REVOLTS AGAINST THE CROWN: THE BRITISH RESPONSE TO IMPERIAL INSURGENCY

by

DR. J. BOWYER BELL

(Editor's Note: *Probably no nation in modern history has accumulated such vast experience with rebellion and insurgency in its client states of the underdeveloped world as has Great Britain during her long march to dismantlement of the Empire. In the article below, Professor J. Bowyer Bell provides a critical analysis of Britain's experience. Though the analogy is by no means precise, the lessons Britain has gleaned from her successes and failures can be instructive for the United States. For this country, with its important economic and security stake in the small nations of the third world, is vitally interested in the establishment and maintenance of political stability in this volatile area.)*

Professor J. Bowyer Bell, a distinguished authority on twentieth-century revolutionary movements, received the B.A. degree from Washington and Lee in 1953, the M.A. from Duke in 1954, and the Ph.D., also from Duke, in 1958. He has taught international studies at Georgia Southern, Trinity School, and New York Institute of Technology; and has served as a Research Associate in international affairs at Harvard and M.I.T. Professor Bell was honored by selection as a Fulbright Fellow (Italy) in 1956-57 and as a Guggenheim Fellow (Ireland, Middle East, Africa) in 1972-73. He is the author of numerous scholarly books, monographs, and articles, including *The Long War: Israel and the Arabs Since 1946* (1969); *The Secret Army: The IRA 1916-1970* (1970); *The Myth of the Guerrilla: Revolutionary Theory and Malpractice* (1971); *On Revolt: Strategies of National Liberation* (forthcoming 1974); and *Transnational Terror and the American Response* (forthcoming 1974). Presently, Professor Bell is with the Institute of War and Peace Studies of Columbia University.

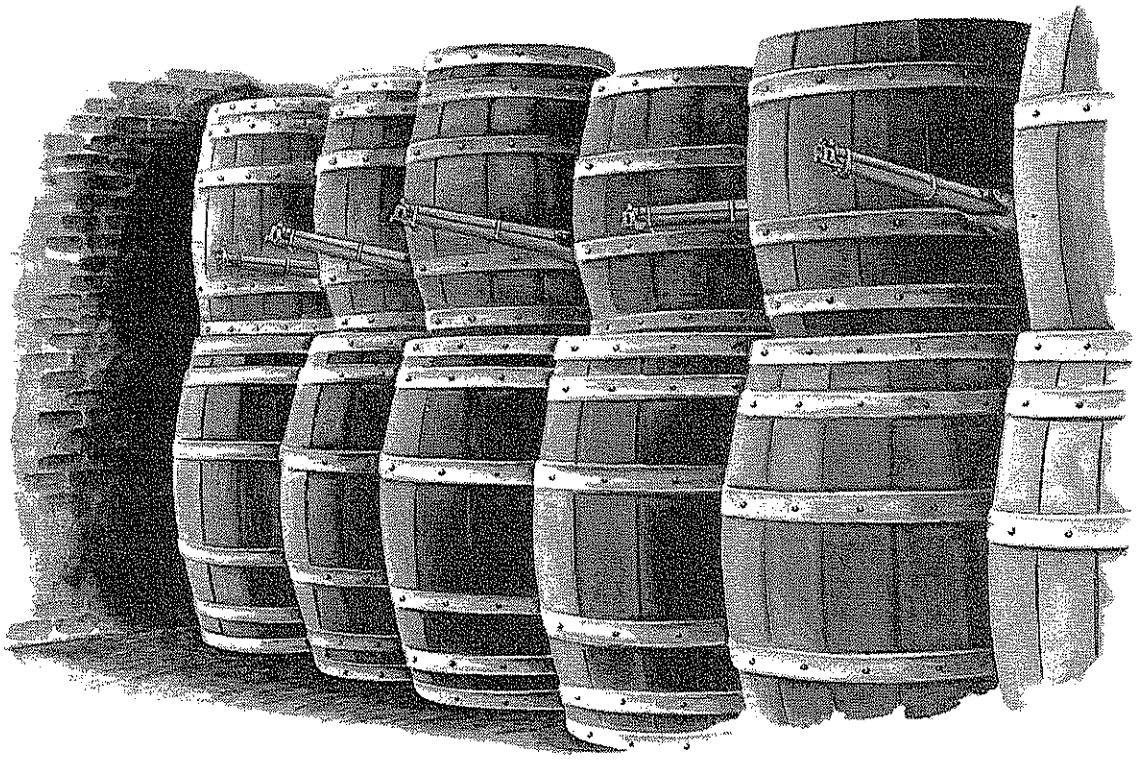
* * * * *

In January 1944, an illicit proclamation began circulating in the British Mandate of Palestine.[1] This declaration of a Jewish revolt by Irgun Zvai Leumi was to be a harbinger of a generation of imperial insurrection, the first scene in the final act of the Empire. In 1944 an "armed struggle" by a small "military" arm of the schismatic Zionist Revisionist Movement neither impressed nor particularly concerned the British. A vast world war was underway, in part directed against the Zionists' most dedicated enemy, Adolph Hitler. All the orthodox Zionists opposed the antics of the little group of zealots in the Mandate, a minority of a minority which frightened no one. What was surprising to the British was that an open revolt, however ineffectual, had been launched by these fanatical Jews against their old "ally": the British were shocked, outraged, and indignant at the pretensions of a gang of terrorists who were without legitimacy or popular support. No matter what the British moral response, the tiny revolt escalated year by year into a massive emergency that drew in tens of thousands of British troops, ate up precious sterling balances, alienated old friends, even the Arabs, and ultimately engendered profound disgust on the part of the British public. In pique and desperation the British sought recourse in the United Nations, finally evacuating the Mandate in general disarray in 1948. By then the armed struggle of the Irgun Zvai Leumi had become a classic model. Under Menachem Begin, the Irgun had devised a strategy that became a paradigm for imperial revolt; a means had been discovered for the weak to lever out the strong—or so it seemed to some.

