connected our two base areas north and south of Route 2. They were not only unable to concentrate forces to take the enemy's famous Loc Ninh base but had their hands full trying to defend their nerve center! From that point the enemy corps was capable of concentrating forces in a certain area only if the other areas were not being attacked. Their strategic reserves were too small, at that time consisting solely of the 81st Airborne Ranger Brigade. The airborne and marine divisions were tied down in Tri Thien [Quang Tri-Thua Thien]. There seemed to be nothing the General Staff or, more accurately Nguyen Van Thieu, could do to affect the situation in a certain military zone than watch as one disastrous defeat followed another. That was the result of a stupid strategy which did not correctly evaluate the strengths and weaknesses of the two sides but greedily wanted to hold each village, hamlet, and outpost and not give an inch to the "Viet Cong." Their forces were spread thinly all over the place, to the extent that they no longer had any mobile reserve forces.

That situation of the enemy, which lasted until the end of the war, caused the enemy forces, which were three or four times larger than ours, to be annihilated piece by piece, until they were totally annihilated.

After May, the enemy also realized that it lacked strategic reserves, so it decided to withdraw the Airborne Division from I Corps to serve as general reserves, but in carrying out that decision, it could only bring the division to Saigon brigade by brigade, slowly and over a long period of time. Even during that dry season there were events that allowed the enemy to evaluate

its capability and realize how mistaken its strategic line. Throughout the dry season, especially during the latter months, most of the IV Corps forces in the Mekong Delta were drawn to My Tho and the Kampuchean border in Kien Tuong. In Hau Giang, the 21st Division had to disperse into battalions but still could not bolster the morale of the regional and self-defense forces. Many outposts were abandoned and many villages and hamlets were lost. The IV Corps commander had to take the initiative of abandoning a number of small, squad and platoon-sized outposts in order to reinforce more important outposts of company size or larger to obtain additional troops and make up for attrition. Only when they had no other choice and faced the peril of annihilation were they willing to abandon some outposts, villages and hamlets. They began that task during the dry season of 1974 and eventually had to abandon the Central Highlands during the 1975 dry season.

The tendency of defeat for the U.S.-puppets and victory for us in the war, which began with the 1973-1974 dry season and ended with the total defeat of the enemy, had its origins in an erroneous strategy that was pursued from the beginning by the Americans and puppets: the strategy of defending all parts of the country, of spreading troops thinly to prevent the "Viet Cong" from taking a single inch of the land, in accordance with Thieu's "four no's" policy.

How about the army that propped up the traitor regime? Although the Americans endeavored to strengthen and equip it so that it could replace the U.S.-troops, the fighting quality and numbers of the puppet army continued to decline. After the Paris Agreement they feverishly conscripted troops and rapidly increased the number of regular and regional troops. Beginning in June and July, their troop strength steadily declined. They admitted that between January and May 1974 the number of troops lost in combat and through desertion was more than 100,000, an average of more than 20,000 a month. During that time, the number of youths they conscripted to supplement their armed forces amounted to only a little more than 10,000 a month. Their IV Corps suffered the highest losses; each battalion had only about 200 troops--some units had only 150 to 180 men--and there was no way to build up those units. The ratio of equipment losses rose to a high level. Of more than 1,800 aircraft of the various kinds, they could use only about 1,000. Of their more than 100 F5 jet aircraft they could use less than half. They were forced to take such stern measures as making a census of their troops and opposing the evils of "ghost soldiers" and "rear echelon warriors." Even the table of organization of the General Staff declined by 20 percent. Unnecessary units and miscellaneous support units were eliminated. Troops were taken from self-defense units and put into regional force units, and were taken from regional force units and put into regular units. Conscripts were brazenly rounded up and monks were taken from pagodas and forced to do military service. Even so, their situation did not improve in the least, but continued to decline.

For our part, by the end of the dry season we had retaken all the areas we had held prior to 28 January 1973, including the area north and south of Route 4 in My Tho, in which the enemy feverishly grabbed land after the agreements.

We not only expanded the liberated area to more than 20 villages with a population of more than 300,000 people, principally in the Mekong Delta. That was a result of our punishing blows; when we wiped out one illegal land-grabbing outpost, the enemy troops abandoned four or five others in panic. (When we annihilated an enemy battalion on a land-grabbing operation in violation of the Paris Agreement, the enemy abandoned three or four nearby hamlets.) Clearly, the puppet troops were aggressive when we drew back, but when we resolutely attacked they became dispirited and ran for their lives. In all three areas our organized mass forces, guerrilla forces, and local troops were developed. The contested area was extended into the area under enemy control in all military regions in the B2 theater. The main-force troops of the military regions and of the Regional Command were augmented, trained and rationally deployed to create a potent offensive status, especially in eastern Nam Bo and around Saigon. While we held on to the base areas and the guerrilla enclaves in eastern Nam Bo and around Saigon, our rear-area base areas were expanded and consolidated to the greatest extent ever. It was an integrated liberated area extending from Quang Duc Province to Phuoc Long, Binh Long, and Tay Ninh along the Kampuchean border. Our Loc Ninh base was connected with the large liberated area of Long Nguyen in Ben Cat District because we wiped out the Nha Bich outpost on the Be River and the puppet's Tong Le Chan outpost--which was secretly abandoned during the night--on the Saigon River. Those two puppet ranger bases were isolated in our liberated area. The enemy tried to hold them to serve as staging areas from which to send spies deep into our area to gather intelligence, and to send rangers to attack our transportation corridor, supply depots, and organs, if we were careless. They would also be tactical bridgeheads for large-scale operations to take our bases in the future.

After the agreement, one of the enemy's difficulties was supplying those two positions and rotating its garrisons, for it was surrounded entirely by our liberated area at the conference table of the Four-Party Joint Military Commission, and later of the Four-Party Joint Military Commission. On the basis of Article 3(b) of the Protocol on the ceasefire in South Vietnam we continually demanded that the Americans and puppets discuss the determination of military transport corridors, so that one side could pass through an area controlled by the other side when necessary. But the Americans and puppets obstinately ignored us. Once, out of humanitarianism, although no such agreement had been reached, we allowed puppet helicopters to evacuate wounded from the Tong Le Chan base. But we resolutely refused to allow enemy military vehicles, military boats, or military transport planes with the mission of supplying food and ammunition or bringing replacements to pass through our area before an agreement had been reached as called for by the Paris Agreement. In April 1975 the enemy troops at Nha Bich, foolhardily launching an operation to open the road to Chon Thanh to obtain supplies, passed through our area. Our 7th Division punished and wiped out the troops carrying out the operation, as well as those in the outpost. The enemy knew that they had made a mistake and were completely silent and bit their lips. Having learned from that experience, the enemy troops at Tong Le Chan, taking advantage of an overcast night, secretly abandoned the post and fled through the jungle to safety in their area. Then the enemy played a slanderous propaganda trick by claiming that we had wiped out the Tong Le Chan camp, thus violating the Paris Agreement.

Their protest led nowhere because there was no evidence. But our rear area was expanded and filled out. The Loc Ninh base was connected with the "Iron Triangle," only about 30 kilometers from Saigon. Also during that dry season our transportation corridors from the rear to the front--from the Truong Son route to the eastern Nam Bo base, and from there to the military regions--were unimpeded. Even the most distant and difficult places, such as the central coastal areas of Military Region 6 and the U Minh Forest in Military Region 9, received shipments of fresh troops and materiel, some for supplementation, some for reserves.

Thus after the 1973-1974 dry season the situation in the B2 theater had become clear. Our position and strength had grown. The enemy was caught in a passive position which it could not reverse because it was becoming increasingly weak but its methods were outmoded and confused and its extremely obstinate and illusory political and strategic line was continuing to sabotage the Paris Agreement and seeking ways to completely annihilate its adversary. Such was the situation at the beginning of the 1974 rainy season.

We were not the only ones who analyzed the transformation of the situation after the end of the 1974 dry season in that way. On the American side there were also people who realized, more or less, that that was the case. Weldon A. Brown wrote in the concluding part of his book "The Last Helicopter," as follows:

"David Shipler, a NEW YORK TIMES correspondent and an experienced observer in South Vietnam during the last months before the collapse of South Vietnam, declared that the illusion of American strength had blinded Thieu. Shipler observed that in the summer of 1974 Hanoi had begun to step up its pressure all over South Vietnam. Shipler wrote that during that critical time an American diplomat predicted that if Washington continued to supply weapons to Saigon, but didn't pressure Saigon into a political accommodation, Washington and Saigon were certain to lose the war."

