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QUYET THANG COMMENTS ON U.S. ARMY TROUBLES

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[Commentary by Quyet Thang, published in June 1969 QUAN DOI NHAN DAN Magazine:  
"The Impotence and Tragic Fate of the U.S. Expeditionary Force in Nixon's  
Obdurate and Stupid Scheme"]

[Text] Forced to definitively adopt a strategic defensive position on all southern battlefields by the general offensive and uprisings of southern troops and people, the aggressors have firmly believed that if U.S. troops could not achieve victories in counterattacks, at least they would not sustain defeats when on the defensive. But the stormy development of the general offensive and simultaneous uprisings of southern troops and people during more than a year has crushed all the U.S. aggressors' subjective calculations.

On the battlefield, as a force to be used for attacks and counterattacks, the U.S. forces, which have sustained defeats in strategic counterattacks, are suffering heavy defeats and becoming increasingly impotent in their strategic defensive position. The U.S. expeditionary force--in which the U.S. imperialists have placed all their hope of achieving victory--actually is causing a headache to Nixon and Abrams, who is in charge of enforcing the U.S. imperialists' present plot against the southern part of our country. Exerting maximum effort while in a position of defeat and weakness, the U.S. force is becoming increasingly weakened and impotent.

Abrams throughout 1968 had a very hard time in executing the clear-and-hold strategy. Faced with this comprehensively defensive and passive situation, the U.S. expeditionary force's tasks have increased, instead of decreasing. U.S. troops have had to protect important cities and U.S. military bases at the same time in order to check and restrict the liberation regulars' attacks. They have had to stop the adversary's infiltration into big cities and, concurrently, to protect or replace the puppet troops in pacification operations.

But the Ky Dau early spring attacks--followed by the May and June 1969 continuous and vigorous attacks by southern troops and people against a series of U.S.-puppet bases, command headquarters, and cities, causing heavy losses in men and war means to the enemy, especially to the U.S. force--prove that U.S. troops have been unable to fulfill their tasks and that the fighting methods of Abrams' clear-and-hold strategy have failed to achieve the expected efficiency. The general offensive and uprisings of southern troops and people have deepened and made more prominent the fundamental weaknesses, contradictions, and stalemates of the U.S. force while being driven into an increasingly passive and defensive position on all battlefields. These are:

1--The U.S. expeditionary troops' morale has further seriously declined. Because of the defeats and stalemates of the war of aggression in Vietnam, an unprecedentedly deep discord has developed in the United States. The American people have risen to protest Nixon's scheme to pursue the war of aggression in South Vietnam and demand a rapid pullout of U.S. troops. Fierce contradictions have prevailed among U.S. rulers. The United States is facing unsurmountable political, military, economic, financial, and social difficulties caused by the war of aggression in Vietnam.

The U.S. expeditionary force's rear has been driven into an unprecedented confusion. The U.S. aggressors' aggressive will has been obviously and increasingly shaken. They have been forced to think about extricating themselves from the war, shifting the war load over to the puppet administration and puppet army, and pulling out U.S. troops. Meanwhile, U.S. casualties have increased rapidly, instead of decreasing. All of these facts have contributed to the wide development among U.S. troops of defeatist views and a desire to end the war early. U.S. leaders have become more seriously disappointed and weary than ever, according to U.S. NEWS AND WORLD REPORT on 26 May 1969.

Cases of lack of discipline and loss of fighting spirit, the antiwar movement, and the campaign for troop withdrawal have developed strongly in all U.S. units. Many companies and battalions have refused to accept operational missions. U.S. servicemen have regarded the Vietnam war as a hell, a source of death. Fired with hatred because their blood has been shed uselessly for the benefit, the stubbornness, and perfidy of the Nixon administration, U.S. youths have increasingly clearly realized that the U.S. administration and their leaders have deceived them and turned them into hostages to the country-selling and people-harming Thieu-Ky-Huong administration.

That is why more and more U.S. servicemen have publicly manifested their antiwar feelings. More than 20 clandestine newspapers, mainly devoted to the antiwar problem, have been in circulation in U.S. military bases, according to reports from Washington on 8 May 1969. Such events have never before occurred in U.S. military ranks. The political and morale situation inside the U.S. armed forces now is worse than ever. The heavier defeats and higher casualties they sustain and the more strongly their leaders' aggressive will is shaken, the more quickly U.S. troops' morale declines.

