

INSURGENCY AND COUNTERINSURGENCY: THE ROLE OF STRATEGIC THEORY

by

CHARLES MAECHLING, JR.

Alarm signals are again flying in the national security establishment over the danger posed by subversion, terrorism, and guerrilla warfare in regions important to the security interests of the United States. Once again conflicting voices are heard inside government and out over the causes of third world turmoil and the proper response: local factors versus external subversion, economic aid versus overt and covert military intervention.

In this debate strategic theory has so far played little part. In contrast to 20 years ago, when the Maoist doctrine of protracted revolutionary war and the writings of Giap, Guevara, and others on guerrilla warfare stimulated a wave of interest in counterinsurgency strategy, the current approach is pragmatic and tactical. Countermeasures are being thought of in primarily military terms, linked to political objectives but separated from them as regards execution, and generally unrelated to social and economic goals.

By contrast, most revolutionary movements in the third world, Marxist and non-Marxist, continue to pursue comprehensive strategies that amalgamate military and nonmilitary components. These strategies are also more protracted in duration than the counterinsurgency programs of the United States, which tend to be reactive and decision-seeking. Unless these revolutionary strategies are understood, the United States will face a

series of Vietnam-like defeats, smaller in scale but more devastating in cumulative impact.

There is no secret about the ingredients of guerrilla warfare—at the purely tactical level it so closely resembles its parent, irregular or partisan warfare, that to the uninstructed there seems to be no distinction between them. The tendency to blur the distinction is reinforced by the fact that partisan warfare is as old as the history of warfare—indeed, as practiced by the Spanish *guerrilleros* against Napoleon's invading army it gave the word "guerrilla" international currency. It is the injection of ideology into guerrilla operations that transforms partisan warfare into revolutionary war. The creator of revolutionary warfare doctrine in the modern sense was Mao Tse-tung, who became the theorist of his own experience.¹

Twenty years ago, before the grand disillusionment of Vietnam, the Kennedy Administration made the first systematic US government effort to come to grips with the problem. In 1961, President Kennedy and his personal military representative (later Chairman of the Joint Chiefs of Staff), General Maxwell D. Taylor, created a cabinet-level counterinsurgency committee to monitor revolutionary movements attacking vulnerable regimes in Asia, Africa, and Latin America and to devise a counter strategy.² Among other actions the Kennedy Administration undertook a vast education

program to indoctrinate US military and foreign service personnel, from ambassador on down, in the causes of social and economic instability in developing countries.³

These were the years when social science academics flocked to Washington and competing theories about the causes of third world turmoil abounded. Influencing the dialogue at the White House policymaking level were the ideas of W. W. Rostow as expounded in his *Stages of Economic Growth*.⁴ He postulated an ideal world of independent nation-states, each evolving toward Jeffersonian democracy through a series of quantum leaps, and suggested that the United States protect the developmental process in strategically important client-states, especially during periods of their maximum vulnerability to communist takeover, which were supposed to coincide with the transition from one stage to another.

Rostow's explanation of the causes of third world violence barely mentioned historical factors and reduced ethnic and cultural patterns to irrelevance. In addition, it did not address the theory and practice of revolutionary warfare. As a result, it was tacitly dismissed by the career services of government as being of little practical value. Instead, each of the national security departments reacted in typical agency fashion to third world revolutionary movements.

In general, the instinctive reaction of the State Department was to identify US interests with established governments regardless of their nature and to view revolutionary movements as a threat. It looked to "quick fix" military and economic aid programs as a means of propping up "friendly" regimes. The Central Intelligence Agency focused on external sources of domestic subversion and tended to view left-wing dissent in terms of conspiracy and Marxist penetration. The Pentagon approached revolutionary movements in terms of their military impact and favored broad-brush modernization of local military forces and conversion of their missions from external defense to internal security—with no questions asked as to the political consequences of turning armies into the equivalent of police forces. Tactically, the

Pentagon's training model was the "Special Forces" course at Fort Bragg, North Carolina, which derived from World War II commando and jungle-warfare training.