It is praiseworthy that an American diplomat was able to realize the reason for the inevitable defeat of the Americans and puppets, and when it began.

CHAPTER FOUR

The Greatest Rainy Season Ever

In general, with regard to weather the B2 theater was divided into two seasons, a rainy season and a dry season, both of which lasted 6 months. In the mountainous region, the rain arrives early and is heavy. In the lowlands the rain arrives late and is lighter. Especially during the rainy season the water flows down from the high-elevation watersheds in large volume and at a rapid rate, overflowing the basins of low-lying rivers and canals, especially the Mekong River basin, before slowly draining into the South China Sea. During the dry season it is possible to walk all over the Dong Thap Muoi area, a low-lying depression in the lowlands, but during the rainy season it becomes a vast sea, with the water reaching depths of 4 to 5 meters in some places. The principal means of travel is by boat. In eastern Nam Bo, although the jungle-and-mountains area is high-lying the rainwater also inundates the fields and roads and the red soil becomes muddy. Such weather and soil conditions exerted a considerable influence on the activities of the concentrated units and the technical combat arms. Therefore, in the rainy season our large units and those of the enemy were forced to scale down their activities and take advantage of that time to prepare for the coming dry season, when they would send powerful forces to attack each other. Over the course of many years of the war, that had become the rule. But the 1974 rainy season was an unusual rainy season in the B2 theater. We were determined to break that rule and act urgently to create a new opportunity and change the gloomy rainy season into the brilliant dawn of a new period. During the June conference, during which the Standing Committee of COSVN reviewed the 1974 dry season and discussed the coming direction, its secretary, Pham Hung, concluded that:

"In this year's dry season a new factor has appeared: We are winning victory and ascending while the enemy is weakening and descending. We must not stand still but must win even greater victories and force the enemy into even greater decline. During this year's rainy season we have many advantages and many capabilities for winning greater victories than during any previous rainy season, even greater than those of the past dry season. Regardless of the weather and the difficulties, we must step up our activities in all regards, create a new status and new strength, materially and with regard to morale, for the military regions, provinces, localities, and main-force units so that they can begin the 1974-1975 dry season with a strong, vigorous spirit. In 1975, especially during the 1975 dry season, we will be capable of winning victory, transforming the situation, and creating a new turning point, one of decisive importance."

There was nothing mysterious about COSVN's prescience. It was based on the actual situations of ourselves and the enemy on the battlefield and reflected the results of the activities of millions of comrades and compatriots in all hamlets, and of tens of thousands of guerrillas, local troops, and main-force troops, who contended with the enemy for each person and each inch of ground, every day and every hour, all over the theater. It was a result of profound

understanding of ourselves and the enemy. It was a result of full understanding of the objectives of our revolution, firmly grasping revolutionary methods, and clearly understanding what we had to do and where we had to go, and at the same time profoundly understanding the plots, acts, desires and capabilities of the enemy.

At that time questions were asked that caused us to think a good deal: "Why, when facing that hopeless situation, did the puppet Thieu regime continue obstinately to adhere to its reactionary political line and deny the true situation in South Vietnam--that there were two zones, two regimes, two armies and three political forces--but refuse to admit there was a third force, was unwilling to form a coalition with the 'Viet Cong,' and was determined to sabotage the Paris Agreement and continue the war?" "Why did they continue to hang on to the stupid military strategy of defending everything, land-grabbing all over the place, and trying to wipe out the liberation armed forces and liquidate the PRG of the RSVN?"

We had long known that the puppet Thieu regime was only a lackey, a tool of the U.S. imperialists. All of its thoughts were under the guidance, and all of their actions were under the command baton, of their masters. Thus the answer to those questions lay in the plots and policies of the United States.

In his book "A Soldier's Report" Westmoreland admitted that "He (P. Harkness) and the other U.S. officials went to Vietnam to implement a national policy that had been drafted in Washington." As for the statements of the South Vietnamese military and civilian leaders quoted in a report prepared for the U.S. Office of the Secretary of Defense titled "The Collapse of South Vietnam," "According to Tran Van Don, General Vien admitted the dependent role of South Vietnam. Another general agreed that the South Vietnamese leaders had been pressured into the implementation of American plans." Nothing could be clearer than words that slipped out of the Americans and puppets after their complete defeat.

Our people's war against the U.S. imperialists was very complicated with regard to both content and form from the very beginning and--through its developmental processes--to that time. It was not merely a national liberation war against aggression and was not merely a class war between revolution and counterrevolution in our country, but was more complicated, a war which manifested the struggle between the forces of progress and reaction all over the war, which converged on the key battlefield: Vietnam! Immediately after France was forced to sign the Geneva Agreements, the United States opposed them and was determined to intervene in Indochina and throw out the French, so that it could assume the role of international gendarme. The U.S. plot to occupy South Vietnam and make it the first line of defense against the socialist camp and prevent the influence of socialism from spreading, so that it could become the masters of the rest of the world (except for the socialist countries). The Americans thought that Vietnam, although a small country, occupied an important strategic position in the world. The United States, rich in dollars and modern weapons, was capable of and had to defeat the socialist bloc there without having to clash with the Soviet Union or China

(China was at that time still a country in the socialist bloc). The U.S. leaders thought the prospects of that strategy were high; they were self-confident, did not deeply study the Vietnamese nation and people, disregarded the experience of their French friends, and ignored the just voice of Americans who protested the war and of the progressive people of the world. As a result, the more bogged down they became the more they had to escalate the war, and the more they escalated the war, the greater were their losses in men and materiel. Like a greedy, addicted gambler they continued to lurch from one defeat to another. After they had escalated to the top-most rung they of course had to deescalate, but both escalation and deescalation were measures for carrying out the global strategy of the U.S. imperialists and carrying out their plot to achieve global hegemony and oppose the socialist bloc. When the strategy of "massive retaliation," based on a monopoly on nuclear weapons, was bankrupted and the three revolutionary currents were attacking victoriously all over the world, the United States had to shift over to a strategy of "flexible response" with its three types of war--special, limited and general--in order to take the initiative and win under any circumstances, and especially in order to oppose the national liberation wars. After that strategy was applied on the Vietnam battlefield in 1961, the special war was defeated at the end of 1964 and the beginning of 1965 and the special war was bankrupted in 1968, but the balance of forces in the world and the conditions at that time did not permit the United States to start a general war and use nuclear weapons, so the strategy of flexible response was rendered impotent. Perplexed and confused, Johnson hastily came up with the "de-Americanization" policy in hopes of pulling his feet out of the Vietnam quagmire. But the U.S. imperialist leaders and strategists were unwilling to accept the disgrace of defeat and still believed that the United States was destined to rule the world. They were very afraid that if they lost Vietnam they would lose a whole series of other countries according to the "domino theory." Therefore, after Nixon became president he adopted a strategy of "regional defensive alliances" which was in fact a policy to mobilize and win over the forces of the world to oppose the socialist bloc, so that the United States would not stand alone. In Vietnam they transformed that strategy into the Vietnamization--not the de-Americanization--of the war. People were partially correct in saying that Johnson wanted to get out of Vietnam by "de-Americanizing," while Nixon wanted to remain in Vietnam by "Vietnamizing the war." In fact, Nixon, unlike Johnson, had not been demoralized, so he tried hard to pursue the unchanging objectives of the U.S. imperialists. Before and after the Paris Agreement the United States implemented its strategy of Vietnamizing the war by seeking all ways to make the puppet army and regime strong militarily, economically and politically so that they could defeat the liberation armed forces and annihilate the PRG of the RSVN, keep South Vietnam as a nation dependent on them and permanently divide our country. Those objectives had never changed. The only change was using Vietnamese blood to replace American blood. The Americans were forced to sign the Paris Agreement although its contents were not advantageous for them and their puppets. But they signed it anyway, thinking that they could reverse the situation by dishonest and crooked schemes, by the economic strength of the United States and by its intricate, insidious diplomatic activities all over the world. They regarded the Paris Agreement as only a means, as a tactic, during a certain strategic phase. They signed the agreement so that they could implement the provisions

beneficial to them while misrepresenting and rejecting those that were not beneficial. Their objective was still to serve their victory. The strength of weapons and dollars are the true "laws" of the U.S. imperialists in the world today. Their own words have very clearly revealed their insidious plot. Lt Gen Tran Van Don of the Saigon puppet regime, said in his book "The Unending War in Vietnam" (published by the Presidio Press, California and London, 1978), "He (i.e. Charles Whitehouse, the deputy U.S. ambassador who accompanied the Kissinger delegation to Saigon in mid-October 1972 to explain the Paris Agreement and persuade Thieu to sign them) said to me, "The agreement has some good points and should be signed. It is only a piece of paper and will change nothing, you will see."