THE BEGINNINGS

Prior to 1944, the British Empire had been exposed to two serious experiences of national revolt. In America in 1776, the rebels, benefiting from distance and a major ally, created alternative institutions and defended them by conventional military means. Learning in part their lesson, the British during the nineteenth century slowly evolved a counter-strategy to rebellion by those sufficiently mature for self-government: the devolution or gradual transfer of power to newly created dominions. This technique by the twentieth century had been refined into the Commonwealth strategy, immediately effective in the English-speaking Dominions and potentially applicable elsewhere. By then, however, an alternative rebel strategy had been devised by the Irish, who by the application of an entire spectrum of techniques and tactics had for hundreds of years engaged in an effort to create an Irish Ireland. The Irish experience, rather than the distant American, became a primer for potential rebels elsewhere in the empire who did not consider themselves candidates for the Commonwealth Strategy.[2]

In 1916, in what then seemed the last gasp of the militant Irish Republican Movement, a traditional "rising" wracked Dublin during Easter Week. This Easter Rising, however, as had all others, collapsed into mere bitterness and recrimination. Beginning in 1918, a more thoughtful attempt was launched by a younger generation. They attempted to create an Irish Republic, Free and Gaelic, by coupling irregular war led by an underground Irish Republican Army (IRA) with the creation of an alternative governmental institution. The subsequent British repression could prohibit the Republican institution from functioning, but could not crush the IRA "terrorists"—in fact the increasingly stringent measures taken against the IRA became distasteful to the British public. In



Dublin, 1916.

time the British found a means of compromising the issues with a formula that created an Irish Free State in 26 counties, a loyal, largely Protestant enclave in six counties of Ulster, and a guarantee of British bases and economic interests. Eventually the Free State evolved into an Irish Republic outside the Commonwealth; but in Britain the Irish Treaty was viewed as a splendid, if unique, exercise in the accommodation of national aspirations—a judicious application of a strategy of devolution. The Irish strategy of revolt, even if not emulated in the other parts of the Empire, was not forgotten. Few potential nationalist rebel groups could hope for the likes of a George Washington, but all could in a pinch manage murder from a ditch.

By and large, however, it was not the combination of terror, British hypocrisy, shadow institutions, international propaganda, guerrillas in the hills, the exhausted imperial machine, and the war-weary population that potential rebels studied. The real key to national liberation appeared to be in India where Mahatma Gandhi and Jawaharlal Nehru fashioned a mass movement based on a disciplined, non-violent campaign of civil disobedience. The leaders of the Indian Congress Movement were convinced that once the masses were motivated, disciplined, and determined, the British would have no choice but to rule by the most brutal and self-destructive force or concede. And they suspected that the force to coerce 400,000,000 people did not exist, even if Britain had the will to employ it, which that nation probably did not. In 1942, in the midst of the war, London had in effect promised independence to the Congress leaders. For many nationalists the Indian strategy seemed to offer the most, for it neatly fit into the British Commonwealth strategy, peacefully demanding what should be cheerfully granted, avoiding the risks of open revolt by the weak, and offering a means to mold the future nation through disciplined political activities.

At the end of the war, there were two major nationalist strategies within the British Empire: leverage based on an armed struggle of attrition, as in the Irish-Irgun option; and

"MY AMBITION IS NO LESS THAN TO CONVERT THE BRITISH PEOPLE THROUGH NON-VIOLENCE. . . . WE HAVE RESOLVED TO UTILIZE ALL OUR RESOURCES IN THE PURSUIT OF AN EXCLUSIVELY NON-VIOLENT STRUGGLE."

Mahatma Gandhi

the Indian model, dependent on civil disobedience on a vast scale by a disciplined mass party. At that time, the strategies of the orthodox revolutionaries (the rush by the urban proletariat to the Marxist-Leninist barricades and the distant experience of Mao Tse-tung in rural China) appeared alien to imperial experience. In the course of the next generation, the British Empire would disappear—a massive act of devolution that for the most part passed peacefully. The Indian strategy was applied in all sorts of odd corners of the world and with some exceptions became the conventional means to power, however much the process might have been accelerated by open revolt elsewhere. After the Indian success it very soon became clear that even in less mature colonies like the Gold Coast progress was possible. There Kwame Nkrumah effected the independence of Ghana by adapting similar methods that,

Nehru and Gandhi.

though less disciplined and more disruptive, were in time equally valid.

THE MAJOR IMPERIAL EMERGENCIES

There were exceptions. For varying reasons the process of devolution did not always run smoothly. The Malayan Communist Party (MCP) launched a guerrilla war using the strategy of Mao Tse-tung and the enthusiasm and ambitions of the local Chinese community.[3] In Kenya the Kikuyu, outraged by colonial policies and the "theft" of their land, attempted to combine the politics of agitation led by the Kenya African Union with the terror of tribal violence loosely organized as the Mau Mau.[4] In Egypt the various political factions sponsored fedayeen raids into the Canal Zone to coerce British concessions. In Cyprus Colonel George Grivas organized a resistance movement, EOKA, and in collaboration with Archbishop Makarios sought unsuccessfully to achieve union (*Enosis*) with Greece.[5] In South Arabia the militant Arab nationalists, emboldened by the direction of events after 1956, launched an armed struggle, certain that Britain's moment in the Middle East had passed.[6] And in 1967 after the British departure, the triumphant National Liberation Front (NLF) established the new People's Republic of South Yemen. There were as well other rebellions, disorders, and continued imperial responsibilities that found British troops active in Borneo, Oman, and Ulster; but, the Gold Coast aside, the major imperial emergencies faced by the British were Malaya, Kenya, Cyprus, South Arabia, and in a special way Egypt. All were very different indeed—the Malay Communists had recourse to the strategy of Mao and the Mau Mau to atavistic tribal custom—and yet the British response became a pattern sufficiently predictable to be negatable at small rebel risk, a pattern so fixed that even after the end of imperial insurrections the response in Northern Ireland in the seventies to renewed violence by the IRA appeared to come from the same imperial mold.

