

VIETNAM - WAR
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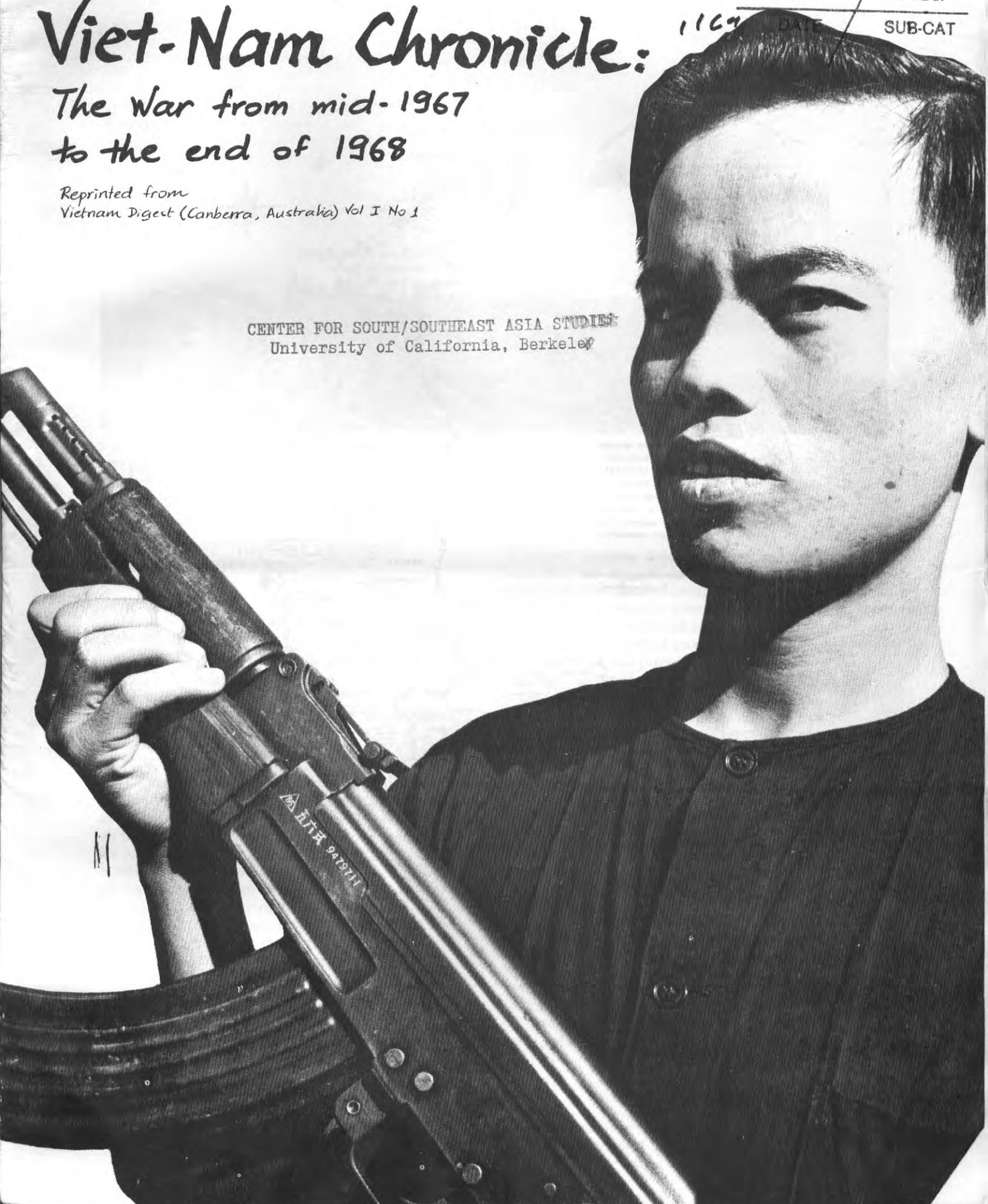
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Viet-Nam Chronicle:

