

within the framework of the Concept. The reason for this rigidity was best expressed by Bernard Brodie when he wrote: "The fact that the military have to practice only intermittently the function for which they exist means that a doctrine that is congenial can be adopted and cherished and given a dominant place in strategic planning. . . . One must remember too . . . that people wedded to dogmas will often continue to cherish them undiminished despite ongoing experience that to any detached observer would prove these dogmas wrong. Awkward events can be explained away as being due either to special circumstances not likely to recur or to a misreading of the evidence."⁴

In sum, the Army's pre-Vietnam experience in low-intensity conflict in general and in counterinsurgency in particular represented a trivial portion of the service's history as compared with the three conventional wars that it had fought over the previous half-century. It was the Army's experience in these conflicts—the two world wars and the Korean War—that formed the basis for its approach to the war in Vietnam.

Any understanding of why the Army Concept represented such a gross mismatch with the needs of an effective counterinsurgency strategy, however, requires an appreciation of how and why insurgent movements succeed, as well as what steps can be taken to defeat them.

Guerrillas: Why They Are There

An insurgency is a *protracted struggle* conducted methodically, step by step, in order to obtain specific intermediate objectives leading finally to the overthrow of the existing order.⁵ Insurgencies typically follow the prescription laid down by such revolutionaries as Mao Zedong and General Vo-Nguyen Giap. As developed by Mao in China and adapted by Giap in Vietnam, contemporary insurgency is a Third World phenomenon comprising three phases: first, insurgent agitation and proselytization among the masses—the phase of contention; second, overt violence, guerrilla operations, and the establishment of bases—the equilibrium phase; and third, open warfare between insurgent and government forces designed to topple the existing regime—the counteroffensive phase.⁶

Specifically, phase 1 involves the creation of a party. The insurgent seeks to develop a close-knit political cadre and to recruit new members to the cause. During phase 2 the insurgent expands his base of support through attacks on the local government leadership and efforts to gain control over villages located in remote or nearly inaccessible areas. Guerrilla units are formed utilizing the base of support that has developed among the population. The link with the population becomes crucial at

this stage of the insurgency. As Mao noted, guerrilla warfare without a base of support among the people is nothing but "roving banditism." Unless they can maintain their access to the population, insurgent forces cannot extend their control and are bound to be defeated. During this stage there are attacks on the government structure at the district level, as well as hit-and-run assaults on vulnerable government forces.

In phase 3 the government witnesses the formation of main-force, or conventional-style, maneuver battalions, regiments, and even divisions of insurgent forces and the initiation of open warfare with government troops. Insurgent lines of communication at the province (state) level are put into place, and a regional command structure is initiated to coordinate efforts on a large scale. The aim is to create an irresistible momentum that will make an insurgent victory appear inevitable. Furthermore, the activities conducted at the lower stages do not cease; they continue to reinforce the overall insurgent effort to topple the regime in power.

In this, the final stage, all insurgent forces are committed to a general offensive conducted in coordination with a massive popular uprising against the government. Full-scale, set-piece battles occur, possibly with the help of large-scale, external, main-force units. The end result of this stage is the insurgents' victory and their assumption of power.

Time is an ally of the insurgent, allowing him to forge a strong organization and consolidate his strength. Furthermore, the longer the insurgency continues, the greater the sense of futility and frustration on the government's part, a frustration that can lead to ill-advised attempts at shortcuts in trying to defeat the insurgents.

If time is essential to the accumulation of insurgent strength, the people are the foundation upon which that strength is built. Political mobilization, said Mao, "is the most fundamental condition for winning the war." Since the insurgent is initially too weak to openly challenge the government, he must pursue an indirect approach. The target of that approach is the population. If the insurgent can gain control over the population through fear, popular appeal, or, more likely, a mixture of both, he will win the war. He will win because the support of the people, be it willing or unwilling, will provide him with manpower for his guerrilla units, the food, medicine, and shelter to support them, and the intelligence on government forces necessary to his safety. At the same time, the inability of the government to control the people will sap away its strength, denying it replacements for the armed forces, making taxes difficult or impossible to collect, and drying up its sources of information about insurgent cadres and guerrillas.

Thus, to eventually win the support of the people. The people, Mao noted, "The support of the people for the aims and objectives is desirable. Rather, the ability to control the community. T. E. lions can be made passively sympathetic and minds of the people willing or unwilling."

