CHAPTER II

NLF: ITS ORGANIZATION AND FUNCTIONING
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Organization helps in the more efficient attainment of goals by minimizing inter-group conflict and the impact of members' idiosyncrasies. By prescribing acceptable forms of behaviour and ascribing roles for its members, the organization reduces uncertainty and brings stability into human relationships.¹ A revolutionary organization, in the words of Paul Berman, "is a means for achieving military goals and replacing existing power holders".²

The NLF was a revolutionary organization, but it did not see revolution as fulfilled until social and political patterns of behaviour were restructured and new patterns sustained: revolution could not be judged successful until a new order became institutionalized. In the Vietnamese model, as represented by the NLF, institutionalization occurred within the revolutionary organization as a result of bonds tying individuals to the organization. The successful revolutionary organization, in short, embodied the new order.

Institutionalization of a new order did not necessarily call for revolutionary violence, and Communist revolutionary organization represented one model for accomplishing societal change by organizational processes. Mao pointed out that under conditions of the modern battlefield, where the individual is largely alone, it becomes the task of the organization to dominate the group through its cadres.\(^3\) According to Selznick, a party organization based on cadres is a highly manipulable skeleton of trained agents; it is sustained by political combat and is linked to the mass movement as its members become leaders of wider groups.\(^4\)

The Communist revolution in Vietnam was typical of this process of institution building. The new order was to be based upon high levels of mass participation and high levels of integration of people into a centralized organizational structure.\(^5\) In the Vietnamese revolutionary strategy, the revolutionary organization was a vehicle for institutionalization. As institutional bonds develop within the revolutionary organization itself, 


\(^5\)Berman, n.2, p.9.
peasants become integrated into a nascent political order that profoundly affects the course of nation building.

The NLF after adopting some ideals and principles but before attempting to put them into practice, first tried to feel the pulse of the masses. It was to link itself to various groups and organizations while being united and functioning under a common leadership.\(^6\) Where its cadres were concerned there was strong emphasis on strict order, discipline, drill, and rigorous training.\(^7\)

The NLF followed the familiar Communist pattern. The basic unit was the cell of people from various villages. Village units were subordinate to the district headquarters which in turn were controlled by the provincial party headquarters under regional or zonal headquarters. In addition to party organization itself, close ties were maintained with the military units through a system of political officers. These officers assigned work to all units from the highest down to the bottom. Their main function was to provide control to the military units and

\(^6\)Morris Janowitz, "Hierarchy and Authority in the Military Establishment", in Amitai Etzioni, A Sociological Reader (New York: Holt, 1969), p.211, concludes that modern warfare has required a continuing shift from external control schemes based on "domination" even in the smallest unit. There is an iron framework of organization which serves as a basis of social control.

supply reports on GVN (i.e., Republic of Vietnam) military establishments and troop movements.\(^8\)

Working steadily, the NLF increased its influence within a short span of two years and gained control of 80 per cent of the countryside.\(^9\) Administrative organizations and committees were set up throughout South Vietnam, and the NLF's own military and armed forces were developed. The consequence of this growing strength was that the South Vietnamese regime was forced to remain confined to main cities and retain the key lines of communications. The NLF was set up administratively at various levels up to its central Presidium but functioned primarily at the village level, where it operated through the familiar mass organizations.\(^10\)

On 31 January 1961, the NLF's politburo through a directive assigned to the NLF the responsibility for rallying broad revolutionary forces. The party directive emphasized the need to strike an appropriate balance between political and military struggle in the three


strategic areas of the South: military struggle was stressed in jungles and mountainous areas; in lowland areas, equal emphasis was given to political and military struggle; and in urban areas, the principal emphasis was on political struggle. The cities posed a challenge, being under the direct rule of the Saigon government, besides having been strongly affected by American cultural and economic influence. The NLF decided to meet this challenge with a two-pronged approach, namely by building up a secret apparatus among radical elements to serve as the nucleus for a future uprising and the seizure of power and by mobilizing broad support from moderate elements through the framework of the Front.

By early 1961 the number of Revolutionary Armed Forces had risen to more than 10,000 as compared to 2,000 in 1959. On 15 February 1961, Communist military cadres met as instructed by the politburo to unify all armed

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11 The Anti-US Resistance War for National Salvation, 1954-1975: Military Events, JPRS no.80, 968 (Washington, D.C.: GPO, 3 June 1982), pp.45-46. Even the party was established as an independent body in the South, but its main function was to ensure that the movement did not develop policies in contradiction with Hanoi's overall strategy. In fact there were important differences between Hanoi's policy towards the South in the 1958-61 period, but the basic was the same, how to step up the fighting in the South. Therefore, Hanoi chose the strategy of supporting an independent southern uprising with no formal ties to Hanoi.

units into a People's Liberation Armed Force (PLAF). The party military committee for the Nam Bo region was designated the Liberation Army Command of South Vietnam with Tran Luong as its head. Later it was reconstituted (with the merger of Trung Bo Party) into the Central Committee Directorate for the South (Trung Uong Cuc mien Nam) COSVN.

The first NLF Congress in 1962 elected a provisional Central Committee which gave an idea of the new political awakening against US aggression. Lawyer Nguyen Huu Tho, a French-educated Saigon intellectual, was elected its first President.

Various functional associations

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14 An organization, usually translated as Central Office of South Vietnam (COSVN), which had been in operation from 1951 to 1954 and was a forward element of the party's Central Committee, an extension of the Central Committee in South Vietnam. It reported routine matters to the Reunification Department of the party and had direct communications with both military and political officials at high levels. Jeffrey Race, *War Comes to Long An: Revolutionary Conflict in a Vietnamese Province* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1972), pp.29-30 and Richard F. Starr, ed., *Yearbook on International Communist Affairs* (Stanford: Hoover, 1974), p.559.

15 Congress of Former Resistance Fighters.

16 Nguyen Huu Tho was one of the leaders of the anti-US demonstration held in March 1950 and later of the Saigon-Cholon Peace Movement, in 1954. He helped the NLF to win great influence over the peasants. The heritage left by the Vietminh he organized and led and helped it to win rapidly a solid base in the rural and mountain areas and cities. Pike, n.7, pp.82-83.
together with administrative bodies were set up by the Front committees at all levels: villages, districts, provinces, and the region, under the supervision of the Central Committee.

The NLF was in fact a coalition of a number of political parties, functional organizations and other interest groups. In order to garner support to itself from various shades of Vietnamese patriotic opinion, the Front gave birth to two new political parties,\(^\text{17}\) namely Dang Xa Hoi Cap Tien (Radical Socialist Party of South Vietnam) founded in July 1961 and Dang Dan Chu Mien Nam Viet-Nam (South Vietnam Democratic Party) (DDCMNVN) founded in December 1961. The former united all patriotic, freedom, justice and peace-loving intellectuals, and aimed at struggling for an independent, democratic, peaceful and unified Vietnam with a radical socialist image in which there would be no war.\(^\text{18}\) Its various programmes always reflected the promises and demands of the NLF. DDCMVN, on the other hand was the political party of patriotic,-------------------

\(^\text{17}\)The Vietminh too had created a "Democratic party" and a "Socialist party" in 1944 and in 1946 respectively.