That the Commonwealth strategy did not work everywhere was mainly, the British assumed, because the imperial power was faced with the thankless responsibilities of adjusting conflicting claims (for example, those of the Arabs and the Jews or the Greeks and the Turks) or eliminating unrepresentative claimants (the Communists in Malaya or the Mau Mau in Kenya). In any case those gunmen and terrorists who sought power outside the Commonwealth route were considered to be without legitimacy. Thus for the British a revolt opens not with bombs actually, but with the unexpected surfacing of a conflict over legitimacy, a conflict that in most cases has had a long and troubled history, a history cherished by the rebel and ignored or denied by the British.

"BY CONTINUOUSLY HARASSING THE BRITISH IN CYPRUS, WE MUST SHOW THAT WE ARE FIRMLY DETERMINED NOT TO YIELD. . . . OUR PURPOSE IS TO WIN A MORAL VICTORY THROUGH A PROCESS OF ATTRITION."

General George Grivas

THE BRITISH REACTION

The immediate British reaction to the rebels' aspirations, no matter what the circumstances, is outraged indignation. The rebel is an alien and evil man, motivated by personal ambitions, often deluded by an imported ideology, who uses terror to acquire support—a man outside the law, outside common decency, outside reason. The full majesty of historically recognized, internationally accepted, *legitimate* authority is turned on the little band of assassins. In the long run rebel legitimacy can only be won by force—or by concession. Some of these illegitimate claimants could, as had been the case with the Irish in 1921, be co-opted by means of an adjusted Commonwealth strategy; but in some cases there was nothing for it but repression. After 1944 in some foreign corner or another, regularly to their

surprise, the British had to confront an insurgency campaign led by undigestible rebels. British colonial officials, career officers, and policemen might, if they were keen, serve in several emergencies. Some reappear a little further up the ladder in each new campaign, a little greyer, a little wiser, like spirits of revolts past. The British knew and continued to have their knowledge reinforced of the dangers and costs of such revolts and the means to avoid the worst problems. From their exposure the British learned the tactics of anti-insurgency, the cost of an emergency, the importance of political concessions, and the means to manipulate the Commonwealth strategy. The Cabinet of whatever composition knew the cost of staying or getting out. Still, caught every time by surprise when a revolt did begin, the British continued to be shocked, outraged, indignant.

Only rarely did the authorities, either on the spot or in London, foresee the possibility of an armed revolt. Conditions that the potential rebels felt were intolerable, that created deep frustration, and that could not be ameliorated except through violence, did not so appear to the British. In many cases the British could not conceive of priorities different from their own.

In Palestine the British simply did not understand the impact of the holocaust, the depth of Jewish agony; nor could they credit the charge of genocide made against them. In the Gold Coast the motive of the mob—political power—went far beyond the usual bread-and-butter issues of colonial politics. The British had simply not dreamed that such factors would appear in the colony for decades. In Malaya the revolt by the MCP was launched not from the depths of despair as in Palestine, but from the high ground of ideological certainty—native Chinese ambition in Malaya hued over with a vision of a communist future. In this case the British were surprised less at the MCP's aspirations than at the mere fact that it dared to revolt. In Kenya the European settlers and local observers had *feared* a revolt but had not anticipated one. Thus despite policies after mid-1952 that almost insured a Kikuyu "revolt" would take place, there was still surprise at the extent of Kikuyu alienation in Nairobi while in London the new emergency had been quite unanticipated. Long after the Cypriot emergency was over, British spokesmen of various hues insisted that *Enosis* was and always had been an artificial issue exploited by agitators. By so refusing even to consider the matter, the British, knowing what the Greeks *really* wanted, had set a boundary to nationalism that someone,

Grivas.

CAUGHT EVERY TIME BY SURPRISE WHEN A REVOLT DID BEGIN, THE BRITISH CONTINUED TO BE SHOCKED, OUTRAGED, INDIGNANT.

sooner or later, would cross—as Grivas did to British surprise. By the time of the South Arabian misadventures, Britain should have been beyond surprises at the ambitions of radical Arabs; but even though Radio Cairo reached into the hills of Dhala, the British still hoped that the old ways and old forms would work with the new Arabs and were surprised and indignant when they did not.

The British difficulty in perception was a fault hardly limited to the British, since surprise had long played a commanding role in military and political affairs. In some cases the potential rebel intended to take up arms no matter what accommodation was offered; but there at least the British might have been forearmed. Even if the rebels did in fact represent alien strains within the Empire, there remains the possibility that a more perceptive eye would have uncovered the pattern of frustration and suggested an alternative to repression. It is, to be fair, difficult to see how London heeding Casandra could or would have acted greatly different in most cases. The rebels largely felt impelled to revolt, for a nonviolent dialogue no longer offered them anything. In Palestine the whole direction of British Middle East policies since 1939 largely precluded undue concessions to the Zionists, and for the men of the Irgun no concession, however generous, would have done. In Malaya the MCP's conviction that victory was certain and any course but the armed struggle was dangerous would probably have remained no matter what the British did or did not do. In Kenya, at least, a realization of the nature of the most immediate Kikuyu grievances might have allowed time for a Gold Coast dialogue to evolve; then again, given the settlers' attitudes, perhaps the necessary concessions were out of the question at the time. In Cyprus the British might have taken *Enosis* seriously, sufficiently so in any case to point out the international complications that might ensue and the rigid requirements of British security—but would the patriots have listened? And surely no concession would have swerved the Arabs in Cairo and Aden from their allotted course. Almost nowhere then, except perhaps Kenya, could a dash of prescience have greatly altered the situation; for the rebels wanted to rise in arms for purposes quite beyond the capacity of the British to concede.

