

UNCONVENTIONAL WARFARE

By Franklin A. Lindsay

UNCONVENTIONAL war is the war that is being fought today in Laos and South Viet Nam; it is the war that the French fought in Indochina and are now fighting in Algeria. It is a form of warfare the Communists have learned to employ with great effectiveness, and one which they will continue to exploit to the maximum in furthering their long-range objectives.

Unconventional warfare differs profoundly from warfare in which regular armies are openly engaged in combat. The objective of such conventional combat is to win control of a state by defeating the enemy's military forces in the field. In contrast, the strategy of unconventional forces must be to win control of the state by first winning control of the civil population. For without the disciplined support of the civil population, militarily inferior guerrilla forces can have no hope of success.

As yet the West has not developed a form of defense that is adequate against this form of warfare. And even where the defense has been effective, the costs to the West of suppressing such attacks have been many times the costs to the Communists of mounting them. In Greece between 1945 and 1948, for example, Communist guerrilla forces, numbering less than 20,000 armed men, successfully cut the country in two so that the only communication between north and south was by sea and air. A Greek army of several hundred thousand men, heavily supported by the United States, was required to contain the very much smaller guerrilla force. The total cost of military and political pacification, and of economic reconstruction, was about \$2 billion—or somewhere between 100 and 1,000 times what the Communists had spent. The fortuitous defection of Yugoslavia from the Soviet bloc, and the consequent loss of guerrilla bases in Macedonia, caused the Communists to call off their attack. Had this not occurred, the costs in men, money and matériel needed finally to subdue the Communist rebels would have been many times greater. And the outcome would not have been certain.

The essential reasons the Communists have been able to do so much with so little in many areas of the world are four:

1. They have learned thoroughly the techniques of gaining

control of the civil population by combining effectively the positive incentives of a political doctrine, applied meticulously from the grass roots up, and the negative pressures of a terrorism applied against those who refuse to accept their leadership voluntarily.

2. They have mastered the principles and techniques of guerilla warfare, a form of warfare quite apart from regular or frontal warfare.

3. They have directed their most determined attacks against countries whose territory is contiguous to the Communist empire so that safe haven and training areas can be provided for guerillas and so that supplies can be provided clandestinely.

4. They have also been able to exploit effectively the pent-up hatreds against former colonial powers and pent-up frustrations with the slow pace of economic advancement.

In most cases these have proven to be unbeatable combinations.

To gain control of a key part of the civilian population is an absolute prerequisite for further action. Having gained this control, the Communist leadership is then in a position to use its guerrilla force with great advantage against equal or superior forces supporting the government in power.

A guerrilla force is like the top of an iceberg; the supporting civilian organization, without which it cannot survive, is the much larger part that can't be seen. Just as control of the air has become a prerequisite for successful frontal warfare, so control of the population is a prerequisite for successful unconventional warfare. From the outset of conflict, a major struggle for control over the civilian population will take place and it will continue throughout the entire course of the war. Each side must try to organize the civil population into a tightly disciplined force, and, through propaganda and police activities, try to break the grip exercised by its adversary.

In Viet Nam, for example, the defeat of the French was due primarily to the Communists' success in this regard. It made it possible to trap French forces in one bloody ambush after another until the French were so weakened they could no longer keep open supply lines to their fortified outposts. Once the fortified outposts were isolated and could no longer be supplied, except in dribblets by air, the Communists were in a position to complete the establishment of political and military control over the rest of the country. With their base of operations thus se-

cured, they could safely convert their guerrilla forces to regular assault forces equipped with heavy artillery and a supply system to back it. The final phase was to launch massive frontal assaults against these weakened fortresses.

Thus the French and their local supporters were progressively driven from the country into the villages, and from the villages into the cities until, at the end, they held in the north of Indochina only the heavily fortified perimeter immediately surrounding Hanoi. In the areas from which they had withdrawn, the Communists erected a political structure which exacted the positive loyalty of every peasant and his family by the stark example of violence to some and the threat of heavy punishment or death to others.

The key to the successes of the Communist guerrillas in Viet Nam and elsewhere is found in the fact that they had established control over the rural population as a first step. For every man in a guerrilla force carrying a rifle there must be a large number of civilians who provide the support he must have to survive and fight. They are the source of food, clothing and recruits. Even more important, the civilian organization must supply the guerrilla force with constant operational intelligence on every movement of the enemy. Only with such information can a militarily inferior guerrilla force be forewarned of an encircling trap, a planned offensive or an ambush. This intelligence net embraces not only the peasants who observe military movements but also spies in enemy headquarters who provide advance warning of intended offensives.

