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COUNTERINSURGENCY REVISITED

by

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It is a time of revolution.

The scientific revolution is projecting men's minds across known physical barriers. The revolution of rising expectations is without boundaries: all men are learning more and wanting more. There is a revolt against poverty and human misery. Social revolution is seeking to sweep aside the old order in every corner of the world. Yet, in this age of revolution, the mainstay of military policy through which the United States approaches the restless peoples of the underdeveloped world is—Counterinsurgency.

As a word, counterinsurgency has a strange and contradictory ring. As a concept seemingly elevated to the national policy level, it appears sterile and incongruous-fitting neither the times nor the national heritage.

The political heritage of America is rooted in freedom and regard for the people. Repeated official pronouncements have continued this tradition on the international scene by supporting revolutions of, by, and for the people, while opposing Communist arrogation and perversion of independence movements in so-called people's wars. The

strategy, tactics, and techniques developed to meet Communist subversive aggressions are identified by the name of counterinsurgency. In these times there are real political, propaganda, and communications risks accompanying a comprehensive identification of the United States as the world's number one counterinsurgency power. The word is imprecise, and the concept is suspect. The United States has been--and is--the land of economic opportunity and social mobility, and the number one revolutionary power in the world.

The U.S. Armed Forces have been actively participating in counterinsurgency action for the past 7 years. During these years certain preconceived concepts have crystallized. Doctrines and personnel training have been predicated on these concepts, and they have been severely tested in a Southeast Asia laboratory. However, the historical nature of the Vietnam conflict and the realities of the political and military situation in that country make it most difficult to assess our counterinsurgency concept, doctrine, and organization. Nevertheless, a comprehensive and penetrating evaluation of this effort must be made, taking into account the changing level of conflict.

Characteristically, the United States has done well in those areas in which traditional experience in conventional war and industrial organization could be applied. In the areas of planning, programming, and hardware--all familiar environments to the DOD apparatus--U.S. Armed Forces have done well. In the areas of psychology, cross-cultural communications, and politics, the U.S. military has not achieved any clear, discernible pattern for success.

A differentiation needs to be made between the combat capabilities of U.S. Armed Forces in the war aspects of the confrontation in Vietnam and, for that matter, Thailand and the political stabilization and pacification aspects. The combat record of American troops has

never been better. The Viet Cong and the regular Army of North Vietnam have been decisively defeated in every significant engagement. Unfortunately, this splendid combat record is only marginally relevant.

In the political and pacification struggle the pattern in South Vietnam has been rather dreary. Bursts of activity will take place in the form of new ideas and increases in aid. When success is not apparent, there will be a return to the old patterns with the spigot of aid remaining wide open with little to show in the form of real progress. It has become a truism that when you don't know what to do, do what you know.

The fact that our soldiers are brave and our leaders are steadfast is not significant. One need only recall the religious wars in France in the 16th century to see the frustration of soldiers confronted by the power of propaganda--"We had beaten our enemies over and over again," cried the frustrated Catholic soldier Montluc, "we were winning by force of arms but they triumphed by means of their diabolical writings." Since it is the military man who is suffering the real as well as the bulk of psychological wounds arising from counterinsurgency warfare failures, it would seem appropriate that military men take some part in rethinking the concept and approach to counterinsurgency. It may be that in the process, hinderances such as vested interests and the professional reputations and domestic posture of personages espousing certain courses of action will come under sharp scrutiny. But it is a fact that those concerned are already under an abusive fire from a variety of interest groups, some of which cannot be described as either objective or responsible.

Much has been written on the non-military aspects of people's wars. The Communist activist has the seeming advantage that his political and behavioral system can consistently manipulate

and control all forms of social conflict, while our own Anglo-Saxon democratic parliamentary system puts a premium upon social cooperation to resolve conflicts to mutual advantage. Communist doctrine has the benefit of political and social totalism which is a significant advantage in dealing with uneducated people. Their dogma and techniques of revolutionary propagandistic warfare are essentially alien to a free world military man because they reduce the military contribution into but one, and not the most important, segment of a larger political struggle. Counterinsurgency therefore becomes essentially political just as the Counter Reformation was essentially religious.

