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In recent years the Communist world has reaped great dividends from the art of effective conflict management. The United States has, on the other hand, exhibited a lack of flexibility in reacting to crises, which is due partly to poor political communications and an emphasis upon military solutions. In order to avoid further difficulties, we must succeed in comprehending the new instruments of world politics and in adjusting our political outlook to them.

REFLECTIONS ON POLITICAL COMMUNICATION AND INSURGENCY

An article by

Captain Robert F. Delaney, U.S. Naval Reserve

The essence of success in world politics is renewal. It is a form of diplomatic action historic in its usage but relatively little understood in its application. Richelieu practiced it with a high French sense of intrigue. Metternich renewed the traditional forces of middle Europe and so preserved the Hapsburgs. Benjamin Disraeli protected empire and crown by discreet renewal of the status quo. More recently, De Gaulle employed renewal as a successful tactic in ridding France of the disaster of Vietnam and the crushing impact of the Algerian insurgency.

In modern America, renewal is equatable with flexibility. And though Americans pride themselves on their flexibility and pragmatism, it is precisely in the failure to use these concepts that the United States is currently undergoing a painful transition. We have not succeeded in comprehending, as we

must, the new instruments of world politics, and we have responded neither effectively nor well to the pressures of adversaries prepared to use maximum flexibility in the employment of modern diplomatic instrumentalities.

The results have been confusion, political turmoil, a loss of national image and direction, and the embarrassment of international harassments, seemingly without end.

The continuum ranges from the humiliation of the *Pueblo* and the adverse reaction to the Dominican intervention to the acute dilemma of a war in Vietnam which we cannot seem to end on terms reasonable to national pride and national security interests.

The political fallout has been serious. One national administration has fallen, and another lives in the shadow of a similar fate. The American public, informed as never before in its history, is

4 NAVAL WAR COLLEGE REVIEW

generating pressure on foreign policy which may ultimately restructure our traditional view of the outer world. The impact of instant world communications has made a shambles of traditional diplomacy, and, indeed, it may be argued that mass communications is in the process of basically altering the conventional bureaucratic organization of our foreign affairs community.

Yet, despite these often traumatic events and changes, our posture and our reactions remain essentially the same. Faced with a world in social revolt, off balance in a series of political and psychological insurgencies, the United States continues to pursue its international role with something less than the reality our vital affairs deserve.

This paradox involving the statecraft of the world's most advanced technical and military sophisticated nation is perhaps best illustrated in America's posture toward the political upheavals of our time which we have come to call insurgencies. The basic reality of an insurgency, be it Communist, nationalist, or a bit of both, is rooted in political revolution: the need, the demand, the organization and timing for change of a fundamental nature relating to an indigenous society and its governance. The change may be nonviolent, although the postwar period chronicles in excess of 100 violent successful and unsuccessful insurgent efforts, and it may be Communist or non-Communist, the case of Vietnam being predominantly the former and the movements in Latin America being largely the latter.

This political dilemma finds its highest expression in Vietnam and the U.S. response. In the professional jargon of the day, we call our reaction "counter-insurgency," and we doctrinally label it military in essence. It is a strange amalgam of military force, economic aid, psychological cheerleading, nation building and, by national terms of reference, this approach to the unconventional is conventionally administered.

Our political and diplomatic response both to Sino-Soviet conflict management¹ as well as to extreme political and social change in the world around us is basically military in nature and naive in political execution. It aims, realistically enough, at blunting Communist efforts at takeover, but it also serves unconsciously to arrest legitimate, if sometimes unpalatable, moves to modernize and change the status quo.

This dilemma has caused profound anguish in our body politic. It is difficult for Americans, inheritors of the oldest viable republic in the modern era, justifiably proud of their history, confident in their ability to adapt and change, revolutionary in their problem solving, to see the United States as de facto defenders of a foreign status quo which cries out for change. Whether the example is Vietnam or Latin America, the issue is basically the same. We are shoring up administrations which often do not meet the test of public support. Once, before the rise of the world communication grid, U.S. policy could survive such contradictions since only the people on the scene dealt quietly with the situation. The American public went hithery on as before. Today, however, the world is "tuned in" from the insurance man in Iowa to the student in Egypt, and the conflict of values becomes pointed and political.

What, in effect, has happened is that the United States has failed to use to maximum advantage the diplomatic technique of renewal in facing down Communist innovative tactics which, drawn together, represent what is popularly known today as "revolutionary warfare."

C.L. Sulzberger, in a perceptive series of articles, labeled revolutionary warfare, as developed by Mao and refined by Ho and Giap, the most "complex the world has hitherto known."²

Col. Roger Trinquier, a Frenchman well versed in the quagmires of Vietnam and Algeria, is more specific. "Military

tactics and hardware are all well and good," he says, "but they are really quite useless if one has lost the confidence of the people."³

The psychopolitical arena into which, for example, Vietnam and our problems in Latin America have slipped is a dimension of policy and strategy in which we as a people are basically deficient.

