

May 4, 1974

Letter from Le Duan to Military Region 6

Citation:

"Letter from Le Duan to Military Region 6", May 4, 1974, Wilson Center Digital Archive, Le Duan, Tho Vao Nam [Letters to the South] (Hanoi: So That, 1985), 356-367. Translated by Merle Pribbenow. <https://digitalarchive.umd.edu/document/175859>

Summary:

Letter from Le Duan to Military Region 6 providing guidance on its operations and urgent tasks in the two years 1974-1975.

Credits:

This document was made possible with support from MacArthur Foundation

Original Language:

Vietnamese

Contents:

Translation - English

Dear Comrades,

During my recent discussions with Nam Hoa [Secretary of the Region 6 Party Committee] I expressed a number of ideas about Region 6's mission and the urgent tasks the region faces during the next two years, 1974-1975. The Party Central Committee Office took notes on my comments and I have reviewed these notes. I am sending them to you now for your study and execution.

Ba [Le Duan]

REGION 6'S URGENT MISSION DURING THE TWO-YEAR PERIOD 1974-1975

I. The Strategic Location and Mission of Region 6

Region 6 is not heavily populated, but it occupies a very strategic location. It is located east and northeast of Saigon and contains strategic roads linking Dalat with the city of Saigon and with the port of Cam Ranh. For several years the enemy has been striving to keep this area secure.

After the Paris Agreement was signed, the enemy developed a plan that he is now implementing, step by step, to move residents of the Tri-Thien and Nam-Ngai areas into Region 6. The enemy's primary goal is to secure control of the unpopulated mountain jungles in this area in order to create a number of defensive lines to block the advance of our forces and to help protect Saigon. The immediate objective of this enemy's effort is to support his military needs, and not to immediately exploit the area's economic potential.

For us, at this time Region 6 also occupies an important position primarily for military reasons. The strategic mission of Region 6 is to form a common strategic link with all of the battlefields in Cochin China. We must not consider Region 6 a battlefield unit that is separate and cut off from Cochin China, but at the same time we should also not integrate it into Region 7, because Region 7 has just been reformed as a regional command and is currently engaged in consolidating its organizational structure. The area of operations would be too large, travel would be too difficult, and command and guidance would not be effective if the two regions were merged. In addition, Region 6 has been a regional command for a long time and the region's party structure and Party Committee are familiar with the battlefield, so we should not cause any organizational disruptions that would delay our preparations for combat operations, and combat preparations will be an extremely urgent task for the region during the next two years.

The strategic mission of Region 6 at present is to strive to gain control of the entire mountain jungle portion of the region and to build the mountain jungle area where Region 6 joins Region 7 into a solid integral strategic base area for the entire Cochin China battlefield, an area from which we can deploy our main force corps-sized units to surround, pressure, and attack Saigon from any different directions.

I would like to say a little more about this matter. In South Vietnam (not counting the Tri-Thien battlefield, which has a solid connection with the southern provinces of the old Region 4) we have two important strategic base areas.

The first is the northern Central Highlands, where the vast liberated areas of the provinces of Kontum and Gia Lai are linked with the liberated zones of [Quang] Nam, [Quang] Ngai, Binh [Dinh], and Phu [Yen] so that our forces can advance down to liberate the coastal lowlands of Region 5 and besiege the city of Danang. The second is the liberated zone of eastern Cochin China, which is connected with the mountain jungles of Region 6 to form a strategic base that represents a constant threat to Saigon. From this base our main force units will advance against and attack Saigon to

defeat the enemy there and throughout the rest of the Cochin China battlefield. For that reason, with respect to Saigon and the Mekong Delta, the mountain jungles of eastern Cochin China and Region 6 have a position similar to that our old Viet Bac base area had toward Hanoi and the Red River Delta during the war against the French.

Several years ago, we up here [in North Vietnam] gave you the mission of building a strategic base area for the Cochin China battlefield in this sector, and we emphasized that we must occupy the unpopulated or lightly populated mountain jungle regions by "transplanting" people from other areas and creating populated locations that can be turned into combat villages so that we can use these villages to build guerrilla and local force units to truly control the mountain jungle area. However, it seems that down there you all did not fully understand the importance of this issue. In addition, Region 6's strength is limited, so you did not have the strength to be able to gain control of your entire mountain jungle area, and COSVN did not have sufficient strength to give you any additional help. Right now, our combat operations require that we accomplish this mission quickly, and now conditions are favorable to do this more quickly and with more force than was possible before. Region 6 needs to correctly understand the importance of this issue in order to strive to accomplish this mission.

