In other areas of Gia Dinh Province, fighting continued fiercely in the heavily populated areas. To uproot the enemy quickly, our forces had to employ airborne Ranger Delta teams which were thoroughly experienced in independent fighting and street combat. The relief process was slow and painful but effective.

By this time, however, the use of tactical air and artillery to support relief operations in Saigon had begun to incur some adverse opinion among the urban population about their destructive effect. To soothe popular sentiment, the newly designated prime minister, Mr. Tran Van Huong, issued instructions to the effect that our forces had to curtail the use of firepower in the densely populated suburbs.

In the area occupied by the Quyet Thang Regiment, our airborne units, abiding by the new orders, requested the use of riot control agents to dislodge enemy troops from their shelters. But the use of riot control agents in this area proved ineffective because as soon as it was released by our aircraft, prevailing winds immediately blew it away and sometimes back toward our lines. Our paratroopers, therefore, had to resort to night raids against enemy positions, a tactic which proved effective. Decimated by heavy losses after a few days of fighting the Quyet Thang Regiment asked for reinforcements from the Dong Nai Regiment. The reinforcements arrived but were intercepted and destroyed by an ARVN airborne battalion. Faced with the risk of complete annihilation, the Quyet Thang regimental commander left behind a battalion to fight a delaying action while he and the rest of the regiment tried to slip away. When this regiment reached the Bang Ky Bridge, it was intercepted by our marines and was forced to fall back in disorder to the Cay Thi Area and lost all chances of breaking through the tightening ARVN ring of troops. On 17 June, the deputy commander of the Quyet Thang Regiment, Senior Captain Pham Van Xuong, surrendered. He informed us that his regiment's strength was down to 230 but 110 among them were wounded.

Xuong's surrender was immediately exploited by our Psywar units. His appeal for surrender addressed to enemy troops was recorded on tape

and broadcast from circling aircraft. One by one, elements of what remained of the shattered Quyet Thang Regiment surfaced and surrendered. By 18 June, a total of 152 enemy troops had laid down their weapons and capitulated. This was by far the largest surrender the enemy had made to date. The remnants of this regiment were subsequently either tracked down and killed or captured. The Quyet Thang Regiment no longer existed in the enemy's order of battle. And with it, the enemy's offensive effort in northern Saigon also came to an end.

South of Saigon, in the Cho Lon area, the enemy's second surge of attacks broke out on 27 May, two days later than in Gia Dinh Province. Here the attacks were short-lived and ended on 7 June. They were conducted by two local force battalions of the enemy 3d Subdivision. The enemy's main effort in this area, like the first time, was against Phu Lam, a vital road junction connecting the Saigon-Cho Lon metropolitan area with the Mekong Delta via Route QL-4. As a result, traffic to and from the delta was temporarily suspended.

In this area, the enemy's tactic was to break down into small elements and occupy high-rise buildings and other civilian habitations. His main weapon was the B-40 rocket launcher. Each enemy soldier, therefore, had to carry one or two B-40 rounds in addition to his individual weapon and ammunition issue. The enemy committed only two battalions, but each battalion had been replenished to a full strength of 350. Before moving in for the attack, all enemy troops had been ordered to fight until the last man and not to withdraw regardless of the circumstances.

On the GVN side, defending forces at Phu Lam consisted of one Ranger battalion, two marine companies and national police forces. Spread as they were over this large area, they could not prevent the penetration of enemy forces, which succeeded with relative ease in occupying a new housing complex, Phu Lam A. A Ranger company counterattacked and successfully drove enemy troops off but was compelled to withdraw into adjacent city blocks because its strength was not sufficient to ensure effective defense of the complex. The enemy, therefore, came back and reoccupied the complex. By the time the entire Ranger batta-

lion had been assembled and deployed to retake Phu Lam A, the complex had been evacuated. Taking advantage of the dark, the enemy had penetrated deeper into Cho Lon.

A major tactical blunder committed by our forces here was their failure to cordon off the area occupied by enemy troops with a continuous security belt. Instead, they just posted a few security guard details around it. This allowed the enemy to move with ease, especially at night. As a result, an entire city block in downtown Cho Lon, to include its main thoroughfare, Boulevard Tong Doc Phuong, came under enemy control. Enemy troops immediately occupied high-rise buildings in the area and dug in for defense.

The battle for the relief of Cho Lon became painful and drawn-out. Our forces had to rely on tactical air and gunships to destroy enemy resistance nests lodged on the top floors of several buildings. In addition, they also used M-79 grenade launchers and 57-mm recoilless rifles to take on enemy weapon positions one by one and eventually inflicted quite serious losses on the enemy.

On 2 June, amidst the raging battle, a fatal accident occurred on our side which caused death to some key Vietnamese commanders making up the command of the relief operation in Cho Lon. Their headquarters was at the Thuong Phuoc High School. A salvo of rockets fired by a U.S. gunship struck this group of officers while they were observing the progress of the battle. Five among them died immediately to include Colonel Nguyen Van Luan, Saigon Police Chief, Colonel Dao Ba Phuoc, commander of the 5th Ranger Group, and the 5th Precinct Police Chief. The mayor of Saigon, Colonel Van Van Cua, and the military governor of Saigon, Colonel Nguyen Van Giam, also present among the group, were injured.

An investigation conducted by U.S. authorities later revealed that the firing accident was caused by technical mishaps. The rockets obviously misfired, and the fire angle was apparently too narrow to afford a good security margin. (The distance between the real target and where the group of officers stood was merely 200 m). The crooked minds of some Saigon politicians, however, refused to believe that it was just an

accident. They speculated that it was a deliberate American error designed to provide President Thieu with an opportunity to appoint those loyal to him to the key positions held by the deceased and injured officers, all appointees and confidants of Vice-President Ky.

In any event, the accident caused a two-day delay in the progress of relief operations. By the time a new commander was appointed and resumed control of operations, the enemy had been solidly entrenched in a Chinese restaurant, the famous Soai Kinh Lam, and our forces were unable to dislodge him. To quicken the relief, the new commander decided to call for armor support and the use of riot control agents. Equipped with gas masks, ARVN troops assaulted the enemy-occupied building after tear gas canisters had been thrown in. They rapidly overwhelmed enemy troops, who had nothing to protect themselves but wet towels. The Soai Kinh Lam Restaurant was retaken easily.

On 6 June, our communications intelligence units intercepted a message in which the enemy 3d Subdivision headquarters disapproved a request from local force units in Cho Lon to withdraw and promised them immediate reinforcements. Two ARVN Ranger companies were deployed to intercept enemy reinforcements at a point on their approach route.

During the night of 7 June, enemy troops disguised as marines and field police troopers and estimated at about a company's strength penetrated into the Kim Bien market area in Cho Lon. Almost immediately, they were surrounded by our forces. The enemy's effort to relieve his battered troops in Cho Lon ended in failure. Caught inside the ARVN noose, a few enemy elements chose to surrender. They were immediately employed to appeal to their comrades to cease fighting. First a group of 17 enemy troops surrendered followed by another group of 32, then by still other groups. Finally, both enemy battalions which penetrated Cho Lon and launched attacks for the last ten days were either captured, killed or surrendered.

A tally of enemy-related activities made after the end of Phase II clearly showed a sharp decline as compared to Phase I. During the first four days of Phase II, for example, there were only 52 enemy initiated infantry attacks, or just one half of the total recorded during the same period in Phase I (104). Of these attacks, only

6 were conducted at battalion level or above, as compared to 29 in Phase I.

In contrast, perhaps to compensate for this waning strength of infantry attacks, the enemy had substantially increased his attacks-by-fire during Phase II. There were 433 shellings reported across the country compared to just 268 for Phase I. The quantity of mortar shells and rockets expended during Phase II in these attacks-by-fire also increased more than twofold (10,369 as compared to 4,185).[1]

Of all infantry attacks the enemy initiated during Phase II, only those driven against Gia Dinh (north of Saigon) and Cho Lon were significant. In both places enemy actions differed with those conducted in Phase I in several aspects.

First, apparently to avoid great losses, enemy forces broke down into small elements and penetrated densely populated areas from which they initiated attacks. This was a marked departure from Phase I during which the enemy launched direct attacks against definite objectives and incurred heavy losses in the process. The lessons of Phase I were apparently well learned. By adhering to populated areas and moving from one place to another in case they could not hold on to any particular place, enemy forces had hoped to reduce the effectiveness of our tanks, artillery and tactical air. The effect of this tactic brought about extensive physical damage and casualties to the population, which induced their grievances and helped enemy propaganda.

Second, during Phase II, the enemy had considerably stepped up his propaganda activities in those areas he penetrated. Armed propaganda teams used loudspeakers to broadcast appeals to the population to rise up and participate in what they called a movement sponsored by the "National

[1]All statistical figures have been obtained from the files of Lt. General William E. Potts, former Assistant Chief of Staff for Intelligence, J-2, MACV (1969-1973) and Assistant Chief of Chief of Staff for Intelligence, G-2, U.S. Army Pacific (1967-1968).

Alliance for Peace and Democracy." Ten different kinds of leaflets were distributed by these teams, making the same kind of appeal. In the Cho Lon and Phu Dinh areas, VCI members searched houses and looked for GVN officials and military and police officers, whom they arrested and took away.

Third, no U.S. installations came under enemy attack during Phase II. This was perhaps a calculated move intended to achieve two things. By sparing U.S. installations, the enemy conveyed the idea that he was showing an attitude of goodwill toward peace negotiations and through this, hoped to gain some American sympathy. This move was also aimed at sowing more suspicion among the South Vietnamese population about a pre-arranged solution to the war, which the U.S. might conclude with the enemy behind their backs. Speculations on this subject had already poisoned public opinion since the beginning of the offensive and affected even some GVN officials and military officers.

The first surge of attacks in Phase II ended with about 4,000 homes destroyed by fire. Our forces suffered 210 killed, to include 67 Americans, and 979 wounded, to include 333 Americans.

All enemy infantry attacks ended by 12 May, but they were followed by the fiercest rocket attacks the enemy had ever unleashed against Saigon. The rocket attacks began on 19 May, apparently to commemorate Ho Chi Minh's birthday. The heaviest attacks took place in June when Saigon received incoming rockets for 12 consecutive days. During this period, to impart still more terror on the Saigon population, enemy propaganda announced that the shelling campaign would last 100 days with an intensity of at least 100 rockets per day. But this turned out to be just propaganda. Enemy rocket attacks on Saigon were not selective; because populated areas became frequent targets for such attacks. During the 12 consecutive days of rocket attacks in June, over 100 civilians were killed and in excess of 400 wounded.

