Chapter XV: General Giap

General Giap was well known as strategically intelligent and strong-willed, not only in conventional wars, such as the battle of Dien Bien Phu, but in 1946, when Ho Chi Minh traveled to France to attend the Fontainebleau Conference, General Giap in coalition with Truong Chinh successfully launched a purge to eliminate almost all of their adversaries. However, facing his political opponents who claimed to have acted on behalf of the Party, he has come to acquiesce and became passive over time. Perhaps his war sword has been taken away by his loyalty to the Party and his strong sense of compliance.

The Trial of “Nam Chau – Sau Su”

Before the VII Congress, General Vo Nguyen Giap was assigned to campaign for his delegation at the Party meeting held in Nghe Tinh Province. In April in 1991, he arrived in Vinh to attend the meeting with the Nghe Tinh delegation. It was in the afternoon, when he arrived. Waiting until the elder general finished his lunch, the Nghe Tinh Province Secretary Nguyen Ba handed over to him a “urgent and top secret” telegram sent by the Secretariat and signed by Mr. Nguyen Thanh Binh. Not allowed to attend the Party meeting, General Giap was ordered to return to Hanoi right on that afternoon.

That year, General Giap was eighty years old. The distance from Vinh to Hanoi was only 300 kilometers but it was dusty and bumpy. General Giap came back to his room, wrote the Nghe Tinh team a few lines to excuse himself, got back in the car, and be driven back to Hanoi, where he had to face the Central Committee 12 to respond to political accusations. This was later referred to as “the Nam Chau – Sau Su trial.”

At the 12th Plenum of the Sixth Session, Mr. Nguyen Duc Tam, representing the Politburo, reported to the Central Committee on a top secret document that revealed a conspiracy in violation of the Party principles in reference to personnel appointments of top ranking cadres. Involving in this conspiracy were Vo Nguyen Giap, Tran Van Tra and some other high-ranking cadres.

General Nguyen Viet Thanh, Deputy Interior Minister, responsible for Security, recalled, “Listening to Mr. Tam, I had the impression that there was a conspiracy to make General Giap Chairman of the State and to replace Mr. Nguyen Van Linh in his capacity as General Secretary of the Party, and to make General Tran Van Tra Minister of Defense. Before the Central Committee Conference 12, Mr. Tra was called to report to Hanoi and restrained at the guest house located at 8 Chu Van An street. This top secret document was circulated to standing committees in provinces and towns by allowing it to be read but not to be copied.”

General Dong Sy Nguyen, member of the Politburo Session VI, said, “A coup conspired to overthrow the government is a lie. Not only is Mr. Giap a general, he is also considered commander-in-chief, a person who not only respects his soldier lives but puts the honor of the country as his top priority. He is a prudent person. Prompting from the Sau Su trial, they reopened the 1967 anti-Party incident and re-visited the old papers written by Le Duc Tho, which was also a set up trial.” Mr. Thanh added, “In
the Party Central Committee’s Conference II and III, many army general were furious. They stood up in General Giap’s defense. The elderly General Giap bitterly said, “People wrongly accused even the general who won the Dien Bien Phu Battle of being an adopted child of French spies.”

As the Congress VII was approaching, one day, around 9:00 pm, Interior Minister Mai Chi Tho called a private meeting. Attendants were Deputy Ministers Cao Dang Chiem, Pham Tam Long, Bui Thien Ngo, and Vo Viet Thanh. Mr. Mai Chi Tho said: “General Secretary Nguyen Van Linh tasked the Ministry of Public Security to bring to light brother Giap’s and brother Tra’s wrongdoings for both the Party’s and the government’s judgments. The Security Ministry appointed brother Vo Viet Thanh to take this responsibility. All four Deputy Ministers started worrying. Mr. Vo Viet Thanh stated, “We would like to suggest the Minister report to the General Secretary that they are patriots who have done so much for the country. If they have wronged, the Committee of Central Inspection will have to confirm and take actions. Once the Ministry of Public Security is involved if there should be clear evidence. Mr. Mai Thi Tho firmly said, “We have to carry out the General Secretary’s directive.”

Mr. Vo Viet Thanh went on, “If an investigation is necessary, I would suggest that brother Cao Dang Chiem or brother Bui Thien Ngo be in charge because they are more professionally experienced than I am. I am not declining but I know the report submitted by comrade Nguyen Duc Tam was prepared with input from some people without good intent in Department II of the Defense Ministry. I also know the person who initiated this report is Doan Khue. Director of Operations Tu Van and Deputy Vu Chinh had opinions different than mine on certain things, like taking advantages of positions to smuggle or arranging to have acquaintances hired. If I would be in charge of this investigation task, I am afraid that it could cause tension between Department II and myself.” Mr. Mai Chi Tho grumbled, “You are in charge of security. If you wouldn’t do it, who would?” Mr. Vo Viet Thanh had to say, “I will do it.”

Mr. Vo Viet Thanh said, “I took a flight to arrive in Saigon. Our team has gathered all necessary records. The problem is the pressure we are under. It came from the high echelons. Many people advised me that our investigation should not deviate from Mr. Nguyen Duc Tam’s report. General Tran Van Danh, the person who was most supportive of us, also said that he heard the same admonition. Mr. Danh called me up. I asked him, “Brother Ba, do you know where this advice came from?” Mr. Ba Tran, as General Tran Van Ba was known, said, “From a very higher up.” I said, “I would suggest that you tell them I have been assigned to do a job where I cannot compromise my integrity and go against the law. Mr. Ba Tran shook my hand. I did not know he discussed with me just to see how I’d proceed but he was supportive of my actions.”

Mr. Vo Viet Thanh went on, “On May 14, 1991, I ordered that Mr. Nguyen Thi Su be put under arrest immediately. Those who executed my order did not arrest her from her house because that would send alarm up the chain. They secretly captured her and brought her to the 258 Nguyen Trai street address. As soon as she got to the station, Mrs. Nguyen Thi Su asked, “Which side are you on?” Our team straightened her out, “You are not allowed to ask such a question. We are a security team. We
ask that you tell us all.” Sau Su responded, “I worked for Department II. I ask that you let me call Mr. Tu Van and Mr. Vu Chinh.” Our team said, “You are a criminal. You are not allowed to contact anyone.” In one day, Sau Su divulged everything."

There was no organization headed by General Giap, as mentioned in Mr. Nguyen Duc Tam’s report. According to Mr. Vo Viet Thanh, Sau Su said that Mr. Vu Chinh gave her money and a car to do the job. Department II specified whom generals she had to see and who gave her talking points. Through a person named Nam Chau, who used to work with Mr. Thanh Quang, General Giap’s former secretary, Sau Su was brought to General Giap’s house, along with certain veterans. Hearing that the veterans were visiting, General Giap stood up from his meal and went to greet them. Sau Su brought in a fruit basket as her gift and asked General Giap to have a picture taken with everyone. That was everything about the meeting. However, Sau Su created a report, saying, “Mr. Giap has concurred with the plan.” Mr. Vo Viet Thanh said, “The tape recorded at General Giap’s house was not audible but Department II cooked it up and turned it into a report. The report concluded that there were ongoing efforts to have a coup against the government, a conspiracy within the Party to influence personnel appointments of top rankings before Conference VII, and this conspiracy was led by General Giap, General Tra and some other high ranking cadres. This reports was used by Mr. Nguyen Duc Tam as the ground to accuse General Giap in the Central Conference 12.”

According colonel Nguyen Van Huyen, General Giap’s Chief of Office, when taking a lunch break from the Central Conference 12, General Giap went home and asked him, “Do you remember anyone named Nam Chau, who used to live in the South, came here to see us?” Mr. Huyen refreshed General Giap’s memory. General Giap ate lunch then took a nap. Before the conference time in the afternoon, Mr. Huyen walked into his bedroom and the General was snoring. Mr. Huyen asked, “How could you sleep when you have to face this serious charge?” General Giap smiled, “The upright tree is never afraid of dying straight” (A Vietnamese proverb that means: ‘Hold steadfast to your honor/integrity’ or ‘not being afraid of doing the right thing’.

On the contrary, Department II was shaking as soon as Sau Su was put under arrest, on May 15, 1991. The Second Bureau was shaken. Director Tu Van became sick. Mr. Vo Viet Thanh flew out to Hanoi with Sau Su’s statements in his hands on May 17, 1991. General Le Duc Anh wrote an extremely brief letter: “To The Politburo. I would like to withdraw from my campaign for Congress IX. Thank you, Politburo. Respectfully, Le Duc Anh.” Under stress, General Le Duc Anh collapsed. Dr. Do Bang Dinh, who treated General Le Duc Anh in the emergency room, stated, “Mr. Le Duc Anh was bleeding in his stomach. His blood pressure got down to a zero. His red cell counts showed only one million. He was fortunate to survive this.”

Mr. Vo Viet Thanh said, “Arriving in Hanoi, I prepared a report for Mr. Mai Chi Tho’s signature. Mr.

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1 Nguyen Thi Su was born in Kien Giang in 1934, resident of District 5, Ho Chi Minh City. She joined the Thanh Nien Tien Phong but chose to stay in the South.
Mai Chi Tho said, “You could sign on it. Send it out and give brother Linh a briefing.” Right on that afternoon, Central Politburo Chief of Office Hong Ha had a meeting scheduled for me to meet with the General Secretary. Listening to my briefing, Mr. Linh said nothing. However, the next morning saw a “secret order” from his office asking that the circulation of Mr. Nguyen Duc Tam’s report be stopped and the original report with Mr. Tam’s signature in it be returned to the Central Bureau. Afterwards, the Central Bureau said nothing to General Giap but kept General Tra at 8 Chu Van An street.” Mr. Vo Viet Thanh added, “General Secretary Nguyen Van Linh offered no conclusion on the Sau Su’s report in the Central Conference and did not update members of the Politburo.” The General Secretary’s attitude sent a signal to Department II and soon after Mr. Vo Viet Thanh started to receive below-the-belt retaliations.

Mr. Vo Viet Thanh said, “On June 23, 1991, before the last session of the Central Conference, when the delegates got called back to Hanoi, Mr. Hong Ha gave me a note that read “We suggest that comrade Vo Viet Thanh see the Politburo and the Secretariat during the break.” I came to meet with them and saw Vo Chi Cong, Nguyen Duc Tam, Doan Khue, Nguyen Quyet and Nguyen Thanh Binh waiting. Doan Khue looked angry. Vo Chi Cong and Nguyen Duc Tam were brief, “Representing the Politburo and the Secretariat, we want you to know, comrade, two things. You are a young, hard working cadre, and having potentials. Unfortunately, we have received reports that led us on to a couple of things. First, right after the liberation day, you arrested two intelligence cadres working for the Defense Ministry but nobody knows what happened to them afterwards. Second, your parents got killed by us, not by the enemies, as punishments imposed on detractors. Therefore, we have to cancel your nomination for re-election to Central Committee VII.”

“I was shocked. When I heard those insulting words against my parents’ honor, I could not tolerate it.\(^2\)

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2 When the Ngo Dinh Diem government launched the Strategic Hamlet Program, Mr. Vo Viet Thanh’s parents were old and against it. They did not want to be forced to move to the hamlet village. On the evening of August 26, 1962, a group of VN soldiers stationed at Luong Phu, Giong Trom district, Ben Tre province impersonated Liberation Army went to their house and asked them to “go to greet the Liberation Army coming.” They were prudent and refused to go. They were tied up, brought to the river bank and got killed. The next morning, the Saigon government distorted it and spread it as they were killed by the Liberation Army, although two of their children joined the Liberation forces. In reference to the accusation of arresting two cadres, according to Mr. Vo Viet Thanh, on the afternoon of April 30, 1975, scouts captured two persons, Phan Mau and Le Duc Phuong. Phan Mau was Brigade Commander of Division 5, who surrendered to the Saigon government in the Tet Offensive. Le Duc Phuong was an espionage who was assigned by Department II to stay in the South in 1954, but betrayed when his identification was revealed. Mr. Vo Viet Thanh, a political commissar working in a battalion under the Military Report Brigade 316, ordered to have Phan Mau and Le Duc Phuong released. Mr. Thanh said, “However, on May 2, 1975, after a meeting with the Headquarters of the Ho Chi Minh Campaign, the Brigade Commander relayed their command that we needed to render judgments, during this gray period, to punish those who had committed crimes against the people. He asked me to re-arrest the two individuals released on the afternoon of April 30, 1975. I ordered the scouting company to execute it. Overwhelmed with my work, I never followed through with it.” After Congress VII, Mr. Vo Viet Thanh had their records reviewed and was informed by the Capital Zone Headquarters that Le Duc Phuong had just recently recognized with new papers signed by Department II as a martyr. Mr. Vo Viet Thanh said, “Afterwards, when confronted in a meeting at the Politburo, Tu Van acknowledged that Phuong was neither a captain nor a member. Tu Van said that there were mistakes made in the Policy Office.”
I had a gun in my briefcase. I thought of pulling it out to shoot at the three of them before taking my life. But I did not want to jeopardize the Conference. I tried to swallow my anger. Mr. Thanh maintained his integrity and respected the Conference but his political career was coming to a close. Mr. Vo Viet Thanh said, “If I had taken the advice and concluded my report as per Mr. Nguyen Duc Tam’s, I would have been promoted. However, I would also have to take the next step, which was to wrongly arrest General Tra and General Giap. In so doing, I couldn’t have lived with my conscience. My conscience would have killed me gradually and eventually.”

That year, General Giap was eighty. He was not associated with any official organizations. If the Nam

3 After Vo Viet Thanh was removed from the listing of candidates for the Central Committee, on June 24, 1991, Le Duc Anh wrote the second letter: “To Brother Linh and Brother To, Politburo, the Secretariat. Previously, in preparation for Congress VI, I suggested that the fifth plenum Politburo allow me to be assigned with a study on war experience and nothing else. The Politburo did not approve and asked me to continue my tenure for another plenum. I have taken my job seriously, as assigned by the Party. I am getting old and have not had a chance to accomplish what I love to do. Now, as necessary, I could continue to work a few more years. I could study to coordination of strategic defense, national security and economy under complicated circumstances. If the Party gives me more challenging assignments that I am not qualified for, when I am this old, I am afraid that I will not be able to accomplish them. That will not help the Party and the country. I ask that the Party allow me or assign me to work on a war experience assessment project, and work with our brothers to study on upgrading our applications in response to new challenges. I would like also to withdraw my name from the nominations to the seventh plenum Politburo. I hope that you will approve. Le Duc Anh.” (Colonel General Le Duc Anh, Quan Doi Nhan Dan Publisher, 2005, page 243). Le Duc Anh was released from the hospital when Congress VII began. Mr. Vo Viet Thanh stated, “During a break, Le Duc Anh was looking for me and took my hand to bring me to a row of chairs along side the hall. He said, “I was hospitalized with my bleeding stomach and I knew nothing about what happened to you. However, I know that it was not big of a deal, brother Bay Thanh. Take it easy.” Mr. Vo Viet Thanh said, “I was touched by what Mr. Le Duc Anh said. I thought that Department II did it because of my relationship with Tu Van. But when I was preparing to leave Internal Affairs Ministry to return to Saigon, brother Bui Thien Ngo, Internal Affairs Minister, called me up and surprised me. Brother Ba Ngo said, “Bay Thanh, I don’t know how Le Duc And treats you, but after Congress VII, he told me not to allow you to maintain your career, but to transfer you immediately to Commerce Ministry.