The War from mid-1967
to the end of 1968

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CENTER FOR SOUTH/SOUTHEAST ASIA STUDIES
University of California, Berkeley



LEGEND

- + - INTERNATIONAL BOUNDARY
 - - - PROVINCE BOUNDARIES
 - - DISTRICT BOUNDARIES
 (◎) NATIONAL CAPITAL
 (◎) AUTONOMOUS CITIES
 (●) PROVINCIAL CAPITAL OR CHIEF TOWN
 (○) OTHER IMPORTANT COMMUNITIES
 (◆) DISTRICT HEADQUARTERS

Scale 1:1,000,000





THE STATE OF THE STRUGGLE

A REVIEW OF THE PAST EIGHTEEN MONTHS IN VIETNAM

Week by week, even month by month, it is extraordinarily difficult to discern trends in the Vietnam war. The fighting seems, by any short-term perspective, to lull and intensify, to shift in location and character without apparent logic or system. Day by day press reports become largely meaningless, little more than reminders that the sordid business of fighting goes on.

It seems to us that events in 1968 are almost inexplicable without an explanation of events in the third quarter of 1967. It looks as though this period will one day in retrospect be judged a turning point. Allied intelligence is absolutely firm on the fact that there was an important change in command on the communist side, during these months. Looking back at events since, there certainly seems to have been a change in strategy. And there was certainly a change in the context of the struggle.

Taking that point first, the political context was considerably changed by the national elections in South Vietnam.

Whatever marginal fiddling there may have been the vast assemblage of pressmen and observers, foreign and local, testified that — in broad — the results were genuine. (1) The Government did after all have sufficient administrative control to muster a respectable proportion of the population in a vote (around 70 per cent of the voting population registered, and 60 per cent actually voted). It was a de-facto Government. And it was able to convincingly demolish a central plank of communist propaganda, namely that the National Liberation Front was the "sole, authentic representative of the South Vietnamese people". Eighty-three per cent of voters (just over 50 per cent of the voting-age population) cast their ballots for presidential candidates supporting continued prosecution of the war and opposing concessions to the communists. Seventeen per cent voted for the dovish Truong Dinh Dzu, who said he favored talks with the NLF.

Of the 40 per cent of people of voting-age who didn't vote, about a half probably couldn't be bothered, being too lazy or failing to understand the system. The other half were in strongly communist controlled areas, where the Government was unable to

organize electoral facilities. It can be assumed that at the very minimum a third of those who live under communist administration in South Vietnam would — if able — vote non-communist, and so it is impossible to argue that the communists have the uncoerced support of more than a quarter of the South Vietnamese people. On realistic, rather than maximum assumptions, that proportion is probably closer to one-eighth.

So the elections were important in demonstrating the root strength of the anti-communist cause and in conferring legitimacy on the Government. The communists recognized the threat this posed to their political claims, and they launched a "counter-offensive" in the form of an "Extraordinary Congress", allegedly held in "a liberated area" of South Vietnam. Out of this came a revised "Political Program". It was the first complete revision since the formation of the Front eight years earlier and it was announced with great fanfare just two days before South Vietnam's presidential elections. (2) Right at the beginning of the new "concrete policies" of the NLF was listed the objective of "free general elections, to elect the national assembly in a really democratic way", a telling indication of the political advantage the Government was gaining by subjecting itself to the trial of the vote.

The third quarter of 1967 was also a critical turning point in communist strategy. "Tong Cong Kich / Tong Khoi Nghia" became the new theme words in internal communist indoctrination. They have been translated as "General Offensive/General Uprising", and their adoption as the guiding principle of communist strategy was to set the pattern of struggle for twelve months ahead. The objective of a "decisive victory in the shortest possible time" seems to have been favored in preference to the "protracted war" doctrine by some men in the North Vietnamese leadership from as early as mid-1966, soon after the US buildup got seriously under way. Lao Dong Party First Secretary Le Duan in a letter (3) to the Viet Cong leader in the South, General Nguyen Chi Thanh wrote at that time that "tremendous efforts are to be made to obtain decisive victory within a relatively short period of time". Thanh himself, having an intimate knowledge of the real military