\(^\text{18}\)It served to attract to the NLF banner those Vietnamese who were philosophically inclined towards economic socialism as well as former members of the various Indochinese socialist parties. It also served as the NLF's intellectual platform attracting teachers and students. Nguyen Ngoc Thuong, Documents of the First Convention of the People's Front for the Liberation of South Vietnam (Ben Tre: Victory, 30 August 1962), pp.12-13.
democratic, and progressive intellectuals, merchants and industrialists with the mandate "in the present phase to struggle to achieve the NFLSV objectives and platform of making South Vietnam independent, democratic, peaceful, and neutral and advancing towards the peaceful reunification of the Fatherland".19

When, with the people's support, the NLF wrested control of territories from the Diem government, a variety of administrative, functional and special interest organisms at the national, interzonal, zonal, provincial, district and village level within NLF governed the liberated areas. They served as the government in the seized territories and as a "shadow government" in contested areas.20

At the village level, peasants were organized into a variety of functional liberation associations such as Peasants' Association for Liberation, Workers' Association

19As the Radical Socialist Party was identical in purpose to the Socialist Party of North Vietnam, so the new Democratic Party was a copy of its northern namesake. Its Secretary General was Huynh Tan Phat. Its themes and interests ranged over the whole spectrum of social and political activity, indistinguishable in tone, emphasis, or balance from the output of the NLF itself. See Donald Lancaster, The Emancipation of French Indo-China (London: Oxford, 1961), pp.163-64 and Liberation Radio (NLF), n.p.: 6 February 1965.

for Liberation, Youth Federation for Liberation, Women's Union for Liberation, School and College Students' Federation for Liberation, Writers' and Artists' Association for Liberation, etc.  

The essential characteristic of all these organizations was that the individual villager considered that the liberation association had meaning to him personally. Like their counterparts in the North, the NLF and its member organizations operated on the principle of "democratic centralism" and relied on criticism and self-criticism for membership control. Members of the functional organizations were grouped into small, usually three-man cells.  

There were also a number of professional associations for journalists, teachers, doctors, businessmen, and other professionals, patterned after groups established by the Vietminh. These associations were headed by a Central

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Committee but had no intervening administrative levels. Many of these groups were strongly anti-Diem and it did not need much effort to persuade them to make common cause with the Front. The NLF regarded religion as an integral part of its struggle. An NLF document stated:

We must strengthen our actions among religious groups and increase our organizational work. Religious leaders should be won over to our cause. Pay particular attention to Catholics, Cao-Daists, and Hoa Hao Buddhists in Soc Sai...unmask the enemy scheme of using religion to divide the people... Help the religious people to maintain their principles, repair pagodas, temples, and churches...Enable the people to carry on their prayers, attend mass and religious ceremonies. Absolutely do not use pagodas, temples, and churches for meetings and do not paste slogans, slips, or banners inside or outside of them...".

23 For discussion of these groups in detail, see Pike, n.7, pp.198-201. These associations existed as independent members in cities but rarely in villages. These groups consisted of self-interests and professional associations and also contributed to the Revolution.

24 Pike, n.7, p.201. Out of 14 million South Vietnamese, at least 10 million were Buddhists. Only 6 million, however, actively practised the religion. Traditionally, Buddhists had been organized in Vietnam. Prior to the French regime the Buddhist religion had played little role in politics. After 1945, however, Buddhist monks formed quasi-political associations to portray and expand activities among the general population. In the early 1960s Buddhist monks took the lead in building up opposition to the Diem government. Perceiving Diem to be pro-Catholic they led an active movement among students, intellectuals, and townspeople throughout South Vietnam. The NLF preferred Buddhist movements under its tents. It also attempted to develop its influence among the Catholics with the theme that the public posture of GVN under Diem was anti-religious. The thematic appeal of the NLF to religious believers was religious freedom. NLF succeeded in increasing its influence among these religious groups.
With this kind of sympathetic approach to religious groups it was not difficult for the NLF to win the support of several religious organizations such as the Patriotic Buddhists Association, the Association of Catholics Devoted to God and the Fatherland, the Association for the Moral Renaissance of Hoa Followers, and the Cao Dai Tien Sect. National minorities and ethnic minority groups such as the montagnards, the overseas Chinese and the ethnic Cambodians also supported the NLF. There were no functional liberation associations of these ethnic minority groups and they were incorporated directly into the major organizations.25

Beginning in 1961 the NLF organized a number of veterans’ organizations in rural areas, which served the two-fold purpose of augmenting and assisting the military proselytizing movement, and developing a home front link to the "hard hat" guerrilla unit. The Hoi Gia Dinh Binh Si Yeu Nuoc (Families of Patriotic Soldiers Association) was the first such organization founded in December 1962, and was open to families who had a member serving in the armed forces. Its purpose was to work for a cessation to the fighting and it became a major vehicle for pressuring soldiers to desert. The Hoi Nhung Nguoi Khang Chien Cu (Former Resisters’ Association) was composed of Veterans

25Pike, ibid., p.205.
of the Vietminh war. Nhóm Nhùng Người Đầu Tranh Cho Hoa Binh Thong Nhut Doc Lap To Quoc Viet Nam. (Vietnamese Fighters for Peace, Reunification, and Independence) was one of the most deadly and secretive NLF organizations, and conducted clandestine operations within the Vietnamese armed forces. The Association of Nhóm Binh Si Tro Ve Voi Nhan Dan (Soldiers Returned to the People League) was composed of ARVN deserters, whose chief purpose was to induce other deserters. There was also Hoi Dong Thuong Benh Liet Si (the Disabled Veterans' and Heroes' Council) which was open to disabled veterans both of the Vietminh war and guerrilla sufferers. It was described as primarily a mutual protection association. The most important element of the NLF, however, was the Liberation Army, which held a special position in its double capacity as member and armed forces of the front.

26 This study is based on Pike, n.7, p.206, which has been relied upon heavily. In minority areas, the NLF was less concerned with economic issues than with cultural and political autonomy. Because of the Saigon government's insensitivity to minority attitudes, a serious rebellion against the central authority was under way in the Central Highlands. The NLF moved into the vacuum and by 1962, thirty different nationalities were brought into one Central Highlands Autonomous Movement (Uy Ban Dan Toc Tu Tri Tay Nguyen). The NLF had assisted sympathetic tribesmen in setting up an autonomous zone in the mountainous area. See Vietnamese Studies (Hanoi: Xunhasaba, April 1965).

27 Douglas Pike, War, Peace and the Vietcong (Cambridge: MIT Press, 1969), p.3. Known since 1966 as the People's Liberation Armed Force according to him. In reality, Communist military forces in South Vietnam were under the direct command of the party.

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By the end of 1961, various committees had been elected in all villages and districts of the liberated but contested areas in 38 out of the 41 provinces and cities.28 Unlike other political fronts which, according to the classical conception, consisted mainly in achieving union at the top, the NLF set-up was, at the very beginning, a large mass organization which effectively controlled political, economic and cultural life.

Media publicity was also given adequate attention with the establishment of the Liberation News Agency and Liberation Radio in 1961. The news agency operated in "enemy-held zones", particularly among the army and police of RVN.29 The Front also started thirty central and regional newspapers and magazines, many of which were in the language of the minorities, particularly in Khmer and Ede.30

The executive leadership of the front comprised of individuals who were not, for the most part, publicly identified as Communists although some, like Chairman

28These were existing at that time, in all the six regions of the country. They were, Central Trung Bo, the Highlands, Eastern Nambo, Central Nambo, Western Nambo as well as in the Saigon-Giadinh special zone. Hammond Rolph, "Vietnamese Communism and the Protracted war", *Asian Survey* (Berkeley), vol.12, no.9, September 1972, pp.783-92 and Pike, n.7, pp.218-19.