In most cases the closer the individual was to the scene of the action on the eve of the trouble the more likely the chance of error and the failure to perceive change. Often those who knew the most saw the least. The-Man-Who-Knew-The-Natives often missed the impact of modernization or the influence of new ideas. Often he had learned his job and his knowledge of the natives on the spot, acquiring the rare and esoteric languages of the bush, absorbing detailed and extensive anthropological data, fashioning a career on extended tours. Some of the "natives" in Tel Aviv or Nicosia, however, were quite different from the stereotyped impressions gained by colonial experts in their previous experiences. Elsewhere, the attractions of education and the appeal of Western technology wrought swift changes: they stirred quite "unnative" ambitions, tilting the familiar into new and not always visible patterns without ever showing the British on the spot a new face. And when the face did appear above ill-fitting white collar and obscure school tie, few realized just how profound the change and how limited the old means of control. Even when that control crumbled, there was only limited understanding of what had gone wrong, that the natives had given up the effort to take part in a dialogue with the deaf, and had sought recourse with bombs.

In carrying on the imperial dialogue in many places, the British had been talking without listening, looking at events without seeing. As the years passed, the discontent turned to the more lethal dialogue, a strategy that inevitably came as a surprise to the British. Mass nonviolence, the politics of confrontation, the tactics of direct action, first in Asia and then in Africa, not only surprised the British but also caught their attention. The British monologue died down and the new native voices of the Gold Coast or Egypt could be heard. If the means of interrupting the British monologue appeared illegitimate (e.g. Mau Mau oathings or Grivas's bombs), or if the time to attract British attention was too short (Palestine in 1944), or

if the rebels did not care to talk, which was mostly the case, then Britain would be surprised at the new form of communication—a revolt by the natives no one ever knew.

After surprise at the new lethal dialogue came shock that rebels would seek recourse to violence when means of accommodation abounded, when the expressed grievances were not legitimate, when the mass of decent people disapproved. Without exception the first analysis on the spot and then in London was that the revolt was the work of a tiny disgruntled minority, dependent on support achieved by coercion or intimidation or violence.

This British analysis was almost always in part correct; for revolts, certainly at the beginning, are the work of a tiny handful of men acting in the name of the masses who, of course, can hardly be polled. The Irgun, EOKA, the Egyptian fedayeen, and the South Yeman NLF were tiny in gross numbers and remained so until the end. The British approach was that because the revolutionary organization was small it was also unrepresentative. And this, too, was often true. The emergency in Kenya was as much a Kikuyu civil war as an armed insurrection and hardly involved most of the other Kenya Africans. The Irgun were a self-confessed minority in a Jewish community that in turn was a minority in the Palestine Mandate. The Communist in the jungles of Malaya was tied to less than a majority of the Chinese, who were again a minority in the colony. Most revolutionary movements, where reasonable estimate is possible, always have been led by a tiny minority, actively, even passively, supported by less than a substantial majority. Often the rebels must coerce or eliminate the loyalists. In South Arabia, for example, more Arabs were killed by the rebels than by British security forces. Thus the British were quite right: the rebels were a minority with limited active support and probably limited support of any kind. The British noted too, if reluctantly, that some support must exist, for information and intelligence about the rebels proved difficult to acquire, and public expression of gratitude for British counter-insurgency efforts was limited.

The obvious conclusion was that the minority was intimidating the majority. That rebel support must be the result of intimidation does not, however, logically follow. Many Jews in Palestine, for example, did not approve of the Irgun's campaign but would not oppose it. Many did not want to be either informer or advocate. Much the same was the case with the Greek Cypriots where many who preferred the quiet life would not oppose EOKA. In fact much if not all the mass always seems to tend toward the quiet life. Given a chance they would vote for a truce or a pause; given no chance they permit the rebels to sacrifice for a higher national "purpose" beyond the ballot box. This neutrality, a slightly biased neutrality, however, is all that a rebel needs. A government needs more; for if the rebel continues to exist, he will in time win—while a government must govern, must win outright, must restore order and hence law. The British problem was to woo the vast apolitical audience, an audience which was often only marginally interested.

The British assumed that only through

force could the rebels achieve toleration. This often was the case: neither EOKA nor the Malayan Communists nor the Kikuyu pretended otherwise than that they were executing traitors and informers. Thus the British assumed that at heart the population supported them and not the rebels. This attitude on the part of the British was not counter-propaganda but an article of faith. The British believed and so acted. Trust is maintained in the "real" people and outrageous risks are taken because of this trust. In Nicosia the valet slipping a bomb under the bed of Field Marshal Sir John Harding, The Military Governor, was by no means a unique betrayal of that trust; there were repeated betrayals. Everywhere from Malaya to Aden, the potentially disloyal servants were kept, often to the last day and the ultimate betrayal. Even the frantic settlers in Kenya wanted to kill every Kikuyu but their own. Since British authority, then, is legitimate, all good men and true will rally about in opposition to the illicit pretenders—unless so prevented by violence. And the rebels are violent, illegitimate men who at best can count on the dubious virtue of certification from a recognized revolutionary center in Cairo or Moscow or from a greedy regime in Athens.

The British had to stand for something as well as to oppose sin. The simple legitimacy of being first in possession of power is insufficient once the old dialogue has broken down and the violence begun. To stand behind the banners of imperialism and the primacy of the British was synonymous with order, decency, fair play, good government, civilization, justice, law, and occasionally Christianity. And, of course, this was true. What Britain did not stand for was immediate independence and native interests over those of Britain. This was the rebel program—everything for us now—and it had great charm. For the British to insist that immediate independence would be disastrous and that Britain could do more for the natives than they could do for themselves would not go over well. Whatever Britain's position on self-determination, now or later or never, the rebels had to be depicted as men who would use proud slogans for low purpose or wave the national banner while selling the nation abroad to alien ideologies. The rebels were thus not nationalists but illegitimate pretenders to power that they intended to misuse—men who had passed from the stage of foolishness into knavery and criminal knavery at that.

If the revolt is absolutely illegitimate, totally without moral justification, led by men without scruple or decency, then it is obviously both easier to oppose and harder to ignore, almost impossible to compromise. In all consciousness, it is difficult to take tea with a terrorist or accept a criminal into the palace; much more important, however, it is far more tempting to seek out and destroy evil. From the first the leadership of the revolt is defined not simply as evil but as alien. And the more appropriate the label the more likely that the establishment of order will be pursued with maximum force. And the "cause" that led to the open revolt has also been perceived by the British as alien, spurious. If not exactly spurious, the rebel causes over the past 30 years have certainly been indigestible. While some nationalists needed and accepted the slow process of institution-building within the Empire and accepted the British Westminster model (whether appropriate or not), the rebels did not.