situation his troops faced, was more realistic. Speaking at the Fourth Congress of COSVN (the Party-Army-NLF directorate in the South) he said: "We must try by all means to take the offensive position". And though he indulged in the usual general bragging which is a morale-building ritual, his specific recommendations were modest and prudent, for example: "To win victories we must first of all correctly understand the balance of forces. It is difficult to understand the balance of forces, but it is all the more difficult to organize to change this balance of forces. For instance, we must clearly understand how many soldiers we need, what the increase in (food) production is to be, and how many more guerillas we must recruit . . .". (4) The COSVN Four Resolution which set the pattern of fighting between

April 1966 and mid-1967 was a strange mixture of protracted-war and decisive-victory doctrines, but in the event the former orthodox line prevailed. COSVN Five in February 1967 saw the doctrinal balance move towards abandonment of the protracted-war model: "we must take advantage of every opportunity to accelerate our victory. The sooner victory comes, the less blood will be shed". There were several references to a "general uprising" with the prescription that: "The people should be motivated to revolt. They should feel that the time for revolution is imminent and that it will be 'now or never' ". There was frequent mention of the aim of "coalition government", which might have "a few (non-communist) notables at the top", but which would have the Party "as its core", thereby leading "the revolution to the final objective". (5) But again this further doctrinal movement does not appear to have been reflected in any change in the actual conduct of the military and political struggle.

Some reports (6) have it that a decisive event was the visit of Chinese and Cuban military experts to the South in March 1967 and their pessimistic report on the battlefield situation to the Northern authorities. Anyway, shortly after this the Central Committee of the Lao Dong Party approved a major Resolution on the war in the South (Number 13) which explicitly rejected protracted-war and ordered the adoption of decisive-victory.

There may have been some resistance to this by the commanders in the South because

no change happened until August. It may be entirely coincidental but the final adoption of decisive-victory and its translation into practice in the form of the plan for General Offensive/General Uprising did not come until the death of the southern commander General Nguyen Chi Thanh: July 6.

Hanoi claimed he died from a heart attack, Washington that he may have been got by B-52 strikes on COSVN. It is not impossible he was liquidated. In any case the death of this 53 year-old four-star general was of great significance. He was the only four-star apart from Defence Minister Vo Nguyen Giap himself; he had served in the North Vietnamese Army as Vice-Chief of Staff and then as Vice-Minister of Defence in the early 60s and he was a member of the Central Committee of the Lao Dong Party in Hanoi. After a period in charge of NVA units in central Vietnam (on either side of the DMZ), he took command of COSVN in 1965. Filling two positions of commander of the VC Liberation Army, and chief political officer, he was able to dominate the whole COSVN-Party-NLF-VC network. After his death, Thanh's job was split and given to two more junior generals, and it can be assumed that the pattern of military operations were then conducted more directly from Hanoi, probably with Defence Minister Giap a key figure. (7)

The prudent guerilla-mobile warfare of General Thanh was cut back as preparations were made for the General Offensive/General Uprising. Mainforce units were moved back into deep mountain or border sanctuaries, emphasis shifted to small-unit and terror operations. Southern recruits were directed mainly into regional force and guerilla units, while infiltration from the North was doubled — from around 5,000 or 6,000 to over 10,000 a month. Giap, Trinh and Le Duan, the three highest Politburo members after Ho and PM Dong, travelled to Moscow and then Peking in October to negotiate the supply of modern armaments which would be required for the "Winter-Spring campaign". Improved internal security and intensified indoctrination produced a sharp drop-off in defections: from as high as 1,000 a week previously to as low as 150 a week.

