

UNCONVENTIONAL WARFARE

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The world of today can look back at some fifty years of widespread and virtually continuous political revolution. Probably more governments have come into being, passed through drastic change, or ceased to exist than in any comparable period in history. Certainly a larger proportion of the world's population has been involved in and has been aware of these upheavals than was ever the case in earlier days. It is the political phenomenon of the twentieth century, the visible wind of revolution, stirring in many continents.

Revolutionary warfare

These changes in regime have been brought about, in the main, by a new form of warfare, now widely termed revolutionary warfare. This new form of warfare, that is symptomatic of our age, has crystallised very rapidly since the end of World War II. It differs fundamentally from the wars of the past in that victory does not come from the clash of two armies on a field of battle. Military operations, as combat actions carried out against opposing forces are, in fact, of limited importance and are never the total conflict. Instead, revolutionary wars are conducted as a carefully co-ordinated system of actions, political, economic, administrative, psychological, police and military. The aim of the insurgent is to subvert and overthrow the established regime and to replace it with another. He will use any means to attain his objective, including ruthless force. His primary task is to gain the support of the people. This he sets out to achieve by establishing a small clandestine organisation whose role is to impose its will upon the population, and get its support or the support of a significant portion of it. The next step is to inspire a revolutionary state of mind in as many of the population as possible — to kindle the torch of war. Without the consent and active aid of the people the guerilla would be merely a bandit and could not long survive.

On the other hand victory can be obtained by a government only by retaining and, if temporarily lost, by recapturing

the support of the masses, and by the complete destruction of the organisation and the eradication of its influence upon the people.

During the past twenty-five years numerous revolutionary wars have been waged throughout the world. These include China, Malaya, the Philippines, Greece, Cyprus, Indonesia, Algeria, Angola, Vietnam, etc., etc. Most, but not all of them, have been Communist inspired. In all of them propaganda, terrorism and guerillas have been the insurgent's main weapons. On January 6, 1961, Krushchev made his notorious speech in which he announced that the Soviets would lend their support to revolutionary wars within the nations of the free world. This made a matter of public record a policy which the Soviet Union had long been following. Red China, too, has entered the field of aggressive predatory Communism and her leader Mao-Tse-Tung is among the most successful proponents of this form of warfare in the world — and possibly the most spectacularly successful. The author feels that the reason why Communists have been able to exercise such a dynamic influence in many revolutionary wars is that Communist parties possess not only a wide and varied experience of revolutionary wars but deep-rooted traditions of revolution which date back into history. One result of this is that they have developed a strategy to which the West has not yet developed an entirely adequate response.

It is important to understand the methods both the USSR and Communist China use to achieve their aims, and why the revolutionary warfare they propound seems so appealing and promising for them. Even the most cursory look at the appealing consequences of an all-out thermo-nuclear conflict makes it clear that there can be no ultimate winner, and this conclusion is just as evident in Moscow and Peking as in the West. The forward momentum called for by Communism's creed of world domination must, therefore, be assured by some lesser form of conflict; preferably by the form least likely to lead to escalation into an unprofitable and almost certainly disastrous holocaust. Inexpensive, easily fomented and extremely difficult to counteract, revolutionary warfare has become one of the most efficient weapons in the Communist arsenal. It is now a key element in the world wide drive for power and domination, and this southern tip of Africa of ours is one

of their avowed targets. Indeed Southern Africa has had ample evidence of internal revolutionary activity in recent years and should anticipate even more frequent, more widespread and more efficient attempts.

Revolutionary warfare must be recognised for what it really is — aggression from outside. The first phase, political subversion and the following phase, armed insurrection are equally to be seen in this light, as being aggression from outside. Revolutionary warfare is a subversive and sinister process, a sort of “plague of dragons teeth, sown and nourished in the soil of confusion, social dissension, economic disruptions, etc., causing armed fanatics to spring up where peaceful peasants worked”.

The great majority of revolutionary wars have been won by the insurgents. In only one have the insurgents been completely defeated — Malaya. (Two, if the Mau Mau troubles in Kenya are considered to have been a revolutionary war). In others there have been partial successes by government forces, but these have been of a temporary nature only. Vietnam is an example of this. In some revolutionary wars the military campaigns have been won by government troops or nearly so, but the wars have finally been lost politically. Algeria is a classic example of this. A Frenchman has said about this war that they lost with bad politics and administration and worse propaganda what they had won with good fighting.