Nguyen Huu Tho, had been closely linked to the Vietminh cause in the South since the 1940s. The top officials were mostly professionals, with representatives of various social or minority groups. i.e., Nguyen Thi Binh and Y Binh Aleo. To limit identification of the Front with the party in the north, the number of open party members in leading positions at all levels was strictly limited. Also, because Communist slogans were not very popular in Southern Vietnam, the NLF adopted slogans like "independence from the clutches of imperialists", "democracy" and "land reforms", etc. besides earlier ICP and Vietminh slogans. Their re-education of people in the areas under their control, at least in the early stages, consisted primarily in motivating the people to oppose the "enemy" rather than trying to obtain support for future programmes. In the words of Pike, "the indoctrination system decreed that the best cadres were those with the greatest capacity for hate".


33Pike, n.7, p.284.
Before the formation of the National Liberation Front, Ho Chi Minh summarized the five essential ingredients for success in the national revolution. The revolution, according to him, had to

- rely upon a broad national front against imperialism;
- solve the peasant question;
- organize a people's army;
- have the brotherly support of the people and proletariat of other countries;
- be led by the party of the working class.  

The NLF leadership being composed primarily of non-party Southerners, the potential existed that they would sue for autonomy. To reduce this temptation, COSVN leaders set up a Southern branch of the VWP, the People's Revolutionary Party (Dang Nhan Dan Cach Mang Viet Nam) on 1 January 1962. The party was to work independently in South Vietnam with no formal relation to the party in the North. It was described as "a revolutionary party of working class in South Vietnam" to be guided by the principles of Marxism-Leninism. Though the party followed the pattern of VWP of North Vietnam, its rare public statements tended to avoid controversial Marxist precepts. In fact, NLF was under the control of PRP because the Front had no vertical

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chain of command of its own.\(^{35}\) It created two youth organizations, independent of the NLF's Liberation Youth Association, through which it indoctrinated many of its future cadres. The Vanguard Youth (Thann Nien Xung Phong) was for children aged twelve to fifteen. At sixteen the more promising of these individuals were selected for membership in the People's Revolutionary Youth League (Doan Thanh Nien Nhan Dan Cach Mang).\(^ {36}\)

When the NLF held its first Congress from 16 February to 3 March 1962\(^ {37}\) the following member organizations participated in it:

1. Revolutionary People's Party of Vietnam;
2. Radical Socialist party of South Vietnam;
3. Democratic Party of South Vietnam;

\(^{35}\)Race, n.14, p.122.

\(^{36}\)Pike, n.7, pp.105-53. While it was possible to remain a member of the League until the age of 35, many were selected at 18 for full membership in the party. The PRP of South Vietnam was in fact, a nonentity. A ten point programme was initiated on 1 January 1962, See Appendix B.

4. Movement for the Autonomy of the Nationalities of Tay Nguyen (Central Highlands);

5. Federation of Trade Unions for the Liberation of South Vietnam (Formerly of Association of Workers for the Liberation of South Vietnam);

6. Association of Peasants for the Liberation of South Vietnam;


8. Federation of School and College Students for the Liberation of South Vietnam;

9. Revolutionary People's Youth League;

10. Association of Former Resisters;

11. People's Liberation Armed Forces;

12. Association of Writers and Artists for Liberation;

13. Association of Patriotic and Democratic Journalists;

14. Association of Patriotic School Teachers;

15. Group of Manufacturers and Businessmen;

16. Association of Patriotic Buddhists;

17. Association of Catholics Dedicated to God and the Fatherland;

18. Association for the Revival of Morality of Hoa Hao Devotees;

19. Association of Luc Hoa Buddhist of Vietnam;

20. Cao Dai Tien Thien sect;

21. Group of Protestants;

22. Red Cross for Liberation;

23. Committee for the Defence of World Peace;

24. Committee for Afro-Asian Solidarity;
25. Committee for Solidarity with Latin American Peoples;

26. Committee for Solidarity with the People of the US;

27. Committee for the protection of Women and Children.\(^\text{38}\)

Cao Dai and Binh Xuyen forces and servicemen who had taken part in the "11 November 1960 coup" were also represented in the Congress. The Congress created a Presidium with Nguyen Huu Tho as President and Huynh Tan Phat as first Vice-President and an official Central Committee of the Front, comprising 39 members, of whom 31 were elected, with another 21 members to be appointed later including three posts of Vice-Presidents.\(^\text{39}\) At the second NLF Congress held in January 1964, the number of central committee members was increased to 64 (of whom 11 were to be appointed later).\(^\text{40}\) This was meant to make room for members from additional political parties and organizations. A North Vietnamese source affirms, however,

\(^{38}\)Pike, n.7, pp.198-201 and 356. Also see Pike, n.27, p.3 and Conley, n.22.

\(^{39}\)For a perusal of the office bearers and officials elected at the first Congress, see Appendix C.

\(^{40}\)Truong Nhu Tang, a secret member of the Front reveals that the complete report on the Congress and its leadership was not made public immediately. He himself had received it after "several weeks through the usual liaison channels". See Tang, n.37, pp.86-87. Western sources on the other hand claim that it was made public on 13 April 1962. Vietnamese Communist Leadership (Saigon: U.S. Mission in Vietnam, 1971).
that the 1964 Congress provided for a Central Committee to be eventually expanded to 100 members, including 30 seats reserved for "personalities and organizations who would join the NLF at a later date".41

The Congress decided to have better coordination for concerted and united action against intervention of the American forces and the Saigon regime. Soon after the first Congress, the NLF issued a stern warning to the United States on 20 July 1962 to end its armed aggression in South Vietnam, abolish its military command there and withdraw all its troops and personnel of its satellites and allies and withdraw all weapons and other war equipment from South Vietnam.42

The NLF developed a politico-military strategy of all-round people's war with stress on political struggle and strategy of military action, political action, and agitation. To defeat the enemy forces everywhere, whether rural, mountainous and urban areas, the immediate task was to "motivate the entire party and people to overcome all difficulties and to strengthen political and armed forces

41*Vietnam Courier*, n.37.

in order to change the balance of forces in favour".43

The day-to-day work of the Front was carried out by the Presidium and Secretariat headed by the Chairman and six Vice-Chairmen. A Commission for Foreign Relations worked under the overall guidance of the Chairman. A Liberation Armed Force to carry out rebellion against government forces, and commissions to co-ordinate activities for health, education, finance and a guerrilla government, operated under the supervision of the Front's Secretary General.44

At the lower level separate committees looked after the daily work and coordination. Various liberation associations of farmers, women, youth, workers, students, and cultural associations, facilitated cadre efforts to mobilize the villagers, and resulted in a system that monitored all village activity, produced increased food, routed out hostile villagers and provided village militia and recruits for the PLF.45 These liberation associations


were managed by administrative revolutionary committees at the village and district levels.46

The Party structure, called the People's Revolutionary Party (PRP), was organized on the model of Vietnam Workers' Party. It had a Chairman and a Secretary General and was responsible for organization building, recruitment, indoctrination work, military affairs, communications and control. Below the Central Committee was the provincial Central Committee managed by a three-man secretariat (Chairman, Secretary, Assistant Secretary). The district Central Committee, the main party operating element, was responsible for all party activity in its area and had considerable latitude in its operations. After 1964, the apparatus was extended to the village, schools, rubber plantations, factories. There were three to twelve branches though day-to-day leadership was in the hands of a single full-time party leader. The basic party unit was composed of three-man cells through which the Front linked with the masses.47

PRP was considered the political arm of the Liberation Front. A Vietnamese seeking membership in the PRP had to be a "worker, middle-class peasant, petit bourgeois, student intellectual, montagnard or army

46ibid.

47Fall, n.31, p. 365.
"deserter", and had to be sponsored by two party members. \footnote{48} He should have actively supported the cause and possessed a good record in this respect. His sponsors were responsible for his indoctrination and his behaviour during the probationary period. The task of the PRP was threefold, namely to ensure the security of the cause, to help fund it, and to develop a broad and effective base of support for it.