All U.S. writings on counterinsurgency talk glibly of winning the hearts and minds of dissident peoples as though this were some kind of political contest in which American competitive party politics could find a means of expression. Actually, what is at stake is control. The Communists have put their faith in Pavlovian control over people, and they depend upon the docility and perversity of mankind, while the United States is attempting to idealize the humanitarian aspects in the way that wins votes on the domestic scene, but does not result in control in an insurgency situation.

In the revolutionary environment of emerging countries, where leadership is always at a premium and people frequently lack social discipline or a tight political organizational framework, the United States is hard put to find a successful means of influencing non-Communist leaders. Conversely, the Communists supply the missing ingredient by means of the party cadre through doctrine, organization, and discipline. The United States, meanwhile, attempts to bring all elements of the fractured South Vietnam society together in order to fight the anti-Communist war. Meanwhile, the Communists, with a single purpose and by

ruthless elimination of opposing leaders and factions, marshal their own supporters and coerce the vacillating majority.

It is unfortunate that the area of heaviest engagement is in South Vietnam where the cards have been heavily stacked in favor of the Communists since World War II. In this environment our basic philosophy that people can be won to the cause of freedom by appealing to their "hearts and minds" through using kindness, honesty, and self-sacrifice has not prevailed. The techniques for influencing the government and military leaders of the non-Communist structure in South Vietnam have, to date, not been successful. Our best efforts to support the opportunity for a free South Vietnam appear to suffer as much from naivete as they do from overt Communist action.

From the beginning of the counterinsurgency involvement by the United States, some dangerous illusions have menaced the prospect of success. Six of these illusions are briefly discussed below and, in the opinion of the writer, deserve further investigation. From the military point of view the most trying of all these illusions is the first listed.

1. **The military can "go it alone."** Mao Tse-tung's concept of "the people's war" pattern is known to all responsible and concerned Government leaders and agencies. It was, however, the military which assumed the counterinsurgency responsibility and developed the counterinsurgency capability at the operating level. This tended to emphasize the *war* rather than the people. It also helped create the illusion that military victories and kill-in-action ratios are the measure of success in Vietnam. The enemy suffers no such illusion. As early as 1963, captured Viet Cong documents stated the conviction that they had gained "absolute political superiority" over the U.S.-supported Diem government and that the introduction of more U.S. troops would only strengthen the Viet

Cong political position.

Under somewhat similar circumstances a French officer, despairing of victory in the Indochina war, recognized that military action alone was ineffective against a social and economic revolution. French political bankruptcy in Indochina commenced an alienation of the French Army which was compounded by Algeria. Here the French Army, attempting to compensate for political deficiencies, developed a theory of revolutionary war; established a "Seventh Arm of the Service" to emphasize psychological warfare and formed the Services Administratives Speciaux to handle civil affairs and to fill civil administrative posts.

From George Washington on, the U.S. military has subscribed to and accepted civilian control. However, the military establishment was never small enough to escape being considered a menace to liberty—a potential instrument with which to "overawe" the people. The traditional fear of military domination has been heightened during the cold war. There is a rash of apprehensive writings noting the pervasiveness of the military in the complex machinery of deterrence. Serious attention centers on the prospective growth of a "garrison" or "warfare" state. Fiction writers focus on sensational scare-crows—a military coup or technological ironies involving tragic consequences.

The danger of too much military participation in U.S. society is exhaustively noted. However, the corollary has not received equal attention. The corollary is that *people's wars need more than soldier participation at the grass roots-or dirt floor-level if U.S. counter-insurgency operations are to succeed.* The fact that the U.S. military professional is not generally "political" precludes adopting Communist techniques in people's wars. Therefore, the Communist general purpose agitator-organizer-propagandist-warrior is a political-military weapon which U.S.

military forces have not been able to counter. Yet, where the United States faces communism in this type struggle, it is the military which is directly involved because in our society only soldiers traditionally fight wars. Political control providing economic and social reforms—the essentials of winning a people's war—are beyond the capability and outside the purview of existing U.S. military forces. Nevertheless, a political vacuum at the operating level serves to explain Army civil affairs and psychological inputs into counterinsurgency concepts and capabilities.