The cause of the French defeat in Viet Nam can be traced to their loss of the support of the civilian population. Here, as elsewhere, the Communists had been able to capitalize upon a basic anti-colonial feeling and to harness this antagonism into an effective tool for political indoctrination of the population. But in order to obtain effective control, the Communists go far beyond political indoctrination. Once they have a fanatically dedicated minority, they begin the application of systematic terror to ensure that the masses of the people will be brought under, and kept under, complete Communist control. Their objective is to build in each village—even though it may be under nominal control of the legitimate government—a shadow government completely controlled by the local Communist representative. It has often happened that in a single village two governments exist simulta-

neously, one the official and open government representing the anti-Communist central government, the other the secret government which, in fact, exercises complete control over the actions of every member of the village.

The use of terror to form a secret government under the nose of the enemy has long been a Communist technique. In some of the worst German concentration camps, a secret Communist government was often sufficiently powerful to bring about the execution, through clandestine manipulation of Gestapo records, of those prisoners who failed to accept its control.

The French were defeated in Viet Nam because they were fighting blind. They never knew where the enemy was. They were repeatedly caught on the march in the most indefensible positions where, without warning, they were subjected to murderous rifle, machine gun and mortar fire from concealed positions on both sides of the track. The surviving remnants of one ambush lived only to be cut down the next day by the same Viet Minh force, which held them constantly under surveillance, and moved through the jungles on foot to prepare the next ambush on the expected line of march. When the French undertook mop-up operations in areas known to be harboring guerrilla forces, the Communist-controlled civil population collaborated in warning the guerrillas, and in helping them to hide or escape.

The pattern of, first, political organization, second, guerrilla warfare and, finally, frontal assault was followed in Jugoslavia during World War II, in China from the thirties until the Communist victory in 1950, and in Viet Nam prior to the partition of the country in 1955. Now it is being followed in South Viet Nam, where Communist organizers have been increasingly active in building clandestine organizations in the rural areas. During the last year, guerrilla activities were stepped up with the objective of forcing government troops to withdraw from the villages into the larger towns and into fortified positions. Now it appears from reports from Saigon that the Communist leaders have decided that their control of many areas outside the cities is sufficiently firm to permit the use of regular military units trained in North Viet Nam. If their judgment is correct, the war for South Viet Nam has entered the third, or final, assault stage.

Because the Communists have been permitted to consolidate their hold over most of the country, the forces of the government, supported by the United States, find themselves in a very pre-

carious position. They can be extricated from the situation only by an extraordinary military effort coupled with a major effort to free the rural areas from the pressures of Communist terror.

In Malaya and in the Philippines are found two examples of the successful suppression and ultimate defeat of Communist guerrilla forces. In both cases, the heart of the Western strategy was twofold: (1) a vigorous and aggressive pursuit of the Communist guerrillas into their own territory while maintaining constant pressure on them so that they were denied the initiative and the ability to launch attacks on their own terms; (2) a major political program undertaken to win back the population, to protect it against the violence and reprisals of the Communists, and to match force with force.

The second of these represents one of the West's most difficult problems, for it is obvious that when two forces are contending for the loyalty of, and control over, the civilian population, the side which uses violent reprisals most aggressively will dominate most of the people, even though their sympathies may lie in the other direction. Communist efforts to dominate the population must be frustrated before their control has become strong enough to support guerrilla operations. If the Communists are unopposed in their initial application of force against the civilian population, and thereby gain control, the counterforce which must be applied finally to break that control will be far greater and the population will suffer far more than if action had been taken resolutely at the outset.

In 1945 in Rumania, for example, a broad popular feeling of support for the monarchy had developed spontaneously. As evidence of this loyalty, people wore badges with the royal coat of arms. Communist thugs began systematically beating up people wearing the monarchist symbol whom they were able to catch alone in back streets after dark. There was no reaction from the population other than to stop wearing these pins when they were alone at night. Thus emboldened, the Communists became more aggressive until they beat up, in broad daylight and in the open streets, those who still wore the monarchist pins. Finally the pins were driven completely from the streets; the will of the people had been broken and the first step in the Communist takeover had been accomplished.

The way in which force is applied to counter Communist terror is nevertheless all-important. The strategy of the Communists

may be to use acts of terror and sabotage to goad the government into repressive counter-measures and thereby widen the split between the population and the government. Thus when the government and its security forces use force to meet the Communist terror they must do so resolutely, but with great selectivity and only against those who are directly responsible.

II

The first step in mobilizing a civilian population against Communist subversion and guerrilla attack is to establish a set of political goals expressed in terms that the average person can understand. They must be goals that strike a sympathetic response and that aim to remove the inequities in the existing society and the grievances which they have caused. Through mass communications these reform programs must be communicated effectively, and repeatedly, to the population.