Currently, in Region 6 our forces have control of a significant portion of the mountain jungle region, not only in the border areas between Binh Thuan, Ninh Thuan, and Binh Tuy provinces, but also along both sides of Route 20 linking your area with Region 7's liberated zone and linking into our strategic corridor down from North Vietnam. This is an important change in comparison with the situation that existed during the resistance war against France, and it is also the happy result of the hard work and continuous efforts of our Party chapter, our people, and our armed forces in the provinces of Region 6. Building on what you have already achieved, with assistance from COSVN and the COSVN Military Headquarters as well as from the Party Central Committee and the Central Military Party Committee, Region 6 must strive to move forward, expand and perfect your control of the mountain jungle region, and work with Region 7 to would a common strategic base for the entire Cochin China battlefield.

On the enemy side, after a year of sabotaging the Paris Agreement, the enemy has not only not been able to improve his situation; the situation has become more difficult and he has become weaker militarily, politically, and economically. During the coming period, the enemy certainly will be dealt painful blows and even greater military defeats, and our political struggle in areas under enemy control, and especially in Saigon, will expand and grow stronger. This may lead to a profound political crisis within the puppet regime that will hasten the enemy's collapse even more.

We now had an opportunity to coordinate our three strategic blows [military, political, military proselyting] to defeat the enemy. For that reason, from this very moment, in addition to attacking the areas temporarily under enemy control, we must very quickly step up the work of developing a solid strategic base in Region 6 and eastern Cochin China in accordance with a common plan so that within a few years this base will be capable of supporting a large main force army.

Region 6 alone may receive several divisions. If we can accomplish this, we will completely change the balance of forces throughout Cochin China and place powerful pressure on Saigon from many different directions, not just from the north, northeast, and northwest, but also from the east and southeast, and we will be able to advance toward defeating the enemy in Saigon, the enemy's final stronghold.

II. A Number of Specific Tasks

Central Committee Resolution 21 stated that we must always maintain a firm grip on our armed forces, strive to build up the revolution's strength, coordinate and combine our military, political, and diplomatic efforts, utilize offensive operations in an appropriate manner in the three strategic areas [mountain jungles, rural countryside, cities], intensify our efforts to gain control of the people, take control at the local level, and gradually expand our area while shrinking the enemy's area of control. We must coordinate front-line tasks with the work in the rear, coordinate attacks with force-building, create new strength and a new battlefield posture in order to change the balance of forces even more in our favor, and make preparations of all types to secure victory no matter how the situation should develop in the future. This is the essential spirit of the resolution. Now we can see the enemy's plots more clearly, we can now more accurately assess our strength and the enemy's strength, and we can affirm that there is now an opportunity for the South Vietnamese revolution to achieve total victory. For that reason, Region 6 must clearly understand the strategic mission discussed above and must make an all-out effort to accomplish this mission, quickly prepare your forces, and support the entire South Vietnamese battle in order to win victory.

First of all, the following concrete tasks must be carried out.

1. Gain control of the population and disrupt the enemy's "pacification" program.

The lowlands of Region 6 are very narrow, and the population has been resettled and repressed by the enemy for a long time. Meanwhile, although few people live in the mountains, we have been able to secure control over a number of rather large areas. Because of the rugged terrain in those areas we control, when the people break out of the enemy's grip, they have places to live, places we can hold and defend. For that reason, the goals for our struggle for control of the population in the mountains may be higher than our goals in the lowlands. This subject is intimately linked to the task of perfecting our control in the mountains and building a base area.

In Region 6, during the earlier resistance war the French established armed "nests" (Goum) to dominate the mountain regions. The same is true today - whoever controls the population will control the mountain region. We must place strong emphasis on the need to gain control of the mountain areas, which means we must devote particular attention to the work of mobilizing and propagandizing the ethnic minority groups and strive to win most of them over to our side rather than simply giving them moral support. At present, there are more than 190,000 ethnic minority tribal people, but we have only liberated and control about 55,000 of them, or only about a third.