The trauma of the Saigon population and the grievances occasioned by these rocket attacks were such that the GVN had to take certain

emergency measures aimed at protecting Saigon more effectively. The CMD command, which was responsible for this protection, was separated from III Corps control and placed under a newly-appointed military governor, Major General Nguyen Van Minh, who was regarded as thoroughly experienced in antishelling measures during the period he commanded the 21st Infantry Division in the Mekong Delta. General Minh immediately appointed a special committee in charge of protecting Saigon against enemy shellings. To increase patrol and surveillance activities along the Saigon rocket belt, CMD was authorized an additional six RF companies and the employment of the 81st Airborne Ranger Group. Particularly effective in night combat, the airborne Rangers were used in night patrol activities and to launch night attacks against enemy minibases near the rocket belt. Security measures within the CMD were also strengthened, and the new CMD commander was authorized to use all ARVN units located in the CMD for security purposes up to 50% of their strengths. All of these new measures greatly contributed to the improvement of security in Saigon and eventually curtailed enemy rocket attacks to a large extent.

The Offensive, Phase III

After the two phases of the offensive which took place during the first half of 1968, the Communists had incurred total losses amounting to 170,000 casualties and 39,800 weapons of all types.

This heavy toll seriously affected the morale of Communist troops and cadres in almost all units. A substantial number of enemy unit commanders had been killed or wounded; many others chose to rally to the GVN. High-ranking enemy cadres captured during the battles of Phase II, included Colonel Le Van Ngot, alias Ba Sinh, commander of the 5th Subdivision and also deputy commander, All-Subdivision Front, and Major Huynh Thanh Dong, Chief of Staff of the forward headquarters, 1st Subdivision. Those who rallied to the GVN included Colonel Phan Viet Dung, commander of the 165th Regiment, 7th Division, in addition to Colonel Tran Van Dac, who had defected during Phase I.

The enemy's propoganda apparatus, which had heretofore been considered effective, fell victim to an unexpected backlash. The outcome of the offensive thus far and the realities witnessed by enemy troops in South Vietnamese cities contrasted so much with Communist propoganda lines that the latter became outright lies. Southern enemy troops, for example, had been informed that they would receive an enthusiastic support from the urban population, which never materialized. NVA troops who were sent to the South to participate in the offensive had been led to believe that South Vietnam had been "liberated" and what remained for them to do was just go in and take over. The situation of South Vietnam had been represented to them as one of near-collapse in which the exploited population was chafing under repressions and deprivations, longing for the day of liberation. But what Communist troops really saw for themselves during the short period they came into contact with South Vietnamese urban civilization had struck them as beyond imagination. NVA troops in particular could not believe their eyes when confronted with the sophisticated amenities of westernized modern life. Their impression was one of awe and bewilderment.

Gradually, they came to suspect and disbelieve their own propaganda apparatus. Just as they were suffering from one defeat after another, for example, this apparatus continued to sing news of victory along with statistical results on "enemy" losses that had been so excessively falsified that even the most gullible Communist troops had to question their veracity. If it was true that all cities of South Vietnam had been liberated and if RVN and U.S. forces had been inflicted so many losses, enemy troops wondered why were they stilI required to participate in unending combat operations. The truth finally dawned on them that what they had been told was simply hollow propaganda. And for the devout Communist, this affected his morale most seriously.

The deterioration in troop morale and confusion among Communist ranks had reached such alarming proportions that COSVN had to issue a series of resolutions intended to educate and restore the shattered faith of the Communist rank-and-file. Resolution No. 6 was adopted and disseminated in March 1968; however, even three months later, it was

followed by Resolution No. 7. This came as a most unusual practice because resolutions were all important policy formulations usually effective for one to two years or more.

In view of their pressing nature, Resolutions Nos. 6 and 7 contained instructions which were usually issued for less important matters.

Resolution No. 7 was issued for the purpose of reiterating the enemy's view of the General Offensive-General Uprising campaign. This campaign, it was argued, was not a one-time offensive but consisted of several offensive phases, each phase overlapping with the next one and all conducted with growing intensity. Resolution No. 7 then emphasized the need for a third phase which was to be initiated in August. The date selected for the initiation of this phase was 19 August, the day the Viet Minh August Revolution took place 23 years earlier.

Despite COSVN's determination to proceed with Phase III, obviously our enemy had lost the capabilities to carry it out. By this time, all major enemy units had been driven out of the CMD. The enemy's 9th Division, the single major unit participating in Phase II attacks in Saigon, Hoc Mon and Ben Luc, had moved to the west of Tay Ninh Province toward border sanctuaries where it would have to lick its wounds and protect infiltration routes at the same time.

The enemy 7th Division, after several engagements with the 1st Australian Task Force in Binh My and after withdrawing one of its elements from battles north of Saigon during Phase II, had retreated into Hat Dich base, which straddled the common boundaries of Bien Hoa, Long Khanh and Phuoc Tuy Provinces. Its sister unit, the 5th Division, had also withdrawn into the Boi Loi area and War Zone D.

To muster more main force strength for his next effort, the enemy deployed the NVA 1st Division from the Central Highlands to III Corps area, where its first regiment was reported in late July. At the same time, local enemy forces belonging to the five subdivisions around Saigon were completely reorganized and upgraded into regiments through a combination of local and main force elements. Each subdivision was required to have one such regiment.

As to RVN and U.S. forces, their primary efforts during this period

against enemy rocket attacks had resulted in a combined effort taken up by the CMD and III Corps in cooperation and coordination with the U.S. II Field Force. The RVNAF also took advantage of this opportunity to implement a program of force structure expansion and modernization, which saw the activation of new units and the delivery of new weapons.

Tactically, the protection of Saigon became more and more effective as enemy shelling was sharply reduced. To ensure this protection, our forces conducted round-the-clock ground and air patrols, installed counter-battery radars in conjunction with a system of observation towers which covered the entire perimeter of Saigon and its immediate vicinity, and extensively used military dogs for the detection of enemy infiltrations. As a result of these activities, large numbers of 122-mm rockets were seized and the enemy was no longer able to preposition rockets around Saigon. Rocket attacks, therefore, sharply declined beginning in late June.

During this same period, ARVN and U.S. forces also expanded search-and-destroy operations around the cities and major bases, especially in III Corps area. The U.S. 1st Infantry Division operated along Route QL-13 north of Saigon and in the areas of Song Be, Quan Loi and Phuoc Vinh. The U.S. 9th Infantry Division conducted activities along Route QL-4 toward the south and southwest of Saigon while the U.S. 25th Infantry Division mopped up the areas west and northwest of the city. The U.S. 199th Infantry Brigade, meanwhile, conducted security operations in the areas surrounding Bien Hoa City and Long Binh Base, and the 1st Australian Task Force operated north of Bien Hoa, interdicting enemy infiltrations from War Zone D toward Saigon. All of these activities were greatly successful. During the month of June alone, our forces killed 1,600 enemy troops and captured over 700 weapons of all types and 78 122-mm rockets. Most engagements with the enemy took place in outlying areas such as Duc Hoa in Hau Nghia Province, Rach Kien in Long An Province, and Loc Ninh in Binh Long Province.

During the month of July, combined RVN-U.S. operations focused on enemy bases located in northern and western III Corps area. The

threat of enemy infantry attacks against Saigon, therefore, greatly diminished, although it still remained a concern.

Phase III of the enemy general offensive began on 17 August 1968, two days earlier than planned. It was a concerted effort that took place simultaneously in I, II, and III Corps areas, primarily through attacks-by-fire. Saigon, however, came under a rocket attack only on 22 August. A total of 19 122-mm rockets were fired on that day, 10 in Saigon, six in Cho Lon and three in the harbor area. This delayed attack on Saigon was part of the enemy's plan for Phase III. According to this plan, elements of the enemy 1st and 7th Divisions conducted attacks against Tay Ninh, An Loc and Loc Ninh on 17 and 19 August with the purpose of drawing our forces away from the CMD, which would leave the ground open for local forces of the five enemy subdivisions to penetrate and launch attacks. But this plan did not work because ARVN and U.S. forces steadfastly remained around Saigon for its defense.

In addition to Saigon, the enemy also attacked another significant target: the Bu Prang Special Forces Camp in Quang Duc Province, five km from the Cambodian border. The battles here lasted several days, ending with enemy losses of 776 killed and friendly losses of 116, including 2 Americans. This attack, however, marked the last enemy offensive effort during 1968.

Of the three offensive phases conducted so far, Phase III was definitely the weakest in all respects. The enemy was able to launch 15 infantry attacks across the country, compared to 52 attacks in Phase II. Among these 15 attacks only 2 were of battalion size or above. Attacks-by-fire were also sharply reduced: a total of 95 were reported, contrasted with 433 in Phase II.

In some other aspects, Phase III attacks also differed from those of the previous two phases. For one thing, these attacks were no longer accompanied by propaganda activities. The enemy's plan for Phase III did not even call for these activities. Obviously, he had realized that inciting the South Vietnamese into rebellion and joining Communist ranks was just an utopian proposition.

Secondly, no main force units joined in the attack against Saigon; only local forces participated even though they had suffered severe losses

during Phase I. In order to bring his local force battalions up to combat strength for the attack, the enemy had to deactivate some others. Most significantly, enemy units attacking Saigon in August were no longer required to fight to the last man. In fact, an enemy document captured during Phase III contained an express order for all attacking units to withdraw after accomplishing their mission and not to become involved in sustained combat. The order also emphasized the need to draw "enemy" forces away from Saigon and destroy them in strategic areas (outside of Saigon). Apparently, the enemy realized he had paid too high a price for trying to hold out in Saigon during Phase II . It was also possible that this new order had been dictated by the need to improve troop morale for those units still capable of attack, because this morale was evidently at a low ebb. A diary captured from an enemy cadre in Phase III recorded these confessions:

"Everybody is tired and confused. Many don't want the unit to break down into small elements because it would be easily destroyed by enemy attacks. Many others are afraid they will get lost in the city, still others will surely run into difficulties because they can't swim. On the other hand, the enemy is more active, more numerous, and enjoys the initiative."

Another captured enemy document revealed the fact that about 1/3 of enemy troops were in bad health.

To Communist leaders, especially COSVN, however, the general offensive continued to bring them victories. They pointed to the fact that the U.S. and RVN had been edged into a deteriorating defensive posture in which they had to redeploy combat units for the defense of cities. The evacuation of Kham Duc and Khe Sanh base by U.S. troops was an evidence of this deteriorating posture. Other events that took place in the U.S., such as the resignation of Secretary McNamara and the replacement of General Westmoreland, also proved that the U.S. was meeting with increasing difficulties.