Compassion & Help

Greater efforts were made in the political field than ever before. Maximum publicity was given to a long new Political Program offered by the NLF, promising everything from sexual equality, religious freedom and social services through to severe punishment for diehard cruel agents of imperialism, all under the aegis of a "national union" coalition government. A mass of lecture notes, instructional documents and leaflets from the September to December period (8) are now available which indicate the character of the intense political indoctrination which was attempted. "Clearly Understand the New Situation and Mission: Take Advantage of Victories and Surge Forward to Completely Defeat the US and Puppet Enemy" was the title of one basic study paper, which was distributed in a variety of forms, one of which was on first glance a Buddhist tract, by a Venerable Thich Minh Tam and titled "Compassion and Help to the Masses of Human Beings". "It has become urgent" the tract said "to secure great victories in a relatively short period of time". Sub-titled "Study material on the new situation and mission, for low-level cadres, Party members, and the sympathetic masses who are the target of the Party's development" it defined an immediate fighting objective as "suppressing the aggressive will of the US aggressors and forcing them to withdraw their troops totally and recognize the key role of the NLF in a broad coalition regime".

This was to be achieved in three ways: by "destroying a large part of a US combat force" in a Dien Bien Phu style psychologically-shattering tactical defeat; "destroy and disintegrate the main body of the puppet army to such an extent that it ceases to be a force on which the US imperialists can rely" and so that "it can no longer maintain the reactionary political regime of the US henchmen in the South under any circumstances"; and third "vigorously push our armed and political struggle" and "arouse the masses in the cities".

There was admitted to be a high degree of inter-dependence involved in the effort: "Only by carrying out the three tasks above can we create a revolutionary situation, i.e., a situation in which the US imperialists and

puppet troops will be weakened in all fields and no longer be able to carry on their aggressive war nor maintain the yoke over the South Vietnamese people as before, while our people of the South will be increasingly resolved to stand up and overthrow the enemy". The idea was to "surge forward, riding on our victorious momentum to win final victory". This was the "thời-cơ", the "time opportunity" literally, evidently better translated as the "historically decisive moment", an opportunity to be grasped because it might never return.

Northerners predominate

Military preparations proceeded. In November for the first time, northerners outnumbered southerners in the communist regular forces inside South Vietnam, and reliance upon rapid-fire Russian designed weapons became complete. Actions were initiated in remote border positions at Dak To, Loc Ninh, and Song Be and at Con Thien and last Khe Sanh on the DMZ, and by ordering their troops to stand and fight in contrast to the usual hit-and-run tactic, these were developed into major battles with American forces. They seemed to have had a first objective of developing a Dien Bien Phu-type defeat in a position remote from allied resupply and reinforcement but close to the bases and sanctuaries of the communists across the border. In this they failed. But they at least partially succeeded in their secondary objective of further scattering allied troop strength by drawing them away from the cities and bases and from the populated paddy-land through which the city-attackers had to pass on route.

Peace and happiness

To gain maximum surprise, activity on the "peace front" was escalated. Overtures were made through communist allies and neutrals, and North Vietnamese Foreign Minister Trinh by a tense-change in the North Vietnamese position on talks. They "would" start if the bombing stopped, whereas before they "could" have started. A truce was called for "Tet", the annual lunar new year holiday for festivities, family reunion and

religious celebration. Liberation Radio broadcast: "The armed forces of the NLF accept the responsibility of protecting our fellow-citizens so that they can celebrate Tet in peace and happiness . . ." To every communist unit was circulated an "order of the Day" which read: "Move forward to final victory. The Tet greeting of Chairman Ho is a combat order for our entire Army and people. In compliance with the attack order of the Presidium of the central committee of the Liberation Front, all cadres and combatants of the Liberation Armed Forces should move forward to: carry out direct attacks on all headquarters of the enemy; disrupt the US imperialists will for aggression; and smash the puppet army and government. Restore power to the people; completely liberate the 14 million people of South Vietnam. Fulfil our revolutionary task of establishing democracy throughout the whole country. This will be the greatest battle ever fought in the history of this country . . . The Mekong is moving . . . The final victory will be ours".

The surprise element worked.