4 In 1983, after seven years working with Thanh Nien Xung Phong forces, he was offered a position within the Internal Security by Mr. Vo Van Kiet. He was named Director of Internal Security Department of Ho Chi Minh City. In 1986, in Congress VI, he became a standing member of the Politburo, when Nong Duc Manh, Nguyen Tan Dung and Truong My Hoa were only alternate members. Lieutenant General Vo Viet Thanh was an army hero, forced to leave the army at a time that was thought there were no enemies. Not only the Nam Chau – Sau Su trial did take General Giap out of the political picture, it also stood in the way of Mr. Vo Viet Thanh, whom Mr. Vo Van Kiet expected to be named Internal Affairs Minister, when he became Prime Minister.

5 General Vo Nguyen Giap was born in An Xa, Loc Thuy village, Le Thuy district, Quang Binh province. General Giap recounted, “My maternal grandfather was a soldier who joined the Can Vuong Resistance. During his attendance at Quoc Hoc High School in Hue, the young Giap used to visit Mr. Phan Boi Chau and was allowed free rein to the books in Mr. Phan’s library. Giap also had a great relationship with his teacher Dang Thai Mai. When Giap was sixteen years old, the French expelled Nguyen Chi Dieu from his school. Giap organized a student movement to protest it. Because of that, Giap was also expelled and had to go back to his village. Nguyen Chi Dieu went to An Xa to look for him. Nguyen Chi Dieu said, “We formed the Tan Viet Party. Giap responded, “I will go with you.” Vo Nguyen Giap actively made efforts to help Tan Viet join the Indochina Communist Party. In October 1930, Giap, his teacher Dang Thai Mai, along with many others, were arrested, including Nguyen Thi Quang Thai, the sister of Nguyen Thi Minh Khai. In 1929, Giap went with his teacher Dang Thai Mai to Hanoi, teaching history at Thang Long high school and also studied to get a bachelor degree in Law and another in Economics. Mr. Bui Diem, a student of General Giap’s, former Minister of the Republic of South Vietnam’s Prime Minister Resident in 1965, and former Ambassador to the United States, wrote: “At that time, everything about Mr. Giap was so particular. That is
Chau – Sau Su incident would have gotten its way, it would only cause damages to his reputation in the Party. When Vo Nguyen Giap became a general, Defense Minister Le Duc Anh was just a cadre at the battalion level. His inferiority complex toward the Generalissimo’s glorious achievements could only have been thickened through the two persons who promoted him, Le Duan and, especially, Le Duc Tho.

The Southern Revolution

It was said that the relationship between Le Duan and Vo Nguyen Giap was quite amicable at the beginning. General Giap said, “When he first arrived in the North, brother Duan confided in me about the difficulties in his work. Many times, he told me that if it was not for sister Thai, he could not have escaped the death penalty in 1940.”

The reference on “sister Thai” that Mr. Le Duan mentioned above took place in 1940, in the trial of those leaders of the Southern Uprising. Mr. Le Duan and Mrs. Nguyen Thi Minh Khai were standing in front of each other in two metal bars enclosure in court. Mrs. Minh Khai wrote a note, folded it and threw it toward Mr. Le Duan. Unfortunately, the note landed at the foot of a prison soldier standing nearby. Mrs. Nguyen Thi Quang Thai, who was standing also nearby, saw it. She quickly picked it up, put it in her mouth and swallowed it down.

When assigning responsibilities among the Party, Mr. Ho Chi Minh said, “The military matters should be assigned to brother Giap.” Once Mr. Ho Chi Minh sent Vo Nguyen Giap to China for military training, but changed his mind when sensing that opportunity was on his side, and called him back. Ho Chi Minh realized that France was losing in Europe in the World War II and wanted to grasp that great opportunity. But this decision also caused General Giap not ever having any kinds of army training. Perhaps his military talent was born out of his teaching history in the past.

On December 22, 1944, in Viet Bac, Vo Nguyen Giap formed the Vietnamese Liberation Army Propaganda Unit with thirty four soldiers, of which three were female. Right after its founding, the

why my memory about him is still vivid, even after a half century. His lecture on Napoleon was very interesting...It seems as if he has absorbed everything in his mind and history became part of his life. He seemed to dwell in his own world and inspired his student to dwell in it with him.” (Bui Diem, In the Jaws of History, Pham Quang Khai Publisher, 2000, pages 21, 22 and 23). In 1946, when Mr. Dang Thai Mai moved from Sam Son to Hanoi, Mr. Giap visited him and met his nineteen-year-old daughter Dang Bich Ha. They got married and had four children. After 1954, General Giap’s family, included Vo Hong Anh, his daughter with Mme Quang Thái lived together in the villa located at 30 Hoang Dieu street in Hanoi.

6 Le Duan, Su That Publisher, 2002, page 36.
7 Vo Nguyen Giap and Nguyen Thi Quang Thai got married in 1935. In 1940, Giap left his young wife and their first newborn to accompany Pham van Dong to Van Nam, China. Nguyen Thi Quang Thai was captured by the French and died in prison in 1944. Professor Vo Hong Anh, their daughter, wrote: “My father heard of the name Nguyen Thi Quang Thai, Nguyen Thi Minh Khai’s intelligent and beautiful younger sister, the first time in 1929. When his train to return to Hue arrived in Vinh, my mother got on board along with another Dong Khanh High School student. They met. My mother wore an ao dai. She wore long hair. Her skin was white and radiant. He was most impressed with her beautiful eyes.”
8 General Giap is the one who wore a felt hat in the photo taken with “34 soldiers” and that is why Le Duc Tho called
Vietnam Liberation Propaganda Unit won two battles in Na Ngan and Khai Phat, Cao Bang province. When the Japanese took over the government from the French, the Vietnam Liberation Propaganda Unit had extended their operations from Cao Bang to Tuyen Quang and Lang Son. On May 15, 1945, this force merged with National Salvation troops and formed the Vietnam Liberation Army.

Not until May 1940 did Vo Nguyen Giap go to China to meet with Ho Chi Minh and joined the Indochina Communist Party, while Le Duan had already become a standing member of the Central Committee of the Party in 1939. However, while Le Duan’s role was diminishing in the South, Vo Nguyen Giap rose to be the shining beacon of Dien Bien Phu, a hero who shook the world.” Mr. Hoang Tung stated, “When Le Duan and Le Duc Tho went to the North, they did not feel comfortable sitting with General Giap.” Although the relationship between Le Duc Tho and Le Duan began with a confrontation, since the day Le Duan arrived in the North, Le Duc Tho played a key role in Le Duan’s road to his pinnacle of power.10

Mr. Giap was very prudent to take care of himself, especially in his interactions with Le Duan. In 1956, the Politburo admitted mistakes in the Land Reform Program. Truong Chinh resigned. Ho Chi Minh was Chairman of the Party and also served as General Secretary. General Giap, who served as Ho Chi Minh’s Assistant in the Party, stated, “In July 1957, I recommended that brother Ba (Le Duan)
be the Deputy General Secretary so he could do his best, but he declined and said that the position should be determined by a Conference. In a meeting, the Politburo discussed preparation for the Conference, when nominated to serve as Chief of the Political Reports Committee, he declined also and said that he had not been in the North for ten years, and found it a tough job, and suggested that comrades Truong Chinh and Vo Nguyen Giap take charge. Finally, the Politburo recommended that Uncle Ho be the Chief and brother Ba, the Deputy.\textsuperscript{11}

Mr. Hoang Tung, who was the Central Committee Chief of Office at the time, said, “Between October 1956 and July 1957, I was tasked to provide assistance to Mr. Giap in chairing the Corrective Conference. When Uncle Ho replaced Truong Chinh as general secretary, Vo Nguyen Giap then a standing member of the Politburo was assigned to provide assistance to Uncle Ho in managing the standing committee business.” According to Mr. Hoang Tung, things were quite sensitive in the Politburo at that time. Some were acting to hide their wish of becoming selected General Secretary by Ho Chi Minh. Some were aggressively working to achieve that ambition. Mr. Hoang Tung said, “Le Duc Tho met with his fellows and said it point blank ‘now it’s my turn.’ His sphere of influence during 1945 – 1946 was great; he was only third behind Ho Chi Minh and Truong Chinh. Uncle Ho had sent him to the South with the intention not to let the “two tigers” Truong Chinh and Le Duc Tho be together. When Uncle Ho sought a straw vote, nobody nominated Le Duc Tho. Among the four candidates Le Duan, Truong Chinh, Pham Van Dong and Vo Nguyen Giap, Le Duan got the highest count.”

But that was what happened in the III Vietnam Labor Party’s Conference in 1960, after “the Southern Revolution strategy” has taken shape.

On July 6, 1956, two weeks before the unification of the South and the North expired according to the 1945 Geneva Accords, Ho Chi Minh wrote an open letter to “the people of the whole country” in which he addressed: “Our sacred duty is to resolutely continue our efforts to fight for the implementation of the Geneva Accords, unifying our country as an independent and democratic country by peaceful means.\textsuperscript{12} On July 9, 1956, in a demonstration in Hanoi, General Giap gave a long speech to elaborate the spirit of the July 6, 1956 letter written by Ho Chi Minh\textsuperscript{13}: “Our strategy is to unify the country by peaceful means. We realize that internal and international conditions are being in our favor and it is

\textsuperscript{11} Le Duan, Su That Publisher, 2002, page 36.
\textsuperscript{12} Nhan Dan Newspaper, July 12, 1956 edition.
\textsuperscript{13} Excerpt from General Vo Nguyen Giap’s July 9, 1956 speech: “July 1956 is approaching. The general election, outlined in the Geneva Accords, is being destroyed by the American Empire and the South government. However, during the last two years, our people and our army have achieved several victories: the North was liberated, the first step to reinforce the South revolution was maintained and developed, and the international support has been strengthened. Our policy is to unify the country by means of peace, and we realized that under these internal and international situations, our goal of successful unification by means of peace is feasible. We have been fighting for peace and establishing peace was our victory. We are determined to fight until the end to realize our unification. This is also the peace competition between the North’s and the South’s politics, within the boundary of one country.” (Nhan Dan Newspaper, July 12, 1956 edition).
feasible for us to achieve it by peaceful means.\textsuperscript{14}\textsuperscript{15}

In the July 6, 1956 letter, Ho Chi Minh also came up with an idea: “Establish normal relations and the right to travel freely between the two regions, helping political, economic, and cultural organizations in the South as well as in the North be able to interact. Organize joint committees that should consist of delegates of the two regions to discuss common freedom elections, aiming at unification, as the Geneva Accords outline.\textsuperscript{15}\textsuperscript{16}”

This was not a perspective shared solely by General Giap or Ho Chi Minh. It was a long-term peaceful co-existence strategy promoted by the socialist camp, led by the Soviet Union, aiming at resolving internal issues after Khrushchev replaced Stalin, who had died three years before.\textsuperscript{16} During that time, in preparation for the Southern Revolution Outlines in Saigon, Le Duan said, “Our strategy in achieving our goals cannot stray from peaceful means. This peaceful means is the only way that helps us form our political power to triumph over wars conspired by the Americans – Diem’s cruel policy.\textsuperscript{17}” According to Le Duan, peace is “the wish of the people in the South.\textsuperscript{18}”

General Giap reasoned, “We have to keep in mind that the world have the ability to avoid wars, but the risk of wars is present as long as imperialism is still existing. The American empire has arrived in the South, therefore, our country is still at risk of a war.\textsuperscript{19}” On the contrary, Mr. Le Duan said, “It is feasible to achieve unification for the country by peaceful means…There is no reason to make wars…People from both regions are against any conspiracy aiming at dividing them and against wars conspired by Americans – Diem, so we could achieve cooperation and negotiation for peace and unification.”\textsuperscript{20}

In August 1955, the Central Conference 8 determined, “The enemies in front of us are the American empire and its puppets.” The Conference emphasized: “To unify the country, the focus is to make all efforts to defend the North, maintain and push the fight by the Southern people.” In June 1956, the Politburo conferred and issued announcements to confirm that the revolutionary duty is to fight against the American empire with the slogan: “Political campaigning does not mean not to use weapons for self defense under circumstances.\textsuperscript{21}”

In March 1957, after Resolution 12 was issued by the Central Committee, the North’s army started its

\textsuperscript{14} Nhan Dan Newspaper, July 12, 1956 edition.
\textsuperscript{15} Nhan Dan Newspaper, July 12, 1956 edition.
\textsuperscript{16} In his speech delivered in front of the July 9, 1956 demonstration, General Giap stated. : “Under this current condition, that goal (to compete for peace) is the only achievable one. That assessment was consistent with a political analysis on internal politics discussed by the Soviet Congress XX. That Congress XX discussed new methodologies to reach socialism, in which one was fighting by peaceful means, not using weapons.
\textsuperscript{17} Party Registered Document Complete, chapter 17-1956, pages 797-798.
\textsuperscript{18} As referenced in the same book.
\textsuperscript{19} Nhan Dan Newspaper, July 12, 1956 edition.
\textsuperscript{20} As referenced in the same book.
\textsuperscript{21} Several Authors, Le Duan Complete, Su That Publisher, 2002, pp. 35-36.
“stage of official establishment.” The policy of “disarmament” was put in practice. Many army generals were assigned to work in economic areas. Even General Nguyen Chi Thanh was sent to Quang Binh to be the “Strong Wind”, as But Tre wrote in his poem: “Bravo, brother Nguyen Chi Thanh. You have come and animal and human fertilizers were scattered all over the place.”

On June 4, 1957, Le Duan landed at Gia Lam airport, after a long flight. At the beginning, Le Duan “did not have any official assignments.” He stayed in the same guesthouse with Mr. Phan Van Dang, who came from the Southern Executive Committee. The two of them used to “fool” security guards and rode their bicycles outside the facility. Knowing it, the security guards did not dare to get in their way openly. They had to release the valve of the tires. One time, in a hurry, they used a sharp pick to poke the tire. The two of them even mingled with crowds to buy “the cheapest tickets” at Hong Ha theater, or clinging on theater columns to watch Cai Luong.22

Before Le Duan arrived in Hanoi, those who joined in drafting Resolution 15 considered that arming to fight was inevitable. Mr. Hoang Tung said, “During the spring of 1957, Tran Quang Huy and I went to Do Son in preparation for Southern Revolution Outline. We outlined our standpoint that peaceful means was not possible, we have to get ready to fight to liberate the South. However, Mr. Hoang Tung admitted, “Thanks to the time he spent in battlefields, Le Duan was the one who developed and completed Resolution 15.”