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Thus, to eventually control the country, the insurgent must control the people. The people enable the insurgent forces to survive and grow. As Mao noted, "The people are like water and the army is like fish."⁸ The support of the people does not, however, necessarily imply their support for the aims and goals of the insurgent, although this is, of course, desirable. Rather, the support of the people is a measure of the insurgents' ability to *control* the people, whether through their willing cooperation or as the result of threats, acts of terrorism, or the physical occupation of their community. T. E. Lawrence recognized this when he stated that "rebellions can be made by two percent active in a striking force, and 98 percent passively sympathetic."⁹ Thus, the insurgent need not possess the hearts and minds of the population, only the minds—the peoples' acquiescence, willing or unwilling, in the revolutionary cause.

Insurgent control of the population explains why an insurgent movement can expand as a whole even while heavy casualties are inflicted on its guerrilla units. The ability of the insurgent to draw on the population for replacements and the expansion of insurgent control over the people through subversion, persuasion, or terror not only will serve to replace losses but will likely result in an increase in strength. The population, therefore, serves as the indispensable base of the insurgent forces.

Until the insurgents' strength can be built up, military operations will be planned and executed, not primarily against government forces, but with an eye toward how well they will extend control over the population. Furthermore, the protracted nature of the conflict allows the insurgent to refuse to give battle with government forces in the event that losses would be unacceptably high.¹⁰

The bottom line for a successful guerrilla warfare operation, then, is a primary support system anchored on the population. Sir Robert Thompson, the noted British expert on insurgency warfare, viewed this support system as running in the *opposite* direction from that of a conventional army.¹¹ In a conventional war, supplies and support are brought up from the rear to support combat operations focused on the destruction of the enemy's armed forces. In an insurgency, supplies and support are *at the front, among the people*, and the direction of the logistical flow is *opposite* that of the line of advance (it flows from the "front lines"—the people—to the insurgents' rear base areas). Combat operations focus on controlling the population to drain the government of its strength and to pave the way for the move to the general counter-offensive. A common error on the part of "conventional" military people has been to view the interruption of infiltration or external support for the

guerrillas as the key to isolating and defeating the insurgents. External support for guerrilla forces, however, at best performs the role of a secondary support system during phase 1 and phase 2 operations. Such external support achieves primacy only during the phase 3 counter-offensive, if then.¹² It is important to recognize that even as the insurgents move from guerrilla warfare to phase 3 operations, the conflict is never transformed into a purely conventional war. The process of transformation is a gradual one in which the principles of regular warfare gradually appear and increasingly develop but still bear a guerrilla character.¹³

While time, access to the people, and guerrilla warfare are the tools the insurgent uses to build a successful strategic framework, two essential elements make up the foundation of that structure: a cause around which rally popular support and a weak governmental administrative and law enforcement apparatus. They allow the insurgent to survive and expand in the early stages of the insurgency, when his forces are weakest and most vulnerable. A cause provides the insurgent leadership with the means to attract that dedicated core to form the revolutionary cadre that is essential if the revolution is to succeed. Ideally it embodies something that the government cannot espouse without risking loss of power (anti-colonialism/nationalism and land reform are two examples). Inefficient police methods and the absence of effective administrative control allow the insurgent cadre the freedom of movement necessary to recruit new followers. The absence of a well-run police force also provides fertile ground for the employment of terror by the insurgents against those individuals who persist in supporting the government.

Guerrillas: How to Beat Them

Just as insurgents have their own set of principles, maxims, or "rules," so must the government develop a set of rules apart from those of conventional warfare if it hopes to prevail. In conventional warfare, military action focused on the achievement of the military objectives set by the policymakers assumes priority, while political, social, and economic considerations are consigned to a secondary role. Yet, if the insurgents are to be defeated, these "secondary" considerations must achieve equality with military goals and objectives. In conventional wars, strategy prescribes the conquest of the enemy's territory, yet this rarely occurs prior to the destruction of the enemy's forces in battle. These rules do not apply, however, against an enemy that refuses to fight for territory.

