BUILDING AND EMPLOYING THE STRENGTH OF THE REAR AREA IN THE WAR OF RESISTANCE AGAINST THE UNITED STATES FOR NATIONAL SALVATION

Hanoi TAP CHI CONG SAN in Vietnamese No 12, Dec 82 pp 11-19

[Article by Senior General Hoang Van Thai]

[Text] In its review of the causes underlying the victory won in the resistance against the United States for national salvation, the Party Central Committee confirmed: "In that process, the party always attached importance to strengthening and protecting the great rear area in the North, which was the constant factor insuring the victory of the war of national salvation"(1); at the same time, "the party attached full importance to building and developing the revolutionary forces in the South."(2) From the realities of building and employing the strength of the rear area, we have learned and gained valuable lessons and experiences that have not only enriched and improved the party's storehouse of experience in leading a war effort, but which are also very useful in our tasks of building socialism and firmly defending the socialist fatherland in the present stage of the revolution.

Building the Common Rear Area of the Entire Country in Conjunction with Building Local Rear Areas on the Various Battlefields

Following the victory of the war of resistance against the French colonialists, our Party Central Committee quickly established the task of building the North into the revolutionary base of the entire country while building base areas in the South with a view toward carrying out the two strategic tasks of the revolution in the two zones of the country. This wise and timely decision was not only consistent with the characteristics of our country, a country that was still partitioned, but also reflected our party's line on building the rear area within the full-scale people's war.

In order to mobilize the tremendous manpower and materiel of the people of the entire country for the revolutionary war, our party asserted that it was necessary to mobilize the strength of the entire nation and mobilize each and every potential of the entire country; every effort had to be made to build the North into the common rear area of the entire country while taking positive steps to build local rear areas in the South. However, because the social systems in the two zones of the country were opposing social systems
and because the revolutionary tasks of the country's two zones were different, the building of rear areas in the two zones had to be carried out on different scales and by different methods. The North, which had been totally liberated, had embarked on restoring and developing the economy and culture along socialist lines and was, at the same time, building the great rear area of the entire country's revolutionary undertaking as an independent and sovereign state. The South was under the rule of the U.S. imperialists and their lackeys and the struggle between ourselves and the enemy there was a fierce one, consequently, the process of building local bases-rear areas in the South developed in an orderly manner from a low to a high level, from small to large scale and also developed rapidly and strongly when favorable opportunities arose and on the basis of the strong support provided by the North. In the various stages of development of the war, our party correctly and promptly guided the work of building the rear areas in each zone. The relationship between the great rear area and the local rear areas became increasingly close and the rear areas of each zone had a major impact. The great rear area was the most continuous and stable source of material and technical forces and means and played the most decisive role in the victory of the entire war. The local rear areas were also important, timely sources of supplies and were of decisive significance in seizing the initiative and winning victory on the great frontlines. During the years of the resistance against the United States, more than one-half of the forces and nearly 80 percent of the weapons, ammunition and technical equipment used on the various battlefields came from the great rear area; at the same time, more than 70 percent of the grain and food supplied to the armed forces was mobilized locally. The role played by the great rear area assumed increasing importance when the war became a large-scale, increasingly modern war (*); however, this did not mean that the role played by the local rear areas was diminished. If local rear areas were not prepared and firmly strengthened, they could not receive or utilize the reinforcements from the great rear area. The experience of the various battlefields has proven that the bases-rear areas were not only strong, solid footholds that provided the material reserves that were needed when favorable opportunities arose so that large forces could be deployed in combat and launch victorious attacks, but they were also closely related to the formation of the effective battle position of the people's war and the victorious implementation of the various modes of war. Whereas the guerrilla war developed into a conventional war and the close coordination between the guerrilla war and the conventional war was the law by which victory was won in the revolutionary war in the South, the material-psychological strength of the rear areas—the great rear area coordinated with the local rear areas—was one of the important bases underlying the application of this law. Because, without strong, solid local bases-rear areas, it was impossible to build, maintain and develop the widespread movement of the mass armed forces to fight the enemy and without a strategic rear area that possessed abundant potentials, troop units and main force military corps could not have conducted large-scale combat operations to destroy large enemy forces in strategic offensives that were suddenly opened in many different directions, thus forming a very effective battle position, as they did on the battlefield in South Vietnam.

At present, now that the entire country has won its independence and is reunified, we are even better able to build a rear area that is strong and
solid in every respect, build a strategic rear area of the entire country in the broad meaning of the term, one that encompasses the entire territory of our country, from the North to the South; at the same time, we can take the initiative in building and preparing rear areas for each area and each locality so that we are ready to mobilize manpower and materiel to support the frontlines should the enemy recklessly unleash a war and can victoriously implement the strategy of a war to defend the fatherland.