We must gain control over the vast bulk of this population. Our cadre and enlisted men in the mountains must be able to conduct propaganda operations to win over the ethnic minority population. We must review all of our political, military proselyting, and combat operations in order to constantly supplement the training and improve the abilities of our cadre, soldiers, and hard-core supporters. Using these experiences and the lessons learned, we should set out goals for gaining control of the population and gaining mastery of the area at different levels for each specific area and each specific tribe, and then move toward launching individual waves of attacks to destroy enemy strategic hamlets and resettlement centers to free the people and have them build new villages that are completely in the area we control.

In order to do that, in addition to building up our strength and coordinating our "three-pronged" attack [military, political, military proselyting], we must prepare areas, land, and equipment beforehand so that we can help the people when they break out of the enemy zone and enable them to produce and make their living over the long term. At the same time, with assistance from the National level, you must provide the people with salt and cloth and you must work to establish medical facilities and schools in order to enable the people to stabilize their livelihoods and

create strong bonds with the revolution and with the liberated zone. You must carry out our ethnic minority policy strictly and properly, win over the support of tribal chieftains and respected village leaders in order to win the masses of each tribe over to our side. To strengthen your proselyting efforts toward the ethnic minorities, you must vigorously train and promote cadre from the local ethnic minority tribes.

As for the lowlands, we do not underestimate the need to disrupt the enemy's "pacification" program and gain control of the population, but you must set goals appropriate to the local balance of forces at a time when our strength has its limits. Do not be overeager or set immediate goals that are too high - the main thing is to gain power systematically, gradually, step by step. The first thing is to loosen the enemy's grip, limit his control, domination, and exploitation of the people in order to give the people an opportunity to break free and give us an opportunity to contact them, propagandize them on our policies, win over puppet government officials at the hamlet and village level, and gradually build political, military, and military proselyting forces. Attacks against enemy forces in the strategic hamlets and expansion of guerrilla warfare in areas under enemy repression must first be approved of and supported by the local masses of the population.

2. Perfect our control throughout the mountain jungle area and quickly build a base.

This task includes attacks as well as force-building, a combination of front-line and rear area tasks within the mountain region. With regard military attacks, you must resolutely defeat the enemy's land-grabbing operations and his commando operations and sudden surprise raids. You must coordinate with units from higher level authorities to expand our control along the Vietnamese-Cambodian border and open up a strategic corridor from the northern Central Highlands down into Region 6's base area. Regarding the attack against enemy forces to liberate Duc Lap that you all recommended, the General Staff is now studying that recommendation. You must focus on attacking enemy roads and lines of communications, on securing control of the population living on the plantations and in the strategic hamlets along Routes 11 and 20. When conditions permit, you should cut selected sections of these roads. You must combine combat operations with civilian proselyting operations in order to disrupt the enemy's resettlement plan and his program for building strategic hamlets. You must attract the people that the enemy has moved down from Central Vietnam and induce them to flee into the areas under our control to make their livings.

On building a base, we must have a comprehensive plan, covering military, political, and economic matters. Special attention should be paid to agricultural production, gradually resolving the food problem for the people and help our headquarters staffs and units to become self-sufficient in food. At the same time we must strive to open up a number of new production areas in order to be able to resolve our logistics problem locally while at the same time building up a stockpile for use by COSVN units when they arrive in the area to conduct operations and by additional reinforcements arriving from North Vietnam. I agree that you should open up production areas in northern Thanh Linh and Hoai Duc districts and along the La Nga and Dong Nai Rivers.

At the same time you might be able to open up additional new production zones in northern Lam Dong.

The direction of production should be to plant staples and food crops, but you must make a concrete study of the area and the soil to select the proper crops to plant. Rice should only be planted in abandoned rice fields where there are good sources of water. You should plant corn, beans, potatoes, and manioc on dry, sloping ground. You must pay a great deal of attention to making and repairing hand tools to ensure that our headquarters staffs, units, and the local population have sufficient equipment to till the soil.

You need to talk to the General Department of Rear Services about requesting that they send people down to conduct a local survey to make sure the base has a good production plan. The General Department of Rear Services will send economic production troops down to work on this project to create solid strong-points from which we can expand the base outward. Regional and province units will be responsible for making production arrangements for troops and civilians in the liberated zone and at the same time of creating conditions that will enable us to support the civilian residents who escape out to us from the enemy-controlled areas.