At the beginning of January 1973 Tran Van Don and Bui Diem, heading a special delegation sent by Thieu to Washington to learn of the U.S. intentions, reported to Thieu that Alexis Johnson, a U.S. undersecretary of state, said privately to me (i.e. Diem): "We have been friends many years, and I am speaking to you as a friend. The fact is that the United States has not changed its objectives in Vietnam." And in a Top Secret message sent to Thieu at that time, Nixon stated that "The freedom and independence of the Republic of Vietnam are still supreme objectives of America's foreign policy."

Thus it is clear. The deep-lying plot of Nixon and Kissinger was to, by signing the Paris Agreement, send the U.S. troops home, secure the release of the U.S. POW's, calm down U.S. and world opinion, and shore up the U.S. military forces, which were no longer prepared to carry out the U.S. global strategy, while having a period of several years of breathing space in Vietnam in order to carry out the following insidious plots:

1. Providing additional equipment, weapons, and modern technical equipment in order to transform the puppet army into a strong force capable of annihilating the liberation armed forces. Increasing economic development aid and investment for the puppet Thieu regime in order to develop that regime, which the United States recognized as the only legal regime in South Vietnam, into a Southeast Asian regime that was strong militarily, politically and economically.
2. Providing reconstruction aid for North Vietnam, using material-technical bait to tempt North Vietnam, infiltrate and monopolize it, and by that means restricting the north's aid for the NLF SVN, using the north to restrict activities in the south, and plotting to achieve the peaceful transformation of the regime in the north.
3. Using the policy of U.S.-style detente on a worldwide basis to create pressure and limit the aid of the socialist bloc for both the north and the south, in hopes of strangling our ability to fight. In fact, after reaching agreement at Shanghai to retain Thieu and keep South Vietnam in the U.S. orbit, China limited its aid to Vietnam, especially with regard to large weapons and transportation facilities. In the "Nixon's Trip to China" chapter of his memoir "The White House Years," Kissinger recounted the working sessions of Zhou Enlai and Nixon: "Zhou's position on Vietnam was a masterpiece of tortuous circumlocution; he objected to Nixon's opinions more out of sorrow than anger. He expressed 'sympathy' for the people of North Vietnam but said

nothing about common interests. He referred to China's obligation to help Hanoi not in terms of the solidarity ideal, or in terms of legitimate national rights, but in terms of the historical debt owed Vietnam because of the Chinese Empire in the past.

"His principal argument regarding the necessity of an early end to the war was that it caused the United States to become bogged down and to waste much energy which should be expended on more important parts of the world. Zhou criticized our negotiating position in a very perfunctory manner. He demanded that we withdraw our troops from South Vietnam. He never supported Hanoi's political program--and of people who criticize us--regarding a coalition government and the overthrow of Thieu."

Then Kissinger concluded, "Our diplomatic activity was about to succeed in isolating Hanoi." The United States truly believed that its scheme to divide the countries of the socialist bloc, and its worldwide detente policy, were about to bear results.

4. Along with the above plots, it was necessary to flout their strength by retaining a strong U.S. military force in Southeast Asia to serve as a deterrent force, intimidate weak-willed people, and support the Thieu clique.

By means of schemes, the Thieu regime would gradually become stronger, the PRG of the RSVN would become increasingly stronger, Thieu would be capable of eliminating the opposition and gaining full control of South Vietnam, and South Vietnam would be transformed into dependency of the U.S. imperialists in that strategic location on the western shores of the Pacific.

In accordance with that scheme, the United States was continuing to implement its strategy of Vietnamizing the war in South Vietnam despite the Paris Agreement. The President and the other key officials in the U.S. administration at that time stressed that in order to persuade Thieu that the United States would always be by his side, it was necessary to provide him with all kinds of aid and be prepared to reintervene in South Vietnam if necessary. Even Kissinger had promised Thieu, in the course of his trip to Saigon in October 1972, that the United States would use military forces to attack and occupy North Vietnam by attacking north from the 17th Parallel. Thieu gleefully suggested that it would be necessary to land troops nearer the objective than attacking north from the 17th Parallel. Although Thieu and his clique were concerned about their fate as servants, were ordered around and treated with contempt by their U.S. masters, and had weak position and strength, they were still confident of the support of their masters and thought that if they got into trouble their masters would certainly not go back on their word but would protect and assist them. The puppet Brig Gen Le Trung Truc, who had been an aide as the chairman of the Interministerial Committee to Coordinate the Cease-fire, admitted that "The United States always bragged about its peerless strength. Thieu had absolute confidence in the military strength of the United States, and thought that since the United States was involved in Vietnam it would remain involved to the end."

Because it was so confident of that, the Thieu clique was blind to the real situation and continued the war in order to fulfill its subjective desires and the intentions of its masters. Such were the plots of the United States and the acts of Thieu. He was under no illusions that the disciple and master would strictly adhere to the agreement. The United States not only wanted to occupy South Vietnam but had the even more insane desire of invading and occupying the North, in order to divide and control the socialist bloc. That illusion had the very encouraging support of his new ally--China--and had been tested during the recent period and events. If the Chinese rulers during the 1960's had not given one signal after another, by many different means, so that the United States could understand that it was free to act in Vietnam provided that they did not clash with China--"If you don't bother us we won't bother you"--in 1965 the United States would not have dared to brazenly send troops to South Vietnam, and then wage a war of destruction against and blockade the North. If in 1972, at Shanghai, they had not promised to save Thieu and South Vietnam for the United States--as Luigi Sommarugia wrote in the Italian newspaper IL MESSIGORIO on 3 April 1979, "China accepted the U.S. recommendation that Thieu be retained in South Vietnam, with the result that Vietnam would, like Korea, be permanently divided. In return, Nixon promised that China could join the United Nations and take a seat on the Security Council, and that the United States would abandon its policy of supporting Taiwan"--the United States would not have boldly withdrawn its troops from Vietnam and changed its strategy, but still believed that it could remain permanently in South Vietnam.

In brief, that meant that whether the United States remained in Vietnam or left Vietnam it had the assurance, ironically, of its gigantic friend to the north, a country bordering ours.

It had been a year and a half since the Paris Agreement was signed. The actual developments in South Vietnam did not follow the meticulous arrangement the United States had made, or the plan that had been drafted by Nixon and Kissinger. The reason for that was something Nixon and Kissinger did not take into consideration and could not comprehend. That was the effect of their adversary's intelligence and courage in thought and action. If after 1973 we had believed that by one means or another the Paris Agreement would be implemented, just as we had believed that 2 years after the Geneva Agreements there would be a general election, or if we had incorrectly evaluated our strength and that of the enemy, and had been guilty of leftist or rightist mistakes in thought and action, the situation would have been different. Of course, faltering steps could not be avoided during the initial period. But a faltering period of the first 3 or 4 months of a new strategic phase of a long war was a short period. It was not sufficiently long for the enemy to take advantage and win victory. On the contrary, we were vigilant, our party's guidance was acute and timely, and our people and armed forces were closely united in combat and revolutionary struggle, so we were on the ascent and the enemy was on the decline and could not recover. The enemy's wily, cruel schemes were not timely and could not be carried out. The puppet military forces could not become stronger, but were becoming dispirited and were falling apart. They wanted to augment their large civilian self-defense forces and build strong, mobile regional forces capable of occupying and defending all areas, but now those two forces were now declining numerically, many surrendered

or deserted, and outposts and bases were abandoned. They wanted to concentrate their regular forces into completely mobile forces with modern, highly sophisticated equipment and weapons in order to reduce the number of troops and save money for economic development while still maintaining a strong military, but now they were forced to urgently increase their troop strength and the number of units, but still did not have sufficient forces to hold the localities and there were no mobile forces. They wanted to expand and stabilize their area in order to appeal for foreign economic construction investment, but that area shrank and was unstable, and no one dared invest in it. They had a serious budget deficit and U.S. aid had to be used for military expenditures. They wanted to create a strong ruling party, the "Democratic Party," but they forced everyone to join "Mr Thieu's Party," which was made up entirely of opportunists and political speculators who joined in hopes of attaining promotions and getting ahead, who stole and bribed to their heart's content, and bullied the people. How could there be a strong ruling party? Thus the puppet Thieu regime did not become stronger in all respects, as the United States hoped, but was becoming weaker in all regards--militarily, politically, economically, etc.--and was in ruins and going downhill.