Neither strategic theory nor the historical experience of nations that had actually grappled with revolutionary movements were given much weight in US government circles. Against France in particular there was a strong and almost irrational bias based on its military defeats in World War II and Indochina. This led to almost total dismissal of the French experience in colonial wars, despite the fact that in a purely military sense the French had won the Algerian war. More respect was accorded to the British victory in Malaya over ethnic Chinese communist insurgents, but since this involved conventional jungle-warfare tactics, it seemed to hold no mysteries for Americans. In general American official thinking about political violence and unconventional warfare rejected European experience as tainted with colonialism.

The same dismissive attitude permeated official US thinking about politico-military theories of revolutionary war. The underlying socioeconomic causes of turmoil and political violence were universally acknowledged, but each specific case tended to be defined in military terms. Hence, US counterinsurgency planning in the 1960s unconsciously fell into the groove of classical strategic theory, as originally expounded by writers like General Karl von Clausewitz,⁵

Charles Maechling, Jr., a senior associate of the Carnegie Endowment for International Peace, is a graduate of Yale and the University of Virginia Law School, and a former professor of international law. A naval officer during World War II, he served at sea and with the Joint Chiefs of Staff. During the Kennedy and Johnson Administrations he was Director for Internal Defense in Politico-military Affairs, and Staff Director of the NSC Special Group (Counter-Insurgency). He is a frequent contributor to *The New York Times*, *Los Angeles Times*, and professional journals.



Henri Jomini,⁶ and Sir Basil Liddell Hart⁷ and refined into US military doctrine by the service war colleges and the Command and General Staff College at Fort Leavenworth.

It was therefore not surprising that when the Kennedy White House called on the National Security Council for a counterinsurgency policy embracing military, economic, social, and psychological factors, this was translated by agency heads into a request for an operational directive that would carve out agency missions, provide the basis for military "doctrine," and set guidelines for furnishing equipment and training to foreign security forces. The result was a 30-page document, drafted by an interdepartmental committee which I chaired, and styled the Overseas Internal Defense Policy (OIDP) of the United States.

The OIDP, which President Kennedy proclaimed national policy in August 1962 and promulgated to all overseas commands and diplomatic posts,⁸ was a somewhat simplistic document. It defined the threat solely in terms of Marxist "wars of national liberation" without discriminating between target governments or concerning itself with the domestic origins and root causes of internal turmoil. It treated each revolutionary movement in a foreign society as if it were a clearly articulated military force instead of the apex of a pyramid deeply embedded in society. It contained virtually no political guidance as to the circumstances in which it should be applied, and no criteria laying down conditions that had to be met by the host country before the aid programs could become operative. Nor was there any reference to US social or economic goals for the country concerned.

In short, the OIDP was not a strategic doctrine, but rather an operational blueprint for security assistance programs in certain third world countries to be specified by executive fiat. Its principal purpose was to prescribe "mission assignments" for government agencies. The programs themselves—military, police, economic assistance, and radio broadcasting—were to be set forth in individual country counterinsurgency plans

jointly worked out between Washington and "the field."

This failure to take the root causes of revolution into account and to integrate social and economic objectives into strategic theory places the OIDP squarely in the classical mainstream. The classical school views the opponent's armed forces as the kernel of its capacity to resist, and all other factors as tangential. It looks to decisive results and clear-cut military solutions, especially to a final victory that will render further resistance hopeless. In classical theory, the theme of a decisive military solution remains constant even when the means to achieve it includes attrition or the indirect approach advocated by some authorities.

At first glance, such a characterization of the classical approach may seem inconsistent with the importance that war colleges attach to the enemy's industrial base and morale, not to mention with Clausewitz's well-known maxim that war is an extension of politics—"a real political instrument, a continuation of political commerce, a carrying out of the same by other means." From earliest times destruction of the enemy's agricultural or industrial base, and interdiction of his foreign trade, have been crucial strategic objectives. Morale has also been rightly regarded as an indispensable component of the will to resist. Both were decisive elements in the American Civil War and the two world wars.