Revolutionary war has its own special rules or principles, different from those of conventional war. Whereas in conventional war the principles of war hold equally true for both sides, in revolutionary war most of the rules applicable to one side do not work for the other. There are two distinct types of warfare — insurgency and counter-insurgency. Insurgency, of which guerilla war is a part, is the agency of radical social or political change. Counter-insurgency is a form of counter-revolution, the process by which revolution is resisted. Many books and treatises on revolutionary war are misleading. For instance, what Mao Tse-Tung calls the “rules of revolutionary war” are, in fact, those of a revolutionary side. The one who directs a war against a revolutionary movement will not find in Mao, Chè Guevara or many other revolutionary writers the answers to his problems. He will, indeed, find useful information on how the insurgent acts, and he may

perhaps infer the answers he is looking for, but nowhere there will he find them explicitly stated. Fortunately there is an increasing volume of literature for the counter-insurgent. Among the best books that have been written so far, in the author's opinion, are those by Frenchmen — paradoxically enough, as they lost both their revolutionary wars — Indo-China and Algeria. The British who are the only people to have won against insurgents have been typically reticent about the reasons for their success. Only recently have they published some first-rate literature on the subject e.g. Sir Robert Thompson's *Defeating Communist Insurgency*. Only recently, too, have the British Joint Chiefs of Staff laid down a definite policy to be followed by their armed forces in counter-insurgency. Until now they stated to enunciate formulae, to dogmatise about counter-insurgency would be dangerous. Ingenuity, inspiration, expediency, flexibility, resolution and boldness were their golden rules.

While one or two of the revolutionary wars of the last quarter century had some similarities, no two such wars have been identical. Nevertheless there have been certain factors common to them all. From the point of view of the insurgents perhaps the basic ingredients of successful revolution are:

- a popular cause;
- trained, efficient and dedicated leadership;
- time to develop;
- support of the population;
- a population with a need, a determination and an ability, to wage a prolonged struggle;
- outside support;
- a firm base or sanctuary.

The basic principles to be applied, on the other hand, by a government in power have formed the subject of considerable research and study and are now almost completely crystallised.

I propose now to outline what I consider is the nature of revolutionary warfare.

A political war

„A revolutionary war is 20 per cent military action and

80 per cent political" — Colonel David Galula (French Army).

The failure to recognise this is bound to lead ultimately to failure in countering and defeating the insurgent.

The basic motive behind revolution is to eliminate the old political order and establish a new government more desirable to the revolutionary rulers and the people whom they persuade to side with them. The basic tenet of the exercise of political power is that there is always an active minority for the cause, an uncommitted majority and an active minority against the cause. For ultimate victory it is necessary to obtain the support of the neutral or uncommitted majority. The objective for both sides in a revolutionary war is, thus, the population itself. The operations designed to win the population over for the insurgents, or to keep it at least submissive to the dictates of the government, is essentially of a political nature. Consequently political action remains paramount throughout the war. That the political power is the undisputed boss is a matter of both principle and practicality. What is at stake is the country's political regime, and to defend it is a political affair. Even if this requires military action, the action is constantly directed towards the political goal. Essential though it is, the military action is secondary to the political one, its primary purpose being to afford the political power enough freedom to work safely with the population.

"The Times" (of London) of 31 July 1963 stated the following about the United States Special Warfare Centre: *"The whole emphasis of training at Fort Bragg is on the realisation, frustrating as it may be to a great military power, that armed force alone is virtually powerless against organised guerilla troops in revolutionary war."*

Yet despite this, in South Vietnam today the United States still seems to place too much emphasis on conventional military power and, even now that it is almost too late, does not seem to grasp the paramount importance of the political factor in revolutionary warfare. They have so far failed to fashion a workable programme for gaining popular support for the South Vietnamese government. The position was succinctly described by a Japanese reporter recently who said that "the South Vietnamese and the Americans understand the political

nature of the war in theory, but not in practice". The longer this awareness is absent the harder will it be to win. But it must be recognised that it is not enough for the government to set political goals, to determine how much military force is applicable, or what civil administration and propaganda methods will be adopted: politics and the administration of the government's policies become an active and a primary instrument of operations. And so intricate is the interplay between it and military actions that they cannot be tidily separated. On the contrary, every military and administrative move has to be weighed with regard to their political effects and vice versa.

More than armed forces

The armed forces are but one of the many instruments in the hands of the government. It is the function of the political power to harness the non-military instruments, to see that appropriations come at the right time to consolidate the military work, that political and social reforms follow through, etc. Military tactics and hardware are all well and good, but they are really quite useless if the government has lost the confidence of the people among whom it is fighting. And by the time their confidence has been lost more armed force will cause the population to become more antagonistic. It is imperative that political and military leaders and senior civil servants in all government departments should learn that revolutionary warfare cannot be left to happy improvisation and military technology. Most measures essential to forestall or quell insurgency must be taken by the civil departments of the government.

