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THE WAR IN SOUTH VIETNAM
(A Military Political Review)

Col I. Moskvín

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Military operations in Vietnam are expanding.

This is evident from the renewal by the US on 31 January of the barbaric bombings of the territory of the Democratic Republic of Vietnam (DRV), which had been halted on 24 December of last year. This so-called "peace initiative" was a diplomatic move to disorient world public opinion in preparation for a further expansion of aggression against the Vietnamese people. It was stated in the declaration by the Soviet government on 1 February 1966 that "if the US wanted to gain peace as they have stated, then is the renewal of bombings really the method to create an atmosphere favorable to a political settlement in Vietnam? No matter what the estimate of the US government was of the position of the DRV, there is no way to justify the new acts of aggression which defy the principles of international law and the elementary standards of human morality".

In turning a "French war" in Vietnam into an "American war", the ruling circles of the US did not give thought to its size and believed that it could be ended in a comparatively short time.

However the Pentagon and the Central Intelligence Agency (CIA) were not able to properly estimate the strength of the National Liberation Front of South Vietnam and in particular the combat capabilities of the Army of Liberation, its high fighting spirit, the fervent support of the army on the part of the Vietnamese people and their burning hatred for neocolonialists.

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Therefore in spite of a passionate wish to "throw back", and then at least "contain communism", the Pentagon strategists did not manage to determine the direction of the main blow and to create an appropriate grouping capable, as they believed, to defeat the South Vietnamese patriots in short order.

The stages of "escalation" of American aggression in Vietnam are well known. Thus in 1950-1953 the US was limited to giving military assistance to the French colonialists. In 1954-1963 the Americans took on the Saigon regime as their responsibility and there began the stepped-up establishment of large numbers of puppet armed forces on the base of American military assistance. According to American calculations, these armed forces were to "bring order" to South Vietnam. This, however, did not take place.

Convinced of the worthlessness of these calculations, US aggressive circles ceased to mask their actions and in 1964 began open warfare against the Vietnamese people using regular armed forces.

On 5 August 1964 ships and planes of the Seventh Fleet brought the coastal regions of the DRV under fire. At the order of President Johnson, American planes since 7 February 1965 have regularly bombed the territory of the DRV. In March of this same year the first unit of US regular troops -- the 9th Marine Brigade -- landed in Danang. At a conference of leaders of the US Armed Forces in Honolulu on 19-20 April it was decided to considerably increase the numbers of American forces in South Vietnam and to strengthen air force and navy units operating in this area. On 24 March the US government declared Vietnam and adjoining waters to be an "area of combat operations" of American Armed Forces. On 3 July the American president decided to employ ground forces and marines in combat operations on land.

The number of American regular forces in South Vietnam in the second half of 1965 reached 165,000 men.

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With the creation of such a major grouping in South Vietnam the leaders of the US Armed Forces were faced with the acute question of organization of a control system over their forces and of coordination with the army of the puppet government. By the beginning of 1966 the number of American troops reached 200,000 men.

Figuring to gain victory through the puppet army armed and trained under the guidance of American instructors, the US command then organized in Saigon a large advisory apparatus [See Note 1] which was later transformed into a "command for giving military assistance to South Vietnam". Later there was established at the decision of the President the "Command of US Armed Forces in South Vietnam" [See Note 2] -- quite a large control organ.

[Note 1]: The number of American advisors reached 25,000 and the size of the puppet army reached a little over 100,000, i.e. there was one American advisor for every four soldiers of this army.

[Note 2]: It would be more correct to say in "South-east Asia", since it has control over American forces in Thailand and other areas adjacent to South Vietnam.

Within the command were established headquarters for ground forces, air force (the previously formed 2nd Air Division is carrying out the functions of air force headquarters) and a marine headquarters (3rd Marine Expeditionary Force). They in turn control the corresponding service of the armed forces. Also subordinate to the command are large groups of American military advisors which have control over all military activities of the Saigon regime.

For the direct control of sovedineniya and chastii in each Corps area (according to the breakdown of the puppet army command) there has been established an American operations command headquarters ([Note]: New York Times, December 26, 27, 1965) which controls combat operations of American troops and also organizes coordination with the puppets through its senior advisor to the staff of the South Vietnamese Corps.

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The following instance is characteristic. When in the middle of 1965 the Americans set up Command "Alfa" in the 2nd Corps area and tried to place their forces and the puppet forces under it, the officers of the latter categorically refused to carry out American orders. Such "conduct" by the "puppets" was a complete surprise for the American generals and they were forced to immediately deactivate this command and establish ties with the Saigon forces through the senior advisor.

After carrying out the indicated organizational changes and establishing, according to American statements, a five-fold numerical superiority over the Army of Liberation, which lacked, as is well known, planes, ships and tanks, it was planned to begin a broad offensive over the whole territory of South Vietnam at the end of the monsoon season (October).