Moreover, until recently wars were fought for some dynastic, territorial, or political goal, which was often inseparable from disruption of the opponent's internal power structure. Allied war aims in the First World War included elimination of both the Hohenzollern monarchy and "Prussian militarism";⁹ in the second, destruction of the Nazi and Fascist political systems.¹⁰ Even more far-reaching changes flowed from the American defeat and occupation of Japan: the Japanese peerage was abolished, the *Zaibatsu* (cartels) were dismantled, farmland was redistributed, labor unions were recognized, self-rule was introduced for local

government, and the armed forces were made subject to civilian control.

Nevertheless, while overthrow of the opponent's political order was sometimes a war aim, and often a consequence of war, destruction of the opponent's entire social order has rarely been a military objective per se. By and large, the reverse has been true. Destruction of the enemy's will to resist implies the presence of a social order capable of giving effect to such will. Implicit in classical theory is preservation of the opponent's social order to enable the victor to enforce a viable peace. Unless total annihilation is the aim (as in Hitler's sadistic plans for Poland) the opponent must be left with a governmental structure of sufficient authority and legitimacy to sign articles of surrender and make them stick.

Hence, from the moment victory looms on the horizon, the victor develops as much of a stake in the stability of the loser's government as the loser. This implies at least minimal restoration of the enemy's old power structure—or creation of a legitimate new one. Otherwise the ensuing vacuum could be fatal to a long-term settlement. The Weimar Republic's lack of legitimacy and the non-participation of the German high command in the 1918 Armistice and subsequent peace settlement led to disavowal of the Versailles Treaty and another world war 20 years later.

The stability of the loser is not only necessary to insure compliance with peace terms; it simplifies the task of the victor in maintaining order and avoiding the perils of famine and disease. Moreover, rule by military government is supposed to be temporary. Sooner or later civil government has to be restored, thereby shifting the burden for famine relief, housing, and employment in devastated and impoverished areas back to the loser.

Since the loser's social order is indispensable to preserving order and achieving a peace settlement, it follows that victors who are primarily interested in restoring stability—and this usually includes the United States—almost automatically wage war according to classical theory, and will try

to preserve the enemy's social order except insofar as its disruption is necessary to insure his defeat. Any other course would implicitly accept long, drawn-out hostilities or prolonged involvement in the defeated enemy's internal affairs. This stake in preserving the enemy's social order, however, creates serious obstacles in combating those adversaries—usually, but not necessarily, Marxist—who engage in protracted “wars of national liberation” or “people's wars.”

The doctrine of protracted revolutionary warfare propounded by Mao Tse-tung and his disciples rejects not the goal but the approach of the classical school. As with the classical school its aim is also destruction of the enemy's will to resist. But instead of regarding defeat of the opponent's armed forces as the primary goal, with disruption of the opponent's social order as ancillary or a byproduct, Maoist doctrine prescribes infiltration of the revolution into the opponent's social fabric as a primary tactic. From the start, Maoist strategy aims at eroding the support that the enemy's social order gives to its armed forces. Defeat of the enemy's armed forces is not abandoned as a goal, and would certainly be accepted if opportunity struck, but is assumed to be so difficult of immediate attainment as to require postponement until its scaffolding is destroyed.

The Maoist theory of revolutionary warfare, which relies heavily on the Chinese experience, involves a series of phases: first, establishment of secure base areas, not necessarily contiguous, to serve as propagation centers for a new social order; second, war of attrition, in part to lure the opponent's conventional forces into overextension or exhaustion through “sweeps” or other conventional tactics; third, guerrilla counterattack with tactical superiority, in order to throw the enemy on the defensive; finally, extension and consolidation of revolutionary base areas and switch to a conventional offensive.