The American character is attuned, curiously enough, to absolutes although our modes are pragmatic. We fight wars to win; we see good and evil, right and wrong, legal and illegal situations. As war by definition is a military operation; it is legally declared, and when the enemy is roundly defeated, we go home to that nebulous condition of life which Warren Harding once celebrated as "normalcy."

It is correspondingly difficult for Americans to understand the limits, the tactics, and the objectives of a "non-war;" that is to say, conflict in the absence of a declaration of war by the Congress of the United States. Yet, since the Korean war 20 years ago, Americans have faced mobilization over Berlin, the brink of war over Cuba, intervention in the Dominican Republic, the involvement in Asia running from Taiwan south to Vietnam, Laos, Cambodia, and Thailand, and last—but for the American mentality, far from least—the gray, unhappy, misunderstood world of paramilitary and special operations, ranging from Bolivia and Che Guevara's death to Central Intelligence subsidies of U.S. organizations and the role of Special Forces in world politics.

It should be no surprise, therefore, that the American people are torn on the issue of Vietnam or, for that matter, on the issue of an American *imperium*, which Ronald Steel rather unkindly describes as "Pax Americana." For nothing about U.S. conflict management makes sense to a people whose national character is self-described and

largely accepted as idealistic, humanitarian, and generous.⁴

The fact remains that the United States rightfully views war as an evil, as a last resort, and, when it does happen, as an all-out effort. We have traditionally developed our war plans and fought our wars on this premise. Our strategy is essentially and historically defensive in doctrine and concept.

The world has not followed suit. Modern warfare from the land concepts of Clausewitz to Sino-Soviet views of revolution and penetration have etched scars on the American military and political mentality. The traditional Western model of conventional modern warfare has been inadequate to the newer concepts and weapons systems of "people's warfare."⁵

Doctrine calls for meeting Communist revolutionary warfare with military checkmates, with training programs for police and internal security forces, with vaguely defined public information campaigns, and with overambitious economic aid efforts. Fundamentally, when insurgency breaks out into terrorism and guerrilla activity, the diplomats, who have not shown any marked ability to comprehend social revolution and renewal, give way to a reluctant but, at least, organized military force.⁶

This approach, while honestly conceived in the competing galaxy of American foreign affairs agencies (including defense), has not solved the problem, as a quick review of our counter-insurgency record will reveal. In truth, however, the doctrine has kept the lid on, and, for this, it may be argued, one should be thankful.

But the reality remains that the United States, faced with an array of flexible psychological, political, and socioeconomic and military weapons, responds sluggishly with inflexibility and a conventional bureaucracy which sorely needs attention.

There is in this period of uncertainty no need to seek out scapegoats for

6 NAVAL WAR COLLEGE REVIEW

Vietnam's frustration. There are no demons at work; rather, there is the reality of an increasingly complex world dominated by poverty, technology, and population pressure. And, if experience is any guide, we, as a world power, are simply not organized to cope with the situation.

The United States emerged from World War II as a victor in the finest sense of the word. Our institutions had stood the ultimate test. Our organizational and production genius had given us victory. Was there, therefore, any reason to doubt either the essential validity of our approach or the basic strength of our governmental apparatus to cope with peace?

What followed, of course, was neither peace nor war. We faced determined ideological and nationalistic adversaries in Soviet Russia and Communist China. We "ad hoced" our response to their pressures and their incursions. We pioneered economic aid.⁷ We invented a new system of world loans and credit institutions. We created the Peace Corps, institutionalized international information programs through the Voice of America,⁸ unleashed our many voluntary agencies in support of humanity, and fitfully tinkered with the organization of the Foreign Service and the military to accommodate the new forces set against us. We saw these forces essentially in adversary terms fostered by 20 years of a cold war first growing colder, then surprisingly warm. The enemy was communism. Defeat it and, like Woodrow Wilson before us, the world would be safe for democracy.

One does not wisely denigrate the intent or the goal of communism, be it monolithic as in the Stalinist period or polycentric as in the current fashion. But our concern with this "revolutionary barbarism" caused us to undervalue the real revolutions of the day until far too late. And these revolutions, three in number, profound in nature,

and worldwide in scope, have found us ill prepared and confused.

The revolutions of our day, of which I speak, are in order of appearance the political, the social, and that of communications.