In the course of this offensive it was planned to cut the entire territory of South Vietnam into three isolated areas, to cut the patriotic forces off from the main rice-producing regions and to destroy the Army of Liberation in none. It was planned in particular to strike blows from the area of Qui Nhon and Saigon in the direction of the Laotian and Cambodian state borders respectively, relying on bases established in the coastal strip.

However the widely advertised attack failed. American military reviewer Baldwin, having visited the more active sector in the area of Pleiku where the 1st Airmobile Division is operating, stated that for victory in this area alone there was need for "at least one more such division." On 28 December 1965 the move of a new division into this area was actually begun.

In preparing for the conduct of war in a different military-political environment and under varying conditions of geography, the American Command gave great significance to the search for a suitable organization of so-called "airmobile forces" and to their armament and tactics.

In the views of the American Command the so-called "airmobile forces" presently comprise such an organization, especially for operations in an unconfined theater of

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military operations. "The essence of the concept of use of airmobile forces," stresses American military literature, "is to ensure a more rapid, safe and economic shift of infantry to a sector where they can gain superiority over the enemy and can hold this sector ([Note]: The Journal of Armed Forces, (sic), 21 November 1964).

Tests of the establishment of such units in the US Army have been going on for over three years. At the beginning of 1963, for example, there was formed the experimental 11th Air Assault Division. In 1965 the organizational structure of this division was reviewed and in its place was formed the 1st Cavalry Division (Airmobile). The organization of this division has been somewhat simplified. It consists of a division headquarters, three airmobile battalions, divisional artillery (three 105-mm howitzer battalions, a helicopter fire support battalion and a battery of artillery fire-directing aircraft), reconnaissance battalion, communications battalion, combat engineer battalion, an aviation group (two battalions of light and one battalion of heavy helicopters and a general support company) and a division support command. The authorized strength is 15,787 and its overall weight is one third that of the infantry division. The division is fully air-transportable. C-130 and C-133 aircraft can be used to move it over great distances. Such a test was run when the advance party of the division -- 1000 men, 254 tons of equipment and nine helicopters -- was moved in the course of a week from its base at Fort Benning (USA) to South Vietnam. The main forces of the division were moved by sea ([Note]: Time, 22 October 1965).

It should be noted that one third of the division's combat elements in a theater of military operations can be lifted at one time by organic helicopters. This division is presently operating in one of the most important areas of South Vietnam -- the Central Highlands. At the end of November 1965 Minister of Defense McNamara visited the 1st Division. He took note of the "successful organization of the airmobile division" and stressed that "one more division of this type will be formed in the US".

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At the same time the American Command is testing the effectiveness of organization and armament of ordinary infantry and airborne divisions as well as marine divisions. It is known that combat operations in South Vietnam are being conducted by the 1st Infantry Division, 3rd Brigade, 25th Infantry Division, 1st Brigade 101st Airborne Division, 173rd Independent Airborne Brigade and 3rd Marine Division.

The American Command placed special reliance on the wide use of the so-called special forces. It is known that the initiators of the creation of these diversionary formations were inclined to believe that the mass and skilled use of such podrazdeleniya in a war to crush a national liberation movement could be no less effective than the use of nuclear weapons in other theaters. Such a "high regard" for the effectiveness of operations of special forces is evidently explained by the fact that of the seven special forces groups in the US Armed Forces four are concentrated in such "hot spots", in the American point of view, as West Germany, Okinawa, the Suez Canal Zone and in South Vietnam ([Note]: ARMY News, 3, 22 September 1965).

In South Vietnam in particular, the 5th Group was designated for joint operations with analogous podrazdeleniya of the puppet army in the mountains and jungles on the border with the DRV, Laos and Cambodia, from the 17th Parallel in the north to the Gulf of Siam in the south.

In addition these podrazdeleniya were given the mission of penetrating inaccessible areas fully controlled by the National Liberation Front in order to conduct undermining work by means of diversions, appropriate cultivation of the populace, bribery of the local authorities etc.

A special forces group consists of detachments of three types -- "A", "B" and "C".

An "A" detachment numbers 12 men and is designated for assisting in the organization of Saigon special forces troops and the control (offering recommendations) of the combat operations of these troops. Such a detachment, in the views of American specialists, can control a South Vietnamese detachment numbering 300-600 men.

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The "B" detachment conducts the basic combat training of personnel detailed to serve in special forces of the puppet troops.

"C" detachments give administrative and material-technical support to "A" detachments. "B" and "C" detachments exist in each of the four army corps of the Saigon Army.

It should be noted that these forces have not yet had any success in South Vietnam.