Basic to Maoist theory is mobilization of popular support at an early stage of the insurgency through underground organization of a new social order behind enemy lines. The

overall aim is to win and hold the allegiance of the impoverished masses—the sea which serves the fish (i.e. the revolutionary movement) as a habitat. Thus, a clandestine political campaign is to proceed concurrently with a military campaign, over a time frame adapted to the ebb and flow of retreat and attack. To quote from Mao's *Guerrilla Warfare*:

Without a political goal, guerrilla warfare must fail, as it must if its political objectives do not coincide with the aspirations of the people and if their sympathy, cooperation and assistance cannot be gained Because guerrilla war basically derives from the masses and is supported by them, it can neither exist nor flourish if it separates itself from their sympathies and cooperation.¹¹

Also basic to Maoist theory is the use of civil disobedience and violence to provoke the established order into indiscriminate repression against the civilian population, thereby alienating the government from the people.

The theories of Mao were later refined by General Vo Nguyen Giap, victor over the French in 1954 and over the American-trained South Vietnamese army 20 years later; by Ernesto "Che" Guevara, the theoretician behind the Castro revolution in Cuba; and by disciples elsewhere. Giap's two principal works, *La Guerre de la Liberation et L'Armee Populaire* (1950) and *Guerre du People, Armee de People* (1961)¹² are interesting for their elaboration of the prerequisites necessary for a final offensive of the conventional jungle-warfare type, but are more tactical and organizational manuals than strategic theory. Guevara's *Guerrilla Warfare*¹³ addresses the special conditions of Latin America, where the forms of constitutional government exist side by side with great social and economic inequity, and with consistent violations of human rights. One quotation of Guevara is particularly relevant to Central America today:

It might be kept in mind that there is a necessary minimum without which the

establishment and consolidation of the first centre is not practicable. People must see clearly the futility of maintaining the fight for social goals within the framework of civil debate. When the forces of oppression come to maintain themselves in power against the established law, peace is considered already broken.

Where a government has come to power through some form of popular vote, fraudulent or not, and maintains at least an appearance of constitutional legality, the guerrilla outbreak cannot be promoted, since the possibilities of peaceful struggle have not yet been exhausted.

Guerrilla warfare is a war of the masses, a war of the people The guerrilla fighter needs full help from the people of the area. This is an indispensable condition Bandit gangs have all the characteristics of a guerrilla army, homogeneity, respect for the leader, valour, knowledge of the ground, and, often, even good understanding of the tactics to be employed. The only thing missing is support of the people; and, inevitably, these gangs are captured and exterminated by the public force.¹⁴

A new, "revisionist" theory of revolutionary warfare now seeks to take the original doctrines of Mao, Giap, and Guevara a step further. As expounded in Arthur Atkinson's *Social Order and the General Theory of Strategy* (London: Kegan Paul, 1983), it fixes society's center of gravity in a social order which is defined as the sum total of social resources available to a community or nation. These resources are the fabric of social, economic, and political commitments whose daily fulfillment makes a society work. Since commitment is a state of mind, the social order necessarily includes a moral order, i.e. the values which shape its commitments and hold a community together through familial, societal, and contractual bonds. The moral order unifies the social order of a community or nation and regulates its collective morale.

The revisionist theory assumes a certain fragility in every social order, whether revolutionary or established. The stability of a social order, and the power of its moral resources, can never be taken for granted, or the home front will become vulnerable to attack—a conclusion certainly borne out in the case of the United States in the Vietnam War. But the social order of a revolutionary movement is equally fragile, since it is built on a thinner material base and is more dependent on commitment for maintenance of momentum.

Since each established order and revolutionary movement dedicated to its overthrow subsists within the same overall social and economic framework, revisionist theory views the struggle as a zero-sum game in which each player tries to siphon off the enemy's social and moral resources into his own. Hence, revolutionary doctrine calls for a spider-like approach that will shred the opponent's fabric of commitments and reconstitute its elements within the revolution's social order. Another way of putting this is that since the opponent's moral order is the seat of its will to wage war, victory will go to the contestant who first throws the opponent's network of commitments into a tangle and out of the mess constructs new relationships based on a complete reordering of political and social rankings in terms of power and status.