Building a Progressive Social System, the Origin of the Rear Area's Strength in Every Respect

War is a decisive challenge to a nation, a challenge in which, as Lenin stated: "The nature of the war and its victory are dependent primarily upon the internal system of the country participating in the war."(3) Imbued with this teaching of Lenin, our party always considered building and strengthening the rear area to be an integral part of the building of the social system, the socialist system in the North and the people's democratic system in the liberated areas of the South, and considered the comprehensive strength of our system to be the origin of the strength of the rear area.

Under the leadership of the party, the North began the period of transition to socialism and recorded major victories in building the political system, the economy and the national defense system. In the South, the base areas and liberated zones were being enlarged with each passing day and the revolutionary government that had been established was leading the people in the struggle to protect their political and economic rights, win the rights of freedom and democracy and implement a policy of broad unit among the various strata of the people with a view toward struggling against the U.S. imperialists and their lackeys for the sake of independence, democracy, peace and neutrality. The achievements that were recorded in the effort to build a progressive social system created a high degree of political unanimity among the people and caused the rear area to be strengthened, to become increasingly uniform and to be the firm political and spiritual base of the frontlines. In the fierce war, the North met stern challenges and fulfilled its sacred obligations to "provide every kilogram of food, every soldier needed" and "provide everything for the frontlines, everything for victory over the U.S. pirate aggressors." In the base areas-liberated zones in the South, despite the tight blockade by the enemy, the fierce enemy attacks, the low population density and the destruction of the economy, the movements to establish "resistance war rice jars," "cultivate resistance war upland fields," "brave women defending the nation," send "youths into the mountains" became universal.

The progressive social system truly created a "rear area within the hearts of the people" that no enemy could destroy.

Together with building the political system, the building of the economic potentials of the rear area was closely linked to the work of building the economic system. The victory of the production relations revolution in the great rear area brought about a change in the national economy. The economy consisting of many different segments, the dominant one being private production, became the socialist economy with its two forms of ownership
(national ownership and collective ownership) and the socialist economy assumed the decisive role within the national economy. The fact that the superior economic system of socialism was strengthened and improved even during the fierce war permitted our party and state to continuously mobilize a high level of manpower and materiel to meet the rising needs of the war. In the resistance against the United States, hundreds of thousands of laborers and millions of tons of grain were mobilized in the great rear area each year to meet combat and combat support needs; in 1 year, our party and state mobilized 6.6 percent of the social labor force and 20-25 percent of total grain output. The implementation of the line on socialist industrialization and the positive steps that were taken to accelerate the scientific and technological revolution enabled us to correct the very backward state of our production, gradually build material-technical bases of socialism, begin to supply technology to the national economy, supplement the national defense industry and meet some of the needs of the armed forces. The developed planned economy also created the conditions for shifting production from a war time to a peace time footing in a rapid and stable manner without chaos or major slowdowns, despite continuous enemy attacks.

During the years of the savage war, the South annually mobilized tens of thousands of tons of local grain; it developed from the point of only having enough grain in reserve for a few months to maintaining enough grain in reserve for 6 months and eventually for the entire year. In the Mekong River Delta, collections for the war of resistance amounted to 6.2 million gia of rice (*) during the highest year; but, even during a difficult year, more than 1.2 million gia were collected.

In addition, the achievements recorded in cultural, educational and public health development in the rear area also had a strong impact and made a positive contribution to heightening the spirit of patriotism and the love of socialism among our people, thereby making a positive contribution to accelerating production while heightening the consciousness regarding national defense. In the resistance against the United States for national salvation, millions of assault youths left to fight the enemy with a profound national awareness and class awareness and recorded glorious achievements in both combat and combat support operations.

In summary, the building of the rear area must always be considered an integral part of the work of building the progressive social system. The achievements recorded in building the progressive system are the origin of the comprehensive strength of the rear area. General Secretary Le Duan summarized the tremendous strength of the people's democratic system and the socialist system in the revolutionary undertaking of the party as follows: "The new system awakened and multiplied the capabilities of the entire nation and of each Vietnamese, mobilized and organized every potential within the country, sought and acquired international assistance and created the large and invincible strength employed by our people in their combat and construction."(4)
Mobilizing Each Potential of the Rear Area for the War of Resistance in Order To Insure Our Ability To Fight a Protracted War, Become Stronger with Each Battle and Eventually Win Total Victory