As a result, the enemy felt a pressing need to keep the offensive spirit alive, if only for the purpose of taking advantage of political events which he was convinced were working to his advantage. But the problem for our enemy was how to proceed, knowing the true status of

his units. In a letter addressed to his troops on 10 August, the political commissar of the 9th Division was heard making this appeal:

"Before we launch this offensive phase in the fall, I want to remind all of you, comrades, that you should try to live up to your own fame. Let us endeavor to accomplish the mission with which you have been entrusted."

The pathetic tone of this appeal failed, however, to fill in the big void created by severe losses that called for immediate replacements, but the only source of replacement manpower was North Vietnam, and this process certainly took time.

The enemy situation after Phase III, therefore, was one of longing for replacements and reduced activities which primarily consisted of shellings, sabotage and terrorists actions.

Taking advantage of the enemy's plight, the RVN vigorously pushed its pacification program ahead with the purpose of restoring control over rural areas that had been lost as a result of the enemy offensive. At the same time, with a renewed source of fresh manpower, it endeavored to make up for the losses incurred since Tet. Both the enemy and our side were well aware that the 1968 general offensive was yet to run its final course.

The Offensive, Phase IV, February 1969

Phase III of the general offensive exposed all the weaknesses which caused the enemy to fall far short of his objectives despite his continued and determined efforts. The dictates of politics and a strong bargaining position for peace negotiations, however, continued to keep him under pressure.

COSVN was therefore so hard pressed that as soon as Phase III had ended in failure, it immediately issued Resolution No. 8 in September to provide guidance for the next effort. By this decision, the enemy committed himself to preparing for what he called the "Winter-Spring" offensive campaign.

In terms of objectives to be achieved, Resolution No. 8 did not differ much from the previous two resolutions. Our enemy was still

striving for a complete military victory. The approach to achieving this objective was different, however. Resolution No. 8 in effect prescribed a step-by-step effort toward that end instead of pressing for an immediate victory. Realizing perhaps that victory could not be achieved as long as U.S. forces were still in South Vietnam, COSVN observed that efforts should be devoted to attacking and destroying major U.S. force components to such an extent that the U.S. would have to concede defeat in South Vietnam and cease all bombings against the north. By the time he issued Resolution No. 8, our enemy had all the reasons to expect a cessation of bombings. He rightly claimed that this would be a big victory for his side.

President Johnson's decision to cease all U.S. bombings beginning on 1 November 1968 came as the enemy had predicted. The cessation of bombings took effect at a time when the onset of the dry season made it possible for our enemy to set his infiltration machine in motion. As if he had fully prepared for it, the enemy did not seem to lose any time in taking advantage of this momentous decision. Only one day after this decision had gone into effect, a large North Vietnamese labor force was assembled under emergency orders to repair and rehabilitate major roads and bridges destroyed by U.S. bombings. At the same time, a fuel pipeline was hastily installed from Dong Hoi to a point just north of the DMZ, a sure indication of stepped up truck traffic in this area. As aerial photos gradually made it all too evident, stockpiles of supplies and war materiels were being assembled in the north and available to be picked up and delivered to southern battlefields.

South of the DMZ, enemy logistic movements also increased considerably. Evidence of an enemy buildup became visible enough through the several operations conducted by U.S. units in this area. During operation Dewey Canyon in late February 1969, for example, U.S. forces captured an enemy 122-mm field gun, which was the first ever seen deployed in South Vietnam.

U.S. operational efforts in the DMZ area during this time were all designed to disrupt and interdict enemy infiltration and logistic movements from North Vietnam. During the first 40 days of 1969 alone, our forces seized in excess of 17,000 assorted mortar rounds and over 500

rockets ranging in calibers from 107-mm to 144-mm. The significance of this amount of ammunition thus captured was less a credit to our success than an indication of the magnitude of enemy supplies and our enemy's capability to move them into the south.

By early 1969, indications of an enemy offensive during Spring had become evident through several intelligence sources. Most indicative among them was perhaps Directive No. 71 issued by COSVN on 31 January.

This directive reasserted the enemy's intent to renew his general offensive-general uprising campaign of 1968 by an offensive effort in the spring of 1969. Drawing lessons from the three offensive phases in 1968, the enemy now placed first priority on destroying U.S. military forces and war-making capabilities in South Vietnam, to be followed in second priority by the destruction of RVN forces and the dismantling of GVN control. To achieve these basic objectives, Directive No. 71 prescribed a program of activities aimed at interdicting major lines of communication, isolating U.S. and RVNAF military bases, wrecking the GVN pacification program, and keeping both the military offensive momentum and the urban insurrection movement going.

In the face of these enemy plans, both the RVN and U.S. forces stepped up their preparations for counteraction. Also drawing lessons from past enemy activity patterns, our forces expanded patrol and operational activities into outlying areas with the purpose of detecting enemy troop movements and preempting enemy attacks.

As a result, when Phase IV of the offensive came about as predicted during the night of 22 February, the enemy could not obtain surprise. However, with the benefit of additional supplies and fresh manpower infiltrated during the dry season, the enemy was able to conduct infantry attacks and attacks-by-fire against over 100 targets across the country, to include provincial capitals, military installations and outposts.

These attacks were kept at a significant level only for the first five days. During that time, enemy activities were primarily shellings; the most significant ones were rocket attacks on Saigon, Hue and Da Nang.

In the Central Highlands, enemy activities focused on major lines of communication such as QL-1, QL-14 and QL-19, to include sabotage of the railway between Qui Nhon and Nha Trang. In the Mekong Delta, infantry

attacks were mounted against several areas in Dinh Tuong, Kien Hoa, Chau Doc, and Vinh Binh Provinces.

In Saigon, extreme precaution had been taken by the CMD command concerning the protection and defense of the city following intelligence reports. ARVN forces particularly stepped up patrol and ambush activities in areas surrounding the suburbs. During the night the enemy initiated his Phase IV offensive, over 500 patrols and ambushes were taking place in these areas. Thus, despite the seven 122-mm rockets fired against Saigon during that night, our security forces succeeded in destroying two enemy rocket teams while they were preparing to fire on the city.

Of all enemy activities in III Corps area, there were two most significant infantry attacks, one conducted by a regiment of the 9th Division against the Long Binh base area, and the other by a regiment of the 5th Division against suburbs of Bien Hoa City. The attack against Long Binh lasted four days during which the enemy suffered 200 killed while U.S. forces incurred only light casualties.

The target of enemy attack in Bien Hoa was the village of Thai Hiep just northwest of the city. The village was penetrated by the 275th Regiment of the enemy 5th Division at about 0300 hours on 23 February. On the same morning, III Corps deployed a task force composed of a marine battalion, an infantry battalion, and an armored cavalry squadron to the area, and the village was sealed off. But the attack by our forces against the village was not launched until 1100 hours after a Ranger battalion and additional RF troops had arrived. From the village, the enemy put up a fierce resistance, solidly entrenched behind parapets made of sand bags, which the villagers had used to build anti-shelling shelters. By 1500, after the use of air power against the target had been decided, ARVN psywar teams made broadcasts to the villagers asking those who were still stranded inside to seek their way out. Taking advantage of this authorized evacuation, some wounded enemy troops managed to slip out. After the target had been softened by VNAF and U.S. tactical aircraft, the search for enemy troops inside the village became an easy task. When the search ended, 87 enemy troops had either been captured or capitulated, 264 enemy bodies lay strewn about, and in excess of 100 assorted weapons were seized. Enemy prisoners declared the mission of their

regiment was to attack Bien Hoa City and the airbase.

A significant feature of Phase IV of the enemy offensive was the conspicuous absence of local forces and the exclusive use of main force units in all attacks. Obviously, after the severe losses incurred during 1968, no local force unit was capable enough to participate in the 1969 Spring offensive.

To stimulate the deteriorating morale of their troops, Communist forces of the B3 Front employed armored vehicles in their attack against the Ben Het Special Forces Camp, located in the Tri-border area, northwest of Kontum City.[2] During this attack, which began on 6 March, 1969, the enemy committed ten PT-76's and six cargo trucks to carry infantry troops. Despite the enemy's initial numerical advantage, the defending forces, which consisted only of one CIDG company, a U.S. Special Forces team and an artillery element, resisted forcefully with the support of U.S. tactical air and destroyed two PT-76's and all six enemy trucks. The fighting lasted for 56 days, and not until 1 July did the enemy break contact and withdraw after failing to take the camp even with the strong support of artillery, mortar and rockets. During the period of the attack, in excess of 6,000 assorted rounds were fired against the camp.

During this last phase of attacks, however, enemy activities were conspicuously non-existent in I Corps area. This was perhaps due to the success of U.S. conducted operations in this area, particularly the combined operation Nevada Eagle, which spanned a period of several months and did not terminate until the end of February. During this operation, the U.S. 101st Airborne Division and its ARVN counterpart, the 1st Infantry Division, inflicted well over 3,000 casualties on the enemy. Other operations during the same period such as Fayette Canyon, conducted by the U.S. Americal Division northwest of Tam Ky, and Hardin Falls also brought about excellent results.

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[2]The enemy employed armored vehicles for the first time in the war against the Lang Vei, near Khe Sanh, on 7 February 1968.

By the end of May 1969, the combined operation conducted by the U.S. 101st Division and the ARVN 1st Division had been successfully terminated when our forces occupied the Dong Ap Bia peak after 10 days of heavy fighting. Dong Ap Bia was a strategic hill from which our forces could control the A Shau Valley, where enemy supplies were usually stockpiled and which was the staging area for most enemy attacks in northern I Corps area. The control of this hill by our forces was a definite setback for the enemy in this area.

Compared to Phase III, Phase IV of the enemy offensive was markedly stronger in terms of both level and intensity. Its significance might even equal that of Phase II as far as the enemy was concerned, and a parallel could be appropriately drawn between the two. The number of attacks-by-fire during Phase IV even surpassed those of Phase II (433) whereas only 95 such attacks were accounted for during Phase III. There were 125 infantry attacks during Phase IV as compared to 52 during Phase II and 15 during Phase III. Attacks of battalion size or larger numbered 16, compared to six in Phase II and two in Phase III.[3]

However, the most conspicuous decline in enemy capabilities during the last phase was perhaps our enemy's inability to launch any infantry attack against Saigon as he did during Phase II. Politically and psychologically therefore, it seemed that the effect of the general offensive had reached its climax during the first half of 1968. Whatever efforts our enemy attempted after that, to include Phases III and IV, were just inconsequential ripples that did not even affect our military posture.