But this is only the beginning of the task. Political organizers must be recruited and trained in sufficient numbers to reach by direct contact nearly every family in the land. They must be as thorough as the best of ward or district leaders in American politics. The organizer must know everyone in his village. He must know who are the Communist sympathizers and who are the secret Communist organizers. He must know who comes and goes in the village and what their business is. He must build a core of persons loyal to himself and to the government. Through these people he must be constantly informed of the activities of the Communists and the pressures they are placing on villagers to gain their secret help. Above all, he must be able to provide effective protection to those who, against their will, are being forced into Communist collaboration by threats of violence against themselves and their families. To accomplish this, he must have the support of his own government and of the West; he must be able not only to provide physical protection but to alleviate the legitimate economic and political grievances of his village. More than anyone else, the local political organizer holds the key to success or failure. If he is successful in his task, he will hold the loyalty of his village and will be able to integrate its people and resources into the effort to defeat the Communists.

If he is not successful, the shadow of Communist control will gradually be extended and consolidated until the village is organized entirely in support of the Communist forces. Food and money

will regularly be collected for that purpose. The entire village will become part of the Communist intelligence network, reporting to the guerrilla commanders every movement of the government security forces. At the same time the government will be totally cut off from information about the guerrillas—their strength, their movements and their intentions.

The organization of the civilian population will require months, if not years. But where control by the Communists has already progressed to the point where they are able to launch guerrilla war, military operations must be conducted aggressively against them, regardless of the disadvantage at which government forces will be operating. Government patrols must push vigorously into Communist-dominated territory, try to contact the guerrillas and force them into open combat. Lacking the intelligence that the civilian population might have provided, the defending forces must employ to the fullest all other means, such as air reconnaissance. The United States has effectively applied its advanced scientific skills to the solution of major problems in the missile and space fields. There is now the opportunity, as yet largely untried, to apply these same scientific capabilities to the development of modern equipment designed to help meet the special problems of guerrilla and counter-guerrilla warfare.

The basic principle of counter-guerrilla military operations is to maintain the offensive and thereby deny the guerrillas the initiative. The Communist guerrilla strategy, in turn, will be to attempt to seize and hold the initiative by mounting a variety of attacks against fixed installations so that large government forces are pinned down defending towns and villages, rail lines, power lines, ports and other vital installations. A counter-guerrilla offensive, then, will have these objectives:

To keep guerrilla units off balance at all times; to force them to flee continuously from attacking government units, and thereby to minimize their opportunities to mount attacks on vital communication lines and military installations or to lay ambushes.

By maintaining the initiative, to force guerrilla units to overrun their intelligence screens, and thereby to deny them the protective cover they need to survive against superior military forces.

To prevent guerrilla forces from grouping for strong attacks against isolated points.

To tire them out, and keep them tired out, through constant offensive action against them; to force them into more isolated

hinterlands where food supplies are less and less available; to force them through constant offensive action to expend their limited ammunition.

Whatever the means used to carry out this offensive strategy, the basic and overriding necessity is that counter-guerrilla forces be organized early enough and strongly enough so that they are able to meet and contain, at the outset, the attacks of guerrilla forces. *Too little and too late* has been the normal reaction of governments to the development of such forces.

The core of the counter-guerrilla troops must be a highly mobile attacking force. Normally it need not be substantially larger than the guerrilla elements opposed to it. It should be able to meet and defeat guerrilla forces essentially on their own terms, that is, with small mobile units capable of moving in patrols over extended periods in enemy territory. As soon as one patrol is withdrawn for rest, another should take its place.

Mobile counter-guerrilla units should operate without fixed plans, and with the ability to modify their operations quickly, in order to take advantage of unforeseen targets and to concentrate superior forces against guerrilla units that have been located and brought to combat. In contrast, the government force that relies on "set piece" offensives, based on plans drawn up days in advance, will always be at a disadvantage. Even before the operation is launched, such plans may find their way into the hands of the guerrillas, who will have moved meanwhile to another area. Periodic offensives of limited duration have the further disadvantage of permitting the guerrillas to hold the initiative between offensives. A strategy of constant offensive can effectively deprive the guerrillas of the opportunity to conduct the war on terms favorable to themselves.

It will also be necessary to provide defensive forces to guard key installations. Care must be exercised, however, that these forces are not spread out beyond all reasonable bounds in the attempt to defend an increasingly large number of fixed installations. A French military commentator has written, "There should be no fortified posts except those necessary for promoting mobility."

III

In a broader sense the dilemma of the West is that, even if we can develop a more effective strategy for defending countries

against unconventional Communist warfare it can at best only limit further losses. When one considers a strategy for liberating areas over which the Communists have gained control, the difficulties are seen to be very great. The organization of clandestine activities in a Communist state faces extraordinary obstacles. It is, for example, common practice for the Communists to undertake provocative activities designed to test the loyalty of each individual in the régime. A person may at any time be contacted by someone purporting to represent a clandestine organization. Even though the sympathies of the person approached may be strongly anti-Communist and his fondest hopes that the Communists be overthrown, he must assume that this is not a genuine resistance movement but rather one conducted under the control of, and at the direction of, the secret police. To prove his loyalty he must not only refuse to join the purported clandestine organization, but must also inform the police. If he does not, he will have failed to demonstrate his positive loyalty to the régime and will be subject to reprisals and imprisonment. Thus a clandestinely organized resistance within a consolidated Communist régime is not likely to get very far before someone has, out of fear, reported its existence to the police.