In an insurgency, the way to destroy the insurgent is to attack him at the source of his strength: the population. If the counterinsurgent forces can

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minimize insurgent access to the population, the insurgent's access to manpower, supplies, and intelligence will be curtailed. Guerrillas can adjust their tempo of operations and remain inactive during periods when ammunition and/or weapons are in short supply, but they must eat. They therefore cannot maintain sizeable forces over a protracted period of time without access to a rather substantial food supply. The intelligence information that the insurgents derive through their ability to inspire or intimidate the people also provides a key link in the chain of factors that enable the guerrillas to survive and prosper. For the insurgents, loss of intelligence means that they can no longer determine with any degree of certainty the whereabouts and movements of government forces. Furthermore, the problem is compounded if the people, feeling secure from insurgent retribution, begin to provide the counterinsurgent forces with information on the activities of the guerrillas.

If denied the ability to move quickly and easily among the population, the insurgent will become, to paraphrase Mao, like a fish out of water. He will be forced to stand and fight to reassert control over the population, in which case he can be identified and destroyed by the superior counterinsurgent forces; or he can retreat to his remote base areas, where isolation from the people will diminish his strength and render the movement increasingly irrelevant in the eyes of the people.

Should government forces attempt to defeat the insurgency through the destruction of guerrilla forces in quasi-conventional battles, they will play into the hands of the insurgent forces. Insurgent casualties suffered under these circumstances will rarely be debilitating for the insurgents. First, the insurgents have no need to engage the government forces—they are not fighting to hold territory. Second, as long as the government forces are out seeking battle with the guerrilla units, the insurgents are not forced to fight to maintain access to the people. Therefore, *the initiative remains with the guerrillas*—they can “set” their own level of casualties (probably just enough to keep the government forces out seeking the elusive big battles), thus rendering ineffective all efforts by the counterinsurgent forces to win a traditional military victory.

As a result of these circumstances, the conventional forces of the government's army must be reoriented away from destroying enemy forces toward asserting government control over the population and winning its support. Government forces should be organized primarily around light infantry units, particularly in phases 1 and 2 of the insurgency. These forces must be *ground-mobile* in order to patrol intensively in and around populated areas, keeping guerrilla bands off guard and away

from the people. The counterinsurgent must eliminate the tendency, fostered by conventional doctrine, to cluster his forces in large units. Only when the insurgency moves into phase 3 will the need for substantial numbers of main-force conventional units arise. Of course, even in phase 3 the counterinsurgent will require a force of well-trained light infantry to combat guerrilla and subversive activity that occurs in the shadow of the big-unit war.

Winning the hearts and minds of the people is as desirable for the government as it is for the insurgent. This objective can only be fully realized, however, after control of the population is effected and its security provided for. Developing popular support often involves political participation (at least on the local level), public works (irrigation ditches, dams, wells), and social reform (land reform, religious toleration, access to schools). These actions are designed to preempt the insurgent's cause, as, for example, in the case of land reform in the Philippines during the Huk Rebellion or the timetable established for the end of British rule in the Malaysian insurgency.¹⁴ Nevertheless, even though attempts to co-opt the insurgents may prove successful in winning the hearts of the people, they will be for naught unless the government provides the security necessary to free the people from the fear of insurgent retribution should they openly support the government.

While it is a relatively easy matter for government forces to drive guerrilla bands away from a given area, it is far more difficult for the military to work hand in hand with the local police and paramilitary forces over a prolonged period to complete the destruction of insurgent forces that have mixed with the population. Yet this is exactly what must be done, and every military move must be viewed with an eye to how it will promote the achievement of this objective.

The support of the population is conditional in that the government must prove to the people that it has the resources to defeat the insurgency and the will to do so. The people who have watched the insurgents painstakingly construct their political infrastructure and punish those who oppose them will not expose themselves to support the regime merely because government forces have temporarily occupied the area and dug a well. The insurgent infrastructure within a village must be eliminated and there must be a long-term government presence in order to create an atmosphere free from fear of reprisal before the people will openly associate themselves with the regime. The people can weather an occasional guerrilla assault on their village, even when the loss of life is involved, far better than they can endure a string of assassinations

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indicating that insurgent agents are living among them. The former implies a relatively high degree of security, while in the latter case security is nonexistent. Without this degree of security, civic action programs designed to win the support of the people are irrelevant. Such civic action programs in the absence of government control over the area merely increase the resources available to the people for reaching an accommodation with the guerrillas.¹⁵ Finally, the government must execute its actions as part of a well-planned strategy executed by forces trained and organized for counterinsurgency.¹⁶ There must be a unity of effort and a unity of command among the government agencies involved. In combating an insurgency, a government has no resources to waste.

