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## A Perspective of Counterinsurgency in Three Dimensions—Tradition, Legitimacy, Visibility

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## A PERSPECTIVE OF COUNTERINSURGENCY IN THREE DIMENSIONS-- Tradition, Legitimacy, Visibility

*In the early 1960's the Soviet Union and Red China initiated a serious effort to increase their influence by sponsoring "wars of national liberation." The United States responded to this attempt by developing both a doctrine and a technology of counterinsurgency. Our present efforts in this field, however, often are opposed to the traditions and patterns of legitimacy of the states the United States is attempting to aid. The present world situation calls for a thorough review and evaluation of the concept of counterinsurgency and the means through which it is applied.*

An article prepared

by

Colonel William F. Long, Jr., U.S. Army

In his "New Victories" speech of 6 January 1961, Premier Khrushchev announced a new Soviet strategic offensive employing "anti-imperialistic wars of liberation." Secretary of Defense Robert S. McNamara soon picked up the gauntlet in an address delivered to the Fellows of the American Bar Foundation in Chicago on 17 February 1961. In this speech the Secretary described a complex of programs designed to cope with the root causes and politico-military violence of "wars of liberation." Counterinsurgency was the collective name given to this effort, and Vietnam became the primary testing ground.


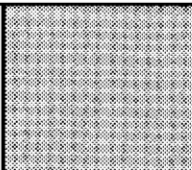

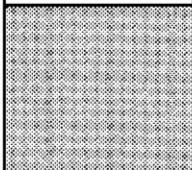

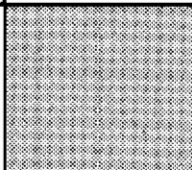

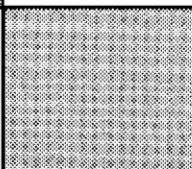

As a nation we now have a background of experience with which to view the concept of counterinsurgency. The tactical lessons and military techniques to counter guerrilla violence are widely distributed and discussed. The clandestine nature of the Viet Cong assault on the nervous system of the

Government and people of South Vietnam is also known, if not fully appreciated. What needs more illumination is the character of the war and the nature of the larger philosophical and sociological environment, both in the United States and South Vietnam, which exert continuing influences in both places.

What follows is a three-dimensional hard look at counterinsurgency. It consists of considering three ideas—tradition, legitimacy, and visibility—cast on three levels: the U.S. political scene, the U.S. military institution, and South Vietnam. It is a hard look because these are hard times.

**Tradition.** The first significant tradition for the United States as a political entity is that Americans are historically and consciously antiauthoritarian, anti-military, anticolonial, and, except for specific moral exceptions, against large involvements on foreign shores. Traditionally, war has been an emotional

# TRADITION LEGITIMACY VISIBILITY

<b>U.S.</b>			
<b>U.S. MILITARY</b>			
<b>VIETNAM</b>			

public act of self-defense or moral intervention.

The Vietnamese involvement, in contrast to previous U.S. participation in war, was initiated through calm, dispassionate, executive action. Using contingency powers granted to the President in anticipation of time compressions which would preclude traditional constitutional procedures in the event of a nuclear war as well as the enormous monetary assets available to the Secretary of Defense under the Reorganization Act of 1958, it was possible to project a posture of intervention which promised sufficient "guns" to manage the conflict and adequate "butter" to lubricate the path to an affluent egalitarian society. American public opinion was approached in a rational, intellectual, and controlled way which had no roots in tradition and which left emotions to the political antagonists.

From the standpoint of U.S. military tradition, war has always been an act of public involvement primarily through an immediate calling up of reserves, which

changed the complexion of the military establishment from a relatively small, highly professional cadre to a large citizen fighting force. This tradition has often been criticized as being wasteful and dangerous, but it has always accomplished the necessary objective of rallying the country in support of the Armed Forces and the war. The longer and costlier a war, the more essential it has been for a deep psychological conviction of the populace of the rectitude of the U.S. position in order to provide necessary spiritual resources to compensate for physical losses.

The Vietnamese people have been traditionally nationalistic and anti-foreign. For most of their history these traditions have been achieved at the expense of war with the Chinese. This tradition also has supported the Vietnamese people in their struggle against colonialism. Vietnamese society is also ambivalent toward authority. They have profound respect for authority. Confucious said, "It is beneath human dignity for man to be without a leader." The

attraction of a charismatic leader is one of the strongest patterns repeated in the arabesque of Vietnamese history.