This inconsequential effect was even felt by those enemy troops who no longer believed in party leadership or a military victory and

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[3]All statistical figures have been obtained from the files of Lt. General William E. Potts, former Assistant Chief of Staff for Intelligence, J-2 MACV (1969-1973) and Assistant Chief of Staff for Intelligence, G2, U.S. Army Pacific (1967-1968).

chose to defect as an expression of their disaffection. Usually, before any military campaign was initiated, all participating troops had to attend indoctrination sessions during which they learned to appreciate the political and military requirements for such an effort. This indoctrination was usually effective and normally, very few enemy troops ever defected before a military campaign began. But it seemed that all this had changed because by the time Phase IV was launched, unprecedented numbers of enemy combat troops had chosen not to fight and to defect. During the first week alone, ralliers of all types had reached over the thousand mark and this rate had remained constant during the following weeks, a record high since March 1967. For the first half of 1969, a total of 20,000 enemy personnel had become ralliers, a threefold increase over the entire year of 1968.

This high rate of enemy desertion reflected the declining morale in most all units during that period. The pressure kept on enemy troops had been overwhelming at a time when irreplaceable losses were increasing and the constant demand for more sacrifices for the sake of bargaining power in future peace talks was being emphasized.

Fully aware of this deteriorating military posture, enemy leaders opted for a new strategic approach to fight the war. Their new strategy no longer called for all-out effort or big scale offensive. Instead, it became an economy-of-force warfare emphasizing small scale attacks by small level units, evidently to keep losses at a minimum. The goal to be achieved, however, ramained the same: however small the attacks, they had to draw public attention, domestically and internationally.

For the first time since Giap's article, COSVN admitted the need to preserve forces when it issued Directive No. 55 in April 1969. The directive stressed in effect: "Never again, and under no circumstances are we going to risk our entire military force for just an offensive. On the contrary, we should endeavor to preserve our military potential for future campaigns."

However sound and realistic this new approach might be, it represented a radical departure from established policies and until directed to do so, COSVN would have to keep it in the conceptual stage. Not until after the North Vietnamese Politbureau had voted its approval did COSVN

make it an official subject for study and indoctrination when it issued Resolution No. 9 in July 1969.

Essentially an embodiment of Hanoi's decision to switch strategy, COSVN's Resolution No. 9 went into effect immediately. Enemy initiated activities during the rest of 1969 faithfully followed the policies laid out in the resolution. During August, sapper activities made a strong comeback as if taking over from big-unit actions. Most of these activities were aimed at sabotage, harassment, and terror; they were reminiscent of guerrilla actions during the early stage of the war. On 7 August, for example, enemy sappers penetrated the U.S. rest and recuperation area of Cam Ranh Base, killing two Americans and wounding 198 others. The next day, saboteurs detonated 60 pounds of plastic at the VNAF English School in the 5th Precinct of Cho Lon, causing serious damage to the school building, 12 Vietnamese personnel killed and 67 others wounded, to include 28 Americans. Late in August, a grenade was thrown into a crowd of civilians during a meeting held by RD cadres at Phu Cat in Binh Dinh Province; 24 were killed and over 100 wounded by this enemy action. The same day, a foreign freighter sailing on the Saigon River detonated a floating mine at Nha Be and incurred some damage.

All of these activities were conducted to implement Resolution No. 9 whose policies clearly indicated the impact that the 1968-69 general offensive-general uprising was having on our enemy.

ARVN Rangers and Tank Blocking the Phan Thanh Gian Bridge, 6 May 1968

Fighting at the French Cemetery Adjoining Tan Son Nhut Airbase, 7 May 1968

Combat Action Near Tan Son Nhut AFB, May 1968

ARVN Rangers Moving Through Western Cholon
After Clearing Enemy, 10 May 1968

NVA Troops Captured Near Saigon, May 1968

VC Rocket Attack on Saigon, August 1968

CHAPTER VI

Impact of the 1968-1969 General Offensive

"Talk and Fight"

Like a catalyst, the enemy's unsuccessful attacks during Tet 1968 had brought about peace talks in Paris barely three months after Hue City was wrested back from among smoldering ruins. It was quite indicative of the enemy's warring policy that peace talks should begin in the midst of his second phase of attacks. For "Talk and Fight" had become the strategy that dictated our enemy's actions in the years ahead.

As a rule of Communist people's warfare since the days of the Long March, "Talk and Fight" was not something new. In the context of the Vietnam war, however, opinions during 1968 differed as to how far our enemy would want to go by it and what kind of balance he wished to strike between war and peace. Not even six months into peace talks, our enemy already strongly hinted at how he viewed peace-making efforts when a document captured from him squarely affirmed in early 1969, "The Paris peace talks cannot bring about any results until we achieve a big military victory."

Peace talks, therefore, did not delude our enemy into forsaking or even diminishing his war efforts. On the contrary, military victory still remained the sine qua non for peace and the ultimate goal to be achieved regardless of talks. A pattern of coordinated enemy activity soon developed which saw military actions support political moves and political moves give rise to military actions, especially when new "peace initiatives" were at stake.

In spite of his weakening military posture in the aftermath of Tet 1968, our enemy still drew heavily on his exhausted capabilities to achieve some spectacular each time he felt the need to give weight to some political move. On 8 May 1969, for example, the NLF came up with

a new 10-point peace proposal, the essentials of which dwelled on a total solution to the war. Among other things, our enemy demanded the unconditional withdrawal of all U.S. troops, the creation of a coalition government for South Vietnam, and no interference from foreign powers. Translated into military terms, this solution to the war sounded like a total victory on the battlefield which was precisely lying beyond the reach of our enemy at that time.

Phase IV of the offensive had ended in failure. Still, to prove that he was utterly serious in his demands and evidently to incite further pressure from the U.S. antiwar movement, which he hoped could cause the U.S. to give in to those demands, the enemy followed up his peace proposal with a military initiative on 11 and 12 May. Essentially a "high point" of cyclical summer activities, this initiative consisted of 212 shellings conducted on a country-wide basis, of which 105 were relatively significant and still included Saigon as a primary target. In several areas, shellings were followed up by infantry attacks, but none of these attacks exceeded battalion size. Conducted primarily at company level, most ended by the end of the second day.

Then on 10 June 1969, the enemy announced the inauguration of the Provisional Revolutionary Government (PRG) of South Vietnam, which virtually upgraded the rebellious NLF into a political entity of international stature. This was also a calculated move preparing and paving the way for the NLF's participation in the peace talks, which practically placed it on a political par with the Republic of Vietnam should the latter decide to play the "talk-fight" game.

By now, the political dictates of the "talk-fight" game were pressing on Communist military leaders for a military strategy which had not only to be tailored to battleground realities and their own capabilities but also to satisfy the military requirements in support of peace negotiations.

In general terms, this new enemy strategy was embodied in COSVN's Resolution No. 9 and details of its implementation explained in a subsequent directive, appropriately called "Resolution No. 14 on guerrilla warfare (DKCT)".

Disseminated among the high levels of the party hierarchy five months after Phase IV of the general offensive, COSVN Resolution No. 9 was a watershed policy directive that set the Communist conduct of the war in South Vietnam on an entirely new course. Most significantly, it provided a cool analysis of the impact of the 1968 General Offensive-General Uprising on our enemy's war posture and thoroughly justified his actions for the past year and a half.

Besides what he termed as successes, which in view of all the evidence gathered by our side, could be attributed to his usual bias, our enemy proved to be more candid and unusually objective when he assessed his own shortcomings. And although called a COSVN resolution, its scope evidently transcended the authority and decision-making power normally assigned to this southern office of the North Vietnamese Politbureau. The preamble of the document, therefore, made it clear that the contents resulted from a "total agreement" with North Vietnam's resolution.

Assessing the general situation, our enemy believed that his general offensive had resulted in a significant human and materiel losses to U.S. forces. The incremental withdrawal of U.S. troops from South Vietnam and the de-Americanization of the war were appropriately considered a major turning point in the war which effectively changed the balance of forces to our enemy's favor. This new balance of forces provided a new opportunity which, if effectively seized at the proper time, could lead to still bigger victories.

However, our enemy felt he was still incapable of making that big leap forward to seize this opportunity because of several shortcomings.

First, he candidly admitted his own failure to promote an indispensable "political tidal wave" among the South Vietnamese population, not only during the general offensive but also and even under the currently favorable political circumstances.

Second, he admitted to the ineffectiveness of his proselyting activities, which failed to disintegrate our armed forces and our

government as he had expected they would.

Third, he recognized that his guerrilla warfare had developed too slowly and sporadically, attributing its weaknesses mainly to errors of approach and tactics.

Finally, the failure of the offensive, as he saw it, was also one of logistics, and he attributed it to the immaturity of people's organizations at the infrastructure level which could not ensure the flow of supplies to frontline units.

Analyzing the causes for these shortcomings, the COSVN leadership believed that its cadres had not fully understood the basic requirements of the General Offensive-General Uprising Campaign as far as party leadership's guidance was concerned. Worse still, it felt that in many instances the implementation of party leadership's guidance had been incorrect and devoid of supervision and control.

The COSVN leadership then castigated its cadres for being "nearsighted" in appraising the balance of forces between the two sides, exaulting the enemy while debasing their own capabilities, distrusting the Politbureau's strategy, and consequently, fighting without enthusiasm or conviction. The single most important principle that ensured victory for the General Offensive-General Uprising, therefore, had not been adhered to and was lost.

COSVN criticism was especially harsh against those cadres whom it accused of having mistaken the General Offensive for just a one-time action of transient nature. This was the most serious mistake that caused them to lose their sense of audacity and duty required in times of emergency, and as a result, they had become rightist-minded and fearful of action.

For all that candor, our enemy's self-criticism still fell far short of his true condition by the latter half of 1969. In fact, each of the shortcomings that he had confessed implied much more than he dared admit for obvious reasons. There were also certain other difficulties that he felt not politically appropriate to discuss. Most serious among them was the severe dent made into his infrastructure ranks as a result of the 1968 General Offensive. The truth was that about half of this infrastructure had been completely and irretrievably destroyed in the process.

The depletion among Communist infrastructure ranks had reached such proportions that beginning in May 1969, our enemy had to use North Vietnamese replacements to fill the void, especially in the Mekong Delta. Naturally, this was an expedient that never met the requirements in terms of local politics and regional affinity. It never helped our enemy resurrect that deceased part of his infrastructure body for the simple reason that a northern transplant could not become a local insurgent overnight.

The increasing substitution of local infrastructure members and combat troops with replacements from the north in the aftermath of the offensive gradually fostered a feeling of animosity between southern and northern Communists which smacked of regionalism and discrimination in spite of party ideology and discipline. Although repressed, this conflict seemed to deepen with time as the southern-born Communists realized that the insurgent war was no longer theirs but increasingly a North Vietnamese enterprise.