The political revolution followed predictably on the heels of victory in 1945. European colonialism was dead. Communism, given new life by Mother Russia, was expansive and aggressive, and the dependencies of the world cried out for, and received or took their sovereignty and independence. World communism, for all its success in Eastern Europe and Mainland China, scored poorly in its political effort to capture the Third World, in part due to U.S. policy, but in larger measure due simply to the new nations themselves. We often overlook this point. The countries involved do not.

The second revolution, more emotional, more far reaching, and as yet unended, is the social struggle for equality, dignity, and acceptance for men of color and men of underprivilege everywhere. It is a revolution which has come home, and the extensions of it within the United States are too familiar to be belabored here.

It is the social revolution, with its economic manifestations of "haves" versus "have-nots," which underscored the gradual shifting away from the East-West axis of primary conflict to the north-south polarity of which Barbara Ward so passionately warns the industrial Western world in terms of disaster and defeat.

It is in this revolutionary world that the Communists have achieved more success than in the political revolutions of independence. And, correspondingly, it is in the world of social revolution that the United States finds itself so inadequate and uncomprehending. Indeed, one simplified view of Vietnam and our inability to find national justification for our involvement there consists of the reality that while we mount

a massive military operation and pay lipservice to it as a political war, the Viet Cong and the North Vietnamese are actually fighting a political war, exploiting the frustrations and despair of social revolution. Philip Selznick called it "the organizational weapon," and Bernard Fall, once condemned and now hailed as a prophet before his time, describes it as "social anomie," the Communist talent for usurping issues quite extraneous to their real goals. Here the Viet Cong and their all-important but little-known political leadership COSVIN have attempted to link themselves more successfully than not to the precepts of social revolution so despairingly desired by the Vietnamese masses and so tragically denied by both warring sides. Here is our sad dilemma. The Viet Cong and National Liberation Front have succeeded in capturing the banner of social change, albeit false as to their true aims, while the United States is cast in the role of supporting a military regime which has enjoyed little reputation as social reformers and less as popular representatives.

The Communists are well aware of our dilemma. By eroding social institutions, by destroying confidence in the national government, by producing anarchy, and by delaying peace negotiations to suit the vulnerabilities of public diplomacy, the slow effort of the United States and South Vietnam to effect change and develop stability is made to appear weak and fruitless. This is at once the Communist strength and the Allied weakness. And it has precious little to do with conventional military operations. The precise difference between their insurgency and our counter-insurgency has to do with political change and social revolution in its indigenous psychological setting. Our response is an American military overlay, conditioned by national character and largely alien to the local environment.

This already depressing picture

becomes vastly more complicated when the third revolution—that of communications—is considered.

The rise of an instant world communications grid has introduced a dimension of mass political involvement in the affairs of life unimaginable a decade ago. Take, for example, the fact that today children in the United States enter first grade preconditioned by some 4,000 hours of television viewing. Or that American national political conventions are televised to world audiences. For the first time, warfare has become standard diet for the major evening television viewcasts.

In a word, political communication has become a weapons system, and the mass media have become diplomatic instrumentalities. This is startling to Americans used to the commercial media only when the totality of this development is brought home, especially in terms of political communication.

Today, with world television a reality, with communication satellites bringing instant visual news and commentary to elites and masses alike, and

BIOGRAPHIC SUMMARY



This article is based upon a series of talks delivered this past summer at the Naval War College by Captain Robert F. Delaney, U.S. Naval Reserve, who in civilian life is Director of the Edward R. Murrow Center of Public Diplomacy, The Fletcher School of Law and Diplomacy, Tufts University. Captain Delaney is a former Assistant Director of the U.S. Information Agency and served on active duty this year as a Special Consultant to the President, Naval War College. He is presently Commanding Officer, Naval Reserve Intelligence Division 1-1, First Naval District, Boston. He served in Vietnam in 1965-66 as Deputy Assistant Director of the Joint U.S. Public Affairs Office.

8 NAVAL WAR COLLEGE REVIEW

with direct global radio and television transmission from point of origin to point of reception the next scheduled major technical breakthrough, international politics takes on a completely different hue.

As if to support this fundamental change, a pioneering study of the House Committee on Foreign Affairs warned of the deepening political crisis developing internationally as a result of the failure to comprehend the importance of communications. The report⁹ urged that form and content of our international information relating to foreign affairs be improved and that better coordinated use of international political communication be adopted. Neither suggestion has been accepted by the executive branch. The jurisdictional bureaucratic lines remain inflexible.¹⁰

In the meantime, the world is visited with new modes of diplomacy. The age of "secret diplomacy openly arrived at" is becoming a reality. The television camera, the press interview, the off-the-record backgrounder, and the radio microphone are steadily replacing the traditional forms of quiet diplomacy. The erosion of historic foreign office "pares inter pares" in the international area is well underway.