Although the armed forces and the police are there to fight against insurgency, just as they are there to defend the country against conventional attack, they are neither organised nor equipped to combat the causes of revolutionary wars. To recognise that counter-insurgency is a total war within the country is implicitly to recognise that the armed forces and the police can no longer handle more than a part of it. The inescapable conclusion is that the overall responsibility rests with the civilian power at every possible level.

The population

The objective for both sides, in a revolutionary war is to gain the support of the mass of the population, their approval, sympathy and active participation. A government must get the majority of the population on its side and this includes the indigenous population, or recapture their support if it has been lost. The insurgent has to gain control of the people by converting to his cause sufficient of them to control the rest.

When a revolutionary situation or a potential revolutionary situation already exists, it means that the insurgents have already gained a head start; the population being *their* objective too. But it must be remembered that for either side, support from the population is conditional on the confidence of the population being retained.

Typical of the insurgents' methods of gaining the support of the people are a dynamic cause, threats, terrorism and promises — because the insurgents have not yet acquired any responsibility for government, these promises may be quite impossible of fulfilment. But it is important to realise that adequate support for a guerilla movement does not necessarily mean the enthusiastic, voluntary backing of a large majority of the population. Indeed, among developing peoples the majority has relatively little understanding of any but the most personal and immediate political issues, and many would have relatively little feeling one way or the other even if they did understand them. The active participation of a small number of people and the general apathy of the majority often provide all the popular support necessary to make a successful revolution.

The support of the population for a government is gained through the favourable minority. The strategic problem of a government may be defined as follows: "To find the favourable minority and to organise it in order to mobilise the rest of the population against the insurgent minority".

Every operation, whether in the military field or in the political, social, economic or psychological fields must be geared to this end. It is necessary to show that the government's cause is better and its strength and ability greater than the insurgents'. This underlines the necessity for the government to come out with an acceptable counter-cause.

Once the insurgent has established his hold over the population, the active minority that was hostile to him becomes invisible. Some have been eliminated physically, thereby providing an example to the others; others have escaped; most have been intimidated into hiding their true feelings and have thus melted into the majority of the population; a few are even making a show of their support for the insurgency. The bulk of the population, watched by the active supporters of the insurgency, lives under the threat of denunciation to the political cells and of prompt punishment by the insurgents. The minority, hostile to the insurgent, will not and cannot emerge as long as the threat has not been lifted, the emerging government supporters will not be able to rally the bulk of the population as long as the population is not convinced that the government has the will, the means and the ability to win.

Effective measures

Five important points are:

- Effective political action on the population must be preceded by police and/or military operations against the guerilla units and the insurgent political organisations.
- Political, social, economic and other reforms, however popular and necessary they might be, are inoperative when offered while the insurgent still controls the population.
- The reigning government needs a convincing success as early as possible in order to demonstrate that it has the will, the means and the ability to win.
- The government must advertise its successes as widely as it is able in order to bring them to the minds and consciousness of the people whose confidence they must bolster.
- The government cannot safely enter into negotiations except from a position of strength or its potential supporters will flock to the insurgents' side.

It would be a mistake to believe that a government cannot get the population's support unless it concedes political reforms. There are means of keeping the population submissive to government dictates. However unpopular the government may be, if it is sufficiently strong-willed and powerful and if it

can rely on a small but active core of supporters who remain loyal to it because they would lose everything including their lives if the insurgent wins, it can maintain itself in power. It may very well withdraw whatever benefits the population receives from the mere existence of its regime — a measure of law and order, a more-or-less running economy, functioning public works and services, etc., and restore them gradually as a reward for the population's co-operation. It may, for instance, ration food and see that only those who co-operate receive ration cards. It may, at the same time, utilise to the utmost those who are willing to support the government actively, giving them increased privileges and power, and ruling through them, however disliked they may be. This is the way the Kadar regime in Hungary and others no doubt, keep themselves in power. But such a dictatorial policy of force could bring, at best, a precarious return to the 'status ante quo', of perpetual tension, not a lasting peace.

Outside assistance

Popular uprisings or revolutions rarely succeed without outside assistance.

Insurrection takes on another dimension when the insurgents are encouraged and supported by the government of another State. It has been suggested that had the Chinese Communists in Malaya not been cut off from the support and material assistance of China herself, the British may easily have found themselves in the same position in Malaya in which the Americans find themselves in Vietnam today.