Air diversionary forces were also created for the same purposes in the Tactical Air Command. They have the following tasks:

- dropping (landing) diversionary detachments in the enemy rear and their air supply;

- direct air support of combat operations of ground-based special forces;

- the isolation of individual areas controlled by the National Liberation Front troops from other areas which are capable of giving assistance to the patriotic forces;

- the conduct of harassing operations;

- air reconnaissance, chiefly of partisan bases and troop movements;

- propaganda, including radio broadcasts from the plane, dropping leaflets and "gifts" etc.

Air diversionary forces have mainly outmoded aircraft at their disposal: the B-26 light bomber, A-1E fighter, T-28 trainer, C-46 and C-47 transports and others.

American militarists are placing great hopes on aviation. It has become the main striking force of the interveners. There are in use in Vietnam around 600 aircraft of the tactical air force, 350 naval, 30 strategic (E-52) and 1300 helicopters. The tactical air force is used in South Vietnam and against the DRV, and the strategic -- only in South Vietnam.

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However the strikes by strategic aviation, as acknowledged by the Americans themselves, do not always achieve their goal, since they are frequently made against uncontrolled areas.

The success is achieved by the use of strategic aircraft for strikes against major bases of the South Vietnamese patriots. These strikes are considered effective when they are made against comparatively low troop units (regiment) for the purpose of dispersing the and disrupting attacks being prepared by the patriotic forces.

Because of a lack of air resistance American aircraft made raids using very simple tactics: bombing was conducted at medium altitudes without air cover and without using ECM.

Since the second half of 1968, when the American Air Force suffered substantial losses over the territory of DRV, its actions began to change. B-47 groups are covered by F-4s fighters, bombing is conducted from low altitudes and strong jamming is performed.

However for the direct support of combat operations of ground forces it is believed most suitable to employ armed helicopters on the strength of their viability and capability for conducting aimed fire from low altitudes while being located over the target a comparatively long time. Transport helicopters are acknowledged to be the best means for tactical mobile moves under conditions of no roads and the difficult theater of Southeast Asia.

Naval forces, especially the carrier strike groups of the seventh fleet, have been widely used in the war in Vietnam.

After the Korean War US carrier forces were used chiefly as a means for frightening "recalcitrant" countries, which in such instances could not offer the appropriate counter-force. Strike carriers immediately appeared off the shores of the Chinese People's Republic during the strained situation in the Taiwan Strait, in the waters of Cuba during the crisis in the Caribbean, off the shores of Southeast Asia when battles were going on in Laos and on the Indo-China border, and in other instances when the Americans unleashed their next provocation against the young countries of Asia, Africa and Latin America.

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First off the shores of Vietnam in August of 1964 were the strike carriers, which marked the occasion by the Tonkin Gulf crisis, well covered in the press. Since then there have been, as a rule, three carrier strike groups in waters immediately adjacent to Vietnam.

Ground attack and fighter-bomber aircraft from these carriers make barbaric raids on objectives in the DRV and against the NLF [National'nyy Front Osvobozhdeniya; National Liberation Front], and ships of other classes fire upon coastal objectives of the NLF. These operations in essence are conducted without sufficient opposition and usually end successfully. Evidently in connection with this, the American press more and more often prints laudatory references to the naval forces. "Now," states the well-known American reviewer Weston, "it is quite evident that the carriers which a year ago seemed to be in their decline are in the highest degree an effective weapon in the war in the waters of Southeast Asia. Operations in Vietnam have once again confirmed the need for new missile frigates and other ships which evidently the navy does not now have" ([Note]: New York Times, 4 October 1965).

In touching upon the tactics of combat operations, American writers conclude the necessity to employ small elements. Thus, in the journal Infantry ([Note]: Infantry, January-February, 1965) it is stated that the company is the basic tactical element for conducting an offensive in jungles. Inasmuch as these elements will frequently have to operate independently, the journal states, in order to achieve success in combat under such conditions the commanders of all echelons will have to have flexible thinking and rapid reactions against sudden danger, and the soldiers will have to be able to conduct close combat and move rapidly off the roads.

For troops conducting a defensive action it is recommended that in place of a perimeter guard as used under ordinary conditions they form patrols to organize ambushes and also well armed patrols which must operate day and night. It is believed best to place no less than half of the forces available to the commander in these patrols.

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Special attention is directed at organizing security on the march and in passes. Thorough reconnaissance is required in all forms of combat activity, in particular because patriotic forces widely employ ambushes and brief strikes against marching columns.

Air landings are made, as a rule, from helicopters after a heavy air preparation of the proposed landing zone. The strength of the landing force does not exceed a battalion, although it is considered best for it to be company size. The landing parties are moved to the target under cover of armed helicopters and other aircraft at altitudes unattainable for small arms (not lower than 600 meters).