This strategy is never easy to carry out. The stronger the political organism under attack, the more multifarious will be the relationships of its social order and the more resilient and mendable its network of commitments. Even a relatively backward modern nation-state usually has such a complex network of relationships and commitments that no matter how imperfect its political institutions it can survive attack for a long time. The social fabric of Tsarist Russia withstood three years of immense casualties, ammunition shortages, and disruption of its military and civilian supply system before it became vulnerable to Bolshevik takeover. Even then, the provisional government would have survived

had it not insisted on continuing the war. The social fabric of El Salvador still hangs together after three years of civil conflict.

Hence, the Mao-Giap-Guevara theory of protracted revolutionary war assumes and indeed relies on a Pavlovian response to revolutionary changes by the established order. It postulates such a wide gulf between the exploitative ruling class and the broad mass of the population that pressure for change will inevitably trigger savage repression.

The revisionist school adapts this theory to the international arena. It maintains that since nuclear warfare is too apocalyptic to achieve anything but destruction of the societies that engage in it, and conventional warfare risks escalation to nuclear warfare, the only level at which use of force to attain political objectives becomes profitable is where limited conventional and guerrilla warfare meet. Hence, in any confrontation between competing power structures, the first party to resort to a strategy aimed at his adversary's social order will certainly win unless the other side reacts at the same level. Earlier writers assumed that the established order would remain irrevocably locked in the traditional cycle of alienation, provocation, and repression, and would passively allow its socioeconomic fabric to be torn to shreds. Revisionist theory assumes that the established order will in some degree reply in kind.

The revisionist school thus sees all forms of continuing conflict below the nuclear level—cold war as well as hot—as necessarily degenerating into a scramble by the parties concerned to destroy each other's social order, especially the moral foundations of the opponent's will to resist. To survive, an established order under attack thus has no alternative except to engage in protracted war against the social order of the guerrillas. This implies selective abandonment of certain elements of the traditional social order, however, since otherwise there would be no way to undercut the appeal of the revolutionary movement to the masses. Since all reform of this kind has a dynamic of its

own, once the parties embark on revolutionary war there is no way of restoring the status quo, regardless of who wins.

The strategy of the revolutionary left in El Salvador seems in most respects to conform to revisionist theory. Politically, the country has a typically Latin two-track system of constitutional forms and fraudulent elections, of free enterprise combined with outrageous economic exploitation. In the countryside the insurgents seem to be waging war according to classic Maoist doctrine, establishing base areas in the outlying provinces (Usulután, Morazán) and building up a new social order in the form of rural cooperatives. They harass the security forces through scattered, small-scale attacks to force them on the defensive; then they fade into the countryside when the security forces retaliate with destructive "sweeps." They try to soften up a conscript army by releasing captured prisoners instead of killing them, like the government.

The revisionist touch can be seen in the guerrilla program of systematically destroying bridges, vehicles, and power plants in order to undermine the economic infrastructure and weaken the social fabric—with some success, as a 25-percent decline of the Salvadoran GNP demonstrates. Their propaganda offensive in Europe and the United States, focused on the government's virtual abandonment of land reform and the appalling atrocities of the security forces, is aimed at destroying the moral legitimacy of the Salvadoran government. The negative attitude of the insurgents both to peace negotiations and elections demonstrates their long-term approach to the struggle, one that envisions a much longer time frame than they believe the United States or the current provisional government can tolerate.

Does this portend inevitable triumph for the insurgents, absent full-scale American military intervention? Not necessarily. Revolutionary movements more often fail than succeed, witness Malaya, the Philippines, Indonesia, Burma, Argentina, Uruguay, and Venezuela. Each revolutionary situation is *sui generis*. The established order,

especially in more developed regions, usually enjoys impressive advantages. One often has to ask whether guerrilla doctrine is a blueprint for victory or *ex post facto* rationalization.