Mr. Hoang Tung added, “At that time, the Politburo had no illusion of peace, but to make pronouncement publicly, we had to say it. Uncle Ho realized that as well, but if it were leaked out, China and the Soviet would reprimand us. According to Mr. Hoang Tung, when arriving in the North, Le Duan has not got used to the way the leadership had to deal with their two “big brothers.” Noticing people debating Resolution 15, when we took a break, Mr. Le Duan said to me, “We have had peace already. They wanted the South to die, they have already abandoned us.” Promoting the peace was not a lip service like Mr. Hoang Tung said. In 1958, Division 332 was disarmed and twenty thousand soldiers were transferred to economic work.23

General Vo Nguyen Giap wrote: “Arriving from the South, he (Le Duan) said, “The most inspiring thing is to know that the Central Committee has realized that Americans are our biggest enemies” and “Until I got here, I did not fully grasp the complex and difficult situation, and we could not initiate an armed operation in the South sooner.” General Le Duc Anh confirmed, “In late 1957, when meeting with him at the Defense Ministry, Le Duan said, “Having been here in the North only for a few months, I learned that our internal condition and the international situation are quite complicated.”

During the time the direction was not definitely defined, ten thousands of Party members got arrested or killed by anti-communist operations administered by the Ngo Dinh Diem government. On the other

22 loc.cit. pp. 35-36.
23 Pham Van Tra, Soldier Life, Quan Doi Nhan Dan Publisher, 2009.
24 Several Authors, Le Duan Complete, Su That Publisher, 2002, pages 35-36.
hand, from that time to 1960, each year, there were 2,500 officials of the South who got assassinated.”

In reality, guerilla activities never ceased, and since 1959, those activities were even more aggressive.

Kissinger wrote: “By the end of President Eisenhower’s term, the Vietnam government has received more than one billion dollars in aid from the United States; there were 1,500 Americans in South Vietnam, of which 692 were military advisors; the United States Embassy in Saigon became the largest U. S. delegation in the world.”

The first attack against Americans took place on January 2, 1963, in a combat village named Ap Bac, located 14 kilometers from My Tho city. However, in 1963, when assigned to draft a political report for the Central Committee Conference 9, Mr. Hoang Minh Chinh still based it on Krushchev’s “peaceful coexistence” principle. His report was not selected. In December 1963, First General Secretary Le Duan called for Central Conference 9, introducing “draft of a resolution for international affairs and against neo-revisionism.” Hoang Minh Chinh maintained his opinion by delivering to certain members of the Central Committee an article he wrote, titled as On Dogmatism in Vietnam. Some of the members, Bui Cong Trung, Le Liem, Ung Van Khiem, lent him support.

Since 1964, resolution on international issues and fighting against neo revisionism has caused forty people who were studying or taking training in the Soviet to “seek asylums.” Among them, there were people who were close to General Giap, such as Nguyen Minh Can, Deputy Chairman of the Hanoi Administrative Committee, colonel Le Vinh Quoc, Secretary of Division 308, Deputy Secretary of Corps III, Lieutenenat Colonel Do Van Doan, former Chief Editor of the Quan Doi Nhan Dan magazine.

After Central Conference 9, the “Southern Revolution” issues were not influenced by China’s or the Soviet’s attitudes. Within the Party, the direction was defined: “developing socialism in the North and liberating the South.” In September 1963, a Deputy Chief in Command position was established and sent to the South. As a matter of fact, during the time Mr. Le Duan was presiding over the Central

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26 As referenced in the same book.
27 Two Liberation companies got into a combat with the RVN, which numbered four times of the Liberation forces and equipped with tanks M113 and artillery and assisted by American advisors. It resulted in 60 RVN casualties, 109 RVN wounded, 3 American advisor casualties and 8 American wounded. The Liberation Army was safely returned to Dong Thap Muoi on the same combat evening.
28 Dean of Philosophy Academy, Depuyu Principal Party School Nguyen Ai Quoc.
29 Mr. Ung Van Khiem was removed from Foreign Affairs Minister to Home Affair Minister in April 1963.
30 In September 1963, colonel Le Duc Anh was named Deputy Commander in Chief and, by the end of that winter, sent to the South. Mr. Le Duc Anh stated, “Before my departure, Mr. Van Tien Dung said, “As soon as you get there, please report to brothers Nguyen Van Linh and Tran Van Tra, discuss with them the implementation of Resolution 15. First, make all efforts to build up our military forces locally; second, the East of the South should be extended to the east coast; third, try to gain and utilize human resources and materials to expand our revolution. Afterwards, Mr. Le Duc Anh visited with Mr. Le Duan at his residence located at 6 Hoang Dieu street. Mr. Le Duan stated, “Those three recommendations make sense. However, we need to add one more, which is to focus on building our revolutionary forces and our military activities in cities and Saigon’s neighboring areas.” (Colonel
Committee Conference 9, hundreds of army officers at the tactical level started traveling to training centers.\(^{31}\)

However, as per the Director of the Defense Intelligence Agency Le Trong Nghia: “At the beginning of 1964, in Hanoi, the Central Committee was divided over drafting Resolution 9. Therefore, Resolution 9 stopped short at fighting against the United States but keep the war as a non-conventional one so it would not spread to the North.”

Early 1960’s, in the South, “Ngo Chi Sy” (president Ngo Dinh Diem, literally “the patriot Ngo”) began to be seen as a dictator, governing the country in a family-rule operation.\(^{32}\) On August 24, 1963, after arriving in Saigon to serve as the United States Ambassador to Vietnam. Henry Cabot Lodge received an order from Washington D.C. to have Nhu removed and to warn Diem not to refuse to execute the order, or the United States would not be able to protect him.\(^{33}\) On November 1, 1963, a group of Saigon’s generals overthrew the government. The two brothers Diem and Nhu ran to hide themselves in Cha Tam Church (in Cholon), but they were captured and got killed.\(^{34}\)

Three weeks later, on November 22, 1963, in Dallas, Texas, President Kennedy was assassinated. The new president, Lyndon Baines Johnson, began to see the appearance of the regular Northern troops in the South as an "invading army". On December 21, 1963, Defense Secretary McNamara told Johnson that the United States faces a choice: escalating military intervention or the fall of South Vietnam.

**The Gulf of Tonkin Incident**

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General Le Duc Anh, Quan Doi Nhan Dan Publisher, 2005, page 63). At that time, Mr. Nguyen Van Linh was Secretary of the Politburo, General Tran Van Tra Commander in Chief in the South Command. Both of them said, “Then we should implement the recommendations offered by brother Ba Duan and brother Van Tien Dung.” (Colonel General Le Duc Anh, Quan Doi Nhan Dan Publisher, page 65.)

\(^{31}\) Colonel General Pham Van Tra stated, “On December 1, 1963, I was notified of my new assignment...We marched to regroup in Tay Ho village, Tho Xuan district, Thanh Hoa province. This was where comrades To Ky and Dong Van Cong, who were on top of our situation and missions, encouraged and diligently prepared for the last phase of the far-away operations. (Colonel General Pham van Tra, Soldier Life, Quan Doi Nhan Dan Publisher, 2009, page 87).

\(^{32}\) In mid-1963, the Ordinance that prohibited religious flags and political party flags hanging signed by President Ngo Dinh Diem caused a chain of protests. In the demonstration in Hue on August 5, 1963, RVN soldiers open fire on the demonstrators. On June 11, 1963, at the intersection of Phan Dinh Phung and Le Van Duyet streets, Buddhist monk Thich Quang Duc immolated himself. Photographs of the monk sitting peacefully in his self-immolation were circulated widely across the world as evidence of the lost-of-mandate Ngo Dinh Diem government. “The last straw” occurred on August 21, 1963, when Ngo Dinh Nhu’s forces unexpectedly raided pagoda after pagoda and arrested more than 1,400 monks.


\(^{34}\) On November 2, 1963, at 6:20 PM, Mr. Diem telephoned General Tran Van Don to announce his surrender and asked that he and his brother Ngo Dinh Nhu be allowed to go to the airport and leave Vietnam safely. At 6:45 PM, Mr. Diem disclosed to General Khiem the location where he and his brother were hiding at. At 7:00 PM, General Big Minh sent general Mai Huu Xuan to bring Mr. Diem to the Headquarters. At 8:30 PM, brothers Diem and Nhu were killed in an M113 tank, in which captain Nguyen Van Nhung, General Big Minh’s bodyguard, was riding. It was not known as to who ordered the killings of Mr. Diem and Mr. Nhu because not long afterwards, captain Nhung died and his death was officially announced as a “suicide.”
A month after Ngo Dinh Diem was overthrown, Central Committee conferred to take the war to the next level: “It is time for the North to lend support to the South. The North has to focus more on its role as the revolutionary base for the entire country.” Shortly afterwards, Division 325 was assigned to “Battlefield B.**35**

The Americans did not sit still when the North escalated military support to the South. They determined to increase their operations in Southern Laos and on the ocean. The 7th Fleet steamed in and dispatched the USS Maddox to the Gulf of Tonkin. Colonel Le Trong Nghia was in charge of the military operations at the Central Military Commission, during the first week of August 1964. He stated, “Our analysis indicated that the Maddox would return to the Seventh Fleet after moving in for launching bombing aircrafts bombarding Nam Can base and disrupting our supplying operations. The Military Commission also found no signs of the Americans’ intention to use the Maddox in attacking North Vietnam.”

On August 2, 1964, cruising from North Vietnam to the waters of Hon Me island in Thanh Hoa, Maddox was attacked by a Vietnamese torpedo boat. The damage was minor but “the Capitol Hill was disturbed.” On August 4, 1964, USS Maddox received radar signals that she believed signaling another attack, although Vietnam’s “records did not indicate anything significant on August 4, 1964.”**36**

The USS Maddox incident challenged the American pride in Washington D.C. On August 5, 1964, American aircrafts carried out air strikes over the sky of the North the first time. On August 7, 1964, 100% of representatives of the House and 98% of senators of the Senate voted to pass the Gulf of Tonkin Resolution that granted the United States President the right to take military actions against communist North Vietnam. A week later, 160 regular army officers were graduated early and, from Thanh Hoa, began their journey to cross the Annamite Cordilla mountain range.**37**

Colonel Le Trong Nghia stated, “When the Gulf of Tonkin incident took place, both Vo Nguyen Giap and Nguyen Chi Thanh were out of town. China and the Soviet were furiously raising cane. Chairman Ho Chi Minh had to call a lesson-learned meeting. At the meeting, Ho Chi Minh raised the question point blank: “Who issued the order?” On the day of the Maddox incident, responsible as Central

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**35** Code names of the South’s battlefields: B-2 included the Southern provinces, B-3 Western Highland, K Campuchia, and C Laos.

**36** General Giap confirmed with U. S. Department of Defense Secretary McNamara in their meeting held in Hanoi on June 23, 1997. In 2005, decoded records issued by the White House indicate that president Johnson knew that there was no such a second attack on August 4, 1964. However, that fact was not disclosed to U. S. Congress and even the U. S. Defense Secretary was taken aback to hear what General Giap had to say.

**37** Colonel General Pham Van Tra stated, “On August 14, 1964, we officially departed. The General Division of Supplies’ vehicle convoy took us to the South on Road 1. The entire convoy included 160 people, most of whom were junior army officers. A week before, the U. S. Air Force continuously operated air raids over Dong Hoi, Quang Binh, Vinh, Cua Ho, Nghe An, Lach Truong, Thanh Hoa, Hon Gai, Quang Ninh…People in Vinh said that on August 5, 1964, U. S. air crafts bombarded and struck the gasoline inventory in Ben Thuy. Although gasoline had been removed to another location and only diesel was left behind, fires and smokes were seen rising as high as thousands of meters. (Colonel General Pham Van Tra, Soldier Life, Quan Doi Nhan Dan Publisher, 2009, page 92).
Military Commission Secretary on duty was General Tran Quy Hai. I was responsible for assessing the enemy’s condition.” Tran Quy Hai stated that he had reported to the Politburo but did not specify to whom. Vo Nguyen Giap suggested that the position be reprimanded but Van Tien Dung said that if we had not attacked them, they would have attacked us anyway. That is the nature of empires. Finally, Tran Quy Hai accepted the consequences, although everybody knew who gave order behind the scene. 

“The Gulf of Tonkin” incident became the reason for the pro-war people on both sides, Americans and Vietnam, escalated it to the next level. General Nguyen Chi Thanh, who most believed in defeating Americans by force, was assigned to the South to serve as Secretary of the Central Bureau. Accompanying him were generals Le Trong Tan, Nguyen Hoa, Hoang Cam and Tran Do.

Shortly after, in February 1965, the Central Bureau determined to launch Dong Xoai Operation. In the meantime, a residential building, where American advisors stayed, was attacked in Pleiku. The Americans retaliated by airstrikes in the North. This attack was quickly led to a well-organized air raid code named “Rolling Thunder.” This has put North Vietnam in a situation where they had to accept an armed force consisting of troops sent from other socialist countries to be present in the North secretly.

In 1964, Mr. Le Duan had planned to “take over the Saigon government” in 1965. It was a plan to have a coup d’état led by colonel Pham Ngoc Thao, in concert with a great attack, taking advantage of the time where the American undeclared war was considered “bankrupt” and their army has not yet been sent to Vietnam. Colonel Pham Ngoc Thao was planted by Le Duan to be a cell in the Ngo Dinh Diem government with a cover of “an intellect who returned from the revolution to the righteous nationalism.” To plan for a great attack, according to Mr. Vo Van Kiet, in 1964, five districts have been established within Saigon – Gia Dinh zone alone. Also in 1964, Mr. Le Duan sent a module from Hanoi to Saigon.

A member of this “module”, Mr. Kieu Xuan Long, stated, “We began to depart for B at the end of 1964, with Le Duan and Truong Chinh waving goodbye. At the beginning of 1965, when arriving in Tay Ninh, we heard Central Bureau cadres urge us expedite it or we would be late.” Counterfeit currency has been printed and brought to the South code named as “Product 65.” The coup d’état attempted by Pham Ngoc Thao failed. The most critical time period of the war had now begun.

On March 8, 1965, American troops landed at Da Nang beach and started going to war in July. In response, in September 1965, Division 9 and Division 5, two main forces of the South, were formed, one by one. In June 1966, Division 7 was added. More American troops were sent and the American presence in Vietnam reached 543,000 troops in 1968.

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38 According to Colonel Le Trong Nghia, General Tran Quy Hai was a close confidant to Le Duan and Le Duc Tho.
The Tet Offensive and Le Duc Tho’s ambition

In late 1966, interviewed by Harrison Salisbury, New York Time’s journalist, Prime Minister Pham Van Dong said it was true that the United States was “much stronger militarily” but “will be defeated in the end because there were more people willing to sacrifice for Vietnam than Americans.”