The allied failure to anticipate, and the shock of the Tet attack when it came on January 30, appears in retrospect attributable less to inadequate tactical intelligence or poor generalship than to a deeper shortcoming: an inability on our side to comprehend the thinking of the Northern leadership. For all the documents being turned up which revealed a "General Offensive/General Uprising", there was not the collective imagination, the political analysis or historical knowledge to guess just what the communists were up to. It was thought that the North Vietnamese leadership was firmly in the Maoist mould, practicing a staged-protracted rural war, according to which the cities would "fall like ripe apples" once the countryside was won. "Khoi Nghia" or the General Uprising of the people, was dismissed as no more than a subsidiary tactic of the communists to make diversionary trouble, propaganda and build troop morale. The US Mission in Vietnam treated it contemptuously: "a social myth, in the Sorelian sense, probably traceable to the myth of the General Strike . . . the revolutionary consciousness of villagers would be developed until one golden morning when all the villages of the country would unite in a general uprising . . .

Khoi Nghia as the main route to power was (in 1963) abandoned . . ." (9)

But the Vietnamese communist leadership is as old and experienced as the Chinese, and they are as familiar with the urban warfare of Eastern Europe as they are with Chinese style revolutionary peasant fighting in the countryside. And when they spoke of General Uprising/General Offensive they were thinking in terms of something much more concrete than a "golden morning". One of the three leading North Vietnamese theoreticians and a hardliner who might have been thought likely to move into the ascendancy in a time of difficulty, Truong Chinh, had written quite clearly of the final stage as he saw it (10): "in the last decisive phase, our troops concentrate rapidly and actively launch planned lightning attacks on the cities and enemy positions to encircle and annihilate them. In brief, we throw all our forces throughout the country into the battle to crush the enemy completely and win back the whole of our territory! The machinery of enemy rule temporarily set up in our country is smashed to pieces by our army

and people, and at the bottom of the scrap-heap of that machinery lie the rotten corpses of the puppet traitors. This third stage is relatively the shortest, but it is also the most victorious and valiant".

Except in Hue, the plan came nowhere near realization. In Hue the communist troops and cadres were able to stay long enough to kill off most of the existing civil administration and other community leaders, producing some 2,000 "rotten corpses" and smashing to pieces the "machinery of enemy rule". Only now almost a year later is a government administration being restored and new community leaders appearing.

But elsewhere the assault which was concentrated on South Vietnamese defended points — Saigon and province capital towns — was quite quickly repulsed. The first phase of a 100,000 man offensive against 40 cities is simply too complex an operation to be described in terms like victory or failure. But as a decisive blow to start off a general offensive and uprising it was without question a costly failure, for only in one city (Hue) did it even begin to work. The best allied estimate six months



after is that 20,000 communists died in the Tet week, a very large proportion of them "irreplacables", experienced indigenous southern cadres and commanders. The political "infrastructure" surfaced and more were caught than during all the previous years of the struggle.

COSVN froze the Saigon assault within two days, realizing its takeover plans were not realizable, and from then on communist units in the city reverted to purposeless and disorganized street fighting and terrorism, while those reinforcements moving in were halted close in around the capital with the sole aim of cutting land communications with the countryside. The South Vietnamese Army, which the assaults were supposed to "disintegrate", mostly fought well: the critical American high command reporting to Washington privately that of the 134 battalions of ARVN only 8 fought "badly", 24 were "outstanding" and the rest did "well". (11)

There appear to have been no delusions of success at COSVN, as this assessment of shortcomings" shows: "We failed to seize a number of primary objectives and to completely destroy mobile and defensive units of the enemy. We also failed to hold the occupied areas. In the political field we failed to motivate the people to stage uprisings and to break the enemy oppressive control . . . Since we did not succeed in completely destroying many units at the very start, nor did we closely coordinate offensive with uprising and troop proselytizing, the enemy still resisted and his units were not disrupted into pieces". (12)