The elements of a successful strategy for the counterinsurgent involve securing the government's base areas, separating the guerrilla forces from the population, and eliminating the insurgent infrastructure. In an area infested by insurgency, the army must concentrate enough force to either destroy or expel the main body of guerrillas in clear-and-hold operations to prepare the area for pacification, that is, for those actions taken by the government to assert its control over the population and to win its willing support.

After the army has driven off or killed the main guerrilla forces, its units must remain in the area while local paramilitary forces are created and the influence of the police force is reestablished. The paramilitary forces should be drawn from among the inhabitants of the area and trained in counterinsurgency operations such as small-unit patrolling, night operations, and the ambush. Resurrection of the local police force is equally important. Properly trained, the police can make an invaluable contribution to the defeat of the insurgents by weeding out the political infrastructure, thus preventing the reemergence of the insurgent movement once the army departs.

Thus, if the paramilitary forces can perform the local security mission, and if the police can extinguish the embers of the insurgent movement through suppression of its infrastructure, the people will begin to feel secure enough to provide these forces with information on the movements of local guerrilla forces and on the individuals who make up the cells of the insurgent movement. But before any of this can occur, it is necessary for the government's main-force army units to demonstrate that they will remain in the newly cleared area until such time as the people are capable of assuming the bulk of the responsibility for their own defense. Should the army depart the area before the paramilitary units and the police force are capable of effective operation, it will have accomplished nothing. The

insurgent infrastructure will quickly reemerge from hiding, and the guerrillas will return to reassert their control. The temporary control established by the government must be followed by the implementation of measures designed to achieve permanent control. Thus, the counter-insurgent must direct his efforts, not toward seeking combat with the insurgent's guerrilla forces, but at the insurgent political infrastructure, which is the foundation of successful insurgency warfare. Keep the guerrilla bands at arm's length from the people and destroy their eyes and ears—the infrastructure—and you can win.

To this end, the police force resurrected in the aftermath of the army's clear-and-hold operation in step I must, in coordination with military intelligence, seek to focus its information-gathering operations on the infrastructure, not the guerrillas. This activity has traditionally been a difficult one for the military, which traditionally focuses intelligence efforts on the enemy's order of battle. The key is to maintain a unified intelligence operation concentrated on the insurgent's political cadre. If the intelligence organization is targeted on the infrastructure, it will get the order of battle as well, but if it is targeted on the order of battle, it will not get the infrastructure.¹⁷

The process of rooting out the insurgents' political cells is necessarily a long one. Obviously, the army cannot position several battalions of troops in every village and town over a prolonged period to prevent the guerrillas from reasserting themselves; it would have nowhere near the forces required for such an undertaking. What the government can do, however, is train and equip paramilitary forces comprising people indigenous to the area. These forces should receive their training while regular army units provide local security. As the local forces acquired skill and confidence, the army units would be phased out of local security operations. The ultimate objective would see the paramilitary forces assuming the entire local security mission, calling upon a mobile quick-reaction force of regular troops only when under attack by main-force guerrilla units.

Emphasis must be placed on mobile, light infantry operations, primarily in a nocturnal environment. When enough small, friendly units are roaming the countryside, it will be both difficult and dangerous for the insurgents to mobilize their forces into main-force units for attacks upon the towns and hamlets. They will no longer have the ability to move within a large geographical area for an extended period of time without being detected and intercepted.¹⁸

A locally recruited force will have an advantage over even the government's regular units in that it has a better knowledge of the people and the

terrain. This increase can be based on intelligence. The effect of this kind of control between the insurgent and guerrilla bands is to make them equally important and fragmented, denying them the ability to rob them of their eyes and ears.¹⁹

Once the security is accomplished, the government must be able to control the people or see the fight, they will be reaction forces.