American political strength was challenged when there were hundreds casualties every week. There were 31,000 Americans dying or missing in action during the period of 1961 and early 1968. Television started airing news on American soldiers and civilians getting killed. The news was watched even from bedrooms every evening.

According to Henry Kissinger, “McNamara desperately wanted to end the war and many times pushed me to find any signs, even vague and indirect, that could help him end the operation by dialogues.” On July 4, 1965, President Johnson announced in Baltimore, “The United States is ready to negotiate unconditionally.” In late December 1965, the United States sent Harriman, a diplomat, to Poland to ask that Poland be the mediator in negotiation with Hanoi.

On January 2, 1966, J. Mikhalowski, Deputy and General Secretary of Poland’s State Department, arrived in Hanoi and advised Deputy Prime Minister Pham Van Dong and Chairman Ho Chi Minh that Americans were flexible and willing to find a way to negotiate. Mikhalowski insisted, “We need a new idea. We need to come up with ideas that showed we wanted peace and for it you will win moral support from the international communities.” Both Prime Minister Pham Van Dong and Chairman Ho Chi Minh flatly rejected the overture.

On June 6, 1966, a Canadian diplomat was sent to Hanoi but his efforts failed. Then the French President sent to Vietnam Mr. Jean Sainteny, the person who signed the preliminary agreement dated March 6, 1946, with Ho Chi Minh.

On July 1, 1966, in Hanoi, Sainteny said, “The United States is seeking a resolution to save face.

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40 Luu Van Loi & Nguyen Anh Vu, as referenced, page 124.
41 Mikhalowski, known as “hoping a lot from the meeting with Chairman Ho Chi Minh” said, “I was assigned by my comrades to come here to have an understanding of your opinions on this. I think that if the U.S. President believes that you comrades rule out all peace talk options, we have only one left, which is to push for war.” (Luu Van Loi & Nguyen Anh Vu, as referenced, pages 127-128). Ho Chi Minh appeared to be tougher than Pham Van Dong. He said, “Why do the Americans have to knock at all doors? It was them who sent troops here. Now, it is time for them to withdraw and stop their invasion. That is how the problem will be resolved. They got to get out! We do not care to be the winner. All we want is for Americans to get out. Good-bye!” (as referenced, page 128). Mikhalowski tried one more time, “Horrible wars would last five years, ten years. Why would we exercise political strategies to achieve similar goals? Americans probably want to withdraw somehow” (as referenced, page 129). Ho Chi Minh said, “The United States is stronger than France. However, we are stronger than we were as well. In the war against the French, we were alone. Now, we have the entire socialist block on our side” (as referenced, page 129). Mikhalowski said, “But our socialist block is not in agreement. You are the one who has to bleed. The price will be very high” (as referenced, page 129). Ho Chi Minh said, “The Vietnamese people are not afraid of it. If our generation could not accomplish it, our next generation will” (as referenced, page 129).
Vietnam has won. The United States has been defeated. As a small country, preventing the United States from getting what they wanted, Vietnam was considered winning. Sainteny tried to persuade Pham Van Dong, “Consider wars but also consider peace. Some day, you will need to negotiate.”

It was said that Ho Chi Minh walked in and interrupted, “If you have a chance to meet with the Americans, please tell them that we are not afraid of them. We are fighting to the end, even we will have to sacrifice everything.” The next day, July 5, 1966, in their official meeting, Ho Chi Minh said to Sainteny, “we understand Americans. We know their power. They could bring down Hanoi, Hai Phong, Nam Dinh, Bac Ninh and other cities. But that will not intimidate our will to fight to the end.”

In 1967, the United States began to have a communication channel with Vietnam through France. In mid-July 1967, Henry Kissinger became the middleman who initiated the negotiation process. Until then, the United States did not know that Mr. Le Duan had already had an ambitious plan, which was later named by American journalists as “Tet Offensive” and by Hanoi official records as “the General Offensive and General Uprising of Tet Mau Than 1968.”

In “the war to liberate the South”, although General Giap was Defense Minister, Commander in Chief, and General Secretary of the Central Military Commission, yet according to Mr. Le Trong Nghia: “Instead of Giap should be the decision maker, Le Duc Tho had an idea to organize a five-member group to assist the Central Committee in directing the war in the South. This five-member group consisted of Le Duan, Vo Nguyen Giap, Nguyen Chi Thanh, Pham Hung and Le Duc Tho. In this group, Mr. Giap had only one vote. The Tet Offensive was planned out in “meeting after meeting” where participants “argued fiercely.” Colonel Le Trong Nghia, who attended most of those meetings, stated, “There were two schools of thought in the Army Secretariat. The first school was delivered by Nguyen Chi Thanh and supported by Le Duan and Le Duc Tho, believing that we could only take over the South by combat forces. The second school was led by Vo Nguyen Giap and Nguyen Van Vinh. They agreed with the military force approach but recommended that political conditions be also factored in so negotiating opportunities could be grasped, if possible. However, in June 1967, both sides came up with a consensus, which was to fight. A strategy was developed, named as Project 67-68.”

On the afternoon of July 5, 1967, the Politburo, Ho Chi Minh included, had dinner to send General Nguyen Chi Thanh off to the South. After dinner, General Thanh stayed to talk with General Giap for a while. His family said that after a toss-and-turn night, with his wife by his side, in his residence at 34 Ly Nam De street, General Nguyen Chi Thanh felt sick. At dawn, he was brought to Army Hospital 108, but when he was laid down on the hospital bed, “an ‘Argh’ choking sound was let off his throat; his face and body turned purple.” Around 9:00 AM, on July 6, 1967, Nguyen Chi Thanh was pronounced

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43 Luu Van Loi & Nguyen Anh Vu, as referenced, page 147.
44 Luu Van Loi & Nguyen Anh Vu, as referenced, page 148.
45 Luu Van Loi & Nguyen Anh Vu, as referenced, page 149.
dead of a “heart attack.

As soon as the general who represented the approach of “claiming victories by all means of military” passed away, came two peace messengers from Washington, Mr. Raymond Aubrac and Mr. Herbert Marcovich. Aubrac was an acquaintance of Ho Chi Minh’s. They met when Ho Chi Minh attended the Fontainebleau in Paris.46 Shocked by General Thanh’s untimely death, General Giap got sick and was sent to Hungary to get recovered. Ho Chi Minh received those Washington messengers without his two generals. He started discussing peace talks.

On July 24, 1967, “Aubrac felt that there were new signs”47 when he met Ho Chi Minh. Prime Minister Pham Van Dong has almost discussed details of peace talks,48 under the condition that Americans got to stop bombing the North.

On August 25, 1967, Aubrac and Marcovich delivered to the Vietnam representative in Paris the first negotiation message that the United States sent the Democratic Republic of Vietnam: “The United States is willing to end the aerial and naval bombardment in North Vietnam with the understanding that it will lead quickly to effective discussions between the United States and the Democratic Republic Vietnam in resolving those issues causing conflicts between the two countries.”49

Nobody knows if that message sent by Washington has been delivered to their highest authorities in Hanoi. When the North responded, Ho Chi Minh was not in Hanoi. Colonel Le Trong Nghia stated, “On September 5, 1967, Ho Chi Minh was brought to Beijing. We received an announcement from

46 Raymond Aubrac (1914-2012) and his wife, Lucie (1912-2007) were two outstanding persons in the French revolution against Nazi Germany (1940-1944). During the time he led the government in Marseille, in the second half of 1944, Raymond Aubrac was wholeheartedly helped Vietnamese non-professional workers (ONS) living in this region. Those non-professional workers later became the first cells of the Vietnamese expat community movement in France. In summer 1946, arriving in France, Chairman Ho Chi Minh was looking for Raymond Aubrac. After meeting only once, Chairman Ho Chi Minh and his delegation (Vu Dinh Huynh, private secretary, posed as “Military Attache,” Pham Van Dong, who was the Lead of the Republic Democratic Vietnam delegation at the Fontainebleau Conference ) soon became guests who frequented their house in Choisy-sous-Montmorency (16 kilometers North of from Paris). During this time, Mrs. Lucie Aubrac gave birth to their youngest daughter Elizabeth (Babette), to whom Chairman Ho Chi Minh was the Godfather. Beside the trip to Hanoi in 1967, in 1975, when the war ended, Raymond Aubrac successfully persuaded McNamara to hand over all maps of landmines planted along the “McNamara Line” (according to Nguyen Ngoc Giao).
48 Pham Van Dong said to the two messengers from Washington, “There are two issues: negotiation and resolution. To negotiate, we stand by our conviction, which is that the United States must stop bombing the North unconditionally. In our negotiation process, we knew what we were asking. The Americans should do their part.” Aubrac asked, “What do you mean by stopping bombing the North unconditionally?” Pham Van Dong said, “We want them to make an announcement. However, we will not be difficult.” Marcovich said, “It could be a bombing cease in reality, not to declare.” Pham van Dong said, “We are not difficult about this. The main point is to stop bombing. We are not going to talk under the threat of weapons.” Marcovich reminded something that Sainteny had said, “The United States does not want to lose face. Kissinger told me to help them withdraw” (Luu Van Loi & Nguyen Anh Vu, as referenced, page 218).
Central Committee, signed by Le Duc Tho: “Uncle was not well and had to take a winter break. Going forward, for those who have been working with Uncle, please contact comrade Le Duan.”

On September 11, 1967, Mai Van Bo gave Aubrac and Marcovich a response from Hanoi: “The United States message was sent after an escalation of attacks against Hanoi and threats of continued attacks against Hanoi. Obviously, it was an ultimatum to the Vietnamese people. The government of Vietnam is determined to decline those proposals made by the United States. The Americans made another proposal named San Antonio, in which the United States would end their military actions against North Vietnam in exchange for dialogues, provided that Hanoi would not take advantages of it. On September 29, 1967, Johnson approved “the San Antonio Project” but Hanoi declined it, according to Kissinger.

Per Mr. Tran Viet Phuong, Prime Minister Pham Van Dong’s Secretary, “Le Duc Tho and Le Duan could not send those two powerful and respected leaders to some place where they did not agree with. The fact that Ho Chi Minh and Vo Nguyen Giap were being sent abroad was explained to be a ‘buy time’ strategy. They wanted to make the world believe that the North was not able to carry out a major policy decision if those two most important personage were not present in Hanoi.”

Subsequent events spelled out that the story was not simply a strategic disguise. Colonel Le Trong Nghia stated, “Twenty days after Nguyen Chi Thanh’s death, on July 27, 1967, Hoang Minh Chinh was put under arrest. More than a month after Ho Chi Minh was sent to Beijing, on October 18, 1967, the closest Secretary of his, Mr. Vu Dinh Huynh, was also arrested.” A trial purportedly said to be “Anti-Party Affair” was initiated and directed by the Head of Central Organizing Committee Le Duc Tho and Public Security Minister Tran Quoc Hoan.

Nguyen Chi Thanh’s death did not sway Le Duan’s determination in his strategy of achieving a decisive victory in the war with the South. General Giap said, “Brother Thanh passed away when we were just considering our attacks against the City, but not a plan to coordinate a general offensive and uprising on Tet Mau Thanh. However, during the time Vo Nguyen Giap was staying in Hungary and Ho Chi Minh in Beijing, a plan named “Quang Trung Campaign” was quickly developed.

Mr. Ho Chi Minh was brought back to Hanoi, when the great offensive was to take place. According to Mr. Vu Ky, Ho Chi Minh’s private secretary, on December 21, 1967, the Central Committee Office telegrammed uncle Ho, “inviting him to attend the Politburo meeting.” On December 23, 1967, the special plane carrying Ho Chi Minh reached Gia Lam. Mr. Vu Ky wrote: “The plane circulated two rounds but could not land because the landing lights on the runway were 15 degrees off. The well-experienced pilot determined to land anyway, without following those landing lights. Fortunately, it was a safe landing. Comrades Le Duan, Pham Van Dong and Le Duc Tho were all at the airport to

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welcome Uncle. They took Uncle home and gave him a briefing.\textsuperscript{52}

Soon after all guests left, the first thing Ho Chi Minh did was to make a call to Central Military Commission to ask for General Giap. Learning from Military Commission that General Giap was staying aboard, Ho Chi Minh reminded them to send cards and presents to “uncle Van” and his wife. He said, “Christmas and New Year are similar to our Tet. Psychologically, those who are out of the country would appreciate a present from the country.”\textsuperscript{53} Not only did he understand the old general who was put out of the loop, Ho Chi Minh was concerned of General Giap’s safety,” according to Colonel Le Trong Nghia.

From Hungary, on September 20, 1967, General Giap sent a letter to Colonel Nguyen Van Hieu: “Hieu, we will be staying here for a few more days. Hope that Hoang has received my letter. We are longing for letters from home. Please contact brother Thach and brother Tien. Whenever a delegate is coming here, bring us letters.” According to colonel Hieu, “brother Thach” and “brother Tien” in Giap’s letter were referring to Nguyen Co Thach and Hoang Van Tien, General Giap’s former Secretary, who was working at the Foreign Ministry. General Giap’s letter indicated that he was “hungry for news” and, instead of being informed through official channels, he had to hunt it though his confidantes.

On November 11, 1967, General Giap sent a second letter to colonel Nguyen Van Hieu from Hungary: “Hieu, I received your letter sent via the delegate. Then I received the letter you had written before that. I have been quite recovered, but not fully. Hoang will tell you more. Please see how my work and home arrangements will be made, so I could prepare myself when I return. I send my regards to our fellows in Department I, Department II and other Department. I heard that our newspaper article has divulged certain secrets (Hoang Tung said). That was not true. We have been very prudent.”

According to colonel Hieu, reading the letter written on a postcard, he was concerned. Why did the standing General wonder “how my work and home conditions would be arranged?” Colonel Hieu said, “During the time brother Van was staying in Hungary, I had to bear criticism against brother Van openly expressed in meetings at the Military Commission. Before, the Military Commission had been very supportive of each other. However, there was times when Nguyen Chi Thanh and Van Tien Dung started talking to cadres and isolating brother Van. Before going to the South, Nguyen Chi Thanh, at times, hinted, “In many countries, Commander in Chief should be a military position, but Defense Minister could be a civilian.” At that time, Van Tien Dung had replaced Hoang Van Thai to serve as Commander in Chief. However, when Nguyen Chi Thanh died, brother Van was still shocked, because the war needed great generals. In reference to competence, Nguyen Chi Thanh was much sharper than Van Tien Dung.”

According to colonel Nguyen Van Huyen, General Giap’s Secretary, that he was not able to validate Tran Quynh’s reminder to Ho Chi Minh, before his scheduled departure for the South, general Nguyen

\textsuperscript{52} Vu Ky, Uncle Ho and That Tet Mau Than, Van Nghe Magazine, Spring 1988 edition.
\textsuperscript{53} ibid.
Chi Thanh said to Ho Chi Minh that Uncle needed to look into personnel issues. However, Mr. Huyen confirmed that there were rumors about General Giap being anti-Party and people wanting to have him replaced. Mr. Huyen said, “Uncle said, “Certain people suggested it. Normally, in the committee, that could be assumed, but brother Giap was not capable of it. Moreover, we are fighting against Americans and winning the war. We should not replace Defense Minister.”