The most alien of all enemies of Empire were the Mau Mau, atavistic descendants into savagery, absolutely illegitimate in political terms. The toll of Mau Mau killed, the mass detentions, resettlements, and imprisonment could all the more easily be undertaken in light of the horror of the Mau Mau oath and the brutality of their massacres. No one seemed particularly surprised that over 1000 Mau Mau were executed in contrast to only eight members of the Irgun during the Palestine emergency. It was, no matter what the provocation, *hard* for the British to kill Jews. Much the same was true in Cyprus, where the British were fond of the Greeks and deeply frustrated that EOKA could not see where their struggle for *Enosis* was leading. The British were not fond of the Chinese Communists in Malaya—an international

conspiracy of an alien ethnic group that threatened British security and the future of Malayan development. The MCP therefore was absolutely illegitimate. The Chinese were not mad, as were the Mau Mau, but they had been converted to an alien ideology. So, too, in Malaya there were the detentions and arrests on a vast scale, deprogramming camps, the wholesale movement of populations, and the huge toll of dead terrorists, executed or killed in the jungle sweeps. The more effective the British were in defining the rebel as alien (and if as a rebel you start by being a Kikuyu instead of a Greek the process is simpler), the more likely the authorities were to see a polarized conflict as without solution and without a need for excess compassion. Rigorous repression thus became the order of the day.

Naturally once this policy of repression begins to show results, a reversal to allow for accommodation becomes difficult, since such

a reversal requires a lengthy process of redefining and reconsidering. In the Gold Coast the Watson Commission investigating the disturbances of 1948 produced a report that depicted Nkrumah as imbued with a pure communist ideology blurred only somewhat by political experience. A red knave with a black skin quite obviously would not be the man for the future. There was in the Gold Coast sufficient leeway for Nkrumah to apply the Indian strategy, adapted for African use, and most important there were British officials in Accra and London who recognized what he was doing. In Kenya, even in 1960, Kenyatta was still the leader of darkness and death to Governor Sir Patrick Renison. In two more years Kenyatta would be a senior minister serving in an African administration presided over by the same governor. The process of turning Kenyatta, a man "definitely guilty" of leading a murder cult, into the doyen of the new African statesmen took not only time but also the pressure of expediency—still it was done. Nor if the nationalists in South Arabia had played the game is there much doubt that the Arab terrorists, thugs and pawns of Egypt, could have been transmuted into candidates for the Commonwealth conference. It is not a process without pain, for many persist in seeing yesterday's villain behind today's glory. Through practice and experience, however, the British could reverse the policy of alienation.

At the time of the revolt, if the rebel is alien, the alternatives appear exacting: crush the revolt or evacuate. Both the Mau Mau and the MCP were crushed and remained in British eyes primitive tribesmen and pawns of communism. In South Arabia the British managed only a semblance of devolution in a last-minute agreement at Geneva; in effect London threw the keys over the wall and evacuated, leaving a long line of Arab friends who had been led up the garden path. In Cyprus the Commonwealth strategy finally came to the rescue. In Egypt a typical treaty solution in 1954 led only to the Suez invasion of 1956, the last violent hurrah of Empire. In Palestine, as in South Arabia, the British scuttled, but under the auspices of the United

Nations. Still, two clear wins, two clear losses, and two revolts accommodated is not a bad show for either the military or the diplomats.

Even when facing what appeared alien, unrepresentative, and illegitimate power-grabs, the British did not rely on coercion alone. Experience had revealed to all that terror could best be countered by political manuevers. Thus if the rebels were not *too* alien (e.g. the Irgun, EOKA, and Arab nationalists in Aden), then the British sought a political option to involve the forces concerned. Such a political strategy might exclude compromise with the rebels but might produce an accommodation that the rebels would accept, as was the case with Cyprus. Even in Malaya and Kenya parallel political programs were launched to erode the support of the rebels, even while the existence of such "support" was officially denied. It was, of course, easier to reach an accommodation, no matter what sort, when the perceived level of rebel violence was low. The Mau Mau violence level was perceived as frightful, which in the number of European casualties it was not, while the fedayeen attacks and the subsequent burning of Cairo were labeled as traditional Egyptian trouble-making and easily discounted at the bargaining table. In almost all cases, alien rebel or no, the British sought a small bit of uneven middle ground even when the aspirations of the rebels endangered crucial British interests or seemed beyond any rational accommodation.

COLONIAL STRATEGY IN SUM

British colonial strategy, then, was to open and maintain a dialogue, unless caught by surprise. Then, if the rebels were too alien to be co-opted, Britain would fight it out. Simultaneously, Britain might grant parallel concessions, e.g. self government, to the loyal natives. The tactics Britain used to balance concession with coercion varied greatly and were often the result of independent initiatives, contingency factors, and contradictory impulses. Britain never had an overall book of colonial tactics. The British on the military side devised after long experience a basic approach to both urban and rural insurrection that, properly applied, went far to reduce to manageable proportions the level of violence. As long as a few men were determined on Liberty or Death, there would be some trouble; but the British experience indicated that such trouble could be narrowly limited if the Cabinet wanted to wait long enough, invest enough in repression, and cooperate in devising parallel political solutions. If not, all the military efforts would abort.

Military tactics in the field, refined over a generation in the hands of officers and men who often had differing experiences in counter-insurgency, could be learned, could be applied, could in the long run be largely effective; but only if used in a cunningly prescribed political formula. Military operations in a political vacuum only created a more efficient rebel playing up to the challenge. British military tactics were, therefore, of little use unless political conditions were factored into the formula. Since the political conditions in each case were quite special, the ultimate formula, adjusted to the various regional unknowns, was in each revolt different.