After the U.S. imperialists were defeated, they had to retreat militarily and shift over to employing all sorts of devilish plots to set up a "prestigious puppet" to replace them and firmly control South Vietnam. But that puppet did not stand erect but had begun to collapse, so at that time what was needed was a shove sufficiently strong to push it into the abyss so that neither the pupil nor the master could save it. That was an opportunity.

The correct evaluation of that situation and a correct realization of the opportunity were extremely important with regard to strategic guidance on a key battlefield that was representative of all of South Vietnam.

Lenin said that "Revolution is a science, but at the same time it is an art. It demands sensitivity toward the situation and timely positive response to changes in the situation. Revolution is always creative." COSVN and the Regional Military Party Commission evaluated and were aware of that changed situation in order to guide all rainy season plans and activities, while also drafting a 1975 plan, especially for the 1974-1975 dry season, and reporting it to the Military Commission of the party Central Committee.

During the July 1974 conference of COSVN the secretary stressed that "The winning of a decisive victory in 1975-1976, especially our efforts during the 1974-1975 dry season, is within the purview of Resolution 21 of the party Central Committee and COSVN Resolution 12, which call for the winning of a decisive victory during the next few years. We must fulfill our rainy season mission and positively prepare to fulfill our 1975 mission. Great efforts are required on the part of the entire party. The basis of our decisions was the situation during the recent period, especially during the past 4 months of 1974. A directive will be issued to the military regions and provinces to review the implementation of Resolution 12, make all-out efforts during the rainy season, and make truly good preparations for the 1975 dry season, with a truly resolute spirit. We will make a full report to the Central Committee and recommend that it guide the combining of diplomatic struggle and coordination on all battlefields in South Vietnam."

The contests of the 1974 rainy season activities, according to the guidance of COSVN and the Regional Military Party Commission included:

--Continuing to defeat the enemy's pacification plan by launching counter-offensives and offensives, expanding the area under our control, and developing the political struggle movement for the masses to arise to become the masters in the various areas, especially in the Mekong Delta and the area around the capital. Holding a conference in September 1974 to recapitulate the task of opposing pacification throughout the B2 theater.

--Strengthening our forces militarily and politically in order to create the position and strength to enable them to fulfill their 1975 mission. We had to be strong in each village, each district, and each province so that we were capable of developing those areas on our own. In comparison, in 1960 there were nearly 5 million people in the liberated and contested areas but we were brilliantly successful in the simultaneous uprising. In 1968, when we controlled nearly 4 million people, we won a victory in the Tet Mau Than general offensive and uprising. Thus the norm regarding the number of people we had to control by the end of that rainy season, and prior to the 1975 dry season, was equal to the 1968 level.

--Concentrating on rapidly accelerating the urban work. At that time, the contradiction between the ruling comprador bourgeois-bureaucratic-militaristic clique and the various strata of people was becoming fierce, especially in the cities. We were capable of creating a strong urban fist.

--Firmly grasping the armed forces and being concerned with development, training and combat. The time had come when all three types of troops had to be developed rapidly and strongly so that they could fulfill their key mission of being the decisive forces.

--Building up the liberated area and base areas and insuring the transportation corridors. Despite the handicaps of the rainy season and the efforts of the enemy to stop us, we had to, by all means, augment the supplies and rear services of the forces, areas, and military regions so that they could be prepared to win big victories during the dry season.

--With regard to the party's leadership, it was necessary to motivate the cadres, enlisted men, and masses ideologically. We had to enable the entire party, the entire army, and the entire population to clearly understand the insidious plots of the Americans and puppets, clearly understand our new victories and the new factors of the situation and enthusiastically endeavor to advance. In view of the insidious plots of the enemy, they had to realize that there was no other course than to use revolutionary violence to oppose counterrevolutionary violence, and that it was necessary to attack strongly in order to defend our right to live. Everyone had fully to bring into play their capability and responsibility in order to win a big victory. It was necessary to oppose rightist tendencies and vagueness regarding the enemy.

--The echelons and sectors had to rectify their table of organization and working methods so that they could be appropriate to the new situation,

streamlined, appropriate to the actual situation and the grassroots situation, and have the highest effectiveness.

One of the most urgent tasks during the rainy season was preparing military forces for the dry season. Since all of the forces had to participate in fighting the enemy in all three areas and attain the norms assigned by the upper echelon for the rainy season, all three types of troops and the military organs had to be concerned with organizing and developing units, and with training in order to increase their combat effectiveness and complete our deployment on all parts of the battlefield. That Regional Command force development plan was approved by the Military Commission on 6 June and immediately afterward disseminated to the military regions and the various echelons, down to the base level. The intention of the plan was to mobilize the localities, to the greatest extent possible, to achieve the unlimited expansion of the village and hamlet guerrillas and local district troops, so that the districts could have battalions, and the villages companies, with which to defend themselves and expand the liberated areas without requiring the aid of the provincial forces. That was based on the actual experience of My Xuyen District in Soc Trang Province and of a number of places in Kien Phong Province. During the recent dry season we effectively retaliated against enemy land-grabbing and by that means expanded the liberated area, so that it was made up of many hamlets and villages which formed a contiguous area. In such places, the popular masses arose and participated enthusiastically, along with the guerrillas and local troops, in attacking the enemy and wiping out, or forcing the abandonment or surrender of, many outposts set up by the popular PF and RF troops in the villages.

The provinces had to expand efforts to encourage youths to enlist and, along with recruits assigned by the upper echelon, supplement existing units or be organized into strong provincial battalions. Depending on its circumstances, each battalion should have between one and four battalions. The provinces capable of doing so, and required to do so by their missions, could organize a light regiment and a few independent battalions. During that period, except for Military Region 6 and Saigon the other military regions--7, 8 and 9--were to have a number of independent regiments directly under their command. In order to enable the military region commands to remain fully abreast of all military and political forces, and command the offensives and uprisings throughout the military region, and in order to streamline organization and have a strong main-force fist, in August 1974 the Regional Command decided to organize a light division for each of the military regions by consolidating the independent regiments, strengthening the combat arms, and organizing division command organs commanded by a deputy military region commander. Military Region 9 organized the 4th Division, made up of the 10th, 20th, and 30th regiments and commanded by comrade Nguyen Dinh Chuch. In Military Region 8 there was the 8th Division, commanded by comrade Sau Phu (Senior Colonel Huynh VAN Nhieu) and consisting of the 18th, 24th and 320th regiments. In Military Region 7 its two independent regiments--the 33d and 4th--were organized into the 6th Division commanded by comrade Dang Ngoc Si (code name Hai Phong). In Military Region 6, where our conditions were difficult in all regards, which was distant from the aid and command of the upper echelon, and which lacked manpower, materiel, and transportation facilities, in order to be

appropriate to the mission and operational guidelines and mode there, we had only organized independent infantry battalion, sapper units, guerrillas, and armed work teams. In view of the new situation and the missions that would be assigned to the military regions, in May and June 1974 the Regional Command ordered the merging of the 186th, 840th and 15th infantry battalions, and the artillery, communications and other companies, to form the 812th Regiment, which was to undergo urgent training and make Binh Tuy and Binh Thuan provinces its main area of operations. Because it did not clearly understand the intention of the Regional Command, the military region was not yet clear about forming that regiment. The Regional Command explained to it the necessity of organizing the regiment and ordered that it be organized immediately to promptly fulfill its mission and avoid missing the opportunity. In 1975 that regiment, along with the local forces and other units, liberated most of Binh Tuy and Lam Dong provinces, all of Tuyen Duc Province, and part of Ninh Thuan Province, thus brilliantly fulfilling the mission of the military region.