For example, while Maoist strategy may have been vindicated in the isolated setting of war-torn China, the final struggle in Vietnam turned into a confrontation of conventional forces long before the social order of the South had eroded.¹⁵ Fidel Castro's sanctuary in the Sierra Maestra was hardly an agrarian base area in the Maoist sense, and infiltration of the Cuban social order did not bring about the demise of the Batista regime; in typical Latin American fashion that was preceded by the collapse of Batista's security forces.

In colonial revolutions or "wars of national liberation," nationalism in the broad sense seems to be a more essential ingredient of success than revolutionary doctrine. The American War of Independence, the Algerian war with France, and the Vietnamese struggle against both France and the United States show nationalism triumphant in the face of miserable strategy, disastrous defeats, and poor morale. Conversely, where there is no external energy, the level of popular discontent has to reach a boiling point before it can equal nationalism in keeping a revolutionary movement viable. Even despotic and incompetent military regimes can usually count on sufficient apathy and fear in the vast majority of the population to prevent discontent from boiling over. Spontaneous mass uprisings are a rarity. Despite their brutality, corruption, and incompetence, neither the Marcos regime in the Philippines nor the Pinochet regime in Chile has yet been toppled.

Neither the Maoist nor the revisionist schools can really sustain their claims of universality. Regions vary so widely in ethnic and geographic characteristics that conditions propitious for revolution in Asia may be totally unsuitable for Latin America. Sheer geographic scale and the proverbial apathy of the Andean Indian frustrated Che Guevara's attempt to export revolution to Bolivia and led to his capture and execution.

Where space is finite and sanctuaries nonexistent, a policy of unbridled repression can smother a revolutionary movement, at least over the short term. In Argentina, a country sealed off by mountains and rivers, security forces employing Nazi-like tactics of extermination eliminated the Montonero terrorists—along with 10,000 innocent people. In Guatemala, resort to mass murder by the army has so intimidated the rural Indian population that guerrillas can no longer use their villages as sanctuaries. The sweeping generalizations of Chairman Mao and General Giap may have been vindicated in the remote vastness of war-torn China, or in pre-1975 Vietnam with its border wilderness and sanctuary to the north; they failed miserably in Malaya and Uruguay.

Maoist and revisionist theory takes no account of modern counterintelligence techniques and of surveillance and communications technology. Competent operatives equipped with the latest communications and electronic surveillance equipment, like the British SAS units in Northern Ireland, can give a powerful edge to security forces, especially where these command the loyalty of the local population. Effective aerial surveillance would make life very unpleasant for the insurgents in El Salvador.

Finally, revolutionary war theory ignores the interdependent nature of the nation-state system and the multilevel relationships that exist even between adversaries. The revolutionary struggles of Asia took place in comparative isolation. But as the Marxist gang in Grenada found out to its cost, this is not true in regions like the Caribbean where there are strong political, ethnic, and economic bonds between neighbors. Once democracy and the consumer economy take root, there is a collective, regional interest in stability.

With all these weaknesses in revolutionary theory, why has the response of the United States to third world revolutionary movements been so ineffective? Some suggested answers:

- Acting through proxies in a foreign revolutionary situation is always risky. Alien

military structures are not easily remolded along American lines. All the training and equipment in the world cannot change cultural and ethnic characteristics.

- The American political system will not accept the full implications of protracted revolutionary warfare and cannot tolerate the long-term commitment of men and resources needed to wage it.

- Americans tend to accept the abuses and inequities built into the societies of developing countries—which often make peaceful change impossible—and cannot understand that they often leave no recourse except to violence.

- The US government is incorrigibly reluctant to impose tough conditions on aid programs and in general to treat such programs as a strictly limited investment to be terminated at any time.

- The US government invariably discounts public opinion at home and abroad between elections, and therefore neglects the moral factor in foreign policy that sooner or later will be reflected in Congress.