British political tactics in pursuing a strategy of devolution, even in the midst of open revolt, varied vastly and could be quite flexible. Naturally a basic principle was to isolate and if possible ignore the rebels. This meant keeping out international investigators, ignoring United Nations resolutions, and turning back efforts to broaden the crisis. The British, however, if there was advantage, had not the slightest compunction in switching gears. Until Grivas's bombs went off, Cyprus was an internal matter. Almost immediately after the reverberations of the EOKA bombs, there was suddenly a London Tripartite Conference: Cyprus had become an international matter, at least to the degree that Ankara had a veto over Greek ambitions. Palestine, too, in time became an international problem before the United Nations, although the British withdrew rather than effect an international solution not to their own advantage. And when all else failed in South Arabia, London snatched at the

United Nations straw in hopes that one more committee might produce results. There were, then, few hard and fast rules in the use of political tactics.

The British continued to devise a variety of approaches to each crisis that might support a return to order: constitutions, commissions, royal visits, aid and development, promises, and programs. All were used, not so much indiscriminately but as part of the uncertain dialogue. Some of the offers might appear to be positive steps, some might actually be so, some might lead to further devolution; but all played a vital role in forcing the pace. Year in and year out, the British divided and conquered, united and ruled, found old ways out of new corners and the reverse. Tactically, the political initiatives in colonial matters were inventive, creative, and often effective. That there were so few revolts and that those so often led to accommodation attest to British political acumen. The British did stumble on occasion; but still there was enough of that graceful swiftness of foot, so admired and so feared by the lesser breeds, to give evidence that there was life yet in Perfidious Albion.

British political responses to colonial insurgency were often complicated by British strategic interests—although seldom by economic factors. London often had to pick up the chits for the strategists, maintaining possession of the odd bit of real estate the generals needed. Essentially on this level the military laid down that the cost of maintaining a strategic position was worth the price in colonial turmoil. As long as the Cabinet bought the premise, the ground for political maneuver was limited. The criticism that this turmoil negated the strategic value of the colony in question long remained an article of faith with many imperial critics.

. . . BY THE LATE SIXTIES NEITHER STRATEGIC NOR ECONOMIC INTERESTS GREATLY IMPEDED THE RUSH TO DISMANTLE THE EMPIRE.

Whether or not Britain needed Aden in 1965, Cyprus in 1957, or the Suez Canal in 1952 is perhaps problematic. What is quite clear is that the cost of repression, high or low, can also pay dividends. An occupier with sufficient power can put down resistance or contain insurrection and continue to use any base—as the British proved in Cyprus in 1956. Toting up the real cost is much more subtle, however, than satisfying the generals' demands for a fortress. In any event as the generation of devolution progressed, the review of value received indicated that often the strategic content was less vital than the generals assumed and the room for political maneuver broader; even outright evacuation proved in some cases no longer a strategic disaster. Increasingly, too, those in power felt that British economic interests would be as well or better maintained with an indirect presence. Some more pragmatic capitalists had their doubts in certain countries, but hardly anyone wanted to stand up and be counted as an opponent of devolution solely because British profits might suffer. Thus by the late sixties neither strategic nor economic interests greatly impeded the rush to dismantle the Empire.

Just as in the case of the political response by the politicians, so had there been a patterned military response on the part of the British army. The first was an avid desire that the political strategy devised in London be forthright, rigorous, and orchestrated with the local military effort. At times, of course, as noted, the military's own definition of British strategic needs (for example, the whole island of Cyprus as a military base) determined to a large extent the bounds of political action. The military recognized, however, that those bounds were limned in London on advice—not as a result of the direction—of the General Staff. Beginning with the Palestine experience of drift and scuttle, the British army recognized and was sensitive to both the political aspects of revolt and to the ultimate power of the Cabinet. Secondly, if possible, the army wanted the power to pursue the rebels with a vigorous campaign centralized under one command, ideally that of a military man, hopefully unrestricted by local

WITHIN THE PROCESS OF DEVOLUTION THE BASIC BRITISH RESPONSE TO REVOLT, HONED BY EXPERIENCE, NOT ALWAYS PROPERLY ABSORBED, REMAINED LARGELY THE SAME.

authorities. Such ideal conditions seldom existed; either there was existing and competing local authority or serious limitation in the degree of force to be used, or both. Largely, however, the military attitudes toward the rebels differed in no significant way from those of other parties involved in policy formulation.

In sum, within the process of devolution the basic British response to revolt, honed by experience, not always properly absorbed, remained largely the same. First came surprise, followed by shock and the processes of defining the rebels as a minority of evil men using force to garner support from the basically loyal people. If the rebels were beyond compromise or had taken up arms openly, the army pursued an anti-insurgency campaign in sure and certain knowledge that their efforts in the field could succeed only if a political formula were found and supported for the long run by London. The means to fashion such a formula might, however, be limited by the very needs of the military, thereby protracting and complicating the problems of suppression. Seldom were economic factors decisive, even when in Malaya or India or the Gulf they were important. In large part the British managed to avoid open revolts and even then devised solutions other than absolute suppression or evacuation. Given the number of "natives" involved, the opportunity for misunderstanding, the international interference from various friends and enemies, and the nature of partisan politics, the dialogue of devolution seldom broke down.

With the evacuation of South Arabia in 1967 and the end of a British presence east of Suez, the end of Empire appeared to have arrived. There were a flurry of ceremonial flag raisings on small islands and in tiny enclaves and a spurt in Commonwealth membership. Little was left under British sovereignty but rocks and reefs. There were marginal and distant responsibilities in Oman or Borneo, but with the end of Empire the problem of revolt seemed to belong to the past. Such did not turn out to be the case, for once more the Irish question, this time in a particularly violent form, appeared; and once more, whether or not Ulster was an integral part of the United Kingdom, the British response followed the imperial model.