The Front started out with the goal of supporting general uprising in the firm belief that it could develop the revolutionary consciousness of the Vietnamese peasants. \footnote{49} It was to be a political struggle and not a small-scale war. General Vo Nguyen Giap’s five lessons in preparing for wars of national liberation were its guiding precepts in this campaign. \footnote{50} To enumerate:

1. Careful preparation in ideology and administrative control (including training of cadres, building up bases of resistance, and the organization of armed forces).

2. Careful timing in seizing the right opportunity.

\footnote{48}{Pike, n.7, pp.148-9.}

\footnote{49}{The Front concentrated more on the South Vietnamese countryside which consisted of 2,500 villages.}

3. "Launching the revolutionary high tide of the people" - i.e., including in the trained cadres representatives of "all classes, all nationalities, and all religions".

4. Skilful use of all forms of armed struggle combined with all forms of political struggle, shifting emphasis from one to the other often enough to keep the opposition off balance.

5. Full use of the vulnerability in the enemy ranks, and spearheading the forces at the "main enemy".

The Front conducted 'special war' and 'local war' by bringing into play both the political and the armed forces.\(^{51}\) Past experience had proved, in General Giap's words, that three categories of troops - main force units, regional forces, and guerrilla and self-defence militia forces were the most appropriate organizational form to mobilize people to fight the enemy.\(^{52}\) In the new set-up, the three categories of troops were the people's militia, regional troops and the army. The militia's task was

\(^{51}\)The political struggle movement operated on two levels. First, it sought intermediate goals for economic betterment, democratic freedom, opposition to US-Diem and unification. The second level was an effort to engage, activate and immerse the persons involved in the movement in the Revolution, i.e., to expand the various revolutionary organizations' training to the people. Pike, n.7, pp.92-93.

defence of the villages. The regional troops, which practised guerrilla and mobile warfare, were capable of self-supporting operations within a district and province and also took combined actions with the regular troops. The army, which was the main force at the top, was organized into major units with modern equipment and was trained in all forms of warfare. The fighting strategy involved close coordination and a common goal among the three set-ups. Militiamen harassed the enemy to compel him to scatter his forces; the regional troops then attacked him at critical points; the regular army then struck decisive blows at territorial level. Enemy units were thus subjected to three trials of strength - 'exhaustion' through guerrilla actions, 'reduction' by regional troops and finally 'putting out of action' by the regular troops. High combat efficiency through the best kind of training was emphasized, and close attention paid in the selection of the village guerrilla fighter.

53 These three types of units were: (1) Quon Doi Chu Luc (main force units), (2) Po Doi Dia Phung (Territorial or Regional units), and (3) Dan Quan Du-Kich (local guerrilla units). See, for example, Conley, n. 22, p.118.

54 Considering political and para military activities, the People's Armed Forces first unit was created in 1958 by the veterans of the anti-French resistance. While the first units of regional and regular troops appeared in 1960, the revolutionary armed forces developed at the time of founding of the NLF. ibid.
Indoctrination of the soldiers laid stress on the need for individual initiative.

The process of increasing the size and effectiveness of the revolutionary armed forces in order to demolish South Vietnamese repression was well under way in 1961. The next year the Front's underground cadre emerged as a well-knit PRP and the various military forces united under a single command and renamed the People's Liberation Armed Forces (PLAF). The Front's Military Committee for Nam Bo region was designated the "Liberation Army Command of South Vietnam" under the leadership of Tran Luong55 and had as its goal combat operations against the conventional forces of RVN.56 The Front authorized the cadres to protect themselves with armed force and to spearhead "local uprisings" where the government apparatus was vulnerable.57 It was estimated by Western sources that the number of regular troops under the Front grew from 4,000 to 10,000 during 1960, 17,000 in 1961, above 23,000 in 1962, 25,000


56Army of South Vietnam.

in 1963 and above 34,000 in 1964. The village militia and regional forces which numbered about 3,000 in 1960, exceeded 72,000 in 1964, making the total number of armed forces 106,000 in 1964. Vietnamese sources, however, put the number at between 140,000 and 200,000 by December 1965.58

There were few organized main force units or self-defence units at the village level, most of the PLAF men being in guerrilla units under the direction of the regional party committees. Units in the beginning were platoon sized and conducted hit-and-run attacks on isolated outposts, besides providing security for party organs. Independent platoons and companies began to be grouped into larger units after 1962, particularly in the mountainous provinces of Central Vietnam.59


59James C. Thompson, "How Could Vietnam Happen? An Autopsy", Atlantic Monthly (Massachusetts), April 1968. The basic unit of both the village guerrilla and the combat guerrilla force was the three-man cell, also known as the Du Kich Bi Mat (secret guerrilla cell). There was a special activity cell, the most dangerous element in the military structure. Its task was to take great risks, strike anywhere at any time. It performed the essential service of spearheading the ideas of the movement among their families and in their villages. Service in the guerrilla movement was not only a means of contd...
usually operated at company size under provincial or district command, against the enemy's local units but when necessary co-ordinated their activities with main force units in the area. The village militia were divided into an armed combat militia composed of the youth who could take part in military operations, and the regular village militia composed of older men, which was to be used only for defence.60

The militia were the foundation of a three-tiered PLAF. They were lethal in small engagements that comprised most of the fighting, and were a recruiting pool for higher level units.61 They set booby traps, planted punji stakes, harassed patrols and convoys, supported night raids on small outposts and provided local party organs with police intelligence.

59contd...

training and indoctrination, but also a period of apprenticeship during which military officials could determine whether a man was fit for higher-level duty in the regular army. Guerrillas also performed important logistic functions and assisted in regular battles in a number of ways. They acted as a covering force, helped clear the battlefield of the dead. They also engaged in paramilitary actions such as ambushes, assaults on officials, and attacks on small enemy detachments and outposts in their own locale.

60Pike, n.7, pp.233-4.

The majority of the PLAF recruits were indigenous South Vietnamese but US Government and other Western sources spoke of "infiltration" by North Vietnam's trained cadres.\textsuperscript{62} Considering that the Vietnamese were fighting for the reunification of their community, the term "infiltration" and the distinction between South and North would appear to have been meaningless, calculated more to attract non-Communists to their side.

The PLAF functioned under the NLF, which differed from region to region and time to time, and thus made the war quite different in the various parts of Vietnam.

The Front dominated the military structure at each organizational level. At the top the Military Affairs Committee (MAC) spoke with the authority of the overall command structure for South Vietnam, the Central Office for South Vietnam (COSVN).\textsuperscript{63} Below COSVN, the main, the provincial and the district forces and the local guerrilla units were responsible to the appropriate

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\textsuperscript{62}There are many books written on Vietnam by Western authors but Pike's work stands apart from all the rest. See Pike, n.7 and 44; Duiker, n.37, p.213; and Kuno Knoebel, \textit{Victor Charlie, The Face of War in Vietnam}, (New York: Praeger, 1967).

