

REVOLUTIONARY WARFARE

How To Tell When the Rebels Have Won

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Vice President Humphrey expressed the national concern over guerrilla warfare recently when he spoke of this "bold new form of aggression which could rank with the discovery of gunpowder" as constituting the "major challenge to our security." It is viewed as the latest weapon in the Communist arsenal with Vietnam as its testing ground [see "Goliath and the Guerrilla," by Eric Hobsbawm; *The Nation*, July 19]. "If guerrilla techniques succeed in Vietnam," wrote James Reston in *The New York Times*, "nobody in Washington dare assume that the same techniques will not be applied in all Communist rimlands from Korea to Iran." This view is based on two assumptions and at least one serious misconception. It assumes that the Vietnamese situation is typical, historically and politically, of other underdeveloped countries, and that American policy toward other nations would be comparable to the one pursued in Vietnam. The misconception concerns the nature of revolutionary warfare.

America's interest in revolutionary warfare began from a defensive posture as a result of reverses in China, Korea, Cuba and Laos, and of protracted involvement in Vietnam. It was natural for its officials to be attracted more to the myths and methods of those who have had to defend themselves against guerrillas than to an understanding of the causes and characteristics of such a war. Americans are therefore unable to avoid the psychological and political pitfalls of colonial powers and feudal regimes like France and Nationalist China. A symptom of this negative posture is that while recognizing "a bold new form" of warfare, government publications, including the course books of Fort Bragg, reject the term "revolutionary war" in favor of old terms which do not suggest the vital distinction between revolutionary and other types of guerrilla conflict.

The official American interpretation of revolutionary war can be summarized as follows: (1) It is essentially a technical problem, i.e., a problem of plotting and subversion on the one hand and of intelligence and suppression on the other.

As the chief conspiratorial group, the Communists are believed to be the most likely initiators and beneficiaries of revolution. It was this attitude which led to the recent attempt to nip in the bud what was construed as the Dominican Communist conspiracy. A logical extension of this theory is the belief that any revolutionary movement is inspired, directed and controlled from abroad. (2) The active sanctuary—from which guerrillas can smuggle supplies and train their troops—is considered the primary factor in their success. (3) The guerrilla movement is believed to enjoy considerable advantage because in the words of W. W. Rostow, "its task is merely to destroy while the government must build and protect what it is building." (4) The civilian population is considered important for providing information and protection to the guerrillas; it is believed that civilian-guerrilla cooperation is enforced by terror. (Dean Rusk, while complaining of the "gullibility of educated men and their stubborn disregard of plain facts," asserted that the Vietcong "has no significant popular following . . . it relies heavily on terror.") Serious inquiry into other bases of guerrilla support and mass mobilization is therefore deemed of no great importance.

Judging from the failure of Washington's prophecies in Vietnam and from the policies followed to date, it would seem that these assumptions represent the actual official view and cannot be dismissed as myths consciously constructed for public consumption. Wrong premises do not usually produce right policies, and these assumptions are, at best, half truths—credible and misleading. (Oliver Wendell Holmes once remarked that a half truth is like half a brick: it can be thrown a considerable distance.) Studies in the field of revolutionary wars and my personal observation of the Algerian struggle lead to very different conclusions which may be summarized as follows: (1) Revolutionaries consider mass support the primary condition for their success; winning and maintaining popular support remains their central objective throughout the struggle. (2) The requirements

of guerrilla war, as well as the history of its failures and successes, confirm the primacy of political factors in such a conflict. (3) Popular support for the guerrillas is predicated upon the moral alienation of the masses from the existing government. The revolutionaries' chief aim is to activate and perpetuate the moral isolation of the enemy regime until such isolation has become total and irreversible. (4) The conditions leading to revolutionary wars are not created by conspiracy. They are partly inherent in a situation of rapid social change, but the outbreak normally results mainly from the failure of a ruling elite to respond to the challenge of modernization. (5) A revolutionary guerrilla movement concentrates on "outadministering," not on "outfighting" the enemy. This is a constructive and not simply a destructive undertaking. (6) The use of terror by guerrillas is highly selective; it does not constitute the main reason for the favorable reaction of the masses to their cause. (7) The external sanctuary has greater psychological and diplomatic than military or political value to the guerrillas. A discussion of these points follows.