To counter a revolutionary strategy aimed at a third world social order, the first priority is to understand it. Such a strategy can only succeed by exploiting long-standing grievances and inequities. Moreover, it is not necessarily Marxist: the original concept of the “fifth column” was Fascist in origin; the strategy of the Ayatollah Khomeini and of Moslem fundamentalists is aimed at dissolving religious commitments. Any aggressive revolutionary movement in which religion or ideology plays a leading part is probably using a variant of revisionist strategy—rather like the Molière character who spoke prose without knowing it. A counter strategy that does not address the context of revolution will be a ten-percent solution—expensive, bloody, superficial, and doomed to failure.

In Central America the policy of the United States in intervening at the surface level of overt and covert military and economic aid, but refusing to intervene at the socioeconomic level (except for halfhearted efforts to promote land reform) is such a ten-

percent solution. This is a region in which the wealthy classes have always been notorious for their failure to contribute to the welfare of the people, and in which capitalism and consumerism have merely reinforced traditional patterns of exploitation. The panacea of economic aid only shores up an inequitable social order that needs to be demolished.

In Central America "free elections" without a guarantee of drastic social and economic reform is a cop-out. First, there can be no free elections without the safe participation of every part of the political spectrum. Second, Anglo-Saxon political institutions, the product of a thousand-year struggle between parliament and crown, and between self-governing colonies and parliament, are not necessarily the appropriate model for alien cultures that are basically primitive and exploitive regardless of material wealth and modern conveniences. Political change without redistribution of land and wealth, and an end to the autonomy of armies and security forces, is a meaningless charade.

Finally, in a media age no counterinsurgency strategy can be effective without taking account of human rights. Atrocities have always been commonplace in the civil conflicts of Asia, Africa, and Latin America, but since they went unreported they had little effect on public opinion outside the region and were rarely a factor in the outcome. Today it has become almost impossible for governments to conceal the excesses of their security forces. Sooner or later the news gets out, even from such remote areas as the mountains of Guatemala, the highlands of Uganda, and the outer islands of the Philippines. The slaughter of noncombatants by the Salvadoran security forces and outrages like the Sabra/Shatila massacres have influenced public opinion all over the world. The media also keep grievances alive. Without a continuing press campaign the fate of the 15,000 Argentine *desaparecidos* would long ago have faded into oblivion.

In the United States human rights now translates into legislative restrictions that limit the military assistance that can be

furnished to flagrant violators—an outright prohibition in the case of Guatemala and over 20 qualifying conditions for aid to El Salvador. In Western Europe, the requirements of the European Convention of Human Rights have haled some democratic countries into court and raised public consciousness about atrocities elsewhere.¹⁶ As the world becomes a global village, international media coverage can be expected not only to hedge government counterinsurgency measures with ever more stringent limitations, but to impose bounds on the behavior of guerrillas as well.

Today, the worst danger facing the United States in its policy toward third world political and social turmoil is fear of revolutionary change and a pathetic reliance on an essentially military counterinsurgency strategy that can only be executed through native proxies. A purely military response not only raises the level of violence, but dangerously deludes the user about his own strength. All the vast panoply of his modern armaments could not save the Shah. Capital ships offshore and jets swooping about overhead are irrelevant to internal politico-military struggles waged at subliminal levels. Modern weaponry ends up in the hands of the guerrillas. Once the impotence of naked military force is shown up, it reinforces the conviction of revolutionary movements that time is on their side.

In areas like Latin America, where the tides of revolutionary change are likely to run strongly for the next 50 years, the United States should try to navigate the current, not dam it up. A couple of tiny Yugoslavias south of the border would pose no security threat to the United States and would be far harder nuts for Moscow and Havana to penetrate than the present festering sores of poverty and injustice. The goal should be to prevent the domination of revolutionary change by Moscow and Havana, not to prevent such change from taking place.