According to Mr. Vu Ky, on December 28, 1967, the Politburo called a meeting, held next to Ho Chi Minh’s residence. There was a large map hung on a stand in the meeting room, where many generals were coming to report. Mr. Vu Ky stated, “In that meeting, the Politburo brought our revolutionary war to the highest level, by means of general offensive and general uprising to achieve decisive victory. On the evening, after a lengthy and tense meeting, Uncle went home, his gait ponderous, perhaps something was happening making him feel ill at-ease. He was presiding the meeting. Sitting at one end of the meeting table, comrade Le Duan reported on the entire subject and coordinated discussions.”

On January 1, 1968, after visiting a few places damaged by aerial attacks in Hanoi, around 2:30 pm, after receiving “the Politburo coming to work with him”, Ho Chi Minh continued to “go Beijing to get recovered.” In Hanoi, Le Duc Tho’s hands started to clamp down tighter.

On the morning of January 6, 1968, at the Headquarters, Colonel Le Trong Nghia was in a meeting with Van Tien Dung in preparation for a successful operation. Mr. Dung said, “Please go to the General Political Department and meet with Song Hao.” Later Mr. Nghia said, “I went there. The person who received me was not Song Hao but Pham Ngoc Hau, Director of the Organizing Committee, also responsible for internal security. Mau said, “Please leave your briefcase, weapons and maps here. You need to go immediately. You have an assignment by the Politburo.” I took off those objects that I never leave home without, one by one, and I went only to the room next door. That evening, my wife came home from Vinh Yen, where she was evacuated to, and was waiting for me to eat dinner together, before she went back to Vinh Yen. I was not kept there for just the day. I was not the only one to be kept there either. In other rooms, Le Minh Nghia, Deputy Chief of Office at the Military Commission at the Headquarters, and Do Duc Kien, Director of Operations, were also in their custody. Worrying about an upcoming operation to be started, a week later, in the capacity of Secretary of Military Commission. I wrote a letter to General Secretary of the Military Commission Vo Nguyen Giap to raise my question as to why I was put under arrest. After a while, when I was about to be transferred to another location, a Deputy Director of Protection came and said to me, “Brother Giap is on leave. All of your business and others’ in the Military Commission are now under Le Duc Tho’s command.”

After “transferring Le Trong Nghia” to a prison, Director of Personnel Pham Ngoc Mau sent an invitation to the Military Chief of Office Nguyen Van Hieu. Nguyen Van Hieu stated, “Mr. Mau said, “The Military Academy is short-staffed. You have to replace Hoang Minh Thao and serve as Deputy

Director. Please hurry up.” I understood that they wanted to kick me out. Arriving at Tam Dao, I learned that they instructed the Academy not to put me in any position at the committee level.” Director of Military Reports Le Trong Nghia said, “In brief, before the opening-fire time, most of those who participated in writing the roadmap for the Tet Mau Than Operation were kicked out of the operation, including the Team Leader Do Duc Kien, Director of Operations.”

In order to keep the operation a top secret, only one week before opening fire, Le Duan called for members of the Politburo to Kim Boi so they could attend Central Conference 14. In the Conference, First General Secretary Le Duan announced that “several comrades are absent” from this important meeting. General Secretary Le Duan said, “First of all, I would like to report to you, comrades, that at this time several Central comrades are not well and not able to join us, and several comrades are busy and not able to join us. Within the Politburo, certain comrades are busy and not coming, and certain comrades are coming. Tomorrow, comrade Tho (Le Duc Tho) and comrade Dung (Van Tien Dung) are coming to report.”

After Central Conference 14, on the afternoon of January 20, 1968, Le Duc Tho arrived in Beijing “to give Uncle Ho a briefing.” General Giap recalled, “When they were about to open fire, Uncle was in Beijing. Uncle sent me a telegram: “Please make arrangements to go home, as soon as you could.” From Hungry, General Giap flew in to Beijing. According to Mr. Vu Ky, on the morning of January 25, 1968, Ho Chi Minh conferred with Vo Nguyen Giap. While both “the elderly father of the people” and “the big brother of the army” were still “resting” in Beijing, in secret, the leading military forces of the North were encircling major cities in the South. On “lunar December 29,” at 6:00 PM, Ho Chi Minh received a telegram sent by the Politburo and Central Committee, wishing Uncle a happy new year.

On the night the whole South Vietnam was overwhelmed with the General Uprising, Ho Chi Minh was in Beijing. “in an empty room” was his Secretary Vu Ky and himself, “Uncle” smiled when he heard a child sing “Oh baby! You are going on an evacuation. Tomorrow you will be back to town” and his own new year greetings: “This spring will be better than the previous ones. Victory will be announced to all families. The South and the North are fighting against Americans, side by side. Advance! Total victory will definitely be ours!”

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58 Vu Ky wrote: “Uncle and I sat side by side quietly, listening to news, music and Tet poem recitations, waiting for New Year Eve. Time slowly passed by. Uncle seemed pensive and quite sad. Since the day Uncle returned after more than thirty years living far from the country, he never missed sending his new year wish to the people and soldiers. Only this spring, when he had to be away from his fatherland. Uncle told me to turn on some good tapes for him to listen. I knew he loved children so I chose a tape that had several children songs and turned it on. When a child voice sang the song... “Oh baby! You are going on an evacuation. Tomorrow you will be back to town,” I saw him smile. There came firecracker sounds that said good-bye to Dinh Mui year and welcome Mau Than. At the same time, from the radio, his own new year greetings were heard: “This spring will be better than the previous ones. Victory will be announced to all. The South and the North are fighting against Americans, side by side. Advance! Total victory will definitely be ours!” That poem had been composed in three
A Chinese plane flew General Giap to Hanoi on Lunar December 29, two days before Tet Mau Than. The next day, he was briefed by General Vu Lang, Director of Operations, on “General Offensive Plan and General Uprising Plan.” Vu Lang said, “Brother Van Tien Dung told me that now I could tell brother Van everything.” General Giap tried so hard to stay calm and show no bitterness. The Commander in Chief was not advised of anything about such a great plan until one day before it was put in action.

Four days after the Tet Offensive began, General Nguyen Van Vinh, one of the most important figures responsible for the operation was outcast. General Nguyen Van Vinh, standing member of General Military Commission, had been assigned to Central Bureau to discuss a plan for the Tet Offensive, ten days after General Nguyen Chi Thanh passed away. General Vinh returned to Hanoi in early January 1968. He was the person who prepared and submitted a report on the war in the South to the Military Commission. He was also the author of Central Resolution 14.

According to his secretary, Mr. Pham Van Hung, on the afternoon of the 5th day of Tet Mau Than, Mr. Vinh was invited to meet with Le Duc Tho at Mr. Tho’s residence at 3 o’clock. The meeting was extended into the evening and Mr. Hung could not wait for Mr. Vinh any longer. The next morning, when Mr. Hung went to Mr. Vinh’s at 34 Cao Ba Quat street, Mr. Vinh told him that his positions as alternate member of the Politburo, standing member of the Central Military Commission, and Deputy Defense Minister have been taken away.

There were thirty people who got arrested. Most of them were closely associated with General Giap, such as General Dang Kim Giang, Director of Department II, colonel Le Trong Nghia, Chief of Office of Defense Ministry, colonel Le Minh Nghia, Director of Operations colonel Do Duc Kien, General Editor of Quan Doi Nhan Dan magazine Hoang The Dung, Deputy Director of Publisher Su That and Quang Binh Province Secretariat Nguyen Kien Giang, Director of Publisher Su That Minh Tranh…Except for those who were coerced into admission of knowing “the leading role of General Giap” and vaguely noticed the political motivation of “the trial,” most of them never understood the hidden agenda behind the trial even to the last day of their life.60

Tran Quynh, Le Duan’s Assistant, stated, “The people who were arrested included those who did not agree with the Party’s anti-revisionism, certain high ranking and middle-level cadres who had attended the Soviet Party’s Advanced Academy and the Soviet Military Advanced Academy, and now planned..."
to act against the Party. They formed a group working to establish an organization aiming at replacing the Politburo. They aimed at those who did not agree with Resolution 9, first of all, high ranking army officers and members of the Politburo.” Certain documents signed by Le Duc Tho also mentioned Resolution 9 and the revisionism. However, Resolution 9 had been implemented since 1964. Khrushchev, the person who promoted revisionism in the Soviet at that time had been outcast and replaced by Brezhnev. Although the trial started with Hoang Minh Chinh being arrested, most of those arrested key figures were either Ho Chi Minh’s secretaries or General Giap’s powerful assistants.

Mr. Pham Van Hung, General Giap’s secretary, said, “Mr. Vinh and Mr. Giang were from the Central Military Commission. They know each other well. Mr. Vinh resided at 34 Cao Ba Quat street, and Mr. Giang at the house across that street. Since leaving the army, Mr. Giang still went to Mr. Vinh’s to talk every now and then. Other high-ranking cadres, sometimes, went to Mr. Vinh’s to talk as well. Mr. Vinh was open-minded. However, he never leaked any military secrets.”

General Giap returned to the Headquarters when he did not have his favorite comrades anymore. “The Tet Offensive” took place on the eve of the Lunar new year, January 30, 1968, where the two sides had agreed to a cease fire so the people could celebrate Tet. Although there were confusions due to time zones of Hanoi and Saigon, right after the new year eve, almost all Liberation army units opened fire at the same time, blending in with the sounds of Tet’s firecrackers, in five of six cities, thirty-six of forty four towns, thirty-six of two hundred forty-two districts, twenty five airports…Especially, the attack shook up with what “Viet Cong” have done in Saigon and Hue.”

General Giap believed: “The General Offensive at an unexpected time was a creative idea. However, promoting a general uprising was not appropriate.” General Giap did not consider Tet Offensive a victory. He stated, “Originally, the goals were set up high: great attack, great uprising, and helping the people taking over the government. Counterfeit currency was printed and transported to the South. Uniforms for law enforcement officers were made. Comrade Dam Quang Trung in Corps IV prepared

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61 On January 27, 1972, the Central Committee issued a resolution to strip away Mr. Nguyen Van Vinh’s Lieutenant General ranking, and cancel party memberships from Mr. Vinh, Mr. Ung Van Khiem and Mr. Bui Cong Trung. Decision number 255, signed by Le Duc Tho, reads: “Comrade Nguyen Van Vinh knew that Dang Kim Giang was a bad individual, who had viewpoints against the Party’s Resolution 9, but still kept a relationship and exchanged certain inappropriate viewpoints on fighting against U. S. policy with Giang, and leaked political and military secret information to him. Giang has used the information in activities against the Party and provided it to foreigners. However, the adverse impact was limited. Comrade Vinh did not have connections with Giang’s organizations and activities like mistakes made by the other three members of the Central Committee, Ung Van Khiem, Le Liem and Bui Cong Trung.

62 Mr. Pham Van Hung became Mr. Vo Van Kiet’s secretary in 1973.


64 According to Nguyen Nhat Hong, Head of Division B29, a division responsible for support to the South, in 1967, the Central Committee had the National Front for the Liberation of South Vietnam’s currency printed and put in 10,000 chests. Because this currency was planned to be circulated in 1968, it was name coded “product 68.” At that time, the Central Bureau maintained 14,000 chests full of the Provisional Revolutionary Government of the Republic of South Vietnam’s currency, coded name “product 65.” It was anticipated that the appropriate currency would be circulated, depending on the upcoming level of the Revolution.
a convoy to transport the army and uniforms to manage the transition of taking over the government. What was later described as the General Offensive and General Uprising was actually far from the truth.

Sometime during the Tet Offensive, the Americans seized a document sent to Binh Dinh province’s cadres: “The General Offensive is a once a thousand years. It will determine the destiny of the country and end the war.” Mr. Le Duan even forecasted before the operation began: “The General Uprising that we are referring to is the final phase.” Mr. Duan believed that when the army marched in, people in Saigon would rise up.

Right after the operation began, Le Duc Tho went straight to the South to serve as Deputy Chairman of the Central Bureau. He stayed until May 1968, when there were no signs of victory in the battlefields.

The first “general offensive” of Tet Offensive created a surprising factor. However, Saigon did not “collapse immediately” and there were not “half million people taking their weapons and joining us” as General Secretary Le Duan anticipated. According to colonel Tu Chu, leader of the Saigon’s Special Force, there were sacrifices and losses that could have been avoided. That happened not only in the first offensive phase. General Giap stated: “When surprise was no longer a factor, extending attacks in cities, changing directions, getting slow in reinforcement, and maintaining the liberated areas and taking control in the countryside have caused us a lot of difficulties and casualties.”

From an upper hand position in the Southern battlefields, the Liberation Army has gone through many defensive days, fighting in despair.

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65 General Giap discussed with other generals who worked on war assessments on February 9, 1999, according to General Le Phi Long.
66 Le Duan spoke at Central Conference 14 in December 1967, “In order to defeat them, we will have to collapse them, not to fight at an average level like this, but to turn to a new phase, which is General Offensive, General Uprising.” He explained, “General Offensive, General Uprising…From Lenin’s perspective, uprising in a city means taking over the government, the first phase of a revolutionary war. An uprising alone is not the end of it. As we could see, after the August Revolution was achieved, we had to continue to fight for another nine years.” However, he stressed, “The uprising that we are referring to now is the final phase, not the first phase, not a one shot deal but a phase… We have our military logics…strong military forces, grand targets and sharp attacks spearheading at their hearts, uprising in terms of both military and politics for a while. Here, we could rise up and they could go down. It is going to be fantastic and we will not be able to imagine. If the Saigon government collapses a half million people, a few hundred thousands of people will take their weapons to join us, it is going to be grandiose, unimaginable” (Nhan Dan Newspaper, January 7, 2008 edition).
68 Colonel Chu explained, “According to the Tet Offensive I, the commando units were responsible for attacking, trying to hold the targets for an hour. There would be Corps’s pointed army divisions coming in support to take over the entire target, destroying central organizations of the Americans and their puppets. There would be certain ARVN military mutinies, uprisings of ten thousands of young people living in Saigon’s neighboring areas to gain control over the zones and targets that we would take over. In reality, there were neither military revolts nor uprisings. In reference to our main forces, some had not arrived in time or were not able to arrive. There were only commando forces attacking targets separately. There were forces fighting until the last man standing.”
70 In Hue, at 2:40 PM, a local commando battalion, two Northern army regiments, and a battalion of fire moved ahead
Yet on the American television there were not “Viet Cong” bases being turned into ashes. They were scenes of Viet Cong attacking the United States Embassy in Saigon, bodies of American troops scattered in Saigon streets, and General Nguyen Ngoc Loan pointing a gun at a POW’s head and executing him while his hands being tied.