Organizers of guerrilla warfare give prime attention, in practice no less than in theory, to the human factor. T. E. Lawrence (of Arabia) spoke of guerrilla war in terms of "the algebraic element of things, the biological element of life, and the psychological element of ideas." In other words, although Lawrence's goals were essentially military, military considerations constituted, for him, only one-third of the problem of organizing and sustaining guerrilla troops. When Tito was told of the exceptionally unfavorable terrain in the region of Srem ("the area is level as the palm of your hand . . . and with little forests") he remarked, "What a first-class example it is of the relative unimportance of geographical factors in the development of a rising. The basic factor is studious political work, the attitude of the mass of people, and the fighting leadership—if these are present the population would fight to the last man." Mao Tse-tung

states. "Because guerrilla warfare basically derives from the masses and is supported by them, it can neither exist nor flourish if it separates itself from their sympathies and cooperation." This belief in the need to command popular support governs the movement through all stages of its development.

History confirms the sovereignty of the human factor in revolutionary warfare. While shying away from the wars that were "lost," American military analysts are prone to cite cases of successful anti-guerrilla operations. A heavy favorite—the British "counterinsurgency" in Malaya—is faithfully imitated in Vietnam. (Sometimes too faithfully, as in the case of the strategic hamlets program launched in April, 1962.) But comparisons with Malaya are fallacious, because there the guerrillas were at a severe disadvantage. Their support was limited to a minority of 423,000 Chinese squatters, who were ethnically distinct from and distrusted by the majority of Malays, and popular grievances were not acute enough to make the guerrillas look like liberators to the Malay peasants. Furthermore, the British acted quickly to remove the grievances on which the rebellion was based. Even then it took thirteen years and a total of 260,000 soldiers and police (80,000 British, 180,000 Malays) to put down 8,000 guerrillas (a ratio of 30 to 1). Another success story, the joint U.S.-Philippine victory over the Huks, is less frequently cited because of its embarrassing aspects. The Huk movement collapsed dramatically when Magsaysay convinced the peasants of his **will and capacity to introduce reforms**. However, the promises made to them were not kept and the Garcia administration witnessed a resurgence of guerrillas. In April, 1962, Macapagal swallowed his embarrassment and ordered a mop-up operation in Central Luzon. According to the latest reports, guerrilla strength in the Philippines is increasing.

The Algerian revolution, the least studied in this country though it comes closest to the Vietnamese situation, had actually been crushed militarily but had won politically when de Gaulle negotiated independence. By 1961, the guerrillas had been reduced to some 5,000 and their ability to engage the French at will had markedly declined. But

France faced a sullen Algerian population that it had conquered but could not rule. The F.L.N. was defeated in the field, but it continued to outadminister and "illegitimize" the French.

Why did the Algerian peasants risk, for seven remorseless years, their lives, the honor of their women, and the security of their paltry belongings? Nationalism alone could not explain their violent and resolute rejection of French rule. In no other colony, except Indo-China, did the movement for independence take so violent a turn. And why did not the peasants respond earlier to the militants' calls to arms? The answer comes from one of the historic chiefs of the Algerian revolution. The time was not "ripe," he said. "These events occur where foreign rule is resented, where acute grievances exist and institutional channels for ventilating and satisfying them are ineffective."

Peasant rebellions had occurred in past years of famine and high taxation, but these spontaneous and periodic disturbances, as expressions of frustration over social and economic conditions, are not a sufficient condition for guerrilla revolution. "Revolutionary warfare does not require simply discontent among the masses but a sense of desperation and a grim determination to end injustice and humiliation. It demands patience with prolonged suffering, and a determined conspiracy of silence, and militancy."