THE IRISH QUESTION RESURRECTED

In August 1969, the civil rights campaign in Northern Ireland collapsed into sectarian violence. The Protestant Unionists, particularly the more militant, believed that "civil rights" was a euphemism for a United Ireland controlled by a Papist Dublin regime. The Catholics, determined to achieve the same political rights available to others in the United Kingdom (the question of a united Ireland aside), would no longer tolerate the provocative and humiliating ritual insults of the majority. They saw this Unionist majority organized into a Protestant state for a Protestant people, where injustice was institutionalized and enforced by a sectarian paramilitary police force and the weight of biased law. Once the riots that began in Derry spread to Belfast, the provincial government at Stormont (a result of the 1921 exercise in devolution) could no longer control the situation; and London ordered the British army in to prevent what appeared to be impending civil war. The British, long uninterested and uninformed about Irish matters, were surprised at the level of violence, the depth of communal hatred, and the intractable and primitive differences between Catholic-Nationalists and Protestant-Unionists. This surprise and subsequent distaste did not, however, lead the Labour government to institute radical political measures to ease what were accepted as legitimate Catholic grievances. Instead

change was urged on a reluctant and suspicious Stormont regime. In the meantime the army kept the uneasy peace while waiting for a moderation of tension or a parallel political initiative. Northern Ireland appeared beyond moderation and, lacking a startling political initiative, began to slide toward chaos.

Three factors produced an open guerrilla war in less than two years. First, London continued to dither, fearful that reform might inspire violent Protestant response, hopeful against all the evidence that time would heal, sanguine to the point of lethargy. In June 1970, a new Conservative government came to power unconcerned with forcing change on Unionist allies and without what had at last been a growing sense of urgency within the Labour cabinet. There were still no radical measures. In the meantime the army saw and was allowed to see its mission as the forcible and rigorous imposition of order. No matter how welcome the military had been to the Catholic community initially, there could be no doubt that the army's posture of neutrality would decay in their eyes. The local "legitimate" authorities at Stormont were loyal Unionists flaunting the Union Jack, proper people who wanted no change. They trusted their police and their army and their friends in London.

The Catholics, on the other hand, wanted change, seeking it in direct action in the streets, distrusting or actively opposing the "illegitimate" authority of Stormont and the police. They caused trouble, often under the rebel tricolor instead of the Union Jack. The British army's sweeps and searches, the use of armor and gas, and the quick hard response were viewed by an increasing number of the minority Catholics as evidence that the army had been co-opted by Stormont. The army as might have been expected slipped from the role of the defender into that of the oppressor. The slide, all but inevitable, was accelerated by a third factor: the maneuvers of the Irish Republican Army. After the August riots in 1969, a new, more military IRA had been formed, the Provisionals or Provos, in contrast to the politically minded official IRA. The Provos at first accepted the role of Catholic Defender, collecting arms, organizing on a neighborhood basis, and even cooperating with the British army to maintain the peace. The leadership of the Provos, a mix of old rebels and new militants, however, intended to transform their role to that of an underground army determined on the expulsion of the British. Thus British tactics, often carefully manipulated by IRA provocation, had by early 1971 alienated much of the Catholic minority. The IRA could then move over to an offensive campaign against the enemy, i.e. the British army. British problems were only compounded in August 1971 with the introduction of internment without trial on the advice of the Stormont regime, who had insisted they knew their Irish natives. The minority then withdrew its consent to be governed, went on rate-and-rent strikes, and backed the Provos. By the end of the year, urban guerrilla war in Ulster had reached a level such that the British Home Secretary Reginald Maulding in Belfast admitted that the IRA could not be crushed but only held within tolerable bounds.

Over the next six months, the British army was sorely pressed. IRA bombs devastated much of downtown Belfast and Derry. The roads in the country were unsafe. There were cross-border incidents, constant sniping in the built-up areas, and a parallel wave of Protestant militancy. The killing of 13 civilians on Bloody Sunday in Derry in January 1972 attracted world-wide attention and vastly complicated the Dublin regime's efforts to contain the IRA in the South. Ultimately, direct rule from London was initiated. The Provos kept up the pressure and finally in July bombed their way to the bargaining table. Provo-Cabinet talks in London led to a brief truce that collapsed into a long year of attrition and continued guerrilla war. The IRA could maintain an unpleasantly high level of violence but not escalate operations. The British army could contain the Provos but not eliminate them. By 1972, however, London had finally geared up and was responding to Irish matters with considerably more flexibility and initiative, if with no more success.

Belfast, 1972.

In Ulster the British had followed the imperial experience. After surprise had come indignation: a tiny IRA minority, acting in behalf of a minority, had attacked the British army, which was performing legitimate peace-keeping duties for the benefit of all. Clearly the IRA maintained support by intimidation since most Catholics surely wanted only decent reforms and peace. The IRA, then, was illegitimate, outlawed North and South, and composed of dreadful bombers who killed innocent civilians in an effort to force the loyalist majority into an alien state against their interests. Thus with the surprise, shock, and outraged indignation came a public determination not to deal with a small gang of violent men who used terror to win support in the pursuit of a mistaken and flawed cause. When neither indignation nor suppression proved effective, London undertook various alternative political approaches and ultimately even talked with the Provos on the cabinet level.

Well before that, in February 1971, when the British security forces slipped irrevocably from peace-keeping into anti-insurgency, the typical two-prong British attack on the problem had been fashioned: military and security operations in the service of political initiatives that sought to erode rebel support by creating parallel options. Even the fact that these political initiatives were so haltingly deployed over the next year was not novel, and much political ground had already been covered by committees, investigations, and consultations. The end of Stormont was seen in part as a means to open the road to a regional solution that would wean the minority from an all-Ireland solution and find some middle force in Ulster. The meeting

with the Provos in London was as much to allow politics a chance to replace the bomb as a serious attempt to find an accommodation with the bombers. Still, it fit in neatly with previous British attempts to pursue a pragmatic and flexible course, however unpleasant. And in Ulster the army, hampered by the albatross of Stormont, the difficulties of operating under the television lens against a Caucasian enemy, and the restrictions imposed by London on excessive rigor, had responded too as in the past. The army sought only authority to do the necessary anti-insurgency job and urged, if quietly, only the need for political intiatives out of London.