However, there are well-defined limits for any central authority whether it be Emperor or President. The person wielding central authority is held absolutely responsible for the protection of his subjects and traditionally reaches his limit of authority at the edge of the village. The Vietnamese proverb says, "If the king makes the law, the village makes custom." The village is the unit of national life and cultural integrity. It has also traditionally been a means of conquest as well as defense. When the Vietnamese people moved south to conquer the areas below the Red River Delta, it was done by means of village cadres moving out to found sister cells in an almost paramilitary-like division.

In contrast to this tradition, the present conflict demands that the Vietnamese must learn that foreigners are friends, that big name leaders—such as Ho Chi Minh and Ngo Dinh Diem—are their enemies, and their villages must be uprooted and relocated for their own good.

It would seem that much of the thrust of effort in Vietnam has been as countertradition as it has been counterinsurgent. The magnitude of this kind of a handicap is difficult to cope with because it can be hidden, suppressed, misinterpreted, or discounted upon separate occasions. However, the cumulative effects of being countertradition without being emotionally revolutionary may be as grotesque as they are troublesome.

**Legitimacy.** Legitimacy is an idea which carries with it deeper connotations than the simple legislative act of "making a law." The concept of legitimacy is the second idea to be examined in relation to our counterinsurgency experience.

The Constitution of the United States, both explicitly and implicitly,

puts the restraining hand of the people upon the military establishment and its use in American society. Article I, section 8, states that Congress shall have the power to declare war and to raise and support armies, but no appropriation of money to that use shall be for a longer term than 2 years. These provisions are complementary. The first makes war the legitimate concern of all the people through their legislative voice. The second is designed to insure that no military venture of any proportion can be embarked upon independent of congressional financial scrutiny.

Regardless of these constitutional provisions, three factors emerged in the early 1960's which exerted a potent influence at the executive level. The first of these was the Reorganization Act of 1958, which not only confirmed the power of the Secretary of Defense but also gave him an executive means of controlling all aspects of military expenditures and operations. The early 1960's also witnessed an enormous breakthrough in executive techniques which could overwhelm slower moving congressional committees with computerized analyses and unassailable data. Then, the Bay of Pigs disaster was followed by the Cuban missile crisis, which was successfully managed and supervised by a small, closely knit group of like-minded men at the executive level. This spectacular bloodless victory engineered by an elite fraternity cast a shadow of confidence in this technique over the early years of the Vietnam involvement. Further, utilizing all the powers of his office, including the monetary flexibilities inherent in a \$50 plus billion a year budget, it was possible for the Secretary of Defense to commit the country to funding accelerated levels of commitment to Vietnam in advance of going to Congress for additional appropriation.

Having become involved in a twilight war outside the constitutional framework, the legislative branch of the

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Government was torn between supporting the administration and the Armed Forces and a desire to reexert what they considered legitimate congressional power. This tension has been manifest in many unusual ways, but it remains a fundamental source of difficulty.

The legitimate role for the U.S. military establishment outside the geographic limits of the United States is to engage in combat operations. Political, psychological, and economic activities external to the United States come under the purview of the U.S. Ambassador and the agencies designed to support him in forwarding U.S. interests in these various areas. However, with the advent of the concept of counter-insurgency—which linked military, political, psychological, sociological, and economic action—in support of a free government, it was necessary to provide personnel to conduct these activities. The only forces under discipline and available in sufficient numbers for this purpose were members of the U.S. Military Establishment. There was no time to question whether the military was the competent instrumentality or even the legitimate one, for it was the only one available. In U.S. society the only people who can be ordered overseas to fight a war are men in uniform. So the equation which resulted was that discipline equals expertise and necessity equals legitimacy.

Meanwhile, in Vietnam two rival structures were vying for legitimate control of the people and the land of South Vietnam. On the one side was the anti-Communist government which derived from the French Colonial Government, through the short-lived reign of Emperor Bao Dai, through the Presidency of Bao Dai's foreign minister, Ngo Dinh Diem, and finally to his successors, the military defenders of South Vietnam.