A people can summon up that resolution only if they feel morally alienated from their rulers. "The success of a revolutionary war is predicated upon the continual and increasing moral isolation of the enemy. When it becomes total the war has been won, for the population will then fight to the last man." Later, other Algerian leaders told me they had spent more effort fighting the French promises of eventual independence and reforms than fighting the military. The Algerians became increasingly alienated from the French as the latter increased their military effort, which in revolutionary warfare means large-scale killing of civilians (if for no other reason than because the guerrilla is undistinguishable from other peasants), and the F.L.N. became more confident of winning not the military battles but the revolutionary war.

The conditions leading to revolu-

tionary warfare are not created by conspiracy. They are inherent in the dislocations and demands produced by rapid social change, and are predicated on the failure of ruling elites to respond to the challenge of modernization. The pressures for change in the political, economic and social relationships of the past inevitably lead to a confrontation with those whose interests lie in the maintenance of the *status quo*. In countries and colonies whose rulers are willing to abdicate their monopoly of power and privileges, where genuine reforms are introduced, and new institutions begin to provide for a sharing of power and responsibility, the change is effected in an orderly (if not entirely peaceful) and democratic manner. But when a ruling class resists reforms (which invariably mean reduction in its power and privileges), its confrontation with the new political forces becomes increasingly violent. A regime unwilling to satisfy popular aspirations begins to lose legitimacy; revolutionary forces deliberately accelerate this process, by weakening the efficacy and cohesion of the ruling elite, and by giving form to the amorphous revolutionary conflagration. In the competition for leadership which often takes place in this volatile situation, non-Communist revolutionary groups are handicapped by several factors, the most important of which are the attitudes and policies of Western powers. By supporting the defenders of the old order, a great nation like the United States weakens the fighting power of the democratic forces, drives the cold-war neutralists to seek the help of the Communists, and gives the latter new heroes and martyrs.

Once a revolutionary movement enters the guerrilla phase its central objective is to confirm, perpetuate and institutionalize the moral isolation of the enemy by providing an alternative to the discredited regime through the creation of "parallel hierarchies." The major task of the movement is not to outfight but to outadminister the government. The main target in this bid is the village, where the majority of the population lives, and where the government's presence is often exploitative (collection of taxes). Here the chief and his council are the main link between the people and the government. Breaking this link demands careful plan-

ning, organization and hard work. The government is systematically eliminated from the countryside by the conversion or killing of village officials, who are then controlled or replaced by the political arm of the movement. The rebels must then build an administrative structure to collect taxes, to provide some education and social welfare, and to maintain a modicum of economic activity. A revolutionary guerrilla movement which does not have these administrative concerns and structures to fulfill its obligations to the populace would degenerate into banditry. The official American view that the guerrillas' tasks are easier because they only destroy contradicts the findings of those who have studied and observed these movements. During this phase, military confrontation is normally avoided, and the government also treats assassinations as a police problem, and ascribes nonpayment of taxes to administrative lags, bad harvests, etc. The Vietcong is known to have gained control over 70 per cent of rural Vietnam during 1957-60—a period when Americans were presenting Uncle Diem as a rival of Uncle Ho and were going around saying: "Look, no Vietnamese army units are attacked. Therefore, there is no guerrilla threat."

Most compelling, but also most self-defeating, is the myth that terror is the basis of civilian support for the guerrillas. Guerrilla warfare requires a highly committed but covert civilian support which cannot be obtained at gun point. Only degenerate and defeated guerrillas are known to have risked the loss of mass support by terrorizing civilians (some Huk and Malayan die-hards were reduced to it). An outstanding feature of guerrilla training is the stress on scrupulously "correct and just" behavior toward civilians. Political work, believes General Giap, is "the soul of the army," and a Chinese guerrilla expert explains that "army indoctrination is primarily aimed at training the troops to act in such a way that they will gain this total support [of the people]." Guerrilla use of terror, therefore, is sociologically and psychologically selective. It strikes those who are popularly identified as the "enemy of the people"—officials, landlords and the like.