EPILOGUE

Events in Ulster have tended to confirm the pattern evolving out of Britain's experience with imperial insurrections. Ireland may or may not be a classic colonial case, as many Irishmen contend; but the British response can be satisfactorily compared to those earlier insurrections. The elucidation of such a pattern is not an academic exercise, even though Britain herself seems truly to have run out of potential imperial rebels; for analogies to her experiences are sure to abound elsewhere. Certainly the next and future rebels, if they are to be wise as well as daring, should contemplate not only the course record of their chosen opponents but also the nature of the national character reflected in the response to revolt. The rebel forewarned may well, as did several of the rebels against the Crown, respond to strategic advantage. They, like the Provos in Belfast, emboldened and encouraged by that knowledge, may fashion a strategy to fit the traditional predilections of their enemy. And on their part, the guardians of existing order might well consider an exercise in introspective analysis. Clearly, for the complete strategist faced with the potential or reality of insurgency, it is as well to know oneself as it is to know the enemy—they may even be interchangeable.

NOTES

1. The literature on all aspects of the Palestine problem is massive (see my bibliography in *The Long War, Israel and the Arabs Since 1946* [Englewood Cliffs: Prentice Hall, 1968]). There is no definitive history of the Irgun, but the best study of the Mandate is still J. C. Hurewitz, *The Struggle for Palestine* (New York: Greenwood, 1968). On the rebel side see Menachem Begin, *The Revolt* (London: W. H. Allen, 1951) and Samuel Katz, *Days of Fire, The Secret Story of the Making of Israel* (London: W. H. Allen, 1968). On the British side there is R. D. Wilson, *Cordon and Search* (Aldershot: Gale and Polden, 1949). A recent survey of the entire period is Dan Kurzman's *Genesis 1948* (New York: World, 1970) containing interesting material on the Irgun.

2. Until my *On Revolt: Strategies of National Liberation* (New York: Basic Books, forthcoming 1974) appears, there will be no single work focused on the various insurgencies against the British since the Second World War. A near exception is Julian Paget's *Counter-Insurgency Campaigning* (London: Faber & Faber, 1967) that examines Malaya, Kenya, and Cyprus. In general, broad analysis tends to concentrate on the political emergence of new nations into the new Commonwealth (Rupert Emerson, *From Empire to Nation* [Boston: Beacon Press, 1962], and Nicholas Mansergh, *The Commonwealth Experience* [London: Weidenfeld and Nicoloson, 1969]). A fascinating popular account of the process is Colin Cross, *The Fall of Empire* (New York: Coward-McCann, 1969). There is a considerable literature on colonial insurgency as seen through British eyes in various professional journals: R. N. Anderson, "Search Operations in Palestine, *Marine Corps Gazette* (April 1948), or Brigadier Heathcote, "Radforce-Lecture," *Royal United Service Journal* (January 1966). These seldom offer an overall view, however, but rather generalizations from specific experiences.

3. The most famous study to come out of the Malayan emergency is Sir Robert Thompson's *Defeating Communist Insurgency* (London: Chatto and Windus, 1966). Two other studies focused on the British military response are Richard Clutterbuck, *The Long, Long War, The Emergency in Malaya 1948-1960* (London: Cassell, 1967), and Edgar O'Ballance, *Malaya: The Communist Insurgent War 1948-1960* (Hamden, Conn.: Archon Books, 1966).

4. There is not a satisfactory study of the Kenya emergency. The most famous is Fred Majdalany, *State of Emergency, The Full Story of Mau Mau* (London: Longmans, Green, 1962). The basis of the British interpretation can be found in F. D. Corfield,

Historical Survey of the Origins and Growth of Mau Mau (London: H.M.S.O., 1960), and countered in Carl G. Rosverg and John Nottingham, *The Myth of 'Mau Mau' Nationalism in Kenya* (New York: Praeger, 1966).

5. The most interesting, and perhaps the fairest, survey of the EOKA emergency is by Charles Foley, Editor of the *Cyprus Times* during the Cypriot crisis, *Island in Revolt* (London: Longmans, 1962), later extended as *Legacy of Strife, Cyprus from Rebellion to Civil War* (Harmondsworth: Penguin, 1964). On the rebel side there is Grivas's *Guerrilla Warfare and EOKA's Struggle* (London: Longmans, 1964), and *Memoirs* (London: Longmans, 1964). For a more jaundiced view of EOKA see Dudley Barker, *Grivas: Portrait of a Terrorist* (London: Cresset, 1959).

6. A remarkable number of the British Governors or High Commissioners have written their memoirs—Sir Bernard Reilly, Sir Tom Hickinbotham, Sir Charles Johnston, Sir Kennedy Trevaskis (*Shades of Amber. A South Arabian Episode* [London: Hutchinson, 1968]) and Lord Trevelyan; but the most interesting if intemperate work is Colin Mitchell's *Having Been a Soldier* (London: Hamish Hamilton, 1970). Two general surveys are Julian Paget, *Aden 1964-1967* (London: Faber and Faber, 1969), and Tom Little, *South Arabia, Arena of Conflict* (London: Pall Mall, 1968).

To the People of Ireland!

"Our Freedom must be had at all hazards."—Wolfe Tone.

The time has come to practice the advice of Fintan Lalor, namely: to train our hands and our sons' hands, for the day will come when we and they will have to use them.

The workers must be disciplined and alert if they are to enjoy the just proceeds of their labour. It has been well said:

"The Price of Liberty is Eternal Vigilance."

The methods of discipline and alertness and the means of power to train our hands, are provided by

THE IRISH CITIZEN ARMY.

This organisation embraces the full principles of Republican Democracy; its aim is to sink the difference of Birth, Privilege and Creed under the common name of the Irish People. It stands for a Union of Progressive Nationalism with the Democratic forces of Ireland, and its policy is to achieve that; for which

Theobald Wolfe Tone died, and John Mitchel suffered—

AN INDEPENDENT IRELAND.

Irishmen! Join the Citizen Army NOW and help us to build up an Irish Co-operative Commonwealth.

All inquiries to be addressed to:

HON. SEC., LIBERTY HALL, DUBLIN.

Muscail do Mhisneach, a Bhanba!

A 1913 Handbill.