At the highest levels many military leaders enthusiastically embraced counterinsurgency because—in marked contrast with pushbutton, thermonuclear catastrophe—it helped restore military force to a rational position in human conflict. Budgetary considerations accompanying the shift towards more intimate forms of warfare also exerted a strong influence. However, the desire to serve the nation to the fullest extent should not blind military leaders to the consequences of assuming a greater counterinsurgency role than the military can play. And this has been one of the tragedies of Vietnam.

The realities are that because of the nature of people's wars, U.S. political tradition, and the organization of the Government—the military cannot win a people's war: the illusion is that the services are waging a war in Vietnam which troops can win. A political revolution is something quite different from a conventional military campaign, and yet we persist in viewing Vietnam as a war which will be won when we bring enough power and force to bear.

2. Advisers can win people's wars. This misconception is the consequence and focus of the preceding illusion. It is the direct product of an unrealistic cultural and management situation in which the adviser suffers all the handicaps of unauthoritative responsibility.

When local troops perform poorly or run away, military advisers are frustrated--but they too must run. By the nature of his position the adviser is denied the moral force of effective leadership, and frequently he becomes the critical victim of his erstwhile comrades. Divisive forces accompany these experiences, and they have political overtones. Advisers, who are powerless either to accomplish reforms or to lead, can help mount extensive military operations--they cannot cope with the essential political and social problems.

Perhaps the most disastrous form of this illusion in the Vietnamese context is the difference between the sophisticated, disciplined structure of the advisory organization contrasted with the less efficient, less responsive local government and armed forces which derive their values (considered as valid as ours by the Vietnamese) from a totally different culture. This difference frequently leads the leadership in the advisory structure to act as though the advisers were actually in responsible control: the fact is that the Vietnamese are, and must be, in terminal control. The illusion of advisory control and responsibility creates great tensions in the advisory structure at the operational level and anomalous conditions at the highest levels of intergovernmental relationships. It is ironic that the advisers have far superior technical expertise and have the know-how in every area except that of rallying the people to the government which, to date, transcends the experience and authority of the professional soldier. The more efficient--or even popular--and obtrusive the adviser, the more the real political situation deteriorates.

3. Beat the Communists at their own game. It can be inferred from press coverage of certain U.S. service units with special guerrilla and antiguerrilla warfare capabilities that these units could be used for covert purposes in

people's wars and turn Communist techniques against the innovators. This is illusory for two reasons: (1) The units concerned can do a superb military job of fighting--but this still leaves the task of political organization of the rear to be accomplished; (2) knowing how the techniques work, the Communists institute a closed society with an all-encompassing network of physical and mental coercion to control effectively the people. Further, there are real dangers inherent in developing clandestine subversive organizations by free societies. In trying to build a world of law, the United States should seriously consider the lawless legacy of partisan warfare. In spite of the variety of races in the United States, there is a paucity of persons who combine intimate knowledge of underdeveloped areas and languages with the instincts required for subversion. Covert gangsterism, even against Communist regimes, is contrary to the American character and, in the long run, may be equally contrary to American interests.

An even worse aspect of this technique is that of the pattern of growth of the Vietnamese involvement. In what may have been primarily the desire to low key the activities of the United States in Vietnam in order to match the Communist political methodology, the level of Communist aggression. At the same time, graduated response was adopted to signal limited goals to Hanoi, Communist China, and the U.S.S.R. Unfortunately, no person or agency had the prescience or foresight to understand the combined effects of speaking out of both sides of the mouth, while at the same time U.S. combat actions were becoming more visible every day.

Quite clearly, Communist leadership estimated that they could absorb the U.S. military self-restricted gradualism and count upon U.S. domestic and worldwide antiwar propaganda and social pressure to achieve a political military buildup continually over-

matched the political preparation of the American public. This approach alienated many potential supporters in Congress because they could see deeper involvements without the traditional consent of Congress in the form of increased appropriations or moral approbation. Seemingly there was, initially at least, the hope that a satisfactory solution could be found through gradual responses which would not require special appropriations nor major economic dislocations on the domestic scene. In short, the desired objective was to signal determination to Hanoi and Communist China by matching each victory for the Viet Cong. To date it seems that we did not beat the Communists at their own game politically—we just played their game.