Killing a village chief, however, is often a more complicated affair. Since most chiefs are local farmers who command legitimacy and loy-

alty through tradition and kinship, the militants ideally want to persuade them into the movement. When that fails, it takes painstaking political work to engineer their assassination and to prepare the villagers to accept it. In the early years of the Algerian revolution it took the F.L.N. from two months to a year to kill a village chief without incurring the liability of public hostility, and that was an anti-colonial war. I was, therefore, amazed to learn that in Vietnam, about 13,000 local officials were killed between 1957 and 1961. Professor Bernard Fall gives a simple explanation: These chiefs, as appointees of Diem, had little legitimacy compared with the Vietminh cadres who had liberated the country from France. Furthermore, the local officials became involved, along with the American-equipped and trained army, in the sordid business of restoring the landlords who had fled the country during the war. (A *de facto* land reform was achieved under the Vietminh.) These absentee aristocrats even demanded eight years worth of back rent, covering the period from 1945 to 1954. Before the war, the rent had been 50 per cent of the yield; the peasant was thus required to pay 400 per cent of his produce and to surrender his rights to the land! The Vietcong had no problem preparing them to accept the killing of officials engaged in such work.

Terror is also used to insure survival of the militants and of the movement. Robert Kleiman of *The New York Times* (May 3, 1965) informs us that in Vietnam's "contested areas, with 40 per cent of the population, Saigon usually gets cooperation by day and the Vietcong by night—because that is when their troops and officials are present. It is an old Asian custom." I was amused by the last sentence, for I know it is not our custom, but a universal practice of guerrilla warfare. The population must seem at least neutral if it hopes to escape full enemy treatment from government troops. Rebel troops and officials do not arrive at night from "somewhere in the mountains"; they are present during the day, too, and often lead the show of obedience to the government. At night, the loyal peasant turns into a guerrilla and all know him as such. To insure that the popular conspiracy of silence develops no seams, ex-

emplary punishments are given to those suspected of having informed.

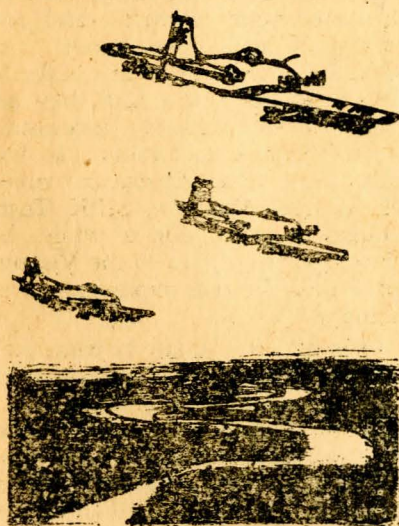
Second-degree terror, which normally does not result in killing, is used to sabotage the government's belated effort to gain popular support. Government schoolteachers and health workers are favorite targets of kidnaping and indoctrination. In June, 1962, a South Vietnamese, UN observer informed UNESCO that the Vietcong had kidnaped more than 1,200 teachers; the government's malaria-eradication campaign collapsed after twenty-two health officers had been killed and sixty kidnaped. Guerrilla sabotage normally guards against causing too much hardship on the population and long-range damages to the economy. Industry and even foreign-owned plantations are spared if they pay their "taxes" to the liberation front. And they normally do so when the government is unable to protect them. (In Vietnam the large European rubber plantations, Michelin, SIPH, Terres Rouges, resisted for a while, but started paying taxes to the Vietcong after their French supervisors were kidnaped.)

It is difficult to say at what point the moral isolation of a government becomes total and irreversible, so that no amount of promises and reforms would restore the lost confidence and reduce the peoples' resistance. In Algeria, at least, the point seems to have been reached when the French were reduced to torturing and killing civilians and to "regrouping" the population. Many Algerian leaders believe that their revolution became irreversible at the moment of France's greatest military victory—General Massu's conquest of the Casbah (the Muslim section of Algiers was reduced to rubble during 1957-58). France could no longer expect the confidence, much less the loyalty, of a people it was destroying indiscriminately, albeit unwillingly and despite itself.