In the Saigon Special Zone, in addition to the forces deployed by the Regional Command inside and outside the city, because of its special conditions we only organized separate battalions, such as "Determined To Win" battalions 1, 2, 3 and 4, along with the district local troops, guerrillas, armed security forces and armed youths. (The Gia Dinh Regiment was formed later.)

By that time the Regional Command directly controlled the 5th, 7th and 9th Divisions, the 201st, 205th, 16th and 271st independent regiments, the 27th Sapper Group, the 316th Municipal Commando Group and a very limited number of combat arms units. In the B2 theater there were five battalions of vehicle-pulled artillery of the various kinds, including two battalions of 105mm and 155mm artillery pieces captured from the enemy which were very short of ammunition, and three battalions of tanks and armored vehicles which were understrength and included M41 tanks and M113 troop carriers captured from the enemy. The combat engineering and communications units were even weaker. There was only one river-crossing combat engineer battalion with insufficient equipment, a construction battalion, two battalions of combat engineers, three bridge-and-road battalions, two wireless radio battalions, and a wired communications battalion. For a long time we had complained to the comrades with the General Staff and in the Combat Arms Command of the High Command that our forces were too small at a time when we were responsible for a large, key theater such as B2, and of course had often demanded additional personnel, facilities, equipment, weapons and ammunition. What commander would not want to control ample combat forces and have reserves so that he can fulfill his mission as well as possible. Perhaps that was why some of the comrades at the General Staff complained that B2 had a localistic, partialistic attitude and demanded more than the B1, B3 and B4 theaters. We heard many such complaints, not directly, but from others who related those biased observations to the extent that when we discussed military forces we often said, "Let us heed what the Greek philosopher Pythagoras said: "If you suffer an injustice, console yourself; the person truly worthy of pity is the one who caused the injustice." We added that a skilled general did not always have to have plentiful forces in order to win.

Even so, when we felt that it was necessary to do so we still made recommendations to the upper echelon, and continued to demand additional forces. We decided to organize a corps for the B2 theater by combining the 9th and 7th divisions and a number of existing combat arms units, and recommended that the High Command give us an additional division and tank and artillery units, and that those units arrive at the battlefield at the beginning of the dry season so that a strong corps on that important battlefield. After receiving the approval of the High Command, at the military conference held in July 1974 the Regional Command officially decreed the formation of the corps, called the 4th Corps, of which comrade Hoang Cam would serve as commander and comrade Hoang The Thien as political officer. In addition, the 271st and 205th independent regiments were formed into the (understrength) 3d Division, commanded by comrade Do Quang Hung, to facilitate command. The 3d Division, as well as the 5th Division, the 16th and 201st Regiments, the 27th Sapper Group and the 316th Commando Group were directly under the Regional Command so that they could be used wherever necessary.

The formation of a corps at the B2 theater level and of divisions for the military regions was a positive preparatory step with regard to the theater's main-force units, in order to meet the demands of the situation and the operational policy adopted by COSVN and the Regional Military Party Committee for the coming period. It was warmly applauded by the people, the sectors and the echelons who helped carry it out. It inspired the soldiers and people of the B2 theater to enthusiastically advance to the winning of new victories. It also demonstrated the greatest period of large-scale force development ever in the B2 theater, with regard not only to main-force units but also provincial and district local troops and village and hamlet guerrillas. The armed forces were not the only ones to be developed rapidly during that period; the party forces at the base level and the mass political forces also grew much larger and stronger, even in areas in which we had been very weak. For example, Cho Moi District in Long Xuyen Province was a district in the weak area, and was a narrow strip of land between two large rivers, the Tien Giang and Hau Giang. Prior to 28 January 1973 there were only two party chapters in the district and very few of the masses were organized, although the people there were very good and had a long revolutionary tradition. By the end of the 1974 dry season, however, we had eight party chapters which encompassed 11 of the total of 13 villages. We were able to create hundreds of secret and special guerrillas and had 79 agents in 15 civilian self-defense groups and intergroups of the enemy. Our cadres could move about and mobilize the masses to struggle everywhere in the province. Another example was Cho Gao District in My Tho Province, which lay immediately east of National Route 4 and was bordered by the Tien Giang River, the Cho Gao Canal, and a branch of the Van Co River. The terrain presented many difficulties for our cadres operating there. There were 20 villages in the district. In 18 of them there were party chapters and mass infrastructures. In all, at that time our military and political forces numbered 4,336, while the enemy had 3,318 RF, PF and civilian self-defense troops. We gained superiority in a district which had been one of our weak districts. Furthermore, a number of village officials and families of puppet soldiers contributed tens of thousands of dong to the district's resistance war fund. According to combined data, by the end of 1974 there were 3.4 million people living in the liberated and contested areas in the B2 theater, in low-level and

high-level revolutionary organizations, which was not far below the 1968 level. During the rainy season we could endeavor to increase that number even more. The reason for that was that COSVN continually monitored and guided the military regions and provinces, by direct contact with the localities and by means of directives 01 to 08, the principal contents of which were urgently creating position and force and changing the comparison of forces between ourselves and the enemy. The norms regarding the development of actual military and political strength in the localities, and activities to oppose the enemy and expand the liberated area, which were assigned by COSVN and the Regional Military Party Commission to the military regions and provinces for the recent dry season had been attained and surpassed. COSVN also was confident that the norms that had been set forth for the rainy season in the B2 theater would be surpassed to an even greater extent. All of the cadres who participated in the military conference in July expressed determination to overcome all norms assigned by the upper echelon. Those comrades brought up a very new situation: the popular masses all over were aware of the decline of the enemy and our victorious position, just as stated in the party resolution, which proved that the masses had caught up with the guidance of the party or, in other words, that the masses were marching in step. Whenever that is true, whether in wartime or in peacetime, the revolution will have the strength to do everything, to resolve many difficulties which were seemingly unresolvable.

During that July military conference we disseminated and explained the April 1974 resolution of the Military Commission of the party Central Committee which had been approved by the Political Bureau in order to, on the bases of the most recent developments in the situation, supplement Resolution 21 of the party Central Committee. The resolution evaluated the new U.S. plot as follows: "The basic plot of the U.S. imperialists is still to carry out the 'Nixon Doctrine,' impose neocolonialism in South Vietnam, and transform South Vietnam into a separate, pro-American country, but shift over from using U.S. military forces directly in the fighting to using the puppet army and regime, with the effective aid of the United States with regard to military advisers, economics, and finance."

"In order to implement that scheme, the United States has from the beginning consistently carried out a policy of both signing the agreement to restore peace and helping the Saigon puppet regime continue the war."

The resolution observed that "In places in which we have resolutely counter-attacked and attacked the enemy have been confused and passive and have encountered difficulties. They have been pushed back in Military Region 9 and have been stopped in Military Region 8, and although they had succeeded in grabbing a little land in Military Region 5 they were stopped. We have wiped out a rather large part of the enemy's manpower, defended our liberated enclaves in the Mekong Delta and around Saigon, defended our vast liberated areas and base areas, and maintained our strategic threat to the enemy."

The resolution gave specific guidance to the battlefields: "Go all-out to take advantage of time to strengthen forces, strengthen material resources, and concentrate guidance on insuring that the lowland areas, especially the Mekong Delta, undergo a clear transformation in our favor."

"Military Region 5 must correctly evaluate the situation, clarify the thinking of cadres and the operational mode, cooperate closely with the main-force units, the local troops, and the militia and guerrilla forces, achieve close coordination between the Central Highlands and the lowlands, essentially restore the movement to the 1972 level and further expand it, and defend and gradually fill out the liberated areas and base areas in the Central Highlands and the western parts of the lowland provinces.

"In eastern Nam Bo we must defend the liberated enclaves around Saigon and consolidate them into strong staging areas which form an increasingly tighter noose threatening Saigon, and further consolidate and expand the corridors connecting the outskirts of Saigon with the vast liberated and base areas.