\textsuperscript{63}MAC of COSVN acted as the headquarters of PLAF and exercised command and control over the main force, the regional force and guerrilla units. The MAC was headed by Tran Nam Trung. See Albert E. Pamerlee, "The Central Office of South Vietnam", \textit{VDRN} (Saigon: US Embassy, 1967), no.40.
level party organization. At each level MAC provided the link to the NLF through a party committee or chapter within the military unit. While within the military headquarters emphasis was placed upon the accomplishment of military missions, the MAC insured that tactical military operations conformed to party goals. The commander was under the watchful eye of a party representative, and military operations required approval of the appropriate party authority. The commander issued orders only in an emergency.64

Main force units, which often ranged nationwide in their operations were directly controlled by the MAC.65 The main force units followed the 3-by-3 principle adopted from the Chinese PLA,66 in which the basic unit was a three-man military cell. These cells were built up into squads, platoons, companies, battalions, regiments and divisions. The three-man cell ensured that its members had a solid political and ideological background, good tactical and technical skills and a good working

64Conley, n.22, p.129.
65Military Affairs Committee, See VDRN, n.63.
66According to this principle, a manoeuvre unit at any level was one of three similar units subordinated to a higher manoeuvre unit which itself was one of three similar units. Giap, n.50 (1970), pp.216-17.
ability. It served four basic functions: (1) as a 'buddy group' capable of satisfying the basic needs of the soldier; (2) as a primary group within PLAF representation; (3) as the basic mechanism within the extensive PLAF surveillance and reporting system; and (4) as an 'autonomous' disciplined and fire-and-maneuvre unit in combat. By 1965, the PLAF consisted of 47 battalions, organized into five regiments. A battalion had 500 men. The main force army had 85 men and there were 94 such companies as part of the 47 battalions.

Ho Chi Minh had set considerable store by cadre training. He said:

Cadres are the root of all tasks. Cadre training is a basic task of the party which must feed and teach cadres, Just like a gardener who cultivates precious trees, it is necessary to esteem talented people, cadres, and every person who is useful to our common work.

The PLAF incorporated the cadres into its fold. The cadres administered surveillance, criticism sessions, and control

67 "Guidance on Organizing, Consolidating and Conducting Activities of the Three-man Cell", VDRN (Saigon: American Embassy, 1972), no. 102, p. 44.

68 Ibid.

69 Quoted in Sang Hao, "Party Leadership is the Cause of the Growth and Victories of our Army", VDRN (Saigon: American Embassy, 1970), no. 72. Hao, as the top political officer in the PLAF reasserts that "man is the decisive factor in battle" and that the cadre guiding the army as the representative of the party are central to the PLAF's struggle to achieve party goals.
techniques. Squad cadres were expected to keep "watch over the three-man cells and to report once every three days to the party leaders about the situation and activities in the cell." The relation between the cadre and the party was like that between the parent and the child. The troops in a unit considered the political officer as their mother. The cadres in their turn, were always watchful to know and settle the disputes among the soldiers, promote the fighting spirit of the soldiers and look after their subsistence needs like food and drink, etc. Broad ideological goals such as "achieving national independence under the leadership of the party" and "building a just society" were linked by cadres in their indoctrination of soldiers to detailed rules covering all aspects of the soldier's existence.

The NLF made the government failure more vivid through propaganda and through a more telling programme of its own. NLF cadres helped the poor to harvest their crops in NLF-controlled areas, while government troops virtually forced cultivation and takeover. If the villagers were working on their land, or fishing, or digging ditches, building dams, etc., PLAF unit men helped them. The men

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71 Conley, n.22, pp.302-3.
were welcomed everywhere. Discipline was their watchword.72 If a Front soldier took a chicken, he left the farmer a receipt which was redeemable after the war. The RVN troops simply stole chickens, thus making the farmers wish for victory for the Front.73

PLAF adopted Mao’s four precepts to soldiers: (1) When the enemy advances, retreat; (2) When the enemy halts, harass; (3) When the enemy avoids battle, attack; (4) When the enemy retreats, follow. To this, Giap added six rules of conduct: (1) Take nothing without permission; (2) Never be disorderly; (3) Learn and abide by local customs; (4) Stay with the poor peasants and help them with their work; (5) Make propaganda all the time; and (6) Form study groups for the peasants and attend their open meetings.74

72But during the war, the PLAF found itself less welcome as its presence was often associated by the villagers with ARVN attacks, Kelan, n.70, pp.7 and 15.


74Giap (1977), n.50, pp.360, 445-8; see also Pickerell, n.9, p.11 and General Di Thien Tich in Wilfred G. Burchett, Grasshopper and Elephants: Why Vietnam Fell (New York: Urizen Book,1977), p.50; Burchett,n.55, pp.183-5 and Knoebel, n.62, p.107 are of the opinion that cadres worked the hardest at slow indoctrination in their districts. They were faithful to Mao’s "Three Unities": The cadre should live with the peasants, work with them, eat with them. He was expected not to accept payment for his work, to pay for his food, if need be stay in a village for several years, and not to reveal that he was a member of the Front and to explain the necessity of struggle to the peasant.
Mao gave importance to military tactics, Giap believed that a strategist of guerrilla warfare could not neglect to establish rapport with people.

Propaganda was another method of gaining control over an entire population against the enemy. The PLAF cadres used to move into remote villages that were of little interest to RVN to begin their propaganda work. They generally operated in areas where the people were friendly to them, and in return they supplied them food and intelligence information. It was natural for the peasants to support them, as many cadres had been living in their village. The PLAF cadres capitalized on such popular grievances as high land rates, poor irrigation facilities and the lack of markets for peasants' needs. The combination of propaganda, economic subversion, and civic actions directed by the Front with the promise of a better government that cared for the people formed the base of their struggle to gain the support of the people.75

75George K. Tanham, Communist Revolutionary Warfare from Vietminh to the Vietcong (New York: Praeger, 1967), revd edn, p. 136; Burchett, n. 55, pp. 179-80 and Pickerell, ibid. The Front accomplished many things while carrying on its propaganda. It built schools, hospitals, and administrative centres. It established its own jurisdictional system, and organized agricultural advisory teams. In return people were indoctrinated. Thus it created a strong army.
The Front took extra care to provide labour at harvest time, weapons for self-defence and cadres for education to convince the people of its promise for the future. After listening carefully to the people and having become better acquainted with village conditions, it began to take control of all activities. The cadres remained in the village long enough so that the people would be in no doubt that the Front would win freedom for Vietnam.78 People had nothing to fear from them except those who took the side of the government, helped government officials or in some other way disobeyed the Front. If the American or government troops passed through their territory, the soldiers of the Front made no effort to stop them. Rather, they turned these episodes into propaganda victories as soon as the troops left. If an American unit moved through the Front's base areas, they followed Mao's dictum of fading into the jungle and letting the unit pass. If the enemy halted or set up base camp, they harassed him, particularly in areas where the people supported the government. The Front's guerrilla force used to break into small groups and disperse rapidly.77 They knew the

76Pikerell, n.9, p.13.