A nation, no matter how prosperous or powerful it might be, cannot stockpile in peace time all of the supplies that will be needed to promptly and continuously meet each need in war time should a war break out. Therefore, when the danger of war arises or when a war breaks out, preparing and mobilizing potential forces are of special importance. The majority of the overall strength of the rear area that is built and prepared in peace time exists in the form of potentials. Only through organization and mobilization can we turn these potentials into real forces with which to wage a war and only in this way is it possible for the rear area to truly play its role as the factor determining victory. The experience of the various wars that have been fought in history shows that as a result of not making full preparations, as a result of poor organization and mobilization and as a result of not displaying high determination when mobilizing forces, many countries have encountered very many difficulties when wars have started and even been defeated by an opposition whose potentials have sometimes been weaker. For this reason, Lenin often said: "Once war become unavoidable, every effort must be devoted to the war and all negligence and lack of determination must be punished under war time law."(5)

In the resistance against the United States for national salvation, the mobilization within the great rear area of the North was carried out in an effective and planned manner. In the South, because our liberated zones had to wage a decisive struggle with the enemy and were being formed gradually, were growing in size and developing from areas of disputed control to areas in which we exercised firm control, the mobilization could not be carried out in a totally independent manner.

In order for the mobilization to be carried out well, it is absolutely necessary to make active preparations in advance, to closely link the process of building the rear area to building the country in every respect and closely coordinate the various fields of cultural, educational and economic construction and development with strengthening the national defense system. We must make scientific forecasts of the nature and scale of the war that might break out in order to lay the basis for computing the needs that will have to be met in the initial period of the war as well as throughout the course of the war. On this basis, it is necessary to coordinate the preparations for the war even within the construction plans of the various sectors, the most important sectors being the sectors of the national economy, in order to gradually and effectively improve the country's defense capabilities while preparing reserve sources of manpower and materiel for the war. To make thorough preparations, a specialized agency must be established to formulate plans and promote the preparations for a mobilization. It must be an agency that regularly collects, collates and analyzes all of the most reliable data on the change and development of the potentials of the country, correctly evaluates the production capabilities of the various sectors, thoroughly prepares suitable forms and methods to be employed in the different situations that might occur when the threat of war is imminent or war has actually broken out and distributes and inspects the establishment of
strategic reserves. Before the U.S. imperialists unleashed the war of destruction, the great rear area in the North was prepared in accordance with this guideline.

Although the process of preparation and implementation was marked by such shortcomings as being less than thorough and not establishing close coordination between the construction and development of the various sectors and the strengthening of national defense capabilities, generally speaking, the rear area took the initiative in preparing for the war of aggression and, when the war broke out, the mobilization of manpower and materiel was carried out in a prompt fashion and the great rear area was coordinated with the local rear areas as well. This was particularly true during phases of combat of strategic significance on the battlefields of the South in which we rather quickly mobilized a large quantity of grain amounting to hundreds of thousands of tons and a force of hundreds of thousands of corvee laborers to support the frontlines.

At present, "our country is in a situation in which it is at peace but must contend with a multi-faceted war of sabotage being waged by the Chinese expansionists and hegemonists in collaboration with the U.S. imperialists; at the same time, we must be ready to deal with a possible large-scale war of aggression unleashed by the enemy"(6); therefore, building our potentials and preparing for a mobilization are very important.

Mobilizing and utilizing the sources of manpower in a war are the main element of the system for mobilizing the potentials of the rear area. Mobilizing and utilizing manpower sources have become a matter of urgency to all countries in war, have become a matter requiring that a correct balance be established between the needs of the frontlines and the needs of the rear area, between the national defense system and the economy and between the task of "providing everything in order to win victory" and the task of preparing to build the country following the war. Experience has shown that manpower needs rise to very high levels when war has broken out. The need for manpower to supplement the armed forces each year alone increases four to five times compared to peace time. Many production sectors that directly support the national defense system (communication-transportation, posts-telegraph, mechanical engineering and so forth) need two to three times as much labor as they did before the outbreak of war. The longer a war lasts, the more it is necessary to establish a truly suitable balance among needs, especially between combat and production, in the mobilization and distribution of the labor of the country, especially high quality labor (young, able-bodied, educated and technically skilled). In a war, priority must be given to mobilizing and distributing labor for the buildup and expansion of the armed forces, both in quantitative as well as qualitative terms. Our party and state have shown appropriate concern and allocated for troop recruitment more than one-half the manpower that can be mobilized each year, manpower than is of an increasingly high quality (more than 70 percent are able-bodies youths 25 years of age of less, 60 to 70 percent of whom have a level II or level III general school education). Military recruiting and mobilization are considered a widespread campaign and political educational effort among the masses to meet quantitative and qualitative requirements, meet time and space requirements. During the years of the war of resistance, military recruiting
sent from the great rear area to the great frontlines. Millions of tons of bombs were dropped by the enemy's air and naval forces in order to destroy our entire system of water-land communications and transportation, and communications-transportation became a violent combat front in the war. Keeping this front open so that we could constantly transport forces and materials to the frontlines became the central, urgent task of the entire party, the entire army and all our people. In order to win victory, we concentrated our forces and material means on this front. During the years of the war, the party and government strengthened the forces of the communications-transportation sector and regularly allocated more than 20 percent of total investment capital to maintaining the operations of the communications-transportation sector. The party and government decided at an early date to build the North-South strategic transport line and assigned this task to the army. The Truong Son Strategic Transport Corps turned the "trail" that bore the name of the revered Uncle Ho into a developed, mechanized communications-transportation network capable of transporting hundreds of thousands of tons of supplies per year, thereby insuring the steady flow of forces, supplies and technology to the various battlefields in the South. In the great rear area, besides the communications and transportation forces of the state, the party and government, by mobilizing all the people, established a large communications-transportation army consisting of hundreds of thousands of persons, persons who contributed more than 90 million mandays to build roads, repair bridges and ferry landings, provide rudimentary transportation, etc.