"Tri Thien must consolidate its position in the contiguous area, penetrate deeply down into the lowlands, create political and guerrilla bases, weaken the enemy's control, advance to coordinating the three spearheads (political, military and proselyting among enemy troops), advance the movement, reconstitute the three areas, destroy the enemy's multiple defense line position, and continually threaten the enemy in order to pin down the airborne and marine divisions and create advantages for the other battlefields in South Vietnam, while at the same time maintaining and strengthening the liberated area."

At the conference there were also presented a detailed evaluation and assessment by COSVN of the rainy season plan and a preview by COSVN and the Regional Military Party Commission of activities necessary to win a great victory during the 1974-1975 dry season. The cadres attending the conference, who had battlefield experience and had been in constant contact with the base levels and with danger during the different periods, agreed unanimously with COSVN's assessment of the situation. That unanimity became collective strength with which to implement the party's resolution and strength which was passed on to the party members and masses.

Immediately after the military conference, comrade Pham Hung, as secretary of COSVN, secretary of the Regional Military Party Commission, and political officer of the Regional Command, joined us in explaining the resolution in detail to groups of cadres from each military region. Especially, we discussed with the cadres from the Saigon Municipal Unit the development and deployment of the various kinds of military and political forces, both secret and open, as well as the operational forms, especially the form of armed activity in the outskirts and in the city. Comrade Pham Hung personally resolved questions in the consciousness of the city's cadres regarding the deployment of sapper regiments in the outskirts and military activities in those areas. Many cadres had the mistaken viewpoint that the party organization and mass organization in the outskirts were still weak and that sappers and local troops should not be deployed there because they might be exposed, because they feared that the enemy and launch sweeping operations had destabilized the situation, thus preventing them from building infrastructures. They were especially afraid that if the sappers or local troops fought the enemy there, all of their bases would be broken up. If armed forces were stationed there, would they not fight if the enemy arrived? Thus the question of "How should we fight to avoid breaking up the bases?" greatly confused them. A number of

places withdrew their armed forces or forbade them to fight. He emphasized that "Our party's line is to attack the enemy in all three strategic areas--the jungles-and-mountains, the lowlands, and the cities--and to attack them with both armed forces and political forces. If that is to be accomplished it is necessary to organize and deploy military forces combined with mass forces. The only differences among the areas is how to organize forces and what types of forces to deploy. We must attack the enemy by means of all three offensive spearheads, so it is necessary to study how the attacks by the three spearheads should be carried out and where in order to win small and large victories. We absolutely must not fight a protracted guerrilla war and not refrain from combat. In war, we cannot hope for stability in order to organize forces, and forces organized under such conditions of artificial stability cannot be of high quality. In the present strategic phase we must further tighten the noose on Saigon, and must be prepared to achieve coordination among the various areas in order to win a victory during the coming dry season. We must not be tardy. When cadres have correct viewpoints and struggle bravely, and when there is close coordination between the local party committee echelons and the military command echelons, there will be correct modes. We must be bold, and dare to think and do."

A very important, unforgettable example of daring to think and do was the transporting and stockpiling of food and ammunition for the B2 theater during the rainy season by warriors who truly were "the first to go and the last to return," in the tradition of the Nam Bo resistance war, warriors who endured difficulties and hardships but were taciturn and were so happy over the victories of their comrades that they all but forgot their own victory. They were the rear services warriors? Throughout the rainy season, with its heavy rain and mud, tens of thousands of rear services troops, along with hundreds of thousands of people worked day and night on all routes from the rear to the front, through muddy, flooded fields, and the rivers and water of Dong Thap Muoi, the U Minh Forest, and all over the Mekong Delta, to the mountains and jungles of Military Regions 7 and 6, to the outskirts of Saigon, and into the capital. Perhaps the rear services branch of B2 reflected most clearly the skilled combination of all elements in our anti-U.S. war: combining the army's rear services with the national rear area, combining on-the-spot purchasing and production, combining specialized rear services with the people's rear services, combining military forces and mass forces enlisted men and civilian laborers, regular troops and guerrillas, large-scale and small-scale, open and secret, secretly carrying supplies across enemy areas at night, secretly using trucks and boats to transport supplies on roads and rivers, transporting supplies into the cities, combining the modern with the primitive (ox carts, cargo bicycles, motorboats, rowboats, backpacks, etc.), and combining the supply work with combat to annihilate the enemy and defend our supply forces. Even in the command structure of the Regional Rear Services Department combination was necessary to insure a high degree of effectiveness of its work. Comrade Tu Khanh (Maj Gen Dao Son Tay), the department's political officer, who had been a worker in the Ba Son factory in Saigon, was born in Gia Dinh Province, participated in the revolutionary movement at an early age and joined the Indochinese Communist Party. In the anti-French war he was a deputy commander of the Military Command of Gia Dinh Province. During the anti-U.S. war, before changing over to the rear services sector he was the

regional artillery commander. Thus he knew a good deal about the military, the city and the people of Saigon, and the eastern Nam Bo region. He was loyal and sincere and loved and was deeply concerned for the cadres and men and knew how to insure that the troops would fight victoriously. The department commander, Bui Phung, from the outskirts of Hanoi, had served as a staff officer of the Rear Services General Department and was expert at his profession. Comrade Tu Vo (Vo Phat), the department's deputy commander, who had been secretary of the Long Chau Tien provincial party committee during the anti-French period and had engaged in revolutionary activities in the Mekong Delta and in Kampuchea, was a person with many accomplishments in creating local sources of materiel for the sector. The lower-echelon cadres made a similar deployment so that they could combine their talents, virtue and knowledge of their work, familiarity with the battlefield, ability to locate sources of materiel, and knowledge of human nature. The assignment of great tasks must be accompanied by organizing and selecting people who are capable of carrying out those tasks, in order to insure their success. It would be impossible to relate all of the combinations that were made to create the combined strength which enabled the B2 rear services sector to support all battles and campaigns, no matter where or when they took place, from the beginning to the end of the war. Even during the period in which the B2 theater was experiencing the greatest difficulties and shortages with regard to food and ammunition, especially in War Zone A in northern Bien Hoa in 1966, the region deployed and kept there the 81st Rear Services Group commanded by comrade Muoi Thien.* Therefore, when the 9th Division had to fight in that area it had rice and ammunition without having to take them along and be slowed down. While en route to an assignment in 1966, I visited the 81st Group. Comrade Muoi Thien and his men assured me that they were determined to "hold their ground" no matter what the situation. In addition to being attacked by bombs, shells and poison chemicals, the men serving there had another dangerous enemy: malaria. For that reason, during "the 9 years"*** the men had a saying, "The Ma Da and Song Be--heroes meet their end" (the place where the Ma Da River flows into the Song Be River was famous for being insalubrious and caused the death of many of our soldiers from malaria during the anti-French period.

There, "miraculous speed" must be understood as preparing the battlefield in advance, and having supplies where and when they are needed. If that was to be accomplished, it was necessary to foresee developments early, accurately and promptly, and be an organization that was skilled in making preparations in advance, efficient, and made up of brave and resourceful people. There can be no miraculous speed if we "wait until the water reaches our feet before jumping." If one waits until something happens before acting, how can one act in time? The Americans and puppets had large and small transport planes and many helicopters and could not get the job done in time, let alone having to meet requirements under urgent conditions. The B2 rear services had the technique of "feathering the nest in advance." It cached hundreds and thousands of tons of food, weapons and ammunition in the guerrilla enclaves and

*Senior Colonel Vo Van Lan, now commander of the Rear Services Department of Military Region 7.