This is a fundamental weakness of the U.S. expeditionary force. Since political and morale factors are fundamental factors of the fighting power of an army, this seriously declined political and morale situation has obviously lowered the U.S. troops' fighting power. This is one of the primary causes of the present defeats and impotence of the U.S. expeditionary force in South Vietnam.

2--The more they squirm, the more deeply U.S. expeditionary troops are driven into a defensive and passive state and the more widely they are dispersed. To eliminate the state of waiting for adversaries' attacks, Abrams has endeavored to launch a number of military operations such as Dau Tieng Tay Ninh Road 9 and Ap Bia but how could these bloody operations exert maximum pressure on the battlefield when they could not even check the strong offensives by the southern armed forces and people or prevent U.S.-puppet bases and units and cities from being attacked. The pitiful failure of these operations clearly demonstrated the U.S. troops' impotence in their defensive.

Previously, when the U.S. aggressors were still furiously conducting strategic counterattacks, the U.S. expeditionary corps' efforts were futile. Now that they are driven deeply into a passive, defensive situation and cannot even defend themselves, it is very stupid on their part to talk about exerting maximum pressure on the liberation troops. In strategic deployment, the Americans want to concentrate U.S. troops on each defensive line and belt, thus forming a defensive system studded with key positions. But the U.S. troops are forced to be thinly stretched and scattered everywhere. Even the U.S. strategic, mobile forces are split up for defensive action in each sector.

The Americans have mustered forces in the 1st and 3d tactical zones, displaying a closely woven net of troops in the 3d Tactical Zone, especially around Saigon. In the 1st Tactical Zone, the Americans have mustered one-third of their forces for the defense of Da Nang. The main defensive forces are the U.S. troops.

In the 3d Tactical Zone, they have pulled around Saigon more than 100 U.S.-puppet battalions which represent three-fourths of their forces in this zone. Almost half of these forces are composed of U.S. troops that are used as blocking forces on various lines considered to be the most important. Nevertheless because U.S. troops have been stretched and continuously attacked everywhere and because they have to scatter to parry blows on many battlefields and to fulfill many complex missions, they continue to be highly dispersed right in areas where masses of them have been mustered, as around Saigon.

As a result, the U.S. mobile forces have been thinly spread. The Air Cavalry Division and the 101st Airborne Division had to deploy troops to accomplish their defensive mission. Their mobile forces in each sector have been reduced and have always had to maneuver from one place to another. The Americans have had to use their mobile forces in each defensive sector to manage to resist us. Exactly as was admitted by Chapman, former U.S. Marine commander, the U.S. forces have been spread too thinly and have become exhausted. According to the Washington POST on 22 April 1969, it is because they have been forced to deploy too thinly and everywhere that the U.S. expeditionary corps, though still possessing more than 500,000 men, have been short of troops everywhere and at all times, and their mobile forces have been gradually reduced, caught in a negative defensive posture, they have to remain in position awaiting new blows directed at them. With numerous weapons, their defensive capabilities have been gradually reduced.

3--All U.S. Army units have been compelled to assume the defensive task, although their own equipment, organization, and specialities, which are suitable for the offensive, are quite different [words indistinct] the U.S. armed forces in general and all U.S. Army units in South Vietnam in particular are specifically organized and entrusted with combat tasks according to their own specialities on each kind of battlefield.

In fact, U.S. Marines are organized, equipped, and trained for landing operations and the protection of bridgeheads. As fire-fighting forces, airborne cavalymen and paratroopers are provided with light equipment in order to acquire quick mobility and reaction. Armored cavalymen, whose mobility depends on motorized means on land, have a powerful assault strength. As for U.S. infantry divisions such as the 1st and 25th divisions, they are accustomed to waging conventional battles in the jungles and mountains.

However, after returning to the strategic defensive to carry out the clear-and-hold scheme, all U.S. Army units in South Vietnam have been compelled to assume the defensive task despite their different organization, status, and equipment. Abrams has hastily done patchwork by increasing armored vehicles and heavy guns for air cavalry and paratrooper divisions, helicopters for U.S. Marine divisions, and tanks for infantry divisions. But he has failed to make these army units suitable for the present defensive task. Moreover, he has confused these units' command organizations and fighting methods, thus making their combat efficiency decrease further.