The severe losses incurred by southern-born insurgents, whether infrastructure or local force elements, during the offensive was a fact that could not be hidden from these families of the deceased. This was also true of northern-born cadres and troops whose families in the north suddenly ceased to hear from them after the offensive. Even though the COSVN leadership never admitted to it, the fact was amply demonstrated by the many diaries and letters captured and the testimony of prisoners and ralliers.

As Communist main force units withdrew from populous centers and urban areas after the offensive failure, the dwindling guerrilla and infrastructure ranks suddenly found themselves cut off from the kind of military support on which they had come to depend. The interdependence and mutual support between these components, which for years had contributed so much to effective insurgent activities, were now lost. This explained why the GVN pacification effort succeeded so easily and so rapidly as of late 1968.

As a result, along with diminishing military effectiveness, other enemy activities also suffered a marked decline. Our enemy found it increasingly difficult to sell his propaganda, recruit new manpower,

collect taxes, or run his financial operations, all the activities that had helped sustain his insurgency warfare for so many years.

To overcome these difficulties and remedy his own shortcomings, the enemy sought ways to keep his military activities alive while trying to keep the commitment of forces and his losses down. He found it effective and economical to fight a kind of "souped up" guerrilla warfare: sapper actions. Essentially a sabotage and hit-and-run tactic, sapper actions were not a military novelty. Their chief advantage, however, was to create headlines, which suited well our enemy's purpose at this juncture, and to inflict as much damage to our military potential as possible at minimum cost. More significantly, from this time on, sapper actions were to become the mainstay of enemy activities.

In a military sense, the impact of the 1968-69 general offensive-general uprising saw a turnabout in enemy strategy which curtailed main force warfare and emphasized small-scale actions by small local force units. It was in this strategic direction that COSVN Resolution No. 9 explicitly promoted guerrilla warfare and implicitly maintained that small-scale warfare was but a transition phase in the continuous process of general offensive and general uprising.

To further explain this new warfare direction to his rank and file, the enemy passed and issued Resolution No. 14 on guerrilla warfare, which was immediately used as indoctrination material in all units.

Resolution No. 14 went at great length to explain the reasons why it was necessary to break up main and local force units into companies while keeping parent unit designations intact. It also encouraged efforts to turn all main force elements thus broken up into sapper units.

This new organizational trend, the COSVN leadership maintained, had several advantages. First, by scattering combat forces, the threat of destruction by firepower, especially B-52 bombings that big force concentrations usually faced, and losses would be greatly reduced. Second, the dispersion of units went along with a dispersion of supplies, which would make it easier to supply and support small units than big concentrated units. Third, the breaking down of major units also allowed the selection of combat-experienced troops to form new sapper units.

The success of guerrilla warfare, the resolution emphasized, depended on these sapper units, whose effectiveness in combat had been fully demonstrated in the past.

In spite of their doctrinal logic, these arguments failed to convince a great number of enemy military cadres who only found weaknesses in the new strategic approach.

These cadres believed that the dissection of units would surely dilute or even dissolve unit integrity and morale entirely. Command and control would become difficult and unit commanders would be overburdened by additional responsibilities with regard to planning, coordination and supervision. It was hard under those circumstances to maintain the offensive spirit required of all units.

They also anticipated logistic problems caused by direct support for company-level operations. Communist cadres were all familiar with the existing supply system in which major units were responsible for their subordinate components. They felt that direct support for small units would complicate logistic tasks and lengthen and multiply supply lines because the system had to reach down to every place across the country.

As to the activation of new sapper units with experienced personnel taken from the present force structure, almost all believed that it would seriously affect unit combat capabilities since by this time no unit had its full complement of combat-experienced troops.

In general, Resolution No. 14 wrought upon itself criticism and scorn from all quarters, to include veteran political commissars. Some were pessimistic about future war prospects, believing that militarily, their side had been soundly defeated. Why else, they reasoned, would they have to retrogress to guerrilla warfare if not because of the offensive's failure? Many cadres and troops, therefore, yearned for the day the Paris peace talks would be concluded, losing their heart in continued fighting. As the testimony of ralliers revealed, many middle-level cadres, those who enjoyed the privilege of owning private radio receivers secretly tuned in to broadcasts of western stations such as the BBC and VOA to monitor with anticipation and hopes the progress of peace talks and what they all longed for most: a cease-fire. And

amidst commonly shared secrets, the forlorn and the homesick already daydreamed about the time all could be reunited with their families.

Undoubtedly aware of these human feelings, the Communist leadership stepped up indoctrination efforts to drive home its new concept of integrated people's warfare. The war in South Vietnam, it maintained, was no longer a three-phase progression like the 1946-1954 Resistance War, but a single-phase effort with a flexible strategy. This strategy was essentially a continuous offensive by military forces whose level and extent had to be consistent with the local situation and local capabilities.

As if to prove this point, and again to support his bargaining position at the conference table, the enemy successively launched his fall campaign on 11 and 12 August 1969 with 137 limited infantry attacks and shellings and his winter campaign in early November with a primary effort driven against Quang Duc Province near the Cambodian border.

But these activities failed to help our enemy redress his weakening military posture and compensate for what had been irretrievably lost. The fact was that all COSVN-controlled main force units had been driven into Cambodian territory and other major units dissected into scattered elements. His infrastructure had been severely and perhaps fatally damaged, and no replacements could ever bring it to full life again. The morale of his troops was at its lowest ebb, and his ranks were continually and increasingly depleted by defection.

In addition to this lamentable condition, COSVN was also deeply concerned about the possibility that the U.S. and RVN might strike into Cambodia and Laos where his lifeline and sanctuaries now lay at their mercy. Politically, the trend was never so bad for the Communist cause. The South Vietnamese people seemed more staunchly anti-Communist than ever, and this spirit was particularly strong among the urban population.

Despite these domestic setbacks, which came as an adverse consequence of the 1968 general offensive, our enemy still felt he had the upper hand in long-term prospects. He saw an indisputable advantage in the withdrawal of U.S. troops and the complete cessation of bombings against North Vietnam which in time might give him the ultimate chance of a final conquest.

Like a cold breeze, the Communist 1968 Tet Offensive seemed to awaken the South Vietnamese people from a lethargic slumber. Everybody became sober and alert, fully aware of what was at stake.

But the damage was done and the moment of truth had arrived. The initial bewilderment and terror gradually disappeared and gave way to consciousness and self-assurance. Even though war had stepped into their heretofore secure habitat and after meeting face to face with an enemy whom they had so far only heard about through all sorts of myths, the urban people still kept their faith intact and never even thought of the RVN being defeated in this showdown of force.

It was difficult to trace back the roots of this overconfidence. People rushed about to stay away from crossfire, but never did they panic. Perhaps in their brief contacts with Communist troops, they had not been impressed. They had seen in those young and plain peasant faces nothing but innocence and immaturity, and they suddenly felt a strong surge of compassion and pity. They had seen that these troops were fighting without the support of artillery or tanks. And, unconsciously, they made a comparison and came to the conclusion that it was most unlikely that the paratroopers, the marines, the Rangers could ever be subdued by those peasants. No, they were convinced that the RVN could not lose this war, especially when the mighty U.S. forces were still there at their side.

As their homes turned into battle positions behind which the intruders entrenched themselves, the urban population suddenly became conscious of their duties to defend not only themselves but their nation. But how could one do this without taking up a weapon and joining in the fighting? Thus, the idea of self-defense gradually took shape and became stronger as the enemy procrastinated. It was a neglected feeling that had not surfaced in the people's consciousness for a long time.

In this very moment of distress, every dissent of opinion seemed to disappear as if by magic. Politicians, congressman, and all those who professed to be political opponents of the regime suddenly found all polemics hollow, almost ridiculous. Unconsciously, they also felt the

need to join in the struggle by contributing constructive ideas to steer the nation away from possible demise.

However, the immediate efforts to save the nation always rested with the military. The first action taken by the Joint General Staff was to conduct an emergency operation to clear the enemy from Saigon, the symbol of the GVN authority. As an expedient to assemble enough forces for the effort and to set the example for the entire RVNAF, it was decided to turn all staff and service personnel of the JGS into combat troops with the exception of a few key staff elements, and the Chief of JGS himself took personal command of the relief forces. Several battalions were thus activated overnight, and it was truly an unprecedented event which saw colonels and majors acting as platoon leaders and company grade officers carrying rifles as simple privates. But they created quite a sensation and greatly impressed the local population around the JGS compound when they were deployed to take up combat positions just like any other ARVN troopers.

In Saigon as well as in other cities throughout South Vietnam, big crowds of servicemen on Tet leave reported to city garrison headquarters, anxious to get back to their units. Because of the lack of transportation facilities, the JGS authorized all sector headquarters to employ these servicemen for immediate combat duties in their hometowns until security was restored; then they could join their units when transportation was available.

In addition to expedient measures, the JGS, pending the general mobilization bill which was being drafted by the National Assembly, recalled to immediate active duty 65,000 retired servicemen who had less than 12 years of service. This bill was passed on 15 June and signed into law on 17 June. By this law, the draft age range was extended from 18 to 38 instead of the current 19 to 39 eligibility. Those who belonged to the 17 and 39 to 43 age classes were required to join the People's Self-Defense system. A stumbling block in manpower procurement, which had been obstinately maintained by the legislative branch, was thus removed.

With this new mobilization law, the JGS estimated that the RVNAF would receive an additional 268,000 men by December. What it did not

expect was that three months ahead of schedule nearly 90% of that quota would have been met. The popular response to mobilization was unprecendented, and it overwhelmed the RVNAF processing and training capabilities. By September, 240,000 draftees had beaten the deadline by volunteering or reporting to draft centers ahead of time; among them, 161,000 were volunteers who enlisted in combat arms or service branches of their choice. Most remarkable was the fact that about half of that manpower consisted of urban youths, again an unprecedented record. The surge of volunteers and draftees was such that basic training had to be reduced from 12 to 8 weeks.

If this enthusiastic response to mobilization was an indication of anything, it could only be a measure of how the people felt toward Communist insurgency. It had to be made clear, however, that this enthusiasm did not result from propaganda or psywar actions, although the Ministry of Information and the RVNAF Political Warfare Department did step up public relations activities. It simply stemmed from a sincere desire to serve, to contribute something at a time when the nation's survival was at stake. And in their decision to join the military services, these youths had unquestionably expressed an unflinching faith in the future of South Vietnam, which they felt they had a duty to defend and believed that it was defensible. As a result of the mobilization law, 6% of the South Vietnamese population had virtually become combatants in one way or another. Transposed to another scale, it was as if 12 million Americans had joined the services at the call of duty.