3. Intensify Urban Operations.

The enemy is strengthening the defenses of the cities and carrying out very stringent control measures. However, when compared with the Ngo Dinh Diem era and the time that U.S. forces were directly involved in the fighting, the enemy's current posture in the cities is weaker than it was before. This is a time when the contradictions between the fascist Nguyen Van Thieu clique and the majority of the population, and between Thieu and the third force and opposition factions, are becoming rather bitter. At the same time, the enemy is also experiencing many economic and financial problems. The different classes of the population and a rather large portion of the enemy's soldiers are now facing burning needs for their daily livelihoods.

Because of their current and long-standing links, Dalat and Phan Thiet must continue to maintain close links with Saigon. They should use our overt movement posture and the possibility of operating legally inside the cities to bring together the masses, and especially workers, students, and women, of these two cities. At the same time, they should use slogans involving the people's living conditions, democracy, peace, and other pressing issues in the people's daily lives to incite and expand the political struggle movement. While you intensify your overt, legal activities, you must be sure to also pay attention to consolidating and expanding the Party's covert organizations and its hard-core supporters.

4. Building Armed Forces and Combat Operations.

The issue of sending additional forces to Region 6 is part of the plan for aid to South Vietnam on which we are currently working up here. However, the issue of how many troops to send and what types of specialty branch units are suitable to the battlefields of Region 6 must first be discussed in detail with the General Staff. In your combat operations, you must use the forces you currently possess with the greatest possible effectiveness, avoid unnecessary losses and casualties, strive to find ways to draw on local resources to strengthen your forces, and be extremely economical in your expenditure of weapons and ammunition, because Region 6, as well as Cochin China, are far from the Center [North Vietnam] and we still have some problems with supplying support to the front lines. In addition, with regards to main force units, the Center [the National leadership] wishes to use them in an extremely concentrated and mobile manner, and only use them when an opportunity arises in order to create the maximum strategic surprise.

You must study the tactics being used by your local force troops to ensure that they are suited to the specific conditions on the battlefield and that they achieve our military and political goals at specific locations and specific times.

For the immediate future, combat operations must support our objectives of securing control of the population, disrupting "pacification," and consolidating and expanding our control. You should review your operations and draw lessons learned from them in the proper methods for combating enemy land-grabbing operations, for eliminating [killing] enemy thugs, officials, and traitors, for besieging enemy outposts, for attacking enemy rear bases, for attacking and disrupting enemy road traffic and lines

of communications, etc. You should focus on combat operations that utilize small, elite forces to achieve a high level of effectiveness with low casualties.

With respect to Dalat, you should aggressively develop springboard positions, create a siege posture around the city, and, when the opportunity presents itself, quickly attack using local armed forces in coordination with mass [civilian] violence in order to liberate the city in order to disrupt the enemy's scheme of pulling back and regrouping his forces to turn Dalat into a large military strong-point on the enemy's defense line along Route 11.

5. The Region Committee's Command and Guidance Operations.

In addition to general matters, I suggest that you should move the Region Party Committee headquarters to another area where mobility is better so that the Region Party Committee can cover the entire battlefield and facilitate contact with Region 7 and our strategic corridor down from North Vietnam. The region's current base could be turned over to the province Party committee for their use. Additional support for Region 6 is a component of our overall plan to provide support to the entire South Vietnamese battlefield. However, to facilitate transportation and the receipt of such support, I agree that you should arrange for transportation of supplies directly from the strategic corridor to the region's base in order to avoid circuitous routes that waste time and energy.

You should analyze the deployment and assignment of individual duties to the members of the Region Party Committee in order to be able to provide guidance to all three areas [mountain jungles, rural countryside, cities]. As for gaining control of the population in the lowlands, the coastal provinces are directly responsible for that but the Region Party Committee should establish an element to monitor, supervise, and assist the provinces in expanding and improving the movement in those areas. With respect to the cities, you should assign additional cadre to Tuyen Duc in order to intensify our movement in Dalat and the rural countryside around the city. Besides those two areas, the Regiment Party Committee should provide appropriate guidance on perfecting our control over the mountainous areas and on expanding and building bases. This should be considered one of your most important, leading responsibilities, and you must carry it out very quickly and vigorously so that next year you will be able to receive main force troops from up here in order to be able to seize the opportunity in time to score major victories.