With this change comes a deepening mass involvement in crucial issues. Public opinion becomes a factor of increased importance. The early concept of Jeffersonian democracy with its emphasis on mass and popular participation seems closer to realization in the age of technocracy than in the age of federalism. In any event, as our national administrations are discovering, the media have made of public opinion a factor, sometimes informed, sometimes not, but potent to the degree that political neglect of its effects is undertaken only at grave risk. One need not look beyond the current impasse over Vietnam, the ABM Safeguard issue, and the entire military budget debate to

seize the force of an exploding, involved public opinion.

Transfer this relatively new-found domestic concern with national security matters and foreign affairs onto the international scene and the communications revolution meshes with the political and social revolutions. For the user of international communications, a neutral technology becomes a programmed weapons system, the depth of which is still to be plumbed. One thing is certain, however, in insurgency warfare, especially as experienced in Vietnam and increasingly in Latin America, political communications have been adroitly used by our adversaries and maladroitly employed by the United States. With a world, in fact, eavesdropping, the failure on our part is a poorly afforded luxury.

The lessons of our recent counter-insurgent efforts seem to suggest among many other things, obviously, that modern insurgent warfare has expanded into nonmilitary areas, into unconventional uses of world opinion and political communication, and into the very heart of the psychological, political, and social revolutions of our era. And the key to insurgency ferment, to guerrilla capabilities far beyond their logistic support is, in major part, political communication at all levels, internal and external. In none of these areas have we shown the requisite imagination, the flexibility, and the organizational adaptability to counter insurgencies and, more importantly perhaps, to explain to a doubting world why it is we are doing what we are doing.

There is a strong argument to push a constructive critique of Vietnam under the rug. There is a growing tendency in military and diplomatic circles to do just this. It would be a major mistake.

With this in mind, well might we ponder the words of a British expert in

the field, Sir Robert Thompson, who, in speaking of U.S. insurgency doctrine asks "What went wrong?" and giving his opinion that in Vietnam "The failure of American strategy after 1965 was accen-

tuated by a continued failure to understand the nature of the war, by certain disadvantages in the situation that had been inherited, and by weaknesses in the American character."¹¹

FOOTNOTES

1. The best treatise on Soviet conflict management remains Stefan Possony's *Century of Conflict* (Chicago: Itognery, 1953). Written long before the insurgencies of the 1960's, it provides a fascinating and prophetic insight into Communist political warfare psychology.

2. Cyrus L. Sulzberger, "Foreign Affairs: a New Kind of War," *The New York Times*, 14 May 1969, p. 46:3-6, 16 May 1969, p. 46:3-6.

3. Roger Trinquier, *Modern Warfare* (New York: Praeger, 1964).

4. This view of national character is supported by the increasing evidence to be found in international public opinion research. But to the world if we are idealistic, humane, and generous, the polls also reflect that we are also capable of venality, naivete, and cruelty—a strange blend.

5. Che Guevara's call for "two, three or more Vietnams" in Latin America has led not to an analysis of local societies and their far-reaching problems, but to a call for increased military assistance, hardly the political and psychological counterthrust needed. Witness the status of popular government in Latin America today.

6. Not enough attention and research has been given to the great military debates of the 1950's when military thinkers such as Generals Matthew Ridgeway and James Gavin fought the political notion of U.S. involvement in land warfare on the continent of Asia, buttressed by an offshore strategy espoused by Adm. Arleigh Burke, a concept later developed in the face of great hostility by Walter Lippman in the late 1960's.

7. The engineering of development became an end-all in itself; an oversold weapon against communism; the proof positive of American entrepreneurial ingenuity. The Rostowian concept of "rising expectations" carried the day until an MIT colleague, Daniel Lerner, pulled the theoretical rug out from under neodeterministic principles of economic aid with his perceptive axiom regarding the curve of "rising national frustrations" to be found where economic aid as promised fails to produce success, progress, affluence, and, most annoying of all, development.

8. The tragedy of the U.S. Information Agency is a classic case of institutionalizing a technique (primarily to counterpunch at Communist propaganda thrusts) without first developing the integrated concept of communications as a political instrument.

9. U.S. Congress, House, Committee on Foreign Affairs, Subcommittee on International Organizations and Communications, *Modern Communications and Foreign Affairs*, Report 5 together with Part X of the Hearings (Washington: U.S. Govt. Print. Off., 1966).

10. A tragic but illuminating example is to be found in the backwash of our national triumph of putting men on the moon. A bitter and petty fight broke out between the U.S. Information Agency, which clearly has a mandate in the field of information, and NASA, which has not, over which agency was to supply film coverage for the world.

11. Sir Robert Thompson, "What Went Wrong? The Failure of American Strategy in Vietnam," *Interplay*, April 1969, p. 13.