4. The "people" are not for the Viet Cong. Perhaps the most dangerous of all illusions has been the comfort derived from the fact that the people of South Vietnam have not gone over to the Viet Cong. The illusion is that this represents a government achievement and hurts the Viet Cong. The people generally have fled from the war, if not the Viet Cong. True. Witness the thousands of refugees. A large percentage of Viet Cong recruits are forced into service. True. Witness the numbers who return to government control at the first opportunity under the Chieu Hoi program. The people, in the large, do not support the Viet Cong willingly. Neither do they support the government. In their fear and desire to be left alone they are victims of Communist techniques. It is the negative aspects of their lack of support to the government which is crucial. Refugees do not occupy areas, cannot give information, do not pay taxes. Refugees dramatize failure, are an incipient source of disenchantment, and are a drain upon the total effort. Neutralism of the population in any form denies the government resources of every kind and is an insurgent achievement of

fundamental importance. The hard truth is that if the South Vietnamese peasant does not actively join the fight out of a desire to be free of Viet Cong influence, the outlook for victory against the insurgency is bleak.

It is an irony of behavior and history that the least coercive and seemingly most attractive option should stand to lose because of its better nature. But lose it will, unless the people have the vision and desire to rescue themselves. Therefore, the oft-repeated statement that the people are not for the Viet Cong is both irrelevant and delusive. Lenin said that a man seeking a quiet life should not be born in the 20th century. Terrible but true. Equally true is the fact that you cannot give a man his freedom if he does not want it more than life. But neither can mankind be permanently denied the highest form of freedom discernible at a given time. Witness the worldwide social unrest and, most particularly, the emergence of "reform" governments under the Communist banner in Europe.

5. Technology and foreign aid can substitute for the support of people. American technology has not been decisive in the fulfillment of U.S. interests in social revolutions in the under-

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 Advisor to the President, Naval War College.

developed areas. In a people's war the battlefield, the objective, and the source of intelligence and support are the people. Communist literature and the U.S. press frequently make slighting references to the United States as the donor of weapons and equipment to Communist revolutionaries—using incompetent local governments and ineffective local troops as the delivery means. The efficacy of technology or foreign aid in lieu of popular support of people's wars is illusory.

6. U.S. idealism and organization can substitute for indigenous leadership and reform. In the Orient—before and after the name counterinsurgency received common coinage—there was high hope that democratic attitudes and organizational efficiencies made in the United States would be reflected in the success of governments created and adopted in the name of anticommunism. American organizational genius devised structures and concepts for supporting the efforts of local leaders. Frequently, however, both the Americans and the concepts were thwarted because they menaced the privileges and power of indigenous governing elites and because they showed a dismal understanding of history and culture. This fact develops a point of basic cleavage which widens in direct proportion to operational failures. The expectation that U.S. idealism and organization can in any way substitute or ignore indigenous leadership, cultural heritage, and tradition in the quest of needed political, social, and economic reform is an extremely dangerous illusion.

This paper has obviously not sought to evaluate the merit of our involvement in Southeast Asia, but rather has attempted to examine briefly the quality

of the effort. Historians, in some future time, may well look favorably on the strategic value of U.S. action and must acknowledge the bravery and tactical skill of the fighting effort, but it is quite doubtful that they will be impressed by the intellectual and conceptual excellence with which it was conducted. The theory and practice of the counterinsurgency endeavor simply did not cope with the cultural, social, and political realities. And it would appear that these factors will be decisive in other underdeveloped areas which will be plagued with Communist-sponsored subversive insurgency. The point to be made is that we need a greater intellectual commitment to the problem rather than more men and material resources.

What can be done? First, let us rid ourselves of the counterinsurgency mentality—old illusions and images must go. The United States must participate in and lead the revolutionary spirit of the age rather than seeking to counter it. Therefore, our good intentions must be harnessed to effective methods. This will require a total assessment of the management of the Vietnamese involvement. This cannot be done without the broadest kind of military participation.

In the course of this assessment we must keep in mind that the hope of free men in this world rests on U.S. military posture, its economic strength, its social unity, and the ultimate attractiveness of American society. There exists no easy path for the United States, and those who believe that one exists do not appreciate the realities of world politics. Hopefully, our Vietnam experience has not poisoned our minds to the degree that we will be unable to develop a decent, respectable, and effective method of participating in the social revolution of our time.