In all cities across South Vietnam, especially in Saigon, the urban people beyond the draft age also displayed a similar enthusiasm in organizing themselves for defense. Given their endemic indifference to the war effort, this sudden demonstration of patriotic fervor struck everyone as strange and incredible. Without being told or asked, they set up self-defense committees, organized fund drives to purchase barrier materiel, fenced off their own blocks with barbed wire, and took up guard duties at the only entrance gate to each block. At night, they became particularly vigilant and security-minded, screening people coming in and out, letting in only those people who lived in the block,

and reporting to police all strangers or suspects who loitered around.

In Saigon, especially in some suburban Catholic communities, people were not satisfied when taking up guard duties with bare hands. They began to petition the government for weapons and ammunition. At first, the distribution of weapons for self-defense purposes was restricted to Catholic communities. Soon, by popular demand, the GVN overcame its cautiousness and made weapons available for all self-defense organizations. This was how the People's Self-Defense movement came into being, a concept which had been espoused since the days of the First Republic but never was implemented on such a scale owing to the lukewarm response by the people. Taking the cue from the growing popular demand, the GVN stepped in and launched a country-wide campaign to institute self-defense forces not only in cities but also in rural areas. By April, just three months after Tet, the People's Self-Defense Forces had become a reality throughout South Vietnam. Their organization was eventually formalized by the Mobilization Law in June 1968.

Riding on the crest of the self-defense movement, the college students of Saigon, made idle by the closing down of universities to make them available as refugee centers, gathered themselves into a para-military organization pompously designated "Capital Defense Student Division". Armed with individual weapons, the students were employed to assist the police and ARVN units in maintaining security for the city. When communist forces attacked Saigon during Phase II of the offensive, 2,000 college students of the division participated in the defense of the city. They were mostly deployed to man checkpoints and guard accesses to Saigon, particularly in the river-bound southern suburbs. The Student Division did not exist for long, however, for as Saigon came back to normal, the students also returned to their books.

During the attacks on Saigon, Communist forces were all equipped with AK-47's and rocket launchers, B-40 or B-41. The superiority of these weapons, especially the AK-47, was immediately recognized by the urban people, even by the teen-agers. For one thing, after days of listening to battle sounds, the Saigon people were able to differentiate between the sharper, rounder and more uniform AK-47 bursts and the dull crackles of our Garand and carbine reports. Therefore, they could

orient themselves and know exactly where the enemy was. To pass idle time while the fighting was still raging, some even amused themselves with this guessing game by listening to the sounds of gunfire and telling whether they were the enemy's or ours. All agreed that the AK-47 sounds were more impressive.

The inferiority of ARVN troops in individual armament eventually became a major concern, which pressed the JGS into asking for improvement. A modernization plan was initiated and placed under a combined JGS-MACV committee for implementation. By May 1968, the first stage of the plan was completed, and the RVNAF began to receive modern infantry equipment such as the M-16 rifle, the M-60 machinegun, the M-79 grenade launcher, and the AN/PRC-25 field radio set.

By the same programming effort, the U.S. also made available more heavy equipment for the RVNAF to keep up with their modernization and force structure expansion trends. By the end of 1969, ARVN armor assets had been brought up to 1,500 vehicles compared to 600 at the time the offensive began. Artillery pieces also increased substantially, to include the M-102 for the Airborne Division, adding two more artillery battalions to each infantry division. The Airborne Division thus found itself with three artillery battalions, one for each brigade for better direct support instead of just one for the entire division as in early 1968. The VNAF also saw its helicopter armada increased fourfold to 400 ships, in addition to 60 more jet fighter-bombers.

An indirect consequence of the offensive was that the rural areas became virtually open to enemy penetration and control. The threat exerted on cities compelled GVN and military authorities to place a high priority on their relief at the expense of other activities, including pacification and development. As the fighting continued, ARVN infantry battalions were gradually extracted from pacification support and redeployed to cities to ensure their defense. Meanwhile, RD cadre teams which remained behind in villages found themselves unable to operate without military support. Many such teams were called back to cities to participate in more pressing tasks such as organizing and supervising the operation of refugee centers.

The deterioration of security in rural areas was such that as soon as the urban situation improved, pacification became the number one priority again. Rapidly, security and control were restored as fighting in cities subsided, just as they had quickly deteriorated when the enemy offensive was in full swing. By 30 September, therefore, the GVN had regained its normal pre-Tet control over rural areas, based on HES statistics.

Encouraged by this quick recovery, the GVN immediately embarked on a three-month accelerated pacification program beginning on 1 November. The purpose was to take back everything that had been lost to the enemy in the rural areas during the offensive.

The subsequent pacification effort for 1969 continued and expanded the scope of the successful accelerated program. More oriented toward development, the 1969 program focused on the village rather than the hamlet, a concept which effectively turned the village, the traditional basic administrative unit of rural South Vietnam, into a bulwark of local development and progress. The village chief, an elected official, was given full authority in local government affairs; he was especially empowered to resolve property and land ownership matters, a move which paved the way for a monumental land reform program the next year. Militarily, the village chief also assumed unified command over the PF, the RD cadres, and especially the police, which for the first time in South Vietnam's history were made available at the village level. Within this new rural administrative structure, the village was destined to play the key role in national defense and development, a role that enabled South Vietnam to contest effectively with the enemy at the very grassroots level.

The immediate goal of the 1969 pacification program, however, was to drive the enemy away and prevent him from returning to the rural areas. Priority was given to those areas that met the criteria of high population density, proximity to major lines of communication and political and economic viability. In June 1969, half way through the program, the GVN pushed it even farther by launching a special four-month pacification effort which concentrated on improving security, order, and law enforcement in villages. When the program was completed,

up to 92% of the South Vietnamese population by HES statistics were living in relative security in class A, B, and C hamlets.

In spite of inherent errors in any data collection and reporting system, the fact should be admitted that by the end of 1969, South Vietnam truly fared much better in terms of rural security and control. Credit of course should be given not only to the GVN efforts but also to the material and technical support provided by MACCORDS. This pacification progress was real and especially unsettling for our enemy. He was so completely flabbergasted by our achievements that a good part of COSVN Resolution No. 9 was devoted to assessing the impact of the GVN pacification program and devising a comprehensive plan to counter it. As if to testify to the success of pacification in 1969, the political commissar of the enemy MR-4 (Saigon-Cho Lon) admitted, in a document captured from him, that the expansion of GVN control was such that he had to spend nearly four months on long detours to reach the Ba Thu area in Cambodia for a high-level COSVN meeting. It had normally taken him only two weeks to travel to the same area.

Improved security made it possible for the RVNAF to take over the responsibility of defending the CMD from the U.S. II Field Force on 1 October 1969. But since the beginning of the year, the RVNAF had already taken on additional combat responsibilities to destroy enemy main and local force units, relegating pacification support responsibilities to the RF and PF.

Socially, the enemy 1968 offensive had brought about additional problems for the GVN which suddenly found in excess of 3 million refugees on its hands. This created unusual burdens for a national budget already deeply in deficit. The process of finding shelters, providing food and health services, and resettling this mass of dispossessed people was not only financially and socially burdensome but time and energy consuming as well. In addition, there were also problems of screening and surveillance to weed out enemy agents who found the refugee masses particulary tempting for propaganda and subversive activities.

Then there was the problem of rehabilitating civilian housing and industrial plants destroyed or damaged as a result of street fighting,

especially in Saigon, Cho Lon, and Hue. All of these relief and financial support expenses struck a big dent in the national budget. On top of these problems, the GVN also had to ensure the regular supply of cities, especially Saigon, in basic commodities to avert shortages in rice and fuel and particularly to combat black market and price manipulation by greedy businessmen.

To make a final tally, the enemy 1968 offensive affected South Vietnam in several aspects and placed many burdens on the GVN. Eventually, all obstructions were removed, and South Vietnam found everything much better than before the offensive. But progress and achievements would have been much more substantial had the South Vietnamese leadership known how to exploit its advantages of the moment. It was agreed that never before had South Vietnam been in such a privileged position, a position which combined all three basic ingredients of success, namely, "opportunity, advantage, and popular consent," as the famous strategist Sun Tzu saw it centuries ago.

The Limitations of South Vietnam's Efforts

Unquestionably, the enemy 1968 offensive came as a windfall for South Vietnam in terms of prospects for long-range success. Among the basic ingredients of success, popular consent was the most important because up to that time it had been missing. For years, the battle of the hearts and minds had been waged but never won. But this time, and most unexpectedly, this battle was won without much effort. The stimulating fact was that during and after the offensive, every South Vietnamese seemed to have made up his mind as to what side he wanted to live with. This almost universal rejection of Communism came about not as a result of propaganda or coercion but as a profound conviction, a faith suddenly rediscovered in the face of disaster. As a result, the popular consent to align with nationalism was sincere, almost instinctive. Without a formal referendum, the great majority of the South Vietnamese population had overwhelmingly voted for the nationalist regime, by their attitude, by their actions. If this popular mandate was maintained

and strengthened, then force of will and solidarity could never be subdued by its Communist archenemy.

It was most unfortunate that as soon as the perils were gone, this national unity and sense of dedication to the national cause also ebbed away, and everything seemed to downgrade to its former condition, edging the nation back to its old problems of divisiveness, factional rivalry, social malaise, and lethargy.

A cunning politician, President Thieu took advantage of the nation's survival effort to consolidate his power, wresting it back from his political rival, Vice President Ky. He fired Ky's appointees, to include the prime minister, reshuffled the cabinet, reappointed key military commanders and replaced them with his own men. All of these changes did not help improve leadership or advance the national cause. They were made in the same old pattern of power intrigue, based not on talent, experience or merits but on personal loyalty and clannish relations. The administrative machinery, therefore, continued to function with the same lethargic pace, plagued by inefficiency, waste, and corruption. Deluded by perpetuating political intrigues, a divisive national leadership, and the aggravation of social ills, the South Vietnamese people who were expecting progress and innovation, gradually found their newly rediscovered patriotic ardor and dedication sapped and gone.

Militarily, the conduct of war efforts was affected by the replacement of three out of four corps commanders. This change was publicized as an effort to remove incompetence but the real motive behind it was entirely different. In fact, since Thieu was elected president, he had always felt his constitutional power greatly constrained by the Council of Generals, a kind of military politburo which had propped him and Ky up into power, of which he was simply a member. By removing the three key members of this council, President Thieu effectively used his elective authority to deal it a fatal blow and asserted himself as the unrivaled strongman of the regime.