Fifty years ago revolutionary Mexico was excoriated in much the same terms that the Reagan Administration employs against Nicaragua today. The United States was eventually forced to accept the Mexican

revolution, but relations have never been the same since. If the United States encouraged revolution in Guatemala, instead of fighting it, there is no reason why in a few years US bankers and exporters could not do as much business in Guatemala City as they do in Belgrade—probably more, since there would be a new generation of technocrats to deal with instead of a corrupt and murderous military government. We owe nothing to authoritarian governing structures, and the notion that they are “friends” is naive and ludicrous.

An effective counterinsurgency strategy should be part of a foreign policy that is both detached and flexible toward revolutionary change in other countries. The test of a revolutionary government’s acceptability should be not its internal social and economic system nor even its ideology; it should be solely whether it serves as a base or staging area for the armed forces or offensive weaponry of another country. In the rare cases when US interests require intervention in a revolutionary situation, such intervention should if possible be under UN or regional auspices (e.g. Contadora), subject to strict conditions rigorously enforced, and never in blind and unwavering support of the existing social order. If the United States wants to deprive the Soviet Union of political influence in the third world, its policy should be to intervene as rarely as possible, but when it does, to protect revolutionary change at the same time.

NOTES

1. The principles of “Peoples War” were first laid out

by Mao in three articles written between December 1936 and May 1938, *Problems of Strategy in China’s Revolutionary War*; *Problems of Strategy in Guerrilla War Against Japan*; and *On Protracted War*, contained in *Selected Military Writings of Mao Tse-Tung* (Beijing: Foreign Language Press, 1966, pp. 77-263). See also Appendix A of *The Chinese People’s Militia and the Doctrine of People’s War* by Thomas C. Roberts, Nat. Security Affairs Monograph Series 83-4, National Defense University Press, 1983.

2. The cabinet-level Special Group (Counter-Insurgency) was created by NSM 124 of 18 January 1962.

3. For example, the seminar on Problems of Development and Internal Defense at the Foreign Service Institute, and similar courses in the DOD educational system.

4. W. W. Rostow, *Stages of Economic Growth*, 2d ed. (New York: Cambridge Univ. Press, 1981).

5. *On War*, ed. and trans. Michael Howard and Peter Paret (Princeton, N.J.: Princeton Univ. Press, 1976). See also Raymond Aron, *The Evolution of Modern Strategic Thought*, Adelphi Papers No. 54, IISS, London, February 1969.

6. *Art of War*, reprint of 1962 ed. (Westport, Conn.: Greenwood Press). See also General Andre Beaufre, *An Introduction to Strategy*, trans. A. H. Barry (London: Faber & Faber, 1965).

7. *Strategy: The Indirect Approach* (London: Faber, 1967).

8. By NSAM 182 of 24 August 1982.

9. For the best recent summary of Allied war aims in World War I see Patrick Devlin, *Too Proud to Fight: Woodrow Wilson’s Neutrality* (Oxford, 1974). See also Harold Nicholson, *Peacemaking 1919*.

10. Among the vast literature on Allied war aims in World War II see *Churchill, Roosevelt and Stalin: The War they Waged and the Peace they Sought*, by Herbert Feis, (Princeton, N.J.: Princeton Univ. Press, 1967).

11. See *Selected Military Writings*, n. 1 above.

12. Combined in English translation in *People’s War, People’s Army: The Viet Cong Insurrection Manual for Underdeveloped Countries* (New York: Praeger, 1962).

13. Che Guevara, *Guerrilla Warfare* (New York: Vintage, Random House, 1968).

14. Giap, *People’s War, People’s Army*, pp. 161-62.

15. For an excellent recent critique of how the Vietnam War turned into a classic jungle-warfare confrontation between conventional forces, see *On Strategy: The Vietnam War in Context*, by Harry G. Summers, Jr. (Carlisle Barracks, Pa.: US Army War College, 1981, rpt. 1982 by Presidio Press, Novato, Calif.). On Malaya, see Sir Robert Thompson, *Revolutionary War in World Strategy and Defeating Communist Insurgency* (London, 1970 and 1966).

16. See, e.g. Charles Maechling, Jr., “Human Rights Dehumanized,” *Foreign Policy* (Winter 1983).