The Communist contestants established their claim for legitimacy through the revolutionary Viet Minh movement

led by Ho Chi Minh. Ho's forces toppled the French Colonial Government, and he became the revolutionary hero in the struggle with the French and for the subsequent Viet Cong struggle in South Vietnam. The strategic target of the Viet Cong was the village society. All its operations were designed to isolate the village from the district, provincial, and Saigon authority and, by terror and persuasion, link the people in the villages to the Communist-directed insurgency. Into this struggle was inserted the U.S. adviser. However, it was precisely at the village level that the adviser was least effective by either competency or legitimacy. U.S. advisers were overwhelmingly military, and the struggle was predominately political. The contest was waged at the village level, and there simply was no acceptable method whereby an American could be inserted into the Vietnamese society to effectively perform his mission, even if there were soldiers available who had the cultural capability and the desire to stay for long periods of time.

The difficulties posed by concepts of legitimacy have hampered the U.S. counterinsurgency effort in Vietnam. Conversely, Communists achieve a mask of legitimacy in people's wars by subversive intervention. The effective legitimate device for direct involvement of American forces in a revolution or insurgency is a matter which needs extensive study, if the psychological and philosophical contradictions in this area are not to frustrate all such activities.

**Visibility.** Of all the difficulties accompanying the Vietnamese involvement, none have been more vexing than that of visibility. No other war in the history of the world has been fought daily on television, which has accentuated the cost, the casualties, and the corruption.

The cost of the war has been highly visible in the United States and has been one of the chief causes of the protest

against the involvement. This has been true for two reasons. The first is that a large segment of responsible legislative leadership was alienated from the administration because the rising cost of the war was hidden by resource transfers from other areas. However, the root of the protest is the desire of other segments of the society to use the \$26 billion a year cost of the war for other purposes.

While the cost of the war has been highly visible, the benefits have been largely invisible. And what is more relevant, the obscure results of the war and its funding must compete with highly visible, and emotional, problems of: racial unrest that is economically motivated, decay of our cities, environmental pollution, and, for the military, military preparedness against the increasing Soviet threat.

What has also been invisible are the changes which have taken place over time since 1961. The American society is not the same as it was in 1961. The relationship of the administration to the people has changed. The perception of communism as a philosophy and movement has changed, and there is a worldwide concern by all nations and peoples who look to the United States as the reserve power and refuge of the free world. This concern is that the Vietnamese involvement is weakening the major position of the United States against the rising technical power and influence of Russia.

While the cost of the war created protest based on competition for the funds concerned, it was the casualties in the U.S. military that provided the strongest antiwar thrust to the protest. The lack of sustained emotional identification with the war tended to make the entire society feel guilty about enjoying "butter," while a relatively small number of American males were doing the bleeding.

While the casualties mounted, significant results leading to a termination of

the war were not visible. Body count as a measure of progress was rejected. A favorable body count ratio is significant only if the apprehension of losses in Hanoi is as acute as it is in Washington. So far, the reverse has been true. Paradoxically, there has been too little time to fight a counterinsurgency operation politically and too little space was permitted to wage a limited war. The counterinsurgency effort to outcontrol and outadminister the Viet Cong would require years of perseverance and flexible tactics and would be open to criticism and interpretation all the while. On the other hand, it has been proven repeatedly that the only way successfully to wage a limited war is to take the war to the opponent. In Southeast Asia a successful limited war would require the elimination of all clandestine logistical support bases outside South Vietnam and a quick and powerful application of maximum pressure designed to force opposing leaders to select peace as a desirable alternative.

What was visible in Vietnam were the frustrating contradictions of this kind of a war and the corruption in Saigon. Climaxed by the high visibility accorded the Buddhists in their contest with Diem, the U.S. news media consistently adopted a position and tone which was largely antagonistic. This kind of selective and anti-South Vietnamese viewpoint created the major difficulty, that of attempting to fight a clandestine war in the open. Sun Tzu highlighted the necessity of knowing yourself and knowing the enemy. If the Communist regime in Hanoi does not know every conflict or problem in, and between, South Vietnam and the United States, it is only because they do not read or watch TV.

While all the seamy aspects of war as a phenomenon became increasingly visible, what remained hidden and undiscernible was the will of non-Communist Vietnamese leadership, the desires of the people, and the commitment of the

Vietnamese villages to the struggle to remain free of domination.

Everything that was bad about the war was visible; the cost, the casualties, and the corruption. What remains invisible are the benefits, results, and progress.

**Some Assumptions to Challenge.** In conclusion, the concept of counterinsurgency became so embroiled in other conflicts that confidence in the approach was overwhelmed by frustrations. This experience indicates there are some assumptions which should be challenged.