In the fierce fight against the enemy's blockade and interdiction, we displayed very much creativity in maintaining communications and transportation operations. We made combined use of the various modes of transportation (secret and in the open, direct and in individual stages and so forth); at the same time, we made coordinated use of the various types of land, river, sea and pipeline transportation and even air transportation when the necessary conditions existed. We also gave our attention to making full use of each type of equipment, from the rudimentary to the modern; however, we always attached importance to upgrading transportation operations to large-scale operations and using primarily mechanized equipment in order to keep pace with the increasingly modern development of the war. As a result of employing determined, creative modes and measures, the volume of reinforcements provided to the various battlefields in the different stages of the war constantly increased (*), which was an extremely important material factor in the victories won by the frontlines.

The building and development of military transport forces and the high degree of militarization of the communications-transportation operations of the country during the war were necessary in order to win victory.

The task of providing transportation in areas in which heavy fighting was taking place, especially in areas adjacent to battlefields, was assigned to the communications support forces and the transport forces of the army. The establishment of troop units and military transport corps proved to be appropriate and highly efficient. In the rear area, the highly militarized communications-transportation sector of the state was still able to utilize its great strength.
The fight against the enemy's blockade at sea was of important significance to the rear area in the North as well as to our country, a country that has a seacoast that stretches for thousands of kilometers, in receiving the large amounts of aid being sent from the fraternal socialist countries. Winning victory over an enemy who enjoyed air and naval superiority involved a fierce and very difficult struggle. We had to closely coordinate the fight to protect our seacoast with transportation at sea; utilize every scale of transport operations, small, medium and large, on the overt and covert transport lines; organize the widespread disarming of bombs and mines by means of forces operating at sea and coastal forces; organize new seaports to receive cargo; bravely organize trans-shipment from the open sea and so forth. The fight to win victory over the enemy's blockade was closely linked to the fight to liberate the South and reunify the fatherland.

In defending the independent, reunified and socialist Vietnamese fatherland, fighting an enemy blockade at sea or in the air continues to be an important strategic task, one in which we must research and apply the experiences recently gained.

The experiences of the recent war of resistance against the United States for national salvation are very useful in the present task of building and preparing the rear area. We are firmly confident that, with the tremendous material and spiritual potentials of the entire country, with the valuable experience that has been gained and with the correct line and the clear-sighted leadership of the Party Central Committee, our people will surely achieve success in their work of building a strong, solid rear area for our reunified country as well as rear areas within each locality. Success in this effort is a firm guarantee of victory in a war to defend the socialist Vietnamese fatherland.

FOOTNOTES


2. Ibid.

* After 1965, when the U.S. imperialists widened their war of aggression to our entire country, the forces and material-technical means sent from the great rear area for use in the war of resistance accounted for an increasingly high percentage, increasing from one and one-half to four times as large as the forces and material-technical means provided by local sources.


* One gia of rice is the equivalent of 20 kilograms of paddy.


Summary data compiled by the Strategic Transport Line shows that the volume of materials and technology supplied to the various battlefields during the fight to win victory over the "limited" war (1965-1968) increased nine times compared to the volume supplied during the fight to win victory over the "special" war (1961-1964); during the fight against the "Vietnamization of the war" (1969-1972), the volume of materials and technology supplied increased four times compared to the fight against the limited war.