But if the primary object of a "decisive blow" was not attained, there were a number of important secondary successes. The most notable was in propaganda. Dissenters from western policy and skeptics in the mass media of the west were able to present the penetration of cities and the sheer scale of the Tet undertaking, plus the incompleteness of the allied military response as a great victory for the communists. Their manpower losses as reported by allied authorities seemed so large as to be incredible, and were simply dismissed by many commentators as ridiculous. Within South Vietnam however the propaganda benefit lay on balance with the Government. The communists had made their great effort and

failed; they had apparently thrown everything into a climactic assault and been beaten. In virtually every town of the country, communist troops had come beflagged and proclaiming liberation and they died or beat a dismal retreat. And the atrocities — live burials, mass shootings and fatal clubbings — committed by the liberators of Hue during their four week occupation was a disastrous political failure. Veteran Vietnam correspondent, Beverly Deepe reported: "The political shockwaves of the communist massacres in Hue spread throughout Vietnam in a miniaturized version of the world's reaction to the Russian invasion of Czechoslovakia". (13)

Another secondary success was in forcing allied units to withdraw to the defence of the towns and bases, weakening security in the countryside. Approximately half the revolutionary development teams left their villages and nearly as large a proportion of the Vietnamese battalions engaged in pacification support. First allied assessments suggested the rural withdrawal had created a nearly disastrous situation there, and these were the basis for reports that pacification was in "ruins" (though interestingly those reporters who had previously been the most vigorous in disputing allied claims of countryside control, were most adept after Tet in finding great 'setbacks'). Fortunately the communists were unable to capitalize on the rural withdrawal over wide areas of the country. The allies left a vacuum but the enemy was unable to fill it. The Hamlet Evaluation System reveals that communist control increased slightly, from about 15 to 17 per cent of the population, and government control fell more seriously: from 67 percent to 59 percent. The number of hamlets with neither side in a position of predominant control rose sharply, for a time. Surprisingly perhaps the government infrastructure and nationalist leadership did not suffer greatly in the villages. Such effort was evidently concentrated in the urban assault that the villages generally had to be left alone.

Following the quick failure of the attack into Saigon, communist troops withdrew into a tight ring around the capital, aiming first to cut it from its rural hinterland, and second to prepare for a further penetration of the city,

scheduled for February 18. This follow-up attack was however very weak, and though the same 50 cities as at Tet were chosen as targets, most were merely subjected to mortar harrassment, and only in half a dozen cases were there ground assaults. The greatest success was in effecting a jail break at Phan Thiet. Communist troops remained close to the cities in relatively exposed positions and eventually allied sweep operations got under way. They took terrible communist casualties, about 60,000 having been killed by the end of March.

But the North was introducing men into the South at a rate of about 20,000 a month, and together with local recruitment of about 3,000 to 4,000, communist troop numbers were maintained. There was however some shift in distribution, Corps Zone I (the five northern provinces) and Corps Zone III (the twelve provinces around Saigon) gaining at the expense of Zone II (Highlands) and Zone IV (the delta).

Palace Guard

At the peak of their concentration in I Corps there were as many as eight North Vietnamese divisions (70,000 regulars) in Central Vietnam, including the Hanoi "Palace Guard" 308 Division. But by the end of March it became clear that this effort in submerging the area through sheer weight of numbers could not succeed against American airpower. By early April the four division siege of the small outpost at Khe Sanh had collapsed. Having suffered perhaps 10,000 killed to bombs and artillery, the North Vietnamese withdrew in disorder leaving behind vast quantities of equipment.

Late in the month preparations being under way for a second wave of attacks on the cities, defections among demoralized communist troops rose (they had been falling from July 1967 to March 1968). Most valuable of these defectors was Colonel Tran Van Dac, in charge of the Regional Political Staff who handed over to the allies the complete plans for the next attack on Saigon. Originally scheduled for April 22, it was postponed to May 5 and lasted two weeks. Up to 30 battalions were involved, a few more than at Tet, but only about 1,000 of the 20,000 communist troops got inside Saigon and the second wave offensive into the cities petered out more quickly than the first. For