The death toll broke the records in early February 1968, with 543 killed and 2,547 wounded in a single week. On February 27, 1968, Walter Cronkite, an American influential television anchor “broadcasted an editorial report that shocked the White House by foreseeing its failure.” Wall Street, a newspaper
to take over the Citadel. In the first six days of the General Offensive, Colonel Pham Van Khoa, governor of Thua Thien province had to hide in the ceiling of a hospital. The Liberation Army kept Hue for 26 days, in which a blue-red-star flag was flown at the highest mast in Hue. However, Hue suffered from the gun fires of both sides. There were 14,000 civilian casualties, 24,000 civilians wounded, excluding 3,000 ARVN and American soldiers, and 627,000 houses destroyed. Many people were taken away and killed. Hue has become a symbol so tragic that when Tet Offensive was referred to, the Southern people thought of mourning. Colonel General Pham Van Tra stated, “In the West, our battalion started with 7 full infantry companies, almost a thousand gunmen. After Tet Offensive I, there were only more than one hundred cadres and soldiers surviving. Certain battalions, when entering Can Tho, soldiers sat crowding hundreds of boats. When they got out, we counted only tens of boats, on each there were only a few brothers. We knew that we would not count both sides’ casualties to determine defeat or victory in wars. However, seeing big losses, we had to reflect or ponder, especially we were commanders in battles...I remember that at that time our brothers in the unit passed on to each other the 6-8 lines of poems that read: “It was easier to get to Vong Cung than to return from it. Bullets were flying next to each other and bombs dug holes next to foxholes;” or “It was thought that we would be riding vehicles on the roads. We never knew that when we returned, we had neither boats nor sampans” (Vong Cung was the name of the road that we took to enter Can Tho, Cai Rang). The author of those verses, a war reporter, was identified and given a warning” (Pham Van Tra, Soldier Life, Quan Doi Nhan Dan Publisher, 2009, pages 142-143). In the reality of war, the General Offensive and General Uprising were crushed. Documentation of assessments by the Secretariat of Zone IX, where Mr. Vo Van Kiet had been Secretary since 1970, read: “Believing in the ability of complete liberation,” the Zone Secretary has gather full force to attack major cities. The U.S. army and the Saigon army took the opportunity to operate “Special Settlement” and “Urgent Settlement” in the countryside, and gathered people to hamlets; cadres and party members were pushed away from the people. There were 250 hamlets in west of the South. By the end of 1968, in 50 hamlets, members had to leave their home, and in 40 other hamlets, there were only one or two members in each. Major regiments were defeated and chased to Tra Vinh and U Minh. Whereas the guerilla force count went down, new soldiers could not be recruited, even in liberated hamlets. In Tet Offensive, Mr. Vo Van Kiet was able to get himself into Saigon. On the afternoon of the new year, he was able to be in a small hamlet near Binh Dong Temple, District 8. Pioneer soldiers in Saigon received order after order to attack cities to “maximize victory opportunities.” Those who directly commanded combats also witness great sacrifices. He said, “It was so painful that many times I burst into crying. More than 110,000 Liberation soldiers died, and civilian casualties were immeasurable. Most of liberation bases became “bare.” The Liberation Army had never been in such a situation. There were commanding army officers at the division level who could not bear with it and had to surrender to the Saigon government. On February 9, 1999, speaking to generals who assessed the war, General Giap said, “A commanding officer sent me a telegram and described the shattering condition of our army, where they had to hide in salt water forests in the southeast of Saigon and generals could not command any longer. In Hue, brother Tran Van Quang sent me a sixteen-page telegram to request a retreat. I agreed and wrote a telegram in response. The next morning, noticing that the telegram was still on the desk, I asked why it had not been sent, brother Van Tien Dung answered, “This is a serious matter that we have to discuss with the Military Secretariat. You should not make the decision by yourself.” Fortunately, our brothers in Hue had already retreated. Comrade Tu Chu, Commander of Saigon commandos also told me about the reality of our soldiers after 1968. The loss was huge. The price we paid was too expensive. In reference to the Hue battlefield, brother Dang Kinh, Hue’s Deputy Commander in Chief, knew it best. He later submitted a report to the Central Committee and left a lot of important records. History is waiting for those who survived to bring it to light, especially those who were in charge.”

known as a Washington supporter, started worrying that the Tet Offensive would ruin the goals that were commended originally. On March 10, 1968, the NBC Television had a comment: “It is time for us to decide if it is senseless that to rescue Vietnam we have to destroy Vietnam.”

On March 31, 1968, President Johnson ordered “an unilateral halt bombing in part of the area north of the parallel latitude 20” and “a complete bombing halt when serious negotiations begin.” President Johnson announced that “no significant additional combat forces would be sent to Vietnam.” On the same day, President Johnson also announced that he would not seek his presidential re-election. Those reactions from Washington gave Hanoi the justification for considering the Tet Offensive “a victory that uproots the United States Empire’s willingness to invade Vietnam and forced it to start scaling the war down.”

**Resolution 21**

It took five years. It was not until ten thousands of lives from both sides were crushed in bombs and gun fires in Quang Tri throughout three months in the summer of 1972. It was not until “Hanoi, Hai Phong and several other cities” were badly damaged and thousands of people got killed in B-52 bombings during the 1972 Christmas season. On January 27, 1972, the Paris Peace Accords were signed.

The most important term that Mr. Le Duan was waiting for in the Paris Peace Accords was that the Americans had to withdraw but the North’s military forces did not have to. Kissinger had agreed to this in the negotiation since 1971. As a matter of fact, in the first few months of his term, President Nixon unilaterally withdrew American troops, reducing them from 575,000 troops in 1968 to 27,000 troops by 1972. The Paris Peace Accords only gave the American departure another name.

General Giap stated, “After the Paris Peace Accords, in Hanoi, there were several opinions in keeping the peace, implementing cooperation, creating a five-year or ten-year long term settlement. There was also a plan turn into an original capital fund 3.5 billion dollars that the United States promised to pay as war reparations. Even at the Headquarters, there was an opinion that recommended the North not to engage in combat, concerning violations against the Paris Peace Accords.

On the morning of March 27, 1973, at the Politburo all hand meeting, after listening to status reports, Foreign Minister Nguyen Duy Trinh suggested that “a strategy to reinforce our strengths be developed and specific policies be issued in response to the United States.” First Secretary Le Duan concluded, “We need to immediately build up our forces in the South as well as in the North, hold the Americans

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72 Ibid.
73 Ibid.
74 loc cit..
75 Vo Nguyen Giap, Headquarters in the Victorious Spring, Chinh Tri Quoc Gia Publisher, 2000, pages 48-49.
76 loc. cit.
responsible for the war, and force the enemy to abide by Paris Peace Accords.

On March 28, 1973, chairing the Central Military Commission meeting to elaborate the Politburo’s March 27, 1973 Resolution, General Giap reiterated his military strategy in the South, which was “a coordination of conventional and guerilla wars, fighting and propaganda, combat and building forces, and destroying enemies and gaining hearts of the people.” On March 29, 1973, the United States military headquarters and the last American troops left Saigon. In a Central Military Commission meeting, General Giap confirmed, “The combat target has now become the puppet army.” On March 28, 1973, Central Military Commission Secretary Vo Nguyen Giap sent telegrams to those who fought in the battlefields and explained: “Military offensive by means of counter-attack means having the initiative to attack, not merely to defend.”

However, after the March 27, 1973 meeting, To Huu and special correspondents Nguyen Tho Chan and Dinh Duc Thien were assigned to the Central Bureau to promote the Politburo’s policy direction, by which “political campaign is a preferred means.” The battlefields got to grasp all opportunities,” aiming at implementing into “opportunity watching” aiming at a national reconciliation and a peace race.” During this time, according to Mr. Lu Phuong, in organizations at the Region level, Mr. Tran Bach Dang interpreted the spirit of a letter known as “Letter to the South” written by Secretary Le Duan, in which “national harmony and national reconciliation” were the first priority, after the Paris Peace Accords were signed. By the end of 1972, Mr. Le Duan has arranged for cadres to study the forming and joining “a three-component coalition government.” Mr. Phan Van Khai, Deputy Director General of the State Planning, was one of the chosen cadres. Mr. Khai’s delegate arrived in the Central Bureau a few weeks after Mr. To Huu’s did.

After listening to Secretary To Huu interpreting the Politburo’s implementation plan of the Paris Peace Accords, in April 1973, the Military Tactical Regions Conference developed “five prohibitions.” They were prohibition of attacking enemies, prohibition of fighting against enemies’ raids, prohibition of firing artillery to enemies’ stations, prohibition of surrounding enemies’ posts, and prohibition of building fighting villages. In Corps IX, Mr. Vo Van Kiet and the Province Committee ordered Military Tactical Regions not to disseminate those Military Tactics Zone’s policies.

Mr. Vo Van Kiet said that after receiving the Central Bureau’s telegram, he communicated with colonel Le Duc Anh and Province Committee, and called up provincial teams and units. According to Mr. Kiet, he believed that the units would feel that there could be definitely other guidance. Previously, on February 2, 1973, in Corps IX, Mr. Kiet called a Province Committee, and thoroughly “warned” his subordinates that they should not have any “delusions” of peace.

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77 Ibid, p. 54.
78 Ibid, p. 55.
79 Ibid.
80 Ibid.
President Thieu had no “delusions” when he quietly had an operation developed and named it “territory overwhelming” aiming at controlling 85% of the land and 95% of the population in the South forty-five hours before the Paris Peace Accords went into effect. On March 3, 1973, thirty ARVN battalions aggressively opened fire in Chuong Thien, anticipating to take over all targets, blocking the U Minh exit in seven days. However, all of their attacks were overpowered. Corps IX organized attacks on all military compass.

Mr. Vo Van Kiet was a standing member of the Politburo. In front of the Regions and Corps, Mr. Kiet declared, “The highest command right now is to preserve the territory and the people.” Mr. Kiet recalled, “There were no other conferences where everyone gathered that quick to attend. The conference took only half day, then everyone was inspired to return to their posts.” However, many people thought that “the Southeast Zone Secretariat violated the Paris Peace Accords.” The Central Bureau sent a telegram to ask that Corps IX realize the new condition.”

The Region Headquarters criticized it, notified the entire region, and ordered that colonel Anh withdraw two brigades to the training site or colonel Le Duc Anh would be brought to the court martial. After discussing with Mr. Kiet, colonel Anh responded to the Headquarters: “Please allow Corps IX to execute the Region Administration’s policies.” Mr. Vo Van Kiet sent a telegram to the Central Bureau and the Politburo: “If we are not allowed to fight against the enemies to maintain our territory and our people, we will lose everything.”

After receiving Mr. Kiet’s telegram, First Secretary Le Duan called up representatives of regions, representatives of Central Bureau, representatives of the Region Headquarters to a meeting held in Hanoi. Deputy Secretary Nguyen Van Linh, the South’s Commander in Chief Hoang Van Thai, Corps IX Secretary Vo Van Kiet were present at the guesthouse to have their reports submitted in Hanoi.

Mr. Le Duan had an approach that was named “pocketing resolutions.” It means instead of elaborating resolutions and forcing units to execute whatever determined by authorities, he listened and considered modifications. He let the reality determined the resolutions and not the resolutions determined the reality. Mr. Kiet called it “bringing reality to resolutions.”

When cadres from the battlefields arrived in Hanoi, Mr. Le Duan requested that members of the Politburo, the ministries, and the offices invest their time enough to listen to each battlefield representative: “Report to any member of the Politburo who wants to listen.” Mr. Le Duan himself was seeking unification at the Politburo. According to Mr. Kiet, when he first arrived in the North, Mr. To Huu met with him many times to “convince Corps IX to execute resolution opportunity watching.”

It was the first time Mr. Vo Van Kiet went to Hanoi, the first time he worked closely with the Defense Ministry and General Vo Nguyen Giap. General Le Hai pointed at “West Concave of the South” on the map and asked, “Can we keep it?” Mr. Kiet said, “We’ll lose it, if we retreat. T3 also depends

81 Coded name of Corps IX.
on the overall condition of the battle. If all of us continue to attack, we will keep T3. If we retreat, we will lose T3.” Unlike Generals Le Hai, Van Tien Dung, who expressed their political opinions quite frankly, General Giap listened and asked specific questions but seemed to keep to himself his views and the Politburo’s on the Paris Peace Accords implementation. It was heard only once, when he said, “Staying completely in hiding benefits the people, but fighting back like T3 is a good proactive move.”

At that time, Mr. Kiet did not know that General Giap was in a very difficult situation and had to be prudent. However, there were reasons for him to evaluate T3 as making a good move. Since mid-April 1973, General Giap had a “Central Team” to elaborate a “strategic overview” coded name as “305 TG1.” The team was led by his loyal General Le Trong Tan, Deputy Commander in Chief.

In summer 1973, First Secretary Le Duan called for General Le Trong Tan. He asked Mr. Tan, “What is the Headquarters up to?” General Duc responded, “We are drafting a strategic plan for liberating the South.” Le Duan asked, “May I listen to your briefing?” According to General Duc, after the briefing, Le Duan ordered the entire Central Team to come and give him a briefing. On the afternoon, Le Trong Ta, Vu Lang and Le Huu Duc return to brief him on the specifics. Le Duan said, “I had the same idea. Listening to you, I felt that the Central Team has reinforced my thought. I will report this to the Politburo.”

Reporting it to the Politburo was a “top-secret issue” and that worried our combat officers. General Le Trong Tan had to communicate with General Van Tien Dung and General Giap to ask for their advice. Mr. Ho Ngoc Dai, Mr. Le Duan’s son-in-law, who lived with him at the villa 6, Hoang Dieu street, said, “One day, when riding in his car half way from Hanoi to Do Son, Mr. Le Duan received a telephone call from General Le Trong Tan, who wanted to have his verbal report submitted to the General Secretary. Mr. Le Duan wanted to ask General Tan to meet him in Do Son, but the general did not accept it because military secrets, on principle, could only be discussed at the Headquarters. Mr. Le Duan had to have his car returned to Hanoi, although the roads were bumpy."