A second device used by the Communists is to form a clandestine anti-Communist organization under their own secret control, to encourage its growth by recruiting unwitting members, and to permit them to conduct actual operations against the régime until finally, having attracted a large number of the most aggressive anti-Communists, its entire membership is arrested.

The communes and collective farms provide other means of containing potential resistance operations, by centralizing food supplies, rather than allowing them to remain under the control of individual peasants. It is thus extremely difficult to obtain locally the food needed to support a guerrilla force. Similarly, the Communist practice of issuing new currency from time to time minimizes the opportunities to build up currency reserves to finance resistance operations.

Because of these techniques, a Communist dictatorship probably can be overthrown from within only in an area in which the Communists have not yet consolidated their control, or in which their control has been seriously weakened by other events. It is therefore of the utmost importance to move quickly to prevent the total consolidation of a nation into a completely controlled

police state. This struggle will take place at a very personal level, and the final outcome will depend on whether the individual, faced by the Communist instruments of terrorist control, can, in the face of this force, be given a viable alternative to complete surrender.

Where the effective political control of the country has passed to the Communists, it will not be enough to conduct long-distance propaganda activities or to make plans on the assumption that the very real and very considerable dissatisfactions with the Communist régime will automatically result in a popular uprising as soon as the guerrilla forces appear. Clandestine support of at least a part of the villages and the countryside is an absolute prerequisite to the employment of guerrilla forces, for they must have local intelligence support and supplies if they are to survive in areas in which superior enemy forces are openly in control. In Yugoslavia, for example, in World War II, the Communist partisans had in many ways as favorable a situation for guerrilla warfare as might be expected anywhere. The main German forces were engaged by powerful allies on other fronts. Tito's partisan forces had as overt allies not only the Soviet Union but the United States and Britain. And from the latter two they received massive air support. In Slovenia, where there were no Cêtnik forces of Mihailovich to contend with, the political commissars of the Communist-established National Liberation Front could represent themselves to the people as the only force fighting the invader, and as having the complete support of all the major powers fighting the Germans. Yet they still found it necessary, in the words of one commissar, to "prepare the area intensively by the introduction of clandestine political organizers for a period of several months before we dared to introduce guerrilla forces."

It is not merely with benefit of hindsight that one can say it would have been a better strategy in Cuba to have built organized support in the villages and rural areas of Cuba and to have organized widespread guerrilla activities rather than to have risked all on a spontaneous uprising following a single assault landing. By far the largest part of any population will not voluntarily risk reprisals even though their sympathies may be strong. Instead, they will sit on the sidelines while others battle it out, joining in only when the outcome becomes a foregone conclusion. The political organization of each village must be undertaken under the nose of vigilant Communist political and security serv-

ices. This is not easy. It requires unusual men possessing great personal courage and high motivation as well as superior political organizing skills. They must be thoroughly trained and then supported to the fullest extent possible under the circumstances. Guerrilla operations can be initiated only as the Communist control at the village level is loosened so that clandestine support to guerrillas can be provided.

The West needs to acquire the ability to conduct unconventional warfare successfully, and it must do so quickly. The Communists have evolved a highly effective strategy combining grassroots political organization and guerrilla warfare which they are employing against the non-Communist world. They have devised a totalitarian political structure that is highly resistant to counter-attack. The creation by the West of an adequate defensive and offensive capability for political and guerrilla warfare will require time and effort. It must be pursued vigorously and without further delay.

The United States has expanded significantly its military capabilities and, in the Army's Special Forces units, is creating a highly competent corps of guerrilla and counter-guerrilla fighters. This capability must be quickly matched with the political skills to conduct unconventional warfare at the village level. This will require training in depth and an extraordinarily high level of individual aptitude and competence. Specifically, we require a system of training—both for our own personnel and for those we are aiding—comparable to that for an army officer, a physician or an engineer. A national institute or staff college comparable to those of the Army, Air Force and Navy is needed to provide a center for training of United States and possibly foreign personnel and for elaborating strategic concepts of unconventional warfare and developing practical and effective tactics to meet the operational problems we now face in many parts of the world. Similar institutes should be established jointly with our NATO partners and in the countries lying across the Communist lines of attack.

The Communists have allowed themselves lead times of as much as 10 to 20 years in training revolutionary leaders. One can only hope that the free world yet has time to build the political leadership, both abroad and at home, to meet their threat successfully.