the next six weeks they worked on the heavily populated hinterland around the capital on a 50km radius, with an inner ring of units at 10 to 15 kilometers to harrass communications and launch rockets into Saigon. The main effect of this activity was to create 300,000 new refugees and make the life of civilians miserable. Allied military losses were negligible. Losing men at a rate of at least 10,000 a month this "close-in" activity could not be maintained. So late June, early July there was a major withdrawal of mainforce units into deep sanctuaries, many over the border in Laos and Cambodia. Then followed the famous "lull" in fighting, which was not broken until mid-August. By this time the allies had regained most of the losses of rural control they suffered at Tet, though a primary aim of allied policy remained protection of the cities.

The first communist move in the third wave was to initiate fighting along the western borders, at Tay Ninh city and at small special forces camps further north, the attempt evidently being principally to draw allied troops away from other defensive positions, which could then be attacked as targets of created opportunity. In every case air support was all that the local defenders required to repulse North Vietnamese attacks. The pressure also increased around Danang and other centres in central Vietnam, in the delta and around Saigon. Two attempts were made to get the 5th and 9th Viet Cong divisions towards the capital but in both cases heavy bombing caused retreats. In the many hundred actions, most quite small, between the launching of the third-wave in mid-August and its fizzle-out at the end of September 20,000 communists died.

Main force units withdrew during October into Cambodia, Laos and North Vietnam, a key factor in inducing the complete halt to the bombing on North Vietnam. There is also evidence from mid-October that the North Vietnamese leadership realized the futility of its 1968 tactic of attempting to operate in heavily populated areas and attack cities, and that it decided to abandon for the time being at least the general offensive/general uprising strategy initiated at Tet. The clearest signal of this came in a major speech (14) by the second ranking member of the Hanoi



Politburo, Truong Chinh in late September: "At times, under certain circumstances, we must shift to the defensive to gain time, dishearten the enemy, and build up our own forces for a new offensive". The 40,000-word speech had plenty of the familiar rhetoric about the inevitability of communist victory, but general offensive/general uprising hardly rated a mention, and there were several references to the need for strategic flexibility. Party tactics "have varied depending on the high tide or the ebb tide" an analogy hardly suggesting decisive victory soon. Engels is later quoted to the effect that "Mass uprisings, revolutionary warfare and guerilla groups everywhere, constitute the only formula which enables a small nation to defeat a big nation, and a weak army to resist a much stronger and better organized army". And more specifically in reference to the present struggle a climatic passage towards the end of this marathon speech urges: "We must clearly see the schemes and tricks of the enemy and our people's great tasks and potentialities, always uphold vigilance, overcome pacifist ideas, and grasp the motto of 'Long drawn-out fight and relying mainly on one's self'".

Protracted war again

If protracted self-reliant guerilla warfare is indeed to become the new theme then this will be the most radical change in the struggle

since the decision to introduce regular North Vietnamese formations in 1964. Just as that decision necessitated the American response of importing its regular units, so a reversion to indigenous guerillaism on the part of the enemy would allow the American contribution to the defence of South Vietnam to revert to a support and advisory effort. But so far at least this is rather lightly based speculation.

What we do know as a matter of clearly ascertainable fact is that the communist military capability is weakening. The balance of strength is running in favor of the southern Government and its allies. On the battlefield this is indicated by the diminishing effectiveness of the successive waves of the general offensive/general uprising of 1968. Communist troop strength is numerically as high as ever, for horrendous casualties have been met by simply putting more and more young North Vietnamese onto the trails toward the South. 1968 will end with 150,000 to 200,000 North Vietnamese having been sent south, an infiltration greater than during all the previous years of struggle put together. But the communist troop strength having been maintained — even slightly increased — quantitatively, has deteriorated in quality. Even lumping in active guerillas and infrastructure, it is now more northern than southern in composition, therefore less indigenous and familiar with the geographic and social terrain of the country. It is less experienced in varied types of fighting, less fit and well trained as standards of

recruitment have been relaxed and training periods shortened, and less dedicated as the northern recruitment authorities rely on minority groups like the catholics who have a history of dissidence. The communist troop body is also both younger and older than it used to be, as the number of men of ideal military age (18 to 30) are consumed. It is better armed (even para-military units mostly carry AK-47 automatic Chinese weapons) but correspondingly more dependent on a long and complex logistics network, and more susceptible to interdiction.