During the same time, between March and August 1973, while the Central Bureau was listening to commanders of the battlefields reporting on the latest and their strategies after the Paris Peace Accords, in Corps IX, the ARVN continuously began their raids in Chuong Thien, with seventy-five battalions in total. Corps IX successfully halted those efforts made by Saigon. According to General Le Duc Anh, Bridgade I, commanded by Mr. Pham Van Tra, played a key role in it. In May 1973, the Politburo decided to have an all hand meeting in Do Son. General Giap said, “Nobody thoughts of resting or

82 Several generals believed that Tran Quynh lied when he wrote in his memoir: “Le Duan worked directly with the Headquarters on military related subjects. Sometimes he worked directly with Combat Department. His work site could be sometimes in the Defense Ministry, sometimes at his residence, sometimes in guesthouse Central Quang Ba, sometimes in Do Son resort. Afterwards, brothers in the Headquarters or Combat Department wrote up the project and had it submitted to the Military Committee, the Military Committee had it submitted to the Politburo for a decision to be made. Le Duan’s worked in a family operating style, without writing records or audiotaping. Le Duan spoke and his assistants took notes. This approach resulted in allowing dishonest people to claim Le Duan;s opinions theirs.”
Mr. Vo Van Kiet recalled, “The Central Conference 21 did not criticize Corps IX and the decision to change its strategy anymore. Central Conference 21, opening June 1973 and finalizing on October 4, 1973, confirmed that the approach of a revolution in the South needed to be a violent one.” General Tra stated, “If, in 1973, we had believed that one way or the other, the Peace Accords would be implemented and general elections would be organized, the situation could have not be the same like now.” What General Tra referred to as “like now” was actually the last battle of the Liberty Army. One month after Mr. Le Duc Anh from Hanoi returned to the Region Headquarters, Hanoi announced that the two colonels were promoted to Lieutenant Generals: Le Duc Anh and Dong Sy Nguyen, Commander in Chief of the Ho Chi Minh Trail Army.

**The Ho Chi Minh Campaign**

First General Secretary Le Duan was concerned, not knowing what the Americans would react to violence taken place even the Paris Peace Accords had been signed. Probably, like lyrics in a song, “Our country destiny has just arrived.” In 1973, President Nixon was involved in the Watergate scandal that led to his resignation. On January 9, 1974, President Gerald Ford succeeded to the presidency. Kissinger, whom President Ford kept on as State Department Secretary, stated, “The first decision the President made was how to react to the inequitable financial assistance to Vietnam.”

The budget allocated to Saigon decreased from $2.1 billion dollars in 1973 to $1.4 billion dollars in 1974 and $700,000 in 1975, although President Nixon proposed a total of $1.4 billion. According to a memorandum dated September 12, 1974, that Kissinger sent President Nixon, even Congress approved the $700 million assistance budget, the RVN will find it difficult to fight. By September 1974, there were 26,000 RVN casualties, since the Paris Peace Accords were signed. However, not only did the United States Senate not approve such a budget, it cut $300 million off the President’s proposal.

Early 1974, when the situation started “becoming critical,” on a business trip, General Giap felt a stomach ache, so badly that he collapsed. He said, “Waking up, I found myself lying in a rescue

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83 Vo Nguyen Giap, Headquarters in the Victorious Spring, Chinh Tri Quoc Gia Publisher, 2000, pages 67.
84 Tran Van Tra, Memoir of Ending the Thirty-Year War, Van Nghe Thanh Pho Ho Chi Minh, 1982.
86 The RVN was in a situation described as follows: “Not sufficient to replace equipment that was damaged or missing, decreased by 50% of capacity of those air crafts that have already landed, belonging to 11 top fleets, decreased by 30% of navy ship operations and 82% of navy boat operations; military medical supplies being exhausted by the end of May 1975; natural resources reserved for the army being exhausted by the end of 1975; by the end of 1975, RVN having only a quarter of the ammunition requirement in response to a big attack; air crafts and ground equipment not in used being damaged quickly (Henry Kissinger, Ending the Vietnam War, Simon & Schuster, 2003, page 496).
Because Army Hospital 108 could not diagnose his illness, the Politburo decided to send him to the Soviet in a special plane. In Moscow, his heart was about to stop beating a few times. Before going through a kidney-stone surgery, he wrote “a few lines to leave with his family.” In April 1974, he got recovered. The Soviet made arrangements to take him home in Hanoi in a plane. At that time, Van Tien Dung also got sick and was sent to abroad to seek treatments.

According to General Giap, in summer 1974, when both of them were taking vacation in Do Son, Le Duan discussed with him a series of strategic plans. After General Giap got recovered from his kidney-stone surgery in the Soviet, Le Duan said to him, “This is very important and imminent. Please grasp it!” In Do Son, General Giap was both resting and completing his 6th draft of “strategy for victory in the South.” He walked around Do Son, a private resort reserved for only the Politburo members, discussing with cadres walking with him. However, according to him, the strategy was kept as top secret, which he dictated only to colonel Vu Quang Ho, Deputy Director of Operations, for typing one part at a time.

According to Lieutenant General Le Huu Duc, the first two conferences were successful, but the third, fourth, fifth and sixth were not, after Le Duan hinted the general uprising approach, meaning using the strongest forces to attack the enemy headquarters such as during the Tet Offensive, then igniting the uprising. The Politburo started heatedly debating the general uprising approach. There were seven out of eleven members were in favor of Mr. Le Duan’s approach. Two members were in favor of General Giap’s general offensive approach.

General Le Huu Duc stated, “General Giap has been very lonely since the day Mr. Le Duan arrived in the North. Those generals like Van Tien Dung, Song Hao, Le Quang Dao, Tran Quy Hai tent to side with Mr. Le Duan’s opinions. Le Trong Tan was a great general and loyal to General Giap; however, he has not been a member of the Politburo. Fortunately, the Politburo did not operate by the majority rule, and General Giap was still trying to persuade patiently.

Since the Congress VII, the Politburo began to consider General Giap’s general offensive approach. General Le Huu Duc, Director of Operations, who worked closely with Mr. Le Duan and took notes of different opinions in the Politburo, stated, “Brother Le Duan kept complaining why the Politburo did not like the uprising approach. When the general offensive approach was chosen, he asked why starting with attacking Ban Me Thuoc but not Saigon.”

The Ban Me Thuoc plan was discussed between general Giap and General Hoang Van Thai right before Van Tien Dung went to the South. According to General Giap, since mid-1973, the Central Team had chosen the Western Highland as the strategic target. In a meeting, General Hoang Minh

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87 Vo Nguyen Giap, Headquarters in the Victorious Spring, Chinh Tri Quoc Gia Publisher, 2000, pages 93.
Thao reasoned that if the Western Highland was chosen, then Ban Me Thuoc should be attacked first. General Giap and General Dung agreed with this choice.

General Le Huu Duc stated, “In January 1975, right after Mr. Le Duan agreed with the strategy of attacking Ban Me Thuot first, General Giap ordered General Le Trong Tan to develop roads near Ban Me Thuoc so tanks and heavy artillery could be used for the clear-cut victory. When we could take over Ban Me Thuot, General Giap said to us, “Under this condition, we should not rule out the possibility of the enemy withdrawing from the Western Highland. It was March 11, 1975. On March 16, 1975, as exactly as he said, the puppet army withdrew.”

On the morning of March 11, 1975, learning that General Van Tien Dung took full control over Ban Me Thuot and his army was surrounding Kontum and Pleiku, the Politburo and the Central Commission Administration conferred. They were all in agreement: “We are able to gain great victories, quicker than anticipated. We concur with the Headquarters’ strategic plan.” In an uplifting atmosphere, near the end of the meeting, Le Duan asked, “Previously, we anticipated to liberate the South in two years. Now, after Phuoc Long, we took Ban Me Thuot. Could we expedite it? I would suggest that comrades in the Politburo and the Central Military Commission think of a way to change our strategy into general offensive all over the South.” General Le Huu Duc later said, “Brother Van was the first to concur with brother Ba’s proposal. Afterwards, all of the other also concurred.”

From March 11, 1975, until the Saigon army withdrew from West Highland, General Giap was working at Operations Department. He read himself all telegrams sent from the battlefields. Director of Operations Le Huu Duc was responsible for going to Mr. Le Duan’s residence to report on battlefields and action plans at 7:00 PM everyday. In the capacity of the Commander in Chief of the operation, General Giap oversaw it and keep in touch with Chief Commanders of the battlefields.

According to General Le Huu Duc, after the Saigon army withdrew from West Highland, General Giap and Standing Military Commissioner were in agreement of moving eastward, with specific responsibilities assigned by General Van Tien Dung. General Le Huu Duc said, “Brother Van instructed me to see brother Ba for his direction. Brother Ba seemed to be uncertain. Since 1972, brother Ba has intended to mobilize major forces so when opportunities presented themselves, we could overpower Saigon and gain victory. He meant when West Highland was liberated, the job of destroying the enemies and liberating the Central Coast provinces should be assigned to Corps V, the rest of West Highland’s forces should move forward to Loc Ninh, the sooner attacking Saigon the better. However, at that time, the preparation for combat and the coordination of strategic actions were not ready. Fortunately, brother Dung sent telegrams to suggest that we move eastward, as the Central Military

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88 Vo Nguyen Giap, Headquarters in the Victorious Spring, Chinh Tri Quoc Gia Publisher, 2000.
89 Le Duan, Chinh Tri Quoc Gia Publisher, 2002, page 664.
Commission also did. We reported one more time and got an approval from brother Ba.\textsuperscript{90}

Receiving those words, Battle Chief Commander Van Tien Dung sent Commander in Chief Vo Nguyen Giap telegram number 107: “Last night, I could not get any sleep over my intention and the directive of mobilizing Division X. Fortunately, twenty minutes later, I received your telegram. I am so excited to see the leadership and the battlefield people are in complete agreement.”\textsuperscript{91}

General Giap planned to go to Vinh Linh immediately. The helicopter was ready. However, he decided to stay because “the battlefield condition changed so fast.” The Commander in Chief could not leave the headquarters. After March 18, 1973, when the Politburo conferred at Nha Con Rong and unanimously agreed with the Central Military Commission’s proposal of “liberating the South in 1975”, General Giap went to Ninh Binh. He decided to send Corps I, the last Corps of the North, to the South. At that time, Corps I was helping people to make embankments in a diversionary plan in Ninh Binh. Receiving the order, Corps I promptly moved to the South, taking the National Route I, leaving only Division 308 in Ha Tay area, to be the reserve force and to protect Hanoi.

Prior to that point in time, from March 17, General Giap continuously sent telegrams to Tri Thien Headquarters and Corps II Headquarters to send forces to the plateau, keeping Hue and Da Nang disconnected, allowing tanks and big artillery to be used to increase attacking capacity and to upgrade offensive speed. General Giap criticized General Le Trong Tan, when he was working for a five-day plan, where the possibility of withdrawing by the ARVN was high, and General Tan had only three days to have the Da Nang battle resolved.

On March 24, the Politburo and the Military Commission conferred and resolutely determined to “take swift and daring actions, attacking the enemies unexpectedly, and liberate Saigon before the raining season of 1975.” The Politburo also approved a plan to form the Quang Da Front, coded name “Front 475” commanded by Lieutenant General Le Trong Tan, with Colonel General Chu Huy Man as Secretary and Lieutenant Colonel Le Phi Long as Head of Combat.

On the morning of March 25, General Le Trong Tan took the last commands from General Giap. That afternoon, along with the main component of the operation, he flew to Quang Binh airport to be transported to Quang Tri by a helicopter. The Headquarters 475 arrived at the mountainous area, west of Hue. They took Road 72 to go to Truoi, planning to command the attack on Hue. Mr. Le Phi Long stated, “On the way to Truoi, we heard that our army has liberated Hue on the afternoon of March 25.” Not having to attack Hue, Corps I was ordered to return to Quang Tri, changing their route from Highway 1 to the Ho Chi Minh Trail. Thirty thousand people and 1,053 vehicles of all kinds participated in the swift operation and reached Dong Xoai on April 16.

\textsuperscript{90} Le Duan, Chinh Tri Quoc Gia Publisher, 2002, page 665.

\textsuperscript{91} loc.cit., page 666.
Overwhelmed with certainty, after the Politburo conference, Le Duc Tho “volunteered himself” to the battlefields and left Hanoi on March 28, 1975. Therefore, at the Headquarters of “the South Liberation,” there were three members of the Politburo: Le Duc Tho, Pham Hung and Van Tien Dung. On April 14, 1975, the Command of the Operation sent a telegram to suggest that the operation be named Ho Chi Minh. A week before, on April 7, General Giap had ordered the “Coast Army” to be swift and daring. General Le Trong Tan had been also well prepared to win the “last battle.”

According to the plan, on April 27, 1975, all forces would begin to open fires in order for all “five army units” to simultaneously attack Saigon on April 29, 1075. However, according to General Le Huu Duc, on the evening of April 24, the Commander of the Coast Army, General Le Trong Tan, sent a telegram and asked for approval for Corps II and Corps IV to start attacking at 5:00 PM, April 26, because if they had to start on April 27, like other Corps, they might not be able to “open fire” at the same time. The Coast Army had to cross two rivers: Dong Nai River and Saigon River.

Receiving the telegram late in the night and thinking of going to each residence of Le Duan, Truong Chinh and Pham Van Dong, General Duc realized that it was urgent. He decided to wake up General Giap. Reading the telegram, General Giap agreed with General Tan immediately. However, being prudent, he took along the Head of Combat with him and brought a map to First General Secretary Le Duan.

After listening to General Duc read General Tan’s telegram, Vo Nguyen Giap said, “I would suggest that brother Ba approve for us to take actions accordingly to Tan’s telegram. Brother Ba responded immediately, “Attack, attack, let’s attack immediately, my brother. We are not going to wait anymore. At this time, we will attack whenever it is feasible.” Brother Van asked brother Ba, “Should I put your name in the telegram response?” Brother Ba said, “No, you are the Commander in Chief, you’ll sign.” Thinking for a while, Mr. Duan added, “If necessary, you could put my name in it. Or, you could say you had discussed this with brother Ba and he was in agreement.” On the same day, April 24, General Tan sent Head of Combat Le Phi Long to the Headquarters of the Operations. General Dung also

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92 Telegram sent from General Giap to Le Trong Tan, dated April 7, 1975: “Command: 1/ Quick, quicker; Daring, more daring. Trying every hour, every minute, advancing to the battlefield and liberating the South. Determine to fight and to defeat. 2/ Communicate to members and soldiers immediately. Van.”

93 In the book Le Duan Complete, both Mr. Le Huu Duc and Mrs. Dieu Muoi mistook it as April 29, 1975.

94 During the war, The Department of Operations was the organization that directly reported on the battlefields status and prepared records, including drafting resolutions for the Military Commission and the Politburo, and prepared telegrams signed by members of the Politburo. According to Major General Le Huu Duc, Head of Department of Operations, during the 55 days of the Ho Chi Minh Campaign, the telegram dated March 9, 1975, was the only one that Mr. Le Duan wrote himself. General Le Huu Duc said, “All other telegrams, even those signed by Mr. Le Duan, were drafted by us, he reviewed and signed, our Department of Operations transmitted them to Department of Cryptography for sending out.”

95 Le Duan, Chinh Tri Quoc Gia Publisher, page 667.
agreed to let the East Army Unit start first.

On April 30, 1975, at 10:50 AM, Bureau II reported to the Headquarters: “Our army has entered the enemies’ President’s residence.” At 11:30 AM, Deputy Director of Standards Department brought to the conference room a telegram sent by General Le Trong Tan. The telegram read: “A unit that belongs to the East Army has raised our flag on top of the Independence Presidential Hall.” General Giap said, “That afternoon, I got in my car and rode around Hanoi. I saw an ocean of flags and flowers. People crowded the town and the streets, just like they were going to a festival.”