77Burchett, n.55, pp.50-59; Mark Seldon, "The NLF and Transformation of Vietnamese Society", The Bulletin of Concerned Asian Scholars (California), vol.2, no.1, October 1969, pp.33-35; F. Schurman, "Our People are a Wonder", Liberation (London), April 1966; and "Doubts contd..
trails, the tunnels and where to find boats. Women and young boys helped to carry messages for them, gather intelligence or carry out sabotage. Women nursed the wounded and helped transport supplies. The Front also had the advantage that its strategic assets were mobile. They fought on their own terms or employed a strategic retreat.78

Camp Ba Thu in the "Parrot's beak" of Cambodia, west of Saigon was the main training centre. Pike suggests that there were one hundred students at this centre at any one time, doing a basic two-month elementary course called "Armed Security Training" or more advanced specialized training. About forty per cent of the coursework was political indoctrination on such items as "Role of the Revolution During the General Uprising Period", "Situation in the South", "Historical Analysis", "Meaning of the General Uprising and the General Offensive" and "Role and Responsibility of Armed Security". The trainees were expected to concentrate on eliminating tyrants, betrayers,

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about Vietcong Strategy", Asian Notes(n.d.), no.73, 25 July 1966. The activities of the NLF became so extensive that a transfer to the countryside was regarded by many civil servants, soldiers and officials as a death sentence. These methods paid off for the Front, and it established its grip on the countryside in a short time.

protecting the revolutionary organs, heightening the prestige of the revolution, and creating conditions favourable to binh van (troop proselytizing) or capturing enemy personnel. The course content included techniques of security, setting up ambushes, reconnaissance, camouflage, tactics of urban warfare, weapons handling (the AK-47 being the basic weapon), and use of B.40 and B.41 rockets; in physical education the emphasis was on noiseless swimming. Toward the end of the training, students were formed into four-man teams under a chief for assembling explosives and detonators and for reconnaissance.79

Operations were broken into three phases of Autumn-Winter, Spring-Summer and Dry-and-Wet Season campaigns. Methods of harassing the enemy included poison cigarettes, poison gas, used wine bottles as grenade carriers, booby traps placed on doors, drawers or automobile engines, and timing devices fitted to cycles or motorcycles to destroy enemy buildings. The success of these devices instilled further confidence among the people about the effectiveness of the Front.80


80Pike, ibid., p.79; and Knoebl, ibid., pp. 127-34. It seems that the Americans had applied their own method for counter propaganda, as Pike was on an intelligence mission in Vietnam during the period. There are many more books which deal with the concocted stories to receive sympathy.
At first the lack of weapons was the greatest problem. In the first year of the revolutionary war, the troops had to rely almost exclusively on the arms they got from the depots of government troops. General Di Thien Tich said that:

the most difficult period was in 1962-63. Our equipment and military technique were very low. We didn't have real arms, only dummy rifles, hoes and all sorts of rudimentary weapons. We started to produce some clumsy grenades and mines, enough for the type of weapons then being used against us. Then the enemy started using helicopters which could spot hideouts and movements from air and amphibious tanks which could catch us off balance for a time. We learned to make some primitive anti-tank mines from unexploded bombs and shells and hit back. The slogan 'Fight the enemy with enemy arms' was very popular at this time. In its fight the Front was inspired by Ho Chi Minh's words:

"Regardless of sex and age, religious creed, party or nationality, if you are Vietnamese,

81Huynh Than Mung, quoted in Knoebel, n.62, p.135. During the first years of the anti-US resistance, the South Vietnamese relied mainly on natural military technology. The peasants built fortifications around their hamlets, with spiked pitfalls, stone traps, spears and mines. To cope with enemy bombings and mopping up raids, they dug underground entrenched camps connected by tunnels. They fought with bamboo spears, knives, poisoned arrows, homemade flintlocks and mines, etc. They even used wasps and cobras against their enemy. The Los Angeles Times, 9 July 1969 wrote that 25 per cent of all casualties suffered during 1967-68 were due to booby traps and mines.

82Tich, quoted in Burchett, n.74, p. 50.
stand up and fight the French colonialist to save the fatherland. He who has a gun uses a gun; he who has a sword, uses a sword, or if he does not have a sword, uses a hoe, shovel or bamboo stick. Everybody must strive to fight the colonialist to save the country."  

The situation gradually eased later, when the Front was able to collect arms from Communist countries, particularly from China, the Soviet Union and Czechoslovakia. It also had French and East German arms. Some of the Front's units were equipped with carbines of the former German Army, and the Red Army, which were sent via China. The Front's Army was equipped with 60 mm and 80 mm mortars, light and medium artillery, anti-tank rockets, bazookas, and anti-aircraft guns. What they lacked in conventional weapons they improvised, like slingshot guns that catapulted a charge of nails, metal scraps, cut bamboo, and stone up to 100 yards. Some guerrilla units fought with arrow slingshot gun, home-made mortar, and homemade shell. The RVN on the other hand widely used American weapons, especially the machinegun M60, and the new US Ar-15 colt, which had extraordinary rate of fire and

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84 Following the massive introduction of US troops, from 1965 onward, the Front received important material aid from communist countries. Later armed forces used rudimentary and modern weapons, particularly portable rockets and recoilless guns.
impact. The PLF was equipped to exist for days or weeks in the jungle without supplies under extreme conditions. Their survival equipment included drugs, a first aid kit, hammock, and nylon sheets to protect from rain and damp. But the gun was the most treasured piece. In the words of Bui Van Dieu, "Many of our men would rather die than lose their weapons, they know how hard it is to capture weapons, how valuable and irreplaceable every gun".85 The men were told that "there is no greater shame than losing one's gun".86 They might lose everything but not their guns. Often the success of an action was measured by the number of abandoned weapons, and not by the number of enemy casualties. The premium on guns was on account of the difficulty in procuring them. It took two months on the average for a carbine to reach South from North Vietnam down the Ho Chi Minh Trail and required five men to transport it over long distance to the battlefield.87

Gradually, however, the dependence on weapons transported down the Ho Chi Minh Trail or captured in battle became less. Factories and workshops were established, hidden deep in the jungle, to manufacture


86Knoebel, ibid.

87ibid.
uniforms, sandals, medicines, bandages, canned rice, charts, maps, magazines, food and weapons, mines, guns and gunpowder, hand grenades and cartridges. Weapon systems were improvised, like simple anti-aircraft guns, mortars, rocket launchers and armour-piercing weapons and captured equipment was rebuilt. Most of the factories were located in the "Iron Triangle" in the provinces along the Cambodian border and in the highlands.88

The Front had monitoring posts to monitor enemy's activities and its army was in constant and direct contact with command posts. Forces were directed through radio. The radio stations also did propaganda work in Vietnamese, Cambodian, Chinese, French, English and different tribal languages.88

The country was divided into three strategic areas, namely the mountainous regions, the lowland plains and the cities. These areas were divided into three inter-zones, the Saigon-Giadinh special zone, and in terms of territorial administration into seven zones. The rural areas were divided into thirty provinces, each province being headed by a provincial committee. The mountainous


areas were the first to be liberated. By 1965 the Front had control of half the population and more than half the total land area. As the liberated areas expanded, the size of the PLA also increased rapidly.

Among the general principles of NLF's military strategy, according to Truong Son, a staunch worker of the Front, were "to maintain and develop continuous offensive position, to hold firm and extend initiative on the battlefield, to compel the enemy to fight according to NLF intentions". Accordingly, he wrote,

We force them to scatter forces and to thin out their position which enables us to strike everywhere. Besides, we prevent them from using the tactics at which they excel. U.S. troops are well trained for pitched battles, with a high concentration of forces, a definite front line and a safe rear: in these conditions they can bring into full play their superiority in firepower and their mobility. But we have adopted the method of warfare without a front line, without definite targets fixed once for all, rallying and dispersing our forces with rapidity, appearing and disappearing unexpectedly, alternating massive attacks with skirmishes and coordinating them closely, striking everywhere simultaneously at the enemy's front, rear or flanks, even at the heart of his combat formation or field.