Defending South Vietnam is greater military strength than ever before. Mid-1968 saw general mobilization and an indigenous military force which is growing toward one million strength. Even the most cynical of reporters on the scene in South Vietnam says these days that the South Vietnamese Army is improving in military performance. With modern equipment this previously much maligned force could become one of the more powerful armies of the region. Supporting it are 600,000 allied troops. This number will almost certainly not be further increased; a rundown is more likely in view of the burden the US is carrying. But it is possible this can be done without impairing the overall military effectiveness of American support. To be blunt, the new US commander Abrams is much better than Westmoreland. He is following more closely the classic military dictum that indirect methods are superior to direct attack. In place of gigantic multi-regimental search-and-destroy operations, he is concentrating on improved intelligence and numerous, dispersed patrols to find targets. These can then be subject to firepower without risking and deploying such large numbers of American GIs. The helicopter gunship has come to replace the helicopter-transported platoon in many encounters. And the job of troops is more to search out and disrupt enemy logistics, than to kill: to pre-empt enemy attacks by picking up his cached supplies and destroy his prepared underground installations. In this context, the struggle at the village level becomes important again. If the cities and towns and military installations of the Government cannot be taken by the enemy, and if he loses in his attempts to destroy units of the South Vietnamese and allied armies, then the villages of the country become the battleground again. Here the losses of Tet have just about been

restored and reasonable security and Government control prevails over 70 percent of the population. Pacification, or the extension of Government control, is proceeding slowly and cautiously. An unprecedented assault is being made on the Viet Cong infrastructure, the Party and NLF organizational network, and some success is being claimed. The VCI is no doubt in severe trouble, having exposed itself in attempts to engineer the general uprisings of February and May, and operating rather overtly in current efforts to organize the semblance of democratic institutions in VC areas, by forming "revolutionary councils". It is in trouble too because of its increasingly blatant reliance on violence: rocket attacks on towns and assassinations of recalcitrant civilians this year have been on a completely new scale. A large number of VCI cadres have been lost having been placed in army units in efforts to maintain political coherence and morale.

The struggle against the communist organization is bound to be a very long and difficult one, but it will be crucial. For after all, the fighting is about who is to run the country: the communists or an elected, constitutionally-based Government.

(1) The author spent three weeks in Vietnam through the time of the election. (2) Texts of the NLF Political Program were released to newsmen in Hanoi on September 1. (3) Captured by the allies, spring 1967, the letter was dated summer 1966. (4) Cadre notebook found Thua Thien province early 1967, text released March 1967. (5) Translation US Mission 18 August 1967. (6) P. Honey, "The Offensive", China News Analysis No. 701, March 22, 1968. (7) Pike claimed this in "The 1968 Viet Cong Lunar - New Year Offensive", Saigon 14/2/68, mimeographed paper. (8) Documents on "Winter-Spring Campaign", released February 13, 1968, see also "Vietnam, Documents and Research Notes". (9) "A Study: Prospects for the Viet Cong", December 1966, Saigon. (10) Truong Chinh, "The Resistance Will Win", Hanoi, 1947, English Language version 1960. (11) Private information supplied to the author. (12) Joint Assessment by Current Affairs Committee of COSVN and Military Affairs Committee of Liberation Army, February 1968. (13) Christian Science Monitor, 15 September 1968. (14) "Let us be grateful to Karl Marx and follow the path traced by him", a 40,000 word speech to a conference of Lao Dong cadres, both northern and southern, convened by the Central Committee on the occasion of the 150th anniversary of Marx's birthday, broadcast on Hanoi domestic network and Liberation Radio, South Vietnam in serial form between 16 and 20 September 1968.

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