To be successful, many governments are the largest. Because of a myriad of nonmilitary factors, the multi-insurgency strategy

If this strategy is pacified, the society will become irreducible, while the government has gradually seeps secure their base and transform them. The insurgent will be receiving assistance to relocate to remove the aid flowing past before they are stamped out; the government's effort

Thus, both departures from "that" won its spirit of thought and

terrain. This increases the likelihood that counterinsurgent operations will be based on intelligent anticipation, not blind swipes at the enemy. The effect of this kind of patrolling is to break down the communication between the insurgent infrastructure that exists among the people and the guerrilla bands that lie in wait just outside the populated areas. What is equally important, saturation patrolling keeps guerrilla bands small and fragmented, denying them the ability to concentrate in large groups and robbing them of the element of surprise should they mass for large-scale attacks.¹⁹

Once the security of the population and its attendant resources is accomplished, the initiative in the war will pass from the insurgent to the government. The insurgent will either have to fight to maintain control of the people or see his capabilities diminish. If the insurgents decide to fight, they will present themselves as targets for government mobile reaction forces.

To be successful, counterinsurgency requires coordination among many government organizations, of which the military is only one, albeit the largest. Because of the political and social nature of the conflict and the myriad nonmilitary institutions involved, a unified approach that orchestrates the multidimensional elements of the government's counterinsurgency strategy is essential.

If this strategy is carried out effectively, more and more areas will be pacified, the source of insurgent strength will abate, and guerrilla attacks will become increasingly rare. Kidnappings and assassinations will dwindle, while insurgent defections will increase. Here the efforts of the government have been compared to an oil drop that upon striking a cloth gradually seeps outward. So, too, the government forces, once they secure their bases, gradually seep outward to pacify more regions and transform them into secure, government-controlled areas. At this point the insurgent will be forced to retreat to phase 1 operations. If the insurgent is receiving assistance from outside the country, he will eventually have to relocate to remote areas near or across the national border in order to keep the aid flowing and the revolution from being extinguished. Years may pass before these small, isolated bands are eliminated and the insurgency stamped out; however, the insurgency will have ceased to threaten the government's existence.

Thus, both insurgency and counterinsurgency represent major departures from "conventional" war. For the United States Army, an army that "won its spurs" through winning conventional wars, the reorientation of thought and process, of doctrine and organization, to acclimate itself to

what was, for it, a “new” conflict environment in Vietnam presented a major challenge. Prior to entering into the quagmire that was Vietnam, however, a brief look at the Korean War—the Army’s first taste of limited war in the nuclear age—is in order.

The Impact of the Korean War

The Korean War was waged by the Army, in congruence with its Concept, within limits set by the political leadership. With the exception of MacArthur’s brilliant assault at Inchon, American Army commanders placed their emphasis on massive firepower and attrition of North Korean and Chinese forces.²⁰ Attrition in Korea was essentially a strategy adopted by default, the result of the Truman administration’s limiting the military’s ability to horizontally or vertically escalate the war to execute a campaign of annihilation against the North Koreans and the Chinese.²¹ The reality was that the parameters of war were modified through the advent of nuclear weapons and the emerging balance of terror between the Superpowers. The potential costs of a full-scale land war with China, coupled with the possible intervention (in Europe, it was feared) of America’s budding nuclear rival, the Soviet Union, mandated a limit on U.S. objectives.

For the Army leadership, accustomed to being given its objective (usually total victory) by the political leadership and then having a relatively free reign in achieving it, Korea proved a frustrating experience. After three years of fighting, these self-imposed limitations on troops and weaponry left the Army in a stalemate along roughly the same lines as those that existed when the war began. At the time of the armistice in July 1953, the U.S. commander, General Mark Clark, told newsmen, “I cannot find it in me to exult in this hour.”²² There was a strong feeling among the upper echelons of the Army that Korea was, to quote General Bradley, “the wrong war, at the wrong place, at the wrong time.” This belief was reflective of an Army accustomed to winning its wars and waging them to a successful conclusion. A “Never Again” attitude developed in the Army, fortified by the negative reaction of the American people to the idea that limited wars were neither desirable nor acceptable.²³

The American public’s disenchantment with limited war was in part responsible for the failure of Truman’s Democratic party to maintain its twenty-year hold on the White House in the 1952 presidential election. Truman’s successor, Dwight Eisenhower, adopted a strategy that reflected his concerns about America’s willingness to pursue limited wars to

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According to Eisenhower, the United States would not intervene in Korea as the one in Korea because of nuclear weapons, and U.S. superiority of strategy would avoid threatening to escalate.

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Early Involvement

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