“The IUD General”

In December 1979, during the IV Conference, although officially a Defense Minister, General Giap was ranked behind Le Duc Tho, according to the Politburo’s new organizational structure. In 1977, General Giap was no longer the Secretary of the Central Military Commission. Per the new regulations, this position is held by the General Secretary. In 1980, he had to turn his Defense Minister post to Van Tien Dung.96

The “Anti-Party Affair” was thought to be closed in 1967, was reopened by Le Duc Tho and discussed in the Politburo, before the V Party Congress.

As per Mr. Vo Van Kiet97, “In the General Assembly session, the Politburo conferred and listened to “the Anti-Party Affair,” Brother Tho also shared the same information that Tran Quynh had written,98 but brother Giap rejected it. However, brother Tho still concluded. The Politburo did not have any grounds to have it resolved differently other than Mr. Tho’s testimony. Brother Le Duan said nothing. Neither did brother Pham Van Dong. There might be members of the Politburo who had knowledge of these political maneuverings regarding General Giap’s fate. But I did not. “

96 In the same year, Mr. Pham Hung was assigned to replace Mr. Tran Quoc Hoan, as Home Affairs Minister. Mr. Nguyen Co Thach was officially named Foreign Affairs Minister., to replace Mr. Nguyen Duy Trinh, and Mr. To Huu was named Deputy Prime Minister, replacing Mr. Nguyen Duy Trinh and Mr. To Huu was named Deputy Prime Minister, in charge of Economics.
97 He was an alternate member of the Politburo.
98 “The anti-Party affair “ that Le Duc Tho was pursuing was supported by General Secretary Le Duan. Mr. Tran Quynh wrote: “Dang Kim Giang disclosed that the spirit of the organization was Vo Nguyen Giap. They made contacts with Ambassador Shchebakov, who was considered as one of many “Russian espionages”. According to Tran Quynh, Le Duc Tho and Tran Quoc Hoan suggested that those who took the lead be disciplined by being expelled from the Party, some be removed from their positions, some be put under house arrest, but allowed to receive benefits. They suggested that Giap be expelled from the Politburo, but Le Duan disagreed. Le Duan said that they still need support from the Soviet in building the North and liberating the South. Giap was supported by the Soviet. If Giap would be disciplined, the relationship between Vietnam and the Soviet could be jeopardized. He suggested that Giap be allowed to stay in the Politburo. They will manage to work with Giap and Giap’s presence in the Politburo would not cause any adverse impact” (Memories of Le Duan).
Years later, Mr. Kiet questioned Mr. Pham Van Dong: “You claimed you understood brother Giap, and you had a voice in the Politburo. And what was that?” but Dong just said, “I too understand brother Giap’s reputation in the public eye,” then he smiled. Mr. Kiet said, “One should not undermine a person’s reputation in the public eye. If brother Giap’s reputation could be exemplified, it would benefit the people and the country. I don’t agree with the way some of you treated brother Giap. I respect his forbearance. It’s a sign of character and inner strength of a great person.”

According to Mr. Ho Ngoc Dai, Mr. Le Duan’s son-in-law, “One day, Mr. Giap telephone him and invited him to his residence. Mr. Giap gave me an appointment at 1:00 pm. I did not get there until 3:00 pm. He told me he had been waiting for me. He put his arms over my shoulders and said, “Please give this letter to brother Ba for me. It turned out that there was a meeting to discuss General Giap issues that evening. On that evening, I gave that letter to my father-in-law. He said it was nonsense.” Mr. Dai continued, “One time, I went to the house at 2 Nguyen Canh Chan street, to visit Mr. Le Duc Tho on the new year. When I arrived, I saw Mr. Giap arriving, too. Mr. Tho came out of the house to greet me. He saw Mr. Giap but he did not say a word. He walked pass Giap toward me and gave me a hug. One time, Mr. Tho said that Mr. Giap got lucky just because he let Mr. Giap have his head on his neck.”

At the V Congress, Vo Nguyen Giap, Nguyen Duy Trinh, Tran Quoc Hoan, Le Van Luong and Nguyen Van Linh were removed from the Politburo. Mr. Hoang Tung said, “Le Duc Tho had to expel five members from the Politburo to prevent gossips; however, the real target of this change was to expel Mr. Giap. Prior to that, both Mr. Tho and Mr. Le Duan had many times openly undermined Mr. Giap’s ability, his military command skills included.”

In 1983, General Vo Nguyen Giap was assigned to an additional position, Chairman of the National Committee on Population and Birth Control Planning, while Mr. To Huu was assigned to join the Politburo as the Standing Deputy Prime Minister. The public started ridiculing: “The poet does economy and the army general places IUD contraception.”

In 1984, celebrating “the 30th Anniversary of Dien Bien Phu Victory,” the government organized several events and the media published memoir after memoir written by Vietnamese and French. For two months, from March to May 1984, the state-organ Nhan Dan would dwell on Henri Navarre and Christian de Castries, but never mentioned Vo Nguyen Giap’s name, the Commander of the operation who defeated those two French generals.

On May 7, 1984, the 30th Anniversary of Dien Bien Phu Victory, the Nhan Dan newspaper published a picture of Ho Chi Minh, Truong Chinh and Vo Nguyen Giap on the front page. However, instead of naming each person in the picture individually, the Nhan Dan newspaper only headlined: “The Politburo determined to operate the Dong Xuan battle campaign of 1953-1954.” “Vo Nguyen Giap’ name” was
According to colonel Nguyen van Huyen, when General Hoang Van Thai published his memoir of *Dien Bien Phu, The Historical Operation*, run in several installments in the Quan Doi Nhan Dan, Vo Nguyen Giap’s name was censored and cut out in the earlier installments. When they could not avoid mentioning his role in the operation, the Quan Doi Nhan Dan referred to him as “the Commander” or “the Secretary of the Military Commission” instead of “General Vo Nguyen Giap” or familiarly, “brother Van.” General Hoang Van Thai got furious and threatened to discontinue the installments. At that point, General Giap’s name started to be printed in General Hoang Van Thai’s memoir in the Quan Doi Nhan Dan newspaper.

The Nhan Dan newspaper and the Quan Doi Nhan Dan newspapers each reserved almost four pages in A3 to publish articles on Dien Bien Phu on May 7 and May 8, 1984. However, in the published commentaries and speeches, there were no words as “Vo Nguyen Giap.” In the May 8, 1984 editions, both the Nhan Dan and Quan Doi Nhan Dan newspapers reporting on the “grand demonstration in celebrating the 30th Anniversary of Dien Bien Phu Victory” organized in Hanoi on the afternoon of May 7, did mention Vo Nguyen Giap in a listing of “the Chairing Committee of the demonstration” but without his general title, only putting it after Pham Hung, Van Tien Dung, Chu Huy Man, Nguyen Huu Tho, never addressing his role in the “victory” that the “entire country” was “wholeheartedly praising.”

Whereas, in the beginning of 1980’s, the media started publishing continuously series of articles in which General Secretary Le Duan’s role was described as “commander in reality” of “the war against the Americans.” In the series *The Period of Defeating Americans*, Thep Moi wrote that Le Duc Tho

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99 To Quoc newspaper, the media controlled by the Socialist Party, was the lone newspaper that, on May 7, 1984, issued a special edition on the Dien Bien Phu, in which it praised General Giap’s talents and, for the first time, mentioned his decision to pull out the artillery. Although To Quoc newspaper belonged to the Socialist Party, but its editor Ham Chau was a member of the Vietnam Communist Party. The General Giap praising concerned the Central Committee’s Propaganda and Training Board. He was cautioned by the Board. According to Mr. Ham Chau, Head of Department of Media of the Central Committee Board, Mr. Phan Quang, was called up and asked, “Why did you mentioned his name when you all had been instructed not to?” The guide that specified not to mention anything about his name was a verbal one, and was sent by Mr. Le Duc Tho to three big communication entities: Nhan Dan newspaper, Quan Doi Nhan Dan newspaper, and Vietnam News. Mr. Le Duc Tho said, “Going forward, please do not mention the name of that general who wore the felt hat any more.” Mr. Ham Chau said, “Even worse, Mr. Le Duc Tho was planning on taking the day the Bac Son guerilla was founded, February 14, 1941, instead of the day the Propaganda Department was founded, December 22, 1944, to be the day the Army was founded. Although the verbal guidelines was, a few days later, passed on to the Nhan Dan and Quan Doi Nhan Dan newspapers, the discipline could not be applied to those who had not received this order directly. Mr. Phan Quang accepted Mr. Ham Chau’s resolution. Mr. Ham Chau said, “Deep down, Phan Quang himself did not agree with Mr. Le Duc Tho’s instruction.”

100 On Mr. General Secretary Le Duan’s 75th birthday, the Nhan Dan newspaper published an article titled as “Creation, a great example” in the November 7 edition. This article was written by Thep Moi, on General Secretary Le Duan’s life. After mentioning Nguyen Trai, Ho Chi Minh, Thep Moi wrote to consider “Outline of Southern Revolution” as an “anti-American strategic guidance” that Le Duan had dedicated his life to, since the
had mentioned Le Duan anticipating the twenty-year division of the South and North in 1955. In this
series, Le Duan was described as the person who initiated almost all great strategies in the Politburo.
“Uncle was the first to approve brother Ba’s initiatives in front of the Politburo, as soon as he arrived in
the North.” Thep Moi wrote: “Uncle’s greatness was to listen to” brother Ba and after listening to
brother Ba, Uncle said, “You are right, brother.”

In March 1985, when he was no longer in his Defense Minister position, General Giap went to Hue to
attend a celebration for the 10th anniversary of liberation. Accompanying him were General Le Trong
Tan, Commander in Chief, and General Le Phi Long. They were well received and arrangements were
made for them to stay at the guesthouse that used to be Ngo Dinh Can’s.

General Le Phi Long said, “Brother Van asked me to come and take a walk around the garden with
didn’t you tell me? In this complicated situation, people could have one of three attitudes, one is to be
straightforward to stand up and fight for the truth, another is to sit still patiently waiting when one doesn’t
have the condition to speak the truth, and finally, to be an opportunist, manipulative, never hesitate to
change from white to black, and distort the truth. You guys, if you are brave enough, choose option
one; if you are not ready, choose option two; but absolutely never option three.”

The next day, General Giap’s delegation drove to Da Nang. On the Hai Van Pass, unlike the warm
welcome that Hue gave him, Da Nang sent a young callow unknown provincial official to greet him, with
no representatives from the Corps and the Province. General Le Phi Long said, “We were fuming, but
brother Van was calm.”

That night, the delegation stayed at My Khe Hotel. The next morning, according to the program

101 In reference to the 1955 regroup, Thep Moi wrote: “When the ship was about to depart, brother ba held brother
Six’ s hand and said, “Please tell Uncle Ho that all the people and the comrades living in the South wish him health
and longevity. I send my best regards to Uncle, brother Truong Chinh and all of our brothers. Under this
condition, I would anticipate that we are not going to see each other until the next eighteen or twenty years.”
History did prove that the South and the North were divided for exactly twenty years, as “foreseen” by Le Duan.
102 Thep Moi, The Period of Defeating the Americans, published in 17 installments every week, starting with the
103 Ibid..
schedule, they would be visiting and placing a wreath at the Martyrs’ Memorial before attending the
celebration. They waited but no one gave “brother Van’s delegation’s” invitations and badges for the
celebration. The officers coming with General Giap raised their questions and was answered, “Those
who did not have appropriate papers should consider themselves uninvited.”

The celebration in Da Nang was organized with great fanfare and honor because the General Secretary
Le Duan would attend that year. General Le Phi Long said, “We were worry and asked for brother
Tan’s and brother Van’s opinions. Someone suggested that they excuse themselves and not attend the
celebration. General Giap gave it a lot of thought then gently said, “We are here not for the celebration
glory, but mainly to visit the graves of our brothers and our comrades who have fallen for this land. As
we have planned to visit them in their memorial, we will organize to give them an honorable visit, as the
army honor code specifies.”

Immediately, General Le Trong Tan ordered the Corps V Headquarters to organize a separate
memorial celebration in full service, with honor guards, military bands, and an army general’s
attendance. The next morning, the people kept coming to crowd the Martyrs’ Memorial. They came
not because they were ordered to gather; they came because they wanted to see General Giap in
person.

At the celebration of the 10th Anniversary of Liberation in Hanoi, on April 30, 1985, Vo Nguyen Giap
was still sitting within “the Chairing Committee,” however, in the listing published in the Nhan Dan
newspaper on May 1, 1985, his name was put behind that of nine other individuals, some of whom used
to be his subordinates in the wars, such as Van Tien Dung, Vo Chi Cong, Chu Huy Man, Do Muoi,
Nguyen Co Thach…This is the order based on his rank in the Party that he held in 1985. His name
was put besides two honorary titles, which were member of the Politburo and Deputy Prime Minister.

Since the day Mr. Giap left Defense Ministry, the media controlled by the government never referred to
him as “colonel general.” However, during the same time, Vo Nguyen Giap was rarely seen without his
uniforms. In those rare foreign trips that he was sent on, Vo Nguyen Giap always put on his white noble
general uniforms.

He still lives in his villa located at 30 Hoang Dieu street. The army assigns an military force to guard his
residence, even during the time where Le Duc Anh was Defense Minister. However, higher than rituals,
pomps and circumstances is the admiration that the military, the generals and the people give him. The
more his name is censored out of the People (Nhan Dan) newspaper, the more it is reminded in the
people’s daily life. As a history teacher, General Giap must have known his role in history. He has
gone through the days of trials and tribulation where he was put at the lowliest ranks in the dais, yet
noble and upright.
After the VII Congress, in 1991, General Giap officially left politics. Although the Nam Chau – Sau Su trial - according to Vo Viet Thanh, was a set up, the Politburo has never cleared his name, as he requested. In 1994, at the celebration of the 40th anniversary of Dien Bien Phu Victory, his name was again officially referred to in a “governmental speech.”

It was the speech that Prime Minister Vo Van Kiet read on the evening of May 6, 1994: “We salute General Vo Nguyen Giap, who was the Commander in Chief of the Dien Bien Phu Battle at that time, who strictly executed the decision made by Chairman Ho Chi Minh and the Politburo, along with the Headquarters of the Operation, commanded the decisive, strategic battle and brought us total victory.” Mr. Vo Van Kiet recalled, “Previously, when Defense Minister Doan Khue went to Dien Bien Phu to celebrate the 40th anniversary of its victory, he never mentioned one word about brother Giap in his speech.”

Although in Mr. Kiet’s formulaic and obsequious speech, there were only fifty-nine words referring to General Giap, but the mere mention of General Giap name alone were enough to elicit the explosive joy to in the Vietnam-Soviet Cultural Center. It was not easy to read what went through General Giap’s mind, since he had not expressed emotions on his face for a very long time. However, the people present in that celebration could not hold their tears. Tears ran down on their faces, while the sounds of clapping hands kept reverberating.