**"The 9 years" referred to the anti-French period.

the areas in which the main-force and local troops would operate when necessary, and cached explosives, weapons and ammunition in the outskirts of cities and next to the enemy's airfields, ports and supply depots; and inside the cities, near important objectives, such as for the sappers and commandos in Saigon, whom we used in accordance with plans drafted by the upper echelon. Without cleverly organized forces commanded by suitable, capable cadres and without revolutionary masses, such tasks could not have been carried out. In order to prepare for the 1974-1975 dry season, during the rainy season the rear services sector transported to the military regions, including Saigon, more than 3,000 tons of weapons and ammunition, and supplied to the units sufficient quantities of base ammunition loads and food for combat and for reserve stocks. It stockpiled in areas in which the dry season battles would take place, especially in eastern Nam Bo, nearly 30,000 tons of materiel, including nearly 8,000 tons of ammunition and 1,500 tons of POL. Something else noteworthy about the B2 rear services sector was that it tried to create local sources of materiel whenever possible, and only requested from the upper echelon what it could not obtain locally. In 1973 and the rainy season of 1974, the materiel obtained locally by the B2 rear services sector amounted to 73 percent of the theater's needs, so only 27 percent were requested from the central echelon. Correctly carrying out the order of the Regional Command, the rear services sector insured that there were always on hand stocks of food, medicine and military medical equipment; enough POL for from 3 to 6 months; and sufficient weapons and ammunition for 1 year. Achieving those feats on a distant, key, extremely fierce battlefield was a very significant accomplishment. When I met with them, those rear services troops who gave their all in all campaigns, they were spontaneously happy despite the hardship and danger, and said nothing about their work.

At the beginning of 1975, I went to the Ta Lai ferry crossing on the Dong Nai River in War Zone A in northern Bien Hoa. I talked with the driver of a truck full of ammunition who was robust and lively. He was bending over feeling the tread of a worn tire but suddenly stood straight and said, "I'm from Ha Bac and came south in 1973. My name is Pham Van Mieng." The comrade who was driving the motorboat that was pushing the ferry across the river was older, and was thin but wiry. He said, "I'm from Ca Mau, and enlisted during the simultaneous uprising. My name is Ut Den. I'm studying new things up here. Back home I only knew how to drive a boat with an outboard motor to take my wife to the market." "So you have a wife," I said, "Do you have any children yet?" He replied, "I had a 3-year-old boy who was shot to death by the PF on a sweeping operation. Then I enlisted for good because I was determined to get revenge." I felt sorry for him. I asked, "How about comrade Mieng?" He replied, "I don't have a family yet. After we win I'll volunteer to stay on here." "So," I said, "are you interested in some girl?" "No, sir," he replied, "I have to take care of my truck night and day." I remember that in 1968, when crossing the Saigon River at night, I met at a ferry crossing in a bamboo grove that had been tattered by bombs and shells but was still capable of camouflaging small groups, several very young girls who were carrying heavy boxes of ammunition to bunkers on the bank. I recognized two of them, Miss Tham and Miss Lien, Warriors of Emulation who had participated in victory celebrations at the regional base and at the Rear Services Department. Most of the girls were from the outskirts of Saigon and had enlisted to do rear

services work in the Saigon-Gia Dinh Zone. When they recognized the commander they were very pleased and gathered around, excitedly asking, "When will Saigon, Tan Thoi Nhat village, and Be Diem be liberated?" Another interrupted, "How About Tan Hiep village in Hoc Mon? You only think of your own village." "Will we be able to go home after Tet?" I wonder where Tham, Lien Mieng, and Ut are now! So many people, including rear services cadres, fell on the battlefield. The first rear services director of B2, comrade Nguyen Van Dung, a worker from Saigon, his hair grey after two resistance wars, also sacrificed his life in the line of duty. In that war there was no division into rear area and front line. The rear services personnel always had to advance to the force and enthusiastically go in advance to prepare the battlefield.

In August and September 1974 the Regional Staff, along the lines delineated by COSVN and under the guidance of the Regional Command, drafted an operational plan for the 1974-1975 dry season that foresaw the winning of a decisive victory within the next few years. At the beginning of October, COSVN discussed and approved the plan. During the meeting, each comrade in COSVN clearly and specifically analyzed the situation on the battlefield and the overall situation, and unanimously decided to win a decisive victory and complete the national democratic revolution in 1975-1976; 1975 would be the pivotal year and in 1976 we would victoriously conclude the war. It was not easy to reach such unanimity. There was much hesitation and reflection, and much analyzing and going over problems again and again. Everyone spoke of the decline of the puppet army and regime in the various areas. In the cities there had appeared a mass political struggle movement to oppose the corruption and impotency of the puppet Thieu regime, and that situation had considerably affected the morale of the enemy troops. Everyone concluded that our position and strength had become stronger and had developed uniformly on all battlefields. Our village and hamlet guerrillas had wiped out and eliminated enemy outposts. But there was still concern about a number of remaining weaknesses: although the guerrilla and local forces had recently developed strongly, numerically they did not yet meet requirements; our main-forces had not yet fought a major annihilating battle; and although the mass movement had become stronger it was not yet strong enough to carry out an uprising and overthrow the puppet regime. Our three strategic blows--main-force, rural and urban--were not yet uniform. Our urban attacks were still weak. Although the United States had been defeated and had to withdraw its troops from Vietnam, and the situation in the United States was in upheaval politically and the United States was in poor shape economically and financially, it was essential that we be clever in order to limit U.S. intervention and insure that we won a rapid, efficient victory. All of those concerns were very correct. They were the truth and everyone realized that it was necessary to make great, continual efforts in order to insure victory within that period of time.

The participants reached unanimity in determining the stage of the revolution and the stage of the war we were in, and agreed with the opinions of Muoi Cuc (comrade Nguyen Van Linh, deputy secretary of COSVN): "The Thieu regime is in a state of serious decline, in part because its contradictions are developing and in part because our attacks are becoming increasingly strong. We must attack even more strongly and more often, and not allow them to regain their

strength. We are now capable of pushing the enemy back step-by-step, winning partial victories, and eventually winning total victory. The puppet regime cannot hold out beyond the 1975-1976 dry season." Bay Cuong concluded that "The enemy is undergoing an all-round crisis that is also affecting the central regime, not merely just one aspect or a certain area. The puppets will decline at an increasingly greater rate, like a truck going downhill, and there is a possibility that that rate will suddenly increase. We still have deficiencies and weaknesses, but we are capable of overcoming them and are in the process of doing so. We are winning a big victory even during the current rainy season. We are capable of making good preparations for the coming dry season. We estimate that we can complete the national democratic revolution in 1976. The year 1976 will present an extremely important opportunity. But 1975 must be the pivotal year; only if we endeavor to win victories that year can we create conditions for winning a decisive victory in 1976. We say 1975, but in fact the decisive period will be the 1974-1975 dry season. It is necessary to fully grasp the spirit of the dry season plan discussed by COSVN and the Regional Military Party Commission, fully explain the significance and contents of the dry season from top to bottom, and understand that this year's dry season plan is a closely coordinated campaign plan encompassing all the military regions--the Military Region 6 to Military Region 9--both the main-force and local troops, and the rural, jungle-and-mountains, and urban areas. It must be coordinated very harmoniously. This time, more than at previous times, we have a plan for coordinating, discussing and carefully preparing, from top to bottom, and in both the military and the party echelons. We are determined to win a big victory. Thus the leadership and guidance of COSVN and the Regional Military Party Commission must be tight during this year's dry season. There must be close coordination between the party committee echelons and the equivalent military echelons in guidance and command. We must do a truly good job of carrying out the dry season plan, while also preparing to develop strongly if the situation develops in our favor. We must try to win the greatest, most timely victory in 1975."

During that COSVN meeting we also discussed the eventuality of the situation developing rapidly and the puppet army and regime collapsing earlier than we had foreseen, especially if there occurred a military-political development in Saigon itself. In such an event the B2 theater would, by itself, have to launch the final attack on the enemy's headquarters lair and conclude the war, and must not fail to take advantage of such an opportunity. I reported to COSVN that we would go all-out to step up the development of local armed forces and guerrillas, and have the localities intensify the development of revolutionary mass forces in order to prepare for such an opportunity. But with regard to main-force units the B2 theater was still very weak, and lacked both the infantry and the technical combat arms to fulfill such a difficult mission. I recommended that the Military Commission of the party Central Committee immediately assign the B2 theater three or four divisions so that we could insure success in that final battle. From the point of view of the possible development of the situation, the strategic line, our method of organizing, deploying and using forces, and the position and role of the B2 theater, sending us three or four additional divisions during that phase would have been entirely rational. I reported in outline our plan for attacking Saigon and spoke of the necessity for those additional main-force units.