The second element of success South Vietnam enjoyed in the aftermath of the 1968 enemy offensive was opportunity. This opportunity came and went because South Vietnamese leadership failed to take full

advantage of it. It was the most opportune moment for the Republic of Vietnam to regain national initiative, enhance its cause, initiate social reforms, create a foundation for national development and self-sufficiency, and reorganize its defense structure and armed forces in such a way that the conduct of the war conformed to both conventional and unconventional requirements and to the economic realities of the nation.

Vietnamization provided just that: a precious opportunity to develop indigenous resources for long-term survival. The gradual American disengagement implied that South Vietnam had to rely upon itself to survive, and with continued American aid, it had all the chances of making it provided that the American protective shield would not be removed as long as North Vietnam still maintained its divisions in the south.

For all its implications, Vietnamization did not concern the South Vietnamese leadership who saw in it just a chance to get more war materiels and economic aid from the U.S.. It failed to see for itself that to survive without the presence of American troops, a comprehensive national plan mobilizing all resources available and obtainable would be required to enable South Vietnam to take over war responsibilities effectively. Aside from criticizing Vietnamization as an inappropriate term to save pride and face, the Independence Palace did not provide any guidance on how it should be implemented, what other requirements it occasioned in addition to force structure expansion and equipment modernization, and how the war should be fought without the American presence. The South Vietnamese leadership even failed to alert its people on the immediate consequences of the U.S. troop withdrawal and condition popular psychology to self-sufficiency and self-defense. As a result, Vietnamization amounted to just that: a normal process of force expansion and modernization, nothing else.

The complacency and nearsightedness with which the South Vietnamese leadership viewed the process of American disengagement derived perhaps from ignorance and blind trust. It was possible that President Thieu did not sense any cause for alarm because he had been promised continued

American support. But as a national leader, he surely took a chance when he did not even question the future of that support.

Last but not least was South Vietnam's enhanced posture as a strong and viable nation, which was brought about not only by the enemy's failure but also by the U.S. disengagement. Both events concurred to make South Vietnam the indisputable master of its own destiny and the invincible adversary of North Vietnam, not the southern insurgents whom it had crushed during the offensive. This was a military and political advantage that in the long run should have contributed to South Vietnam's success in war or in peace.

CHAPTER VII

Observations and Conclusions

The Communist General Offensive of 1968-69 marked an important turning point in the Vietnam war. Despite its short-lived intensity, which lasted for some time during Phase I, then diminished during Phase II, and finally became insignificant during Phases III and IV, the repercussions and effect caused by it bore heavily on the final outcome of the war.

Both sides, the Communists as well as the RVN and U.S., claimed victory. Victory, however, depends on the sense that each side imparted to it. In the commonly accepted sense, victory usually means military success, and the extent of victory can be measured by the objectives achieved, the losses incurred. Within this frame of reference, the Communists could hardly say they were the victors of this offensive.

Of all the military objectives that the Communists had set about to attain--the major cities, provincial capitals, and district towns of South Vietnam--none was under their control when the offensive ended. For this failure, they had to pay a prohibitively high price in human losses even if we were to scale down our own reporting statistics.

Our enemy also publicized what he claimed to be "severe losses" inflicted on our side. Knowing communist propaganda for what it was, there could hardly be any grain of truth in those figures, which had in fact been so exaggerated that even Communist troops and pro-Communist public opinion refused to believe them as a matter of simple logic. If the alleged losses had been as true as reported, they reasoned, the RVNAF would have been entirely wiped out. But the truth dawned on them that not only were the RVNAF very much alive and well, they also became stronger and stronger. What else could explain the fact that eventually Communist forces had to withdraw to their bases, and even main force units were constrained to break down into small

elements in order to survive?

Victory, however, did not simply mean military success in Communist eyes. Our enemy recognized the importance of military success, but he believed that the essential ingredient of victory was political success. In the drawn-out process of conquering South Vietnam, the Communists always nurtured the dream of a political victory. Their strategy of offensive, therefore, combined all three efforts: political, military and proselyting, in which the military effort was but a lever to drive political success forward.

Such a political success was what the Communists had very much expected during their 1968 General Offensive-General Uprising. They hoped to achieve this through the catalyzing effect of the military offensive: a country-wide revolt among the population living under the RVN control.

Popular uprising and tactical surprise were the two key factors that led to genuine victory, as the Communists viewed it. Both had been the objectives set forth in the offensive plan whose success was predicated on their being achieved.

As the offensive unfolded, everyone could see that the Communists were able to achieve only one of these objectives: the much-expected "general uprising" never materialized. If our side was the victim of military surprise, then the total indifference shown by the South Vietnamese people toward Communist instigations came about perhaps as an even bigger surprise for our enemy because it was political.

Just as we kept asking ourselves why we were surprised, our enemy must have asked himself the same thing. This surprise of his, like ours, had its own causes. For one thing, he had misread the feelings of the South Vietnam population. It was true that urban unrest had crippled South Vietnam to some extent ever since the Buddhist showdown in 1963. This and the subsequent political turmoil coupled with anti-government, anti-U.S. protests and demonstrations, which climaxed in disruptive acts of violence, were obviously the manifestations of a frustrated urban populace undergoing a phase of political growth crisis. They never meant, as our enemy had erroneously construed it, an expression of sympathy toward insurgency or Communism.

True to their self-serving interpretation, Communist leaders identified this urban unrest with the process of political struggle for the Communist cause. They believed that Communism was the only alternative and that those who openly defied the government naturally opted for Communist insurgency.

In this black-and-white world of Communism where party discipline and doctrinal orthodoxy were the absolute rules, understandably no political cadre of the lower echelons would ever dare contradict the party's leadership by reporting the contrary. No party member would want to run the risk of being criticized as rightist-minded and lacking faith in the party's policies and leadership. For this aberrance, he might even be castigated for failure or neglect in proselyting the masses or the crime of heresy. As a result, the Communists committed the same error that sometimes marred our effort, namely, failure to report the truth.

One of the ploys that our enemy had planned to use in instigating the South Vietnamese population into insurrection was to make them suspicious of the U.S. His purpose was to impart on them and on the RVN government and armed forces the impression that his offensive action had been subject to pre-agreement by the U.S.

The suspicion was further enhanced by the fact that the RVN was caught off-guard by the offensive. Apparently very few Vietnamese, especially those who had some knowledge about U.S. capabilities, could bring themselves to believe that the U.S. was unable to detect Communist preparations for the general offensive. They suspected that the U.S. did know but withheld the information because it had struck an agreement with the Communists to end the war and disengage from South Vietnam. This was how the surprise came about, they concluded. To some senior Vietnamese Commanders, it also appeared that the U.S. intelligence system, in spite of its technological prowess, had simply failed to fully predict the objectives, scope, and timing of the enemy offensive.

To obtain the element of surprise, the Communists had to strike on New Year's day that, by tradition, every Vietnamese held in sacred

veneration. The price they had to pay for that surprise, therefore was unexpectedly high because it was the popular backlash that doomed their plans to utter failure. There was no doubt that in those areas under attack the urban people were irrated by what they considered a most treacherous act by the Communists. And this wrath partly accounted for the enthusiasm with which people subsequently responded to the GVN appeals for solidarity in self-defense against aggression.

Granted the Communists did achieve the element of surprise, I do not believe it would have been possible under normal conditions. Our enemy had spent at least six months to prepare for his offensive. Given the scale and the extent of preparations, there was simply no way he could keep it secret, regardless of how precautious he might have been. Indeed, to some extent, our enemy did give away his secret and our intelligence was also able to detect several indications. In the light of these indications alone, the enemy scheme would have appeared more transparent to us had we not been preoccupied with overconfidence and subjectivity. The lesson here was quite classic, but this was how we learned not to underestimate the enemy's capabilities.

Since our enemy had predicated his success on the element of surprise, a question that could have been asked in the aftermath of the offensive was this. Had we been able to detect the enemy's scheme, or, in other words, if our enemy had known that his plan was no longer a secret, would he still have proceeded with the offensive?

It is difficult to prove something that would have resulted from what did not really happen, but from hindsight and based on events which subsequently unfolded, one may say that the offensive would have taken place even if it had been discovered.

As evidence to this, we may point, for example, to the fact that the enemy still launched the second phase of his offensive even though he no longer enjoyed the element of surprise. The fact was enemy infantry forces kept returning and even succeeded in penetrating Saigon and Cholon for a second time even though we knew in advance the

entire enemy plan, including such essential details as his objectives, his forces, his direction of attack and even the timing of his attack.

It was self-evident, therefore, that any planner had to take into consideration the possibility that however minute his planning, the element of surprise might or might not work. That it might not work would not necessarily doom the entire plan, and in view of the political objectives he had decided upon, it would be senseless for our enemy to hold back his offensive simply for the reason that we had known about it.

Undoubtedly, our enemy had weighed the pros and cons and estimated the chances of victory or defeat in his planning. This was precisely the reason why Vo Nguyen Giap later concluded that even in the event of defeat, his side had nothing to lose in the offensive. This made sense militarily because the worst that could happen to our enemy amounted simply to a retreat toward his former bases where he could always wait and prepare for another chance.

Not only did our enemy have nothing to lose, he had everything to gain because the general offensive was perhaps the only strategic alternative to help him recover some measure of initiative that had been lost after the dismal dry seasons of 1965-1966 and 1966-1967. The general offensive was intended precisely to wrest back the initiative, not only a military sense but also in terms of politics and international prestige.

The chain of events that successively took place in the aftermath of the offensive, such as President Johnson's non-candidacy, the reshuffle of U.S. military leaders seen through the resignation of Defense Secretary Robert S. McNamara and the reassignment of General William C. Westmoreland, the complete cessation of bombings against North Vietnam, the mounting anti-war movement in the U.S., and the eventual U.S. troop redeployment from South Vietnam: all were considered as political victories by the Communists. Centainly, as they viewed it, these were far more important than just military gains.

To put it differently, our enemy believed that he had broken the will and determination of the U.S. through his general offensive. To

his reasoning, the U.S. intervention in Vietnam had reached its peak; from this time on, it had no other way to go but downhill.

As far as the RVN and U.S. side was concerned, the military gains were more obvious. Such military accomplishments as measured through statistics on enemy troops killed, detained or rallied, on enemy weapons captured, represented solid facts that nobody could dispute because they were witnessed by the South Vietnamese people themselves. No single city or district town had been completely seized by the Communist during the offensive. More importantly, the enemy was completely driven away from urban areas. These facts also constituted undeniable evidence of our military victory.

In addition to military victory, the RVN also achieved other gains which, though less visible, were perhaps far more important for its long-term survival.