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90See Duiker, n.37, pp.210-11, and Pike, n.7, p. 239.

disposition, overcoming him by dint of courage and ingenuity in the most unexpected circumstances.92

The NLF kept its own troops in fighting trim by inculcating in them high combativeness, resolute spirit of offensive, flexible and powerful organization, good technical and tactical standards, tested capability of cadres in organizational work and firm leadership, high spirit of organization and discipline, creative combat methods, adequate material and technical means.93 Among its defensive tactics were use of booby traps, mine fields, and underground trenches, while among the offensive tactics were sniping, ambushes, gradual encroachments, roving attack, and surprise shellings by artillery and rockets. It preferred to fight at close quarters and for special operations used its specially trained commandos.94

When the attacks on government forces commenced in January 1960 with the success of Ben Tre uprising, the US command unleashed in South Vietnam its armoured units, its special force 'the Green Berets' and its air force. US allies like Australia, New Zealand, South Korea, the Philippines, Taiwan and Thailand also came to its

92Troung Son, ibid (1967), p.43-44.
93ibid., pp.35-37.
94Giap, n.50, p.361.
succour. After a spate of terror raids and counterterror operations inside the country during 1961-62, in January 1963 PLAF successfully launched attacks at Ap Boc followed by victories in other battles. The fall of the Diem government was directly caused by its military debacle in the Loc Ninh battle in October 1963, and thereafter anarchy ruled in Saigon. On 4 December 1964 the PLAF main force unit attacked the RVN ranger battalion at Binh Gia, 70 kilometres southeast of Saigon, and in a weeklong battle, inflicted heavy casualties on it. Similar attacks took place near the Cambodian border and in the Central Highlands. The US command was by now convinced that the PLAF had achieved tactical superiority over the ARVN.


87William C. Westmoreland, A Soldier Reports (New York: Doubleday, 1976), p.90. According to the author "RVN were losing a battalion a week, destroyed by North Vietnamese troops or by Vietcong main force troops operating from border base camps. That trend, if continued, would have resulted in disaster". 
This was the beginning of the massive American involvement in South Vietnam. By the end of 1967 the United states had committed in Vietnam 40 per cent of all combat-ready US divisions, one half of US tactical air power, and one-third of US naval forces. In economic terms, it cost the US treasury $25 billion a year. 98

The year 1965 began with a division-sized PLAF attack against RVN units. The latter was evidently in no position to defend itself - RVN was losing infantry battalions and district capitals at the rate of one a week - and the US came to its succour with the use of its air power. 98 The PLAF retort was to launch a surprise attack against the US installations at Pleiku on 7 February 1965, leading to the biggest casualty toll the US had yet suffered in any single action in the Vietnam war. Similar attacks were also carried out at Vietnam Post (Quangnam), Giahuu Post (Binh Dinh), Thanhtan Post (Thuathien). 100

The US responded with intensified counter offensive


98 These were Bien Hoa Airfield, Anlao, Chopchai, Binh Gia. See Vietnamese Studies n.28, pp.4-14, and Westmoreland, n.97.

100 Vietnamese Studies, ibid., pp.7 and 94.
measures. In "Operation Flaming Dart", on 7 February 1965, US fighter-bombers launched an air strike against military barracks at Dong Hoi, North Vietnam's major troops dispersal base above the 17th Parallel. In "Operation Rolling Thunder", on 2 March 100 US fighter-bombers crossed the 17th Parallel to bomb bridges, railway lines, port and supply facilities. This operation gradually developed into a series of sustained attacks without announcement. Simultaneously, 4,000 US Marines landed at Da Nang, and thus began the commitment of US combat troops in Vietnam. The Marines, supported by tanks and aircraft launched a major "Operation Starlight" on 18 August, on the Batagnam Peninsula south of Da Nang, the first combat action by American military units. According to Burchett, by the end of 1965, there were 185,000 US combat troops in South Vietnam; some 250,000 tons of bombs had

101 The counter offensive was launched against North Vietnam on the pretext that North Vietnamese patrol boats had attacked the US destroyers in the Gulf of Tonkin. In fact, the bombing was in reprisal for an NLF commando raid against the US air bases in South Vietnam. It was believed that North Vietnam was behind all these incidents, New York Times, 30 April 1965.

102 Jean Lacouture rightly wrote in his book, Viet-Nam Between Two Truces that "The north was guilty because it was communist, because it was a neighbour and accomplice of a people on whose territory armed forces of the United States suffered cruel disappointments, because it did not close its doors to its compatriots from the South who were engaged in combat against the greatest power in the world". See n.73, p.265.
already been dropped on North Vietnam.\textsuperscript{103}

The year 1966 saw major offensive operations and troops buildup on both sides, but on the war front the results were indecisive. General Westmoreland of the US army launched five simultaneous offensives in the coastal plains of Central and South Trung Bo and in Mekong delta with the aim of reconquering the strategic regions to command Quang Nagi, Binh Dinh, Phu Yen, Saigon and Ba Ria. The search-and-destroy operations, launched during the dry season brought intense pressure on the NLF troops. The cream of US troops and Marines\textsuperscript{104} were assigned the job, such as the 196th and 199th Light infantry brigades and the 1st Airborne Division (which were specially created for the war in South Vietnam), the famous infantry divisions, Big Red One and Tropical Lighting, the 'fierce paras', and the 'redoubtable' 9th ID. But all this mobilization and tactics like surprise attacks, deep thrusts, flank attacks, leapfrog, horse shoe, belt enclaves and mobile defences through combined dispositions failed to bring the Front to its knees. Throughout the year Front forces were able to attack continuously and the COSVN and PLAF divisions remained as elusive as ever, and NLF

\begin{footnotes}
\textsuperscript{103} Burchett, n.74, p.2 and \textit{Vietnamese Studies}, n.26 pp. 97-98.

\textsuperscript{104} The forces included those of the US, ARVN, South Korea, Australia, Thailand, New Zealand, and the Philippines.
\end{footnotes}
troops and cadres kept returning to their positions as soon as the US troops vacated the strategic areas.105

General Westmoreland believed that although the Communists had not been defeated, the end was in sight.106 To accomplish this goal, he applied more conventional firepower in 1967 to challenge the PLAF in areas which had long been under its control. The PLAF main force units were gradually forced into remote areas and jungle in order to maintain themselves as cohesive, organized units. US forces foiled PLAF attacks and strategic moves through massive B-52 raids. The PLAF having changed tactics, focused its attacks around Saigon and US bases in Central and Southern Trung Bo and in the Central Highlands, harassing the enemy forces and launching repeated attacks against their bases in urban centres.107


While the US forces were regrouping, the PLAF launched the Tet offensive, on the night of 29-30 January 1968. Simultaneous attacks were launched by local units of the PLAF against Da Nang, Hoi An, Bong Son, Quy Nhon, Trey Hoa, Ban Me Thuot, and Pleiku. On 31 January Hue, Quang Tri, Bien Hoa and Ben Tre came under attack, and on 1 February Saigon, Dalat, and Phan Thiet. The action, which involved about 80,000 PLAF forces covered thirty-six of the forty-four provincial capitals, five of the six autonomous cities, and sixty-four of the 242 district capitals, as well as hamlets and villages. Saigon was completely taken by surprise. Because of a holiday, most of the RVN units were not at full strength. PLAF forces penetrated into a number of major cities and bombed the US Embassy, the presidential palace, radio station, Security Office, Police Headquarters as well as the US joint command, Navy and paratroopers. In the liberated city quarters, the government administration was replaced by self-management committees.¹⁰⁸

The Tet offensive was a major victory for the Front and outraged American public opinion. The offensive, more

than any other event, turned Americans against the war and contributed to President Johnson's decision not to seek re-election.