After the landing the podrazdeleniya organize their security, comb the area and consolidate their positions, just as ordinary infantry elements do, and then a base camp is established in this area. The area occupied in this manner is turned over to puppet troops and the local administration. However experience has shown that as soon as American troops leave such an area the patriotic forces have immediately returned and eliminated the camp of the local forces. In this regard the American Command has now been forced to leave its troops in the camps and with them as a base point to make further sweeps of the adjacent terrain. In the American press such operations have received the name of "grease spot tactics". As is known, grease spots have a tendency to spread. Having turned South Vietnam into a "bloody test range", the American occupiers are conducting large-scale experiments in the use of weapons and combat equipment.

At the present time there has evidently still not been developed a unified opinion on the advantages of one type of weapon over another. In this regard the American press prints different and frequently contradictory statements. However one thing is clear: under the conditions of a difficult theater, where combat operations bear essentially a partisan nature, when there is no solid front and when there is a lack of a more or less substantial concentration of troops and objectives in the operational rear, the use of aircraft, large caliber artillery and heavy tanks does not give the results on which the Americans counted.

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According to the estimate of the American military press, heavy tanks cannot find wide application under conditions similar to those under which the war in Vietnam is being conducted. And, on the other hand, the M41 light tank, which has been acknowledged as obsolete, showed good operational qualities, a good cross-country capability and the needed maneuverability. The best effect is achieved by the armored reconnaissance vehicles and tracked M113 and M114 APCs.

Having encountered the firm defense of the patriotic forces, the American Command was forced to admit that the "American soldier places heavy dependence on fire support" ([Note]: New York Times, 26, 27 December 1965), and in October 1965 eight battalions of 105-, 175- and 203.2-mm self-propelled artillery pieces were moved to South Vietnam ([Note]: Los Angeles Times, 24 October 1965). In January 1966 the move of an independent tank battalion was begun.

The American Command also had to make substantial changes in the system of rear supply, in particular the locations of the supply bases.

As is known, with the advent of rocket-nuclear weapons the American Command has attempted to situate the largest supply bases as far as possible from the probable combat areas. In the Pacific Ocean, for example, it was believed that the safest area was the Hawaiian Islands and adjacent islands. However even the comparatively small-scale combat operations in Vietnam created unbelievable difficulties in the shipment of military cargoes. As strange as it may seem, the American Command came up against an insufficient number of naval transports.

In this regard the Commander of US Armed Forces in the Pacific, Admiral Sharp, stated the following: "The Subic Gulf in the Philippines, Okinawa, Japan and Guam are nearer to the Vietnamese war than Hawaii, and the supply bases located there are fulfilling a more important role in the support of operations than is Hawaii" ([Note]: New York Times, 21 October 1965).

In the second half of 1965 rear area commands were established in South Vietnam, Thailand and on Okinawa, evidently for the purpose of eliminating these difficulties.

They previously were in Japan and South Korea.

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Americans had to do considerable work in preparing the territory of South Vietnam and Thailand. The most indicative fact characterizing the scope of work is the construction of a base at Cam Ranh, which will cost almost 100,000,000 dollars. Constructed here is a landing strip 3,300 meters long, nine fuel reservoirs with total capacity of 8,500 tons of liquid fuel, ammunition dumps, a T-shaped pier etc. A 100 meter floating dock was delivered here. On the whole, Cam Ranh will be able to store a 45-day reserve of equipment for all US forces located in Central Vietnam ([Note]: Time, 22 October 1965).

Thus the American Command, in unleashing a war against the Vietnamese people, has encountered a large number of difficulties. Characteristic in this regard is the evaluation by Chairman of the Senate Armed Services Committee D. Russel, who noted that in Vietnam there had been committed literally all military errors about which it is only written in textbooks. We, continued the Senator, have made our share of the errors. We believed, he stated, that we had specially trained troops who knew how to operate in a mobile partisan war until we ourselves took an active part in military operations in Vietnam. Now, concluded Russel, we must considerably improve training.

We should note the feverish activity of the American Command as it amends and reexamines in the course of combat operations many principles and traditions in military affairs which have already been formed and theoretically "proven". For study of the "Vietnamese experience" the US Defense Department created a number of commissions and committees with the task of broadly and thoroughly investigating literally every more or less significant episode of the war in Vietnam.

However by virtue of a class limitation the American neocolonialists will hardly learn a basic lesson from the war in Vietnam and understand that the time of the colonial takeovers is long past. It is this which explains their plans for further expanding aggression in Vietnam and their attempt to spread it to other areas of Southeast Asia.

The US imperialists will not succeed in breaking the will of the Vietnamese people and their resolve to stand up

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for freedom, independence and unity of their Motherland. There can be no doubt that the American aggression against Vietnam will suffer an inescapable defeat, since on the side of the Vietnamese people in their fight for national freedom is all of progressive mankind, and primarily the Soviet Union, which will now and in the future give necessary aid to the Democratic Republic of Vietnam.