Inciting rebellion has become a technique of foreign policy and a form of unconventional international aggression. Since this sort of unacknowledged and irregular attack is not aggression in the classical sense of the word, it is difficult to demonstrate to international tribunals and to the world at large that aggression is indeed taking place, and as a result effective forms of defence and retaliation are hard to determine and carry out without world opinion coming down hard against a government taking strong action against those who would overthrow it. This is unconventional warfare as we are seeing it waged today.

Attacks of this sort are certainly nothing new in the world,

for stirring up trouble in neighbouring states is an ancient political pastime. Encouraging rebellion and civil war by supporting and guiding the disaffected has always been a temptingly easy way of making trouble and gaining political objectives. For example, the government of France complicated and enlivened British politics for well over a century by supporting the Stuart claims to the British crown, and that policy was not wholly different in its tactics and objectives from the infinitely more extensive efforts that the communist leaders are pursuing throughout the world today.

Conventional warfare to follow

Propaganda, terrorism and guerillas constitute only one stage of modern warfare, designed to create a situation favourable to the build-up of conventional forces for the purpose, eventually, of confronting government forces on the battlefield, and defeating them.

In China and at Dien Bien Phu guerillas were used to supplement conventional forces, which is their classical employment in international war and which, according to Mao Tse-Tung, is their proper employment in revolutionary war, i.e. they must be followed up by conventional forces. However, only Mao Tse-Tung in China and General Giap in French Indo-China have used guerillas in this way in revolutionary warfare. In view of the increasing influence being created by Red China throughout the world, it is reasonable to expect that future revolutionary wars will be followed by conventional forces in typically Mao Tse-Tung campaigns. For this reason it is imperative that a government's conventional warfare potential be not dissipated for counter-insurgency operations. They must remain in being. Equally important is it that counter-insurgency forces be capable quickly of resuming the conventional role and their commanders of applying the appropriate strategy. This latter is so because conventional war ultimately hinges on the ability to destroy the enemy's main armed forces in pitched battle whereas in revolutionary war this is not so. This stark fact is not easily grasped by civilian leaders. Indeed, even some military leaders, and Orde Wingate foremost among them, seem to suffer from the same strategic astigmatism, possibly caused by their penchant for and skill in guerilla-type operations.

If a country's manpower is not enough for both counter-insurgency and conventional commitments, then at least the fire power of the conventional forces must be increased to right the imbalance.

Time, patience and all other resources

Time is a weapon of the insurgents. Communists and other insurgents recognise that at the beginning of a revolutionary war the balance of forces is likely to be in favour of the government they intend to overthrow. The process of changing this balance may be long and difficult. They expect no great success until the support of the population has been effectively won. They stress this fact by preparing their cadres for a protracted war, thus forestalling any disillusionment that may later occur in their forces.

More than anything it must be realised that to communist-inspired revolutionaries time is unimportant. The communist doctrine states that revolution is perpetual. Revolutionary war, more often than not is war of attrition. This is where guerillas demonstrate their enormous power. A successful insurgency operation takes a long time to complete. Insurgents recognise this; and their only concern with time is that they should have enough to complete their operations. Mao Tse-Tung believes that time at the insurgent's disposal is in direct proportion to the space in which he can operate. He does not concentrate on the problem of ending a war quickly. His problem is to keep it going. He believes also that space in Africa could be made to yield time, and time, revolutionary organisations, political cohesion and victory — for Communism. The communists have a monopoly of patience. The anti-communist front is committed to quick victory and therefore cannot and will not underwrite a long drawn-out war — until the government and the people are made alive to the necessity to face up to this unpleasant prospect. Government forces must recognise that their counter-insurgency programme will be long drawn out.

Revolutionary war will tax to the utmost the full resources and patience of any state. Simon Bolivar wrote: "It is a terrible truth that it costs more strength to maintain freedom than to endure the weight of tyranny". The operations needed to relieve the population from the insurgents' threat or domination

and to convince it that the government will ultimately win, are necessarily of an intensive nature and of long duration. They require an exorbitant concentration of effort, resources and personnel. This invariably means that operations (military, political, economic, administrative, etc.) have to be applied successively area by area. Staying power is an attribute that is vital for eventual government success. Operations in Malaya took 12 years and Algeria 8 years to be concluded.

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The very nature of revolutionary warfare is based on the following considerations: the political aspect is the dominant factor; the support of the local population must be obtained; it is a type of external aggression; the ultimate aim is to engage and overpower the government forces by means of conventional warfare; time is a factor in favour of the insurgents; counter-insurgency requires a sustained effort on the part of the government.

The South African armed forces are not unaware of the seriousness of the threat against our country. We are well prepared and we shall overcome.