The similarity of these U.S. army units is that they are very bad and have sustained heavy defeats. This is the losing position of an aggressive army which has been compelled to shrink to the defensive instead of launching attacks. This situation has affected not only the development of each U.S. Army unit's own speciality at present, but also the organization and building of U.S. armed forces in general and the combativity of U.S. strategic mobile forces in particular. On the battlefield, all combat measures and defensive and operational tactics to be carried out by the U.S. troops themselves in the clear-and-hold strategy have successively gone bankrupt before the PLAF's effective combat methods and constant creative development during the phase of general offensive and concerted uprisings.

Regarding the tactical ideology in battles, the U.S. troops' firepower-relying tendency has further increased. The U.S. commanders have previously admitted that in South Vietnam, U.S. infantry is but an adjunct of U.S. artillery and aircraft. But, the U.S. infantry's role is now depreciated. As commented by the western press, the U.S. land combat forces' present function is to disclose enemy targets for aircraft and artillery. Radically weak in strategic offensive, U.S. infantry has become weaker in the strategic defensive. The high development of the offensive strategy of the revolutionary war in South Vietnam has bared the U.S. troops' weakness and impotence in their defensive strategy. For this reason, despite their great numerical strength, the U.S. troops' quality and strategic effectiveness on defense have further decreased.

Faced with the skill and offensive strength of the South Vietnam armed forces and people, the U.S. expeditionary forces cannot fulfill their main tasks in the deteriorating defensive posture. With heavy casualties, they cannot even defend themselves. Then how can people expect that they will exert maximum pressure on the opposite camp or will help the puppet armed forces gradually strengthen themselves so that the latter may replace the U.S. forces in accordance with their plan of puppetizing the aggressive war, which will inevitably be doomed?

The U.S. forces sustain heavy losses while trying to keep their casualties at the lowest level. The more than 500,000 men--with a ground fighting force of 11 divisions, of which 9 divisions and 5 brigades are composed of the most seasoned units of the U.S. armed forces and representing about half of the ground forces and about 70 percent of the infantry and paratroop forces of the United States--has far exceeded the U.S. initial anticipation for a local war in Asia.

According to Western papers, to maintain the U.S. combat forces in South Vietnam, the United States has to mobilize 1.5 million troops as reinforcement or replacement forces, and about 5 million defense personnel to serve the war in Vietnam. This costly war--in manpower and wealth--has upset the U.S. economy, weakened U.S. society, completely upset U.S. world strategy, and has exhausted the U.S. armed forces, as many U.S. politicians have complained. In this situation, the ever increasing U.S. casualties on the battlefields have not only caused great difficulties for the United States in manpower and financial fields, but has also stirred up U.S. public opinion and stepped up the American people's struggle against the Nixon administration's stubbornness in pursuing the aggressive war and wasting the lives of American youths for the selfish interests of the U.S. capitalist monopolists.

Therefore, the present primary target in the U.S. defensive is to prevent the U.S. forces from sustaining heavy losses. The question of keeping the U.S. casualties to the lowest level which has always been a great concern of the U.S. aggressors since the beginning of the unjust local war, has now become a very urgent and central requirement--in both military and political fields--in the present strategies of U.S. leaders. The British paper *TIMES* of 2 April 1969 stated that U.S. casualties, that is, the number of U.S. killed or injured in Vietnam, constitute political (?explosion) for President Nixon and many other Americans. This marks the unacceptably high price they have to pay for a most serious miscalculation in the military field.

As for the paper *New York TIMES* of 9 March 1969, it says: "The unexpected increase in U.S. casualties in South Vietnam is a new, bitter manifestation of the very high price of the present war, a price which, more than ever, refelcts the need to end the war."

For this reason, the White House and Pentagon have successively issued instructions to Abrams, stressing the need to keep U.S. casualties at the lowest rate. What has Abrams done to reduce U.S. casualties? He has set forth and carried out many measures, but his main one is the imperialist troops' conventional measure of using firepower instead of armed forces. But, contrary to the contradictory intentions of the stubborn U.S. Aggressors who want to maintain the U.S. expeditionary troops in South Vietnam, to continue their aggressive war, and to restrict and reduce U.S. casualties at the same time, the U.S. death toll of the battlefields has rapidly increased, especially since the early Ky Dau spring days.

U.S. casualties in 1968 were almost equal to those in 1966 and 1967, thus surpassing 3 times the bearable limit of 500,000 casualties per year. The U.S. death toll in South Vietnam is higher than those in other great U.S. wars, except World War II. Since the early Mau Than spring days, almost all U.S. Army units, such as the 25th and 1st Air Cavalry Division, the 101st Airborne Division and the 3d Marine Division, have suffered heavy losses.