First and foremost, the RVNAF had gained self-assurance; they were confident they could defeat the North Vietnamese Army. Then, the extensive firefights that pitched our RF and PF against NVA units completely shattered the myth that the RVN territorial forces were no match for the enemy's main forces. The RVNAF felt confident because they had fully demonstrated, to their own people and in the inquisitive eyes of the foreign press, the value of their combat capabilities, a value that had been misconstrued because they had had no previous chance to prove it.

In terms of internal politics, the RVN also gained a resounding victory. The South Vietnamese people, at the most critical moment of the situation when the enemy was at their very doorsteps, had made a clear-cut decision as to their political inclination. They had unwaveringly opted for the regime of South Vietnam and declined the invitation to join the Communists, although this invitation was wrapped under such appealing concepts as Neutrality, Democracy and Peace. This unflinching attitude of the South Vietnamese people toward Communism was termed appropriately "voting by feet." Indeed, by their feet, they always chose to flee the Communist-controlled areas toward where the nationalist government was established.

But the South Vietnamese people did not only vote by their feet; they also voted by their hands which picked up weapons and by their will which told them to use these weapons for defense. They did not simply flee the Communists; they actually joined the ranks of nationalists and fought against those from whom they fled, directly or indirectly, even with weapons, something which was least expected and seldom occurred before. Without being told, they voluntarily cooperated with the government in organizing themselves for defense, protecting their households, their communities against the VCI whose members they tracked down and eliminated. The surprising fact about it all was that never before had the rapport between the people and the armed forces and between the people and the government been so close. Without much effort, the GVN had thus definitely won the battle of the hearts and the minds.

Such was the situation of South Vietnam in the aftermath of the 1968 Tet Offensive. Its positive aspects were self-evident. Unfortunately they were little known by the world at large, especially the American public, which was exposed only to the negative aspects that carried all the undertones of pessimism, despair, and defeatism.

Reports on the enemy's offensive came to the American public only from one side, the South Vietnamese side. Among the words and pictures depicting war, destruction, and death, there was none that suggested and effectively conveyed the fact that those involved on our side, to include the people, never lost their confidence in the survival of South Vietnam. The end result of it all seemed rather weird. While those directly involved in the fight were still confident and hopeful, the spectators detached from it had already felt disheartened and gave up.

In this atmosphere charged with prejudices, everything seemed to take on a meaning quite different from normal. General Westmoreland, for example, requested an additional 200,000 U.S. troops, which made sense militarily since this reinforcement was needed not only to deter future offensive attempts by the Communists but also to exploit the gains achieved after they had been defeated.

But this request unfortunately brought about a totally different effect, an effect which was both undesirable and unexpected. It fed more fuel to the anti-war movement whose most vocal elements vehemently demanded the withdrawal of all U.S. troops from Vietnam and an immediate end to the war. Although it never had any significant effect on our conduct of the war other than mollifying the will of some ARVN junior officers, this clamor struck at the hearts of some segments of the American public and U.S. Congressmen as well who had already felt bitterly disappointed with the military solution in Vietnam, in which they no longer took heart. For at a moment of utmost confidence and optimism, the enemy suddently pulled out a surprise attack which seemed to turn everything upside down.

From hindsight, one may be tempted to question the wisdom of that request for more U.S. troops. At a time when Americans felt increasingly adverse to the war, perhaps a political move such as recommending a gradual reduction in the level of U.S. troops by that same amount would have helped level off the mounting tension. Not only would this have been more logical, it could even bring our hard earned military victory and other gains into proper focus. After all, we should have required less, and not more troops in South Vietnam since the enemy had been so soundly defeated.

To free nations, however, balancing the requirements of the war against those dictated by politics in order to achieve the desired overall result was perhaps not a habitual domain of war leadership. Yet, in the context of the Vietnam war, political dictates could hardly be ignored because it was they that eventually prevailed.

Strangely enough, the events which unfolded in the U.S. during 1968 followed a pattern similar to those that took place in France fourteen years earlier. It was in that remote backstage of the war scene, whether in Washington, D.C. or Paris, that people felt the most insecure and disenchanted. But there could hardly be any parallel between 1954 and 1968 because the military situation then was entirely different. The aftermath of Dien Bien Phu was one of deterioration and despair, whereas what followed in the wake of Tet

1968 was but improvement and high expectations. Despite this, much to our consternation, we could do nothing to help cleanse the polluted air of our political backstage.

All this led us to the conclusion that the outcome of the enemy's 1968 General Offensive-General Uprising had self-compensating but opposing effects for both sides of the war. To our side, South Vietnam and the U.S., it was obviously a military success but a political failure in the long-term. As to our enemy, he was unquestionably defeated militarily; but politically, it was hardly deniable that he had won.

The enemy offensive, in the final analysis, was not unlike a chess game in which our opponent sacrificed his queen to move into checkmate position. We won his queen but in the process we also exposed our king to his checkmate. However, the final outcome of Tet 1968 would not have necessarily turned out this way had we known how to enhance our chance. For Tet 1968 had brought about new opportunities that would have helped us attain success in the near future. But we just let these opportunities slip by unknowingly.

Our enemy, on the contrary, jumped on this occasion to formalize the National Liberation Front as an entity capable of struggling politically with our regime on equal terms. He also seized the opportunity to obtain the complete cessation of bombings against his homeland, to gain an advantageous position in the peace talks that followed, and finally to wrest back the initiative in the war.

The United States, too, had seized its own chance, the chance of disengaging from the war with honor and in the hopes that its new strategy would work as long as South Vietnam survived.

On its part, South Vietnam was given the opportunity to strengthen its defense posture by expanding and modernizing its armed forces. For some time, it was able to regain initiative on the battlefield, driving the enemy away from urban centers and into his jungle habitat. Two years after Tet 1968, it was even able to launch offensive operations into Cambodia. But the best opportunities that South Vietnam enjoyed in the aftermath of Tet 1968 were perhaps the support of

its people, the solidarity of its own ranks, and the ascendency of its cause. All these were the ingredients that should unfailingly lead to ultimate success had our leadership known how to nurture and find ways to develop.

The sad fact was that once the threat to survival had been removed, all the gains that we were able to achieve gradually disappeared and finally everything seemed to retrogress to its former condition amidst contentment and complacency.

It was inadmissible, however, for the South Vietnamese leadership to fail to see what our enemy could and would do both in the short and long term and take appropriate actions to counter it. Communist strategy in South Vietnam was as clear as daylight, especially since the event of COSVN Resolution No. 9. Never in the war had we been able to lay our hands on such a comprehensive enemy policy document. All of our enemy's strategic approach, present and future, his vulnerabilities and shortcomings, his short and long-range objectives were there, laid out with unmistakable clarity. Despite this, we failed to plan for counteraction or even modify our plans to meet the implications of our enemy's strategy. Perhaps our leaders did not appreciate the importance of that document or did not believe in it. Or perhaps they were confident that their way of conducting the war was appropriate enough to face any contingency. In any event, it looked as though they saw in COSVN Resolution No. 9 nothing but the evidence of a military feat.

South Vietnam's passivity and inertia in the face of enemy designs were evidenced by its own indecisiveness as to whether to make the enemy document public. Our leadership did not know what to do with it and was unable to agree to disagree with a U.S. recommendation to release it to the press. It was finally the U.S. Embassy which made the decision and informed our own press of COSVN Resolution No. 9.

Finally, the Republic of Vietnam failed to exploit its own political and military advantages brought about by the enemy offensive. By its own doing, it let its principal role slip away and relegate its position to that of dependent nation. Its subsequent efforts to regain that

primary role in the Paris peace talks, therefore, were not too successful because it was too late.

The elements of success that South Vietnam enjoyed after the 1968 Tet offensive were all there for it to exploit. But it did not know how to do it and let them slip away.

Politics, for one, reverted to intrigues and power struggles as if oblivious to the ever-present threat of Communist conquest and seemingly ignorant of the fact that U.S. policies had irreversibly changed from commitment to disengagement.

Had our national leaders been more pragmatic and more properly concerned about future prospects, they could have seen for themselves that South Vietnam was in grave danger. Had they been cognizant of that danger and taken appropriate measures to maintain and exploit the gains achieved after the 1968 offensive, then perhaps this offensive would have yielded golden fruits, not for our enemy but for us who rightly deserved it.

South Vietnam would certainly have survived the conquest of its archenemy. For the prospects of a militarily strong and politically stable South Vietnam would have caused our allies, especially the U.S., to adopt political and military policies other than those that prevailed in the end.

Unfortunately, political clairvoyance and wisdom were not the forte of our leadership. As a result, what we gained from the 1968 Tet offensive turned out to be just an ephemeral victory. But from it our enemy was able to shape up the favorable conditions that enabled him to win the final victory in 1975.

Glossary

ARVN	Army of the Republic of Vietnam
ABN	Airborne
AK-47	Russian-designed assault rifle, 7.62-mm
B-40, B-41	Chinese-made rocket launcher
BBC	British Broadcasting Corporation
Binh-Tri-Thien	The provinces of Quang Binh, Quang Tri and Thua Thien
CIO	Central Intelligence Organization
CMD	Capital Military District
COSVN	Central Office for South Vietnam
CT	Enemy code abbreviation for divisions (Cong Truong), particularly those under COSVN control such as the 5th, 7th, and 9th
DMZ	Demilitarized Zone
FWMA	Free World Military Assistance
GVN	Government of the Republic of Vietnam
G-2	Assistant Chief of Staff for Intelligence, Corps and Division level
HES	Hamlet Evaluation System
J-2	Assistant Chief of Staff for Intelligence, JGS
J-3	Assistant Chief of Staff for Operations, JGS
JGS	Joint General Staff
JOC	Joint Operations Center
MACCORDS	Military Assistance Command Civil Operations and Rural Development Support
MACV	Military Assistance Command, Vietnam
MP	Military Police
M-79	Grenade launcher

MSS	Military Security Service
MR	Military Region
NLF	National Liberation Front (Viet Cong)
PRG	Provisional Revolutionary Government (Viet Cong)
PF	Popular Forces
PT-76	Russian light tank
QL	Vietnamese National Route
RD	Rural Development
RF	Regional Forces
ROK	Republic of Korea
RPM	Chinese-made light machine gun
RVN	Republic of Vietnam
RVNAF	Republic of Vietnam Armed Forces
S-2	Officer in charge of Military Intelligence, regiment, battalion, sector and subsector levels
Tri-Thien	The provinces of Quang Tri and Thua Thien
Tri-Thien-Hue	The provinces of Quang Tri, and Thua Thien and Hue City
USARV	United States Army, Vietnam
VCI	Viet Cong Infrastructure
VNAF	Vietnam Air Force
VNN	Vietnam Navy
VOA	Voice of America