After discussing the situation the comrades in COSVN agreed unanimously and decided to request those forces from the central echelon immediately. But so that those divisions could reach our theater in time we would request the central echelon to assign those units on a rotational basis, i.e. send divisions from the Central Highlands to the B2 theater, then send replacement units from the Tri Thien theater to the Central Highlands, and so forth, until a sufficient number of units were deployed on the battlefield. By doing so we could reduce the time required to move the units.

COSVN and the Regional Military Party Commission reported our plan to the Central Committee and its Military Commission, and recommended that the Political Bureau convene a meeting of representatives of all theaters to discuss a unified plan for all of South Vietnam during that phase.

The 1974-1975 dry season plan approved by COSVN was in fact a plan to prepare for a general offensive and uprising in the B2 theater, a plan to create conditions for advancing to winning victory to end the war in that key theater. Therefore, it had to be based on the preparation in advance of a plan for a general offensive and uprising throughout the B2 theater. In fact, we had nurtured that contingency plan for a long time beginning with the preparation and execution of the General Offensive and General Uprising of Tet Mau Than [1968]. During decades of combat in that theater, first against France and then against the United States, our military cadres had practically memorized each terrain feature, village, river and canal. We also fully understood our enemy and their capability to defend and respond in each period. More importantly, we fully grasped our party's leadership line in that war. We attacked the enemy by both military forces and political forces. Parallel military and political efforts would inevitably lead to a completely victorious general offensive and general uprising. Unanimously approving of and confident in that leadership line, we were always certain that the time would come when we absolutely had to carry out a general offensive and general uprising. Therefore, after the adoption of party Central Committee Resolution No 9 in 1963, a resolution which delineated that line very clearly, we in the theater that included Saigon-Gia Dinh, the capital of the puppet regime, continually thought about how the general offensive and general uprising should be carried out. In 1964 the B2 theater delineated five lines of attack on Saigon, then organized the Saigon Special Zone into subzones 1, 2, 3, 4 and 5 for the purpose of organizing and deploying forces and direct the general offensive and general uprising of Tet Mau Than. During that time we selected the objectives inside and outside the city, and organized appropriate types of forces to combine attacking from inside out to attacking from outside in. Tet Mau Than was an extremely valuable practical experience. Every day the war was developed by the use of many different forms and scales was also a day which further enriched our thought and provided us with additional experience. Now we were standing in the threshold of a second general offensive and uprising in Saigon and all over the B2 theater. Having mulled it over in our minds for many years, we had little difficulty in drafting a plan for Saigon and all of the B2 theater to serve as a basis for the 1975 dry season plan.

It was not a plan to launch a general counteroffensive against the enemy troops from a certain front, as in a regular war. We would not use exclusively

military forces--powerful main-force corps--to wipe out the enemy and chase them from the Central Highlands, or advance from Quang Tri to Thua Thien, Quang Nam, and Da Nang, then down to Saigon, then pursue the enemy to Cau Mau, Con Son, Phu Quoc, etc. Indeed, we would be incapable of doing so even if we wanted to, and it would be dangerous to do that if we were capable of doing so, for there was the danger that the enemy would gradually draw in their troops to form an enclave in a certain area and then, with the support of superior U.S. air and naval power, counterattack. The "Gavin Plan" had called for such a strategic enclave in the Mekong Delta. Gavin was a well-known U.S. general who came to Saigon in 1972, when the Americans and puppets were being knocked about and were being heavily defeated from Quang Tri to eastern Nam Bo. Against that background, is recommended a strategy of gradual retrenchment and withdrawal if the puppet forces were defeated. The last area to be defended would be My Tho-Vinh Long-Can Tho. He reasoned that the Mekong Delta was a manpower pool, the source of sustenance for Saigon, and the heartbeat of the "capital." The Mekong Delta would be a place for consolidating forces and aiding Saigon. There it would be possible to strengthen defensive forces and create the capability to counterattack the enemy under even the worst possible conditions. He remembered the lesson learned when puppet troops were sent from My Tho to save Ngo Dinh Diem in a certain year. He also thought that the Mekong Delta, which fronted the sea and Con Son, Tho Chu, Phu Quoc, and other islands, afforded a strong position and would facilitate the entry of U.S. forces from the Pacific. The ways the colonialists viewed things differed very little. In 1946, a directive sent to the D'Argenlieu, the French High Commissioner in Indochina, Moutet, the French minister for overseas colonies, stressed that: "Cochin China is the true focal point of our overall policy in Indochina. We must succeed, and succeed rapidly, in Cochin China because the future of the presence depends almost entirely on our victory or defeat there." D'Argenlieu also had the viewpoint that "Cochin China is the key to the Indochinese Federation in the French Union. If the authority of France is consolidated there, the Indochinese Federation in the French Union will become a reality." "The importance of Cochin China must never be forgotten. It will be the long-range foundation of the Indochinese Federation and the foundation of our influence."

Nguyen Van Thieu vehemently opposed Gavin's plan and thought that it was stupid and a surrender to the "Viet Cong." But that was a time when Thieu thought that he was still firmly in power and relied on the strong supporting pillar of the United States. But now that his tenure was no longer secure, was not the Gavin plan the best solution? The Western Press commented that "With a population of about 10 million in the Mekong Delta, could not Nguyen Van Thieu be the president of a Southeast Asian country with an area of about 60,000 square kilometers?"

But we had thought all that out before Gavin, as well as possibilities Gavin hadn't thought of.

*According to documents of the Historical Office of the Military Science Department.

From the very beginning, our party adopted a strategic plan of a marvelous general offensive and general uprising of a revolutionary people's war developed to a high degree. We attacked the enemy by means of military forces organized in many appropriate forms, combined with mass uprisings, on both a small scale and a large scale, in all areas: the jungle-and-mountains area, the lowland rural area and the urban area. In view of the fact that the enemy had complete superiority in the air, at sea, and on the rivers and canals, had modern weapons and facilities, could move rapidly by helicopter on all kinds of terrain, and had strong firepower, our principal forces were those deployed on the spot. Everywhere there were revolutionary forces, so everywhere the enemy troops went they were attacked by both military forces and mass political forces, by large forces and by small, elite forces, and by visible forces as well as by invisible forces. Even our main-force units fought only mobile warfare, but they remained within certain areas and cooperated closely with the local forces. There were no main-force units that operated all over the theater and apart from the localities. Our superiority was that the localities were very decisive in nature, but all the localities were united very closely from the central level. Did not Tet Mau Than in 1968 demonstrate that? On the same day, at a signal given by the central level, hundreds of cities, and thousands of villages and enemy objectives were attacked fiercely, to the point that the enemy troops, so much so that the enemy troops didn't know where to turn, and had no place to which to withdraw or retreat. The enemy were dizzy in Vietnam and even in the United States. Such was our miraculous speed, miraculous speed which encompasses a vast space in a short period of time, miraculous speed in combat activities, in campaigns, and more important in a strategic phase, in a method of concluding a war. Don't think of miraculously rapid attacks merely in terms of large, mobile units traveling long distances, for if you do you can't understand the actual situation.

Firmly grasping those strategic viewpoints, throughout the 1974 rainy season COSVN and the Regional Military Party Commission went all-out in monitoring the localities and in supervising them in rapidly developing their military and political forces, and in creating position and strength, so that each place could expand its liberated area. In October 1974, COSVN issued a directive which stressed that "villages must liberate villages, districts must liberate district, and provinces must liberate provinces, throughout the B2 theater." The introduction of that immortal action slogan, based on the strategic viewpoint of combining offensive and uprising and on the actual developments on the battlefield, at that time created a terrible strength. The B2 theater's 1974-1975 dry season plan was based on the assumptions that B2 itself would have to carry out a general offensive and uprising in Saigon and that each military region and province would have to take care of their own battlefield needs without waiting on forces from the upper echelon, but cooperate closely in a common plan with regard to objectives and time, under the leadership of the central echelon. The contingency plan for a general offensive and uprising throughout the B2 theater was drafted on the basis of the following important factors:

First of all, it was necessary not to push the enemy back from one line of resistance to another, and not to allow them to withdraw into strategic enclaves in any area, in Saigon, in the Mekong Delta, or even on the islands in the South