The Tet offensive dealt the final blow to Westmoreland's strategy and he was replaced by General Abrams on 22 March 1968. The new incumbent applied the new strategy of "clear and hold" and "defence in depth" to clear the urban centres, military bases and communication lines and the areas surrounding them. He brought crack troops for the defence of Saigon and Da Nang. Assuming that the Front had its base headquarters inside Cambodia American forces began the secret bombing under code-name Operation Breakfast, Lunch, Snack and Dinner on 18 March.\(^{109}\) The PLAF meanwhile launched the second general offensive on 4 May 1968 to attack cities, provincial capitals, district towns, and air bases.\(^{110}\)

The year 1968 was the bloodiest in the Vietnam war. In several provinces, the Front severely damaged the Allied pacification programme and many villages came under


revolutionary control. But overall, the gains for the Front were less than anticipated. Nevertheless, in the words, of Nguyen Van Linh:

The result of that offensive was that it shook the White House. At that moment, the Vietnamese troops launched an attack right against the den of the American and the puppet army. From that fact, the United States realized it could not win the war in Vietnam and that it would not be beneficial economically and politically to prolong that war. It was also costing America friends in the international arena. The United States had to think of preparing to pull out of Vietnam, and from there, peace negotiations opened.

Thus on 13 May 1968 official talks between representatives of the DRV government and those of the US government started in Paris.

When the US Army's heavy attack under "Operation Speedy Express" was under way in Ben Tre and My Tho Provinces, on 20 April 1968 the Front formed a new united Front, called Lien Minh Cac Luc Luong Dan Toc Dan Chu Va Hoa Binh (Alliance of National, Democratic, and Peace)


112 This new version has been expounded by Nguyen Van Linh in Bui Xuan Quang, ibid.

Forces - ANDPF). Trinh Dinh Thao was made its President and Lam Van Tet and Thich Don Hau its Vice-Presidents. The united front put forward a programme of action which comprised three essential points: (1) to restore peace and regain national independence and sovereignty; (2) to build an independent, free, peaceful, neutral and prosperous South Vietnam; and (3) to advance towards the peaceful reunification of the country on the basis of equality and due consideration for the political and social features of North and South. This new organization was not to replace the NLF but was meant to rally the labourers, the urban people, and students who had not joined the NLF. During the Tet offensive, especially in Hue, Saigon and other cities, a number of local Front organizations were created to try to rally more people behind the NLF and an attempt was made to unite these various new organizations into one broad front. ANDPF enlisted the participation in its struggle from the upper strata of the urban population, especially the intelligentsia and victims of the brutal US aggression.

115 ibid., no. 42, p.7.
116 For its manifesto, communique and political programme, see Turner, n.10, pp.444-50.
117 Duiker, n.37, p.269.
On 8 May 1969, NLF sent a delegation under Tran Buu Kiem to attend the sixteenth plenary session at Paris, where Kiem put forward a 10-point proposal. In order to develop people's revolutionary power and to establish administrative authority in newly liberated areas, the NLF and the ANDPF met in a Congress on 6-8 June and agreed to set up a new "government of anti-US resistance for revolutionary salvation" - the Provisional Revolutionary Government. Huynh Tan Phat was appointed Chairman of the Council of Ministers, Nguyen Huu Tho was elected as Chairman of Advisory Council and Trinh Dinh Thao was made

118 The representatives were Averell Harriman, Henry Cabot Lodge and David Bruce for the US, Pham Dang Lam for Saigon, Hxuan Thuy and Ha Van Lau for Hanoi and the Tran Buu Kiem and Madam Nguyen Thi Binh for the NLF. Talks held at Hotel Majestic, Avenue Kleber.

119 The Vietnamese people's national fundamental rights as recognized by the 1954 Geneva Agreements withdrawal of US troops and war material, and establishment of a Provisional coalition government, and pending free and democratic general elections were the main demand on the basis of political programme and 5-point position of the NLF, which kept with 4-point stand of the DRV. See "Tran Buu Kiem, Chief of the Delegation of the South Vietnam National Front for Liberation, at the 16th Plenary Session of the Paris Conference on Vietnam, 8 May 1969", in Peace Initiative (n.p., 17 September 1970), p.4, a pamphlet.

its Vice-Chairman.\footnote{It drew its membership from the NLF, ANDPF, PRP, and Democratic and Radical Socialist parties; See Appendix E for Action Programme of Provisional Revolutionary Government. An Outline History, ibid.}

As with the Vietminh, the NLF, the PRP, and other Front organizations, the PRG was designed to appeal to those moderates who objected to identification with Communism, and to serve as an effective tool of the party. To provide the PRG with an administrative apparatus, People's Revolutionary Councils were formed in 1,268 townships, 124 districts, and three cities. By the end of 1969 PRG government was established in forty-three provinces.\footnote{Nhan Dan, 11 June 1969, in JPRS 48, 699, n.11, Translations on North Vietnam, no.589 and DRV government statement on formation of PRG, See the "Provisional Revolutionary Government of the Republic of South Vietnam", VDRN (Saigon, January 1972), Document no.101, P.29.}

The formation of the PRG was the climax of a process of setting up revolutionary power, capable of claiming legitimacy alongside the RVN. It assumed all responsibilities of the NLF Central Committee and, after 1969 played a dominant role in the political and diplomatic struggle against the US.

The PRP and NLF had their headquarters in Cambodia close to the border province of Pleiku, as well as South of Hau Nghia and their offices in Phnom Penh. Their military sub-organization and a Commission for Weapons and Supplies
existed through eastern Laos, very close to the jungle village of Chavane. Knoebel believed that Vietcong command post was in the iron triangle near Saigon. The leaders, however, constantly moved from place to place.\textsuperscript{123}

From the outset, the NLF sought to gain support from outside the country and to extend its influence abroad. Claiming to be the true government of the people of South Vietnam, it worked tirelessly to develop this image with the assertion that it was capable to maintain envoys and treaties. It established and maintained relations with international Communist front organizations and Communist bloc nations and countries such as Cuba, Indonesia, and those of Africa whose foreign policies served the Communist cause.\textsuperscript{124} By 1968 it set up permanent delegations in twelve countries, particularly Algeria, the UAR, Indonesia, Cambodia, Syria, and Tanzania. It opened two information bureaus in Paris and Stockholm. In fact, its diplomatic relations with Cuba and Cambodia were at ambassadorial level even before the founding of the PRG. By 1965, it had representation with twenty-five international Communist and pro-Communist Organizations.\textsuperscript{125}

\textsuperscript{123}Knoebel. n.62, p. 121.
\textsuperscript{124}Pike, n.7, pp.306-7.
The USSR had permitted the NLF to open a permanent mission office in Moscow on 30 April 1965. Sihanouk recognized the DRV and the RGNLF as the legitimate governments of North and South and allowed the Front to use eastern Cambodia as a privileged sanctuary, storage depot and staging ground for military campaigns. Indonesia had established full diplomatic relations with DRV during the Sukarno era and showed sympathy and support to the NLF in the South. India too was very sympathetic to the NLF and considered it the *de-facto* voice of the people of the South. Prime Minister Indira Gandhi had accorded a tumultuous welcome to the NLF leader, Mrs Nguyen Thi Binh, then Minister of Foreign Affairs of RGNLF, in 1970.

RGNLF in South Vietnam was accorded diplomatic recognition by twenty-five countries of Asia, Europe and Africa. Even Western nations such as Sweden accorded recognition to RGNLF and gave it permission to establish a diplomatic mission in Stockholm. RGNLF however got international legitimacy when its delegation was accepted

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128 Wilcox and others, n.125, pp.165-6.

129 Pike, n.7, p.316 and ibid.
for talks at the Paris Peace Conference. Madam Binh joined in the peace talks on 17 September 1970, and presented her "10 points" as the conditions for establishing peace in the South. She highlighted the crimes committed by the RVN and questioned its legitimacy. Thus a separate identity and legitimacy of the NLF vis-a-vis RVN was effectively projected.

Although at the end of 1968, ninety-eight nations were recognizing the government of RVN, they started withdrawing that recognition or allowed it to lapse. This diplomatic victory over its adversary at the international level tremendously boosted the NLF's morale.