The desertion of the intellectuals and moderates often signals, not so much the irreversibility of a revolutionary war, but its take-off. Intellectuals, especially the Asian variety, are a democratic, liberal group, who view organized violence with distaste. Somewhat alienated from their culture, Westernized and city-centered, they distrust the peasants but desire an improvement of their condition. When an armed revolution breaks out, they are likely to

play in the middle, hoping to get some reforms under way by using the armed threat as a counter for bargaining. They begin to go on exile or to defect to the rebels after the failure of the regime and the success of the revolution become imminent.

The defending army's pressures for conventional attack on an external sanctuary is yet another sigh that a revolutionary war has been lost on home grounds. In revolutionary warfare, armies trained for conventional combat follow a vicious logic of escalation, which



derives from acute frustration over an elusive war that puts in question not only their effectiveness but the very validity of their training and organization. Moreover, the morale of professional soldiers cannot be maintained if they know they are fighting a popular rebellion. Hence the compulsion to believe that behind the popular behavior lies the terror of an army trained, equipped and directed by a foreign power, and the wish to draw the enemy into open battles. Since reprisals against the population fail to produce the desired result, carrying the war to a sovereign nation becomes the only road to a conventional showdown. In Algeria this demand led to French participation in the invasion of Suez, then to the bombing of the Tunisian border town of Sakiet Sidi Youssef, and produced a succession of army revolts, the last of which destroyed the Fourth Republic. Had the French Government succumbed to these pressures, France would have been the first power to violate the international practice of respecting the rights of

sanctuary—a principle that was observed in Korea, Greece, Cyprus and Malaya.

The importance of an active sanctuary should not be underestimated, although it is not essential to guerrilla success. In Cuba, Yugoslavia and China the revolutionaries did not have active sanctuaries. In Burma and to a lesser extent in Greece, sanctuaries proved of limited value. Politically and militarily, revolutionary guerrillas are, by and large, a self-sustaining group who can go on fighting indefinitely even if infiltration from across the border stops. External help, however, has great psychological and diplomatic value. In a war of attrition, there can be no decisive victory over a strong foreign enemy. At best, one hopes to inflict on it heavy losses, tire it out and, through international pressure, force it to negotiate withdrawal. External help is important in internationalizing guerrilla demands, and keeps alive the hope of liberation. When a revolutionary army loses an ally, it loses not so much military support; it loses hope. When the world is not watching, when the fear of diplomatic sanctions and the threat of a widened war are absent, a foreign power trapped in counter-guerrilla operations is likely to make the final and the only move that may "win"—it starts to commit genocide.

Finally, the assumption that a guerrilla outfit, like a conventional army, can be controlled and commanded by a foreign or externally based government, ignores the organizational, psychological and political facts of revolutionary warfare. The distrust of the "home based" guerrillas, even for their own government in exile, cannot be overstated. The resourceful and tough "interior" leaders and cadres who face the enemy daily, collect taxes, administer, make promises and give hopes to the population are not easily controlled from abroad and make suspicious, exacting and hard-to-please allies. Therefore, zone commanders and political commissars are, for the most part, monarchs of what they survey. As a group, they are joined together by shared experiences, by a common mood which is defiant and insular, by a shared suspicion of "politicians and diplomats over there" selling them out, and by a collective will to defy a settlement that is not of their making.

In Vietnam, the signs are clear. The South Vietnamese regime has no legitimacy, and no government backed by a Western power can hope for popular support in a country where the Communists have capitalized on the nationalist appeal of restoring independence and unity, and where the pro-Western leaders have been Bao-Dai, Diem and the musical-chair generals. The massacre of civilians began as early as 1960 (not counting the earlier repressive measures of the Diem regime), as attested by reputable scholars and even a former Chief U.S. Military Adviser (Lt. Gen. Samuel T. Williams; see *U.S. News & World Report*, Nov. 9, 1964). It has since escalated. The intellectuals and moderates have deserted or defected. And North Vietnam is subjected to daily bombings. America and its South Vietnamese allies have lost the revolutionary war because they could not win the support of the Vietnamese people, and now their moral isolation is total.

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