According to the U.S. press, U.S. troops suffered the heaviest losses in the early Ky Dau spring days, compared with previous times. The U.S. 25th Infantry Division and the Americal Division lost half their numerical strength and nearly half their war material, with several of their brigades being mauled.

During the offensive of the southern armed forces and people in May 1969, the U.S. Air Cavalry Division was heavily struck in Tay Ninh and Binh Long. One brigade of the 101st Airborne Division was mauled at A Bia. More painful was the U.S. loss of much of its numerical strength, especially its most seasoned forces. The death toll among U.S. officers was the highest of any other U.S. war. Moreover, the United States lost very large quantities of war material, technical equipment, and fuel including thousands of aircraft of various types, thousands of military vehicles, hundreds of artillery pieces, and tens of millions of liters of gasoline.

These heavy U.S. casualties and losses have not only further deteriorated U.S. troops' morale, but have also kept U.S. forces constantly understrength numerically and disorganized. Many Infantry and Marine divisions are only at 55 to 65 percent strength. There is a serious shortage of commanding officers from the company level downward. U.S. logistics can only meet half the planned requirements. Even though the U.S. aggressors have shifted some army units from West Europe and the United States to South Vietnam and have increased war material to compensate for losses, they have failed to strengthen their army units in this country and to reinforce in time the material and technical installations at bases and logistic storage areas, which have been constantly attacked and heavily damaged.

Due to the constant increase in U.S. casualties, U.S. civilian and military circles in Washington and Saigon have quarrelled, blaming each other. According to UPI on 25 May 1969, some pointed out that because of his anger, Abrams had launched adventurous operations at (Kokahova), Dau Tieng, and A Bia which they described as frenzied military moves of suicidal operations. As for the U.S. commanders on the battlefields, they are dissatisfied with Laird's order that Abrams keep U.S. casualties at the lowest rate by minimizing U.S. land operations. According to NEWSWEEK on 21 April 1969, it is necessary to launch attacks instead of remaining in the bases awaiting the enemy's offensive. As for Laird, he made this contradictory statement:

"Our objective is to exert maximum pressure on the enemy while keeping casualties at the lowest rate."

This remains an order for all U.S. commanders on the battlefields. As reported by AP on 29 May 1969, the New York TIMES flatly pointed out that "Laird's definition of U.S. military tactics"--that is, exerting maximum pressure on the southern armed forces and people while keeping U.S. casualties at the lowest rate--"is a sophisticated argument on a tragic problem."

The truth is that heavy or light casualties of U.S. troops cannot be decided by the U.S. side alone, especially since the offensive initiative is completely in the hands of the NFLSV command. According to AFP on 23 March 1969, in an increasingly passive defensive position and confronted with the very redoubtable combined offensive posture of the southern revolutionary war in the new era and the PLAF's increasingly efficient, talented, creative offensive art and combat methods, even if U.S. troops rashly edge outward or remain inactive at their bases, they cannot avoid painful blows and heavy casualties and losses. U.S. papers, such as the Baltimore SUN on 25 May 1969, admitted that with his widespread attacks on U.S. positions, the enemy--that is, the southern armed forces and people--has doubled the U.S. weekly casualty toll.

Therefore, the Nixon administration's stubbornness and illusions in its defeated position have deadlocked it and created contradictions in the use of the U.S. expeditionary corps. In its defeated and passive defensive position, by planning to use U.S. troops to gain a position of strength, exert maximum pressure, and control and invigorate the disastrously declining puppet troops to replace U.S. troops, thus Vietnamizing the war, the Nixon administration is sacrificing the lives of tens of thousands of U.S. troops for its stubborn, crafty, and hopeless scheme. To reduce the casualty toll to the lowest level and create a position of strength in order to Vietnamize the war, means prolonging the U.S. troops' presence in South Vietnam and sustaining heavier losses. This is a stalemated and stupid calculation of the U.S. aggressors in their impasse.

The more stubbornly it pursues its aggressive war and the longer it prolongs the presence of the U.S. expeditionary corps in the south, the Nixon administration will certainly suffer increasingly heavier troop casualties, more and more difficulties, and increasingly greater failure. The U.S. imperialists' sole escape is to end aggression, unconditionally withdraw all U.S. and satellite troops from South Vietnam, strictly respect the Vietnamese people's basic rights, and let the Vietnamese people settle their own internal affairs.