The first assumption open to challenge is that the ingredients of a counterinsurgency are, in fact, stabilizing. It should be expected that any concept which is aimed at improving political access, social mobility, and economic betterment would be destabilizing. Perhaps the equation hoped for was that education = understanding = progress = freedom = stability. There is ample reason to believe that the true equation may be education = desire = dissatisfaction = revolution.

The next assumption which might be challenged is that counterinsurgency is a proper role for the U.S. Military Establishment. U.S. tradition has not encouraged political development of its military officer corps nor has it permitted activity on their part while on active duty. Further, there is no coherent link between military behavior which is domestically acceptable and that which may be required for successful participation in a clandestine war. Without a political mandate or relevant psychological inclination, the military man is simply not professionally fitted to make substantive contributions to political, economic, or sociological problems as regards foreign involvements. He must understand these factors within the context of his profession, but an excessive commitment to them will only detract from his primary concern—military

capability.

The attitude of the citizenry of the United States toward the military—and the traditional desire to stand clear of all but necessary foreign entanglements—raises the question as to whether the United States has, or can develop, a counterinsurgency mentality. Although the United States has always been anti-colonial and for self-determination of all peoples and states, the recognition of the insidious aspects of international communism designed to thwart self-determination in other people has raised tensions for every U.S. political leader since 1947. The problem is posed in terms of whether Americans will support other people in their struggle for liberty or seek to keep them free of Communist domination. Tensions arise as to which of these goals will take precedence. The Communists recognize this tension and have turned to “just wars of national liberation” as a technique of subversion. So far, their strategy has been generally recognized, but the counterstrategy has not been generally accepted, if, in fact, it has been properly conceived.

Having raised questions which strike at the value and practicality of counterinsurgency, it is only equitable that the

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#### BIOGRAPHIC SUMMARY



Col. William F. Long, Jr., U.S. Army, did his undergraduate work at Otterbein College in political science and holds a master's degree in international affairs from the George Washington University. He is also a graduate of the U.S. Army Command and General Staff School and of the U.S. Naval War College. He has served in China, in Korea, in Vietnam as an adviser, and as Commander of the 1st Brigade, 5th Infantry Division. Colonel Long is currently the U.S. Army Adviser to the President, Naval War College.

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assumption which logically arises from these criticisms be challenged. This assumption is that the dislocations of counterinsurgency are inevitably favorable to communism. Quite clearly there are many paradoxes and anomalies connected with U.S. counterinsurgency experiences. However, when the educational and constructive aspects of counterinsurgency are employed in undeveloped areas, it does not necessarily follow that communism or any other totalitarian form of social organization will be benefited. There are, of course, specific contradictions. A short time ago the successful counterinsurgency operation of the Bolivian Armed Forces in removing the threat of Che Guevara was hailed as a proper response to subversive insurgency. Today, the same Bolivian Military Establishment has confiscated U.S. business holdings in that country in the name of social justice and political propriety. It can be argued that one is the logical successor of the other and that this is very much in the true American tradition. For once it is communicated to the people of any nation that they are important and that the United States feels that they are important and that they should be in control of their own destiny, it should surprise no one when they start implementing our own concepts.

There is in the 5 October *New York Times Magazine* a friendly, considerate,

and straightforward appraisal of General Abrams as a soldier and a leader. The crux of this article is that General Abrams is a fine soldier and deserves a better war. Well, so does General Westmoreland deserve a better war. And so did Warrant Officer Richard Pugh, who was killed early in his military career in a helicopter accident in Vietnam. He was a sterling young man and would have contributed a great deal to our country. And so did 2d Lt. Philip Gamble, Professor Gamble's heroic son who was killed leading his platoon in Vietnam and so do the aviators and the sailors and the marines and the drafted men and the public and all of us. But what can professional military men do?

Military men must constantly think about, and even force our political leaders to think very carefully about, the character of any kind of war in which the Republic is to be engaged. Clausewitz said, "The first, most sweeping, most vital of all decisions that the statesman and commander have to make is to clearly establish the *character of the war* which they are about to undertake." Professional military men, representatives of government agencies, even our allied friends must achieve in their strategic thinking intellectual maturity and personal insight so that their value in counsel matches their heroism when they are called upon to fight.

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The purity of a revolution can last a fortnight.

Jean Cocteau, 1889