

GUERRILLA WAR

Thirty years ago, in the foreward to one of my own books, I coined the maxim 'If you want peace, understand war'. It seemed to me a necessary and fitting replacement for the antique and oversimple dictum 'If you wish for peace, prepare for war', which too often has proved to be not only a provocation to war, but a matter of mistakenly preparing to repeat the methods of the last war in conditions that have radically changed.

In the nuclear age, the revised maxim might well be amplified—but not, as might be expected, by inserting the word 'nuclear'. For if the nuclear power now available were unleashed and not merely maintained as a deterrent, its use would mean 'chaos' not 'war', since war is organised action, which could not be continued in a state of chaos. The nuclear deterrent, however, does not apply and cannot be applied to the deterrence of subtler forms of aggression. Through its unsuitability for the purpose it tends to stimulate and encourage them. The necessary amplification of the maxim is now 'If you wish for peace, understand war—particularly the guerrilla and subversive forms of war'.

Guerrilla warfare has become a much greater feature in the conflicts of this century than ever before, and only in this century has it come to receive more than slight attention in Western military theory—although armed action by irregular forces often occurred in earlier times. Clausewitz in his monumental work *On War* devoted one short chapter to the matter, and that came near the end of the thirty chapters of his book VI, which dealt with the various aspects of 'defence'. Treating the subject of 'arming the people' as a defensive measure against an invader, he formulated its basic conditions of success and its limitations, but did not discuss the political problems involved. Nor did he make any reference to the most striking example of guerrilla action in the wars of

his time, the Spanish popular resistance to Napoleon's armies, which brought the term into military usage.

A wider and more profound treatment of the subject appeared a century later in T. E. Lawrence's *Seven Pillars of Wisdom*. That masterly formulation of the theory of guerrilla warfare focussed on its offensive value, and was the product of his combined experience and reflection during the Arab Revolt against the Turks, both as a struggle for independence and as part of the Allied campaign against Turkey. That outlying campaign in the Middle East was the only one in the First World War in which guerrilla action exerted an important influence; in the European theatres of war it played no significant part.

In the Second World War, however, guerrilla warfare became so widespread as to be an almost universal feature. It developed in all the European countries that were occupied by the Germans and most of the Far Eastern countries that were occupied by the Japanese. Its growth can be traced largely to the deep impression that Lawrence had made, especially on Churchill. After the Germans had overrun France in 1940, leaving Britain isolated, it became part of Churchill's war policy to utilise guerrilla warfare as a counter-weapon. Special branches of Britain's planning organisation were devoted to the purpose of instigating and fostering 'resistance' movements wherever Hitler tried to impose his 'New Order'. Following Hitler's run of conquests and Japan's subsequent entry into the war as an ally of Germany, these efforts were extended wider and wider. The success of such resistance movements varied. The most effective was in Yugoslavia, by the Croat Communist partisans under Tito's leadership.

A more extensive and prolonged guerrilla war had been waged in the Far East since the 1920's by the Chinese Communists, in whose leadership Mao Tse-tung played an increasingly dominant part. It developed in 1927, when Chiang Kai-shek, on defeating the northern warlords in a tidal advance from Canton, sought to suppress the Communist elements in his National Revolution Army. It was turned against the Japanese from 1937 onward, when the Nationalist and Communist forces again made common cause in an uneasy alliance against the foreign invaders. The Communist guerrillas did much to relieve the Japanese pressure on Chiang Kai-shek's regular forces by harassing the invading army. During this struggle, the Communists also played their hand with a

view to the future, spreading their influence among the people in the occupied areas so effectively that when Japan eventually collapsed under American air and sea attack, they were better placed to profit from the result and fill the vacuum than Chiang Kai-shek's Nationalist regime.

That 'takeover bid' proved brilliantly successful. Within four years after the departure of the Japanese, Mao Tse-tung gained complete control of the Chinese mainland, and in the process took over most of the American arms and other equipment that had been poured into China to aid Chiang Kai-shek in his resistance to the Japanese and the Chinese Communists. At the same time he progressively developed his guerrillas into regular forces, while exploiting a combination of the two forms of action.

Since then, the combination of guerrilla and subversive war has been pursued with increasing success in the neighbouring areas of South-east Asia and in other parts of the world—in Africa, starting with Algeria; in Cyprus; and on the other side of the Atlantic, in Cuba. Campaigns of this kind are likely to continue because they fit the conditions of the modern age and at the same time are well suited to take advantage of social discontent, racial ferment, and nationalistic fervour.

The development of guerrilla and subversive war was intensified with the magnification of nuclear weapons, particularly the advent of the thermonuclear hydrogen bomb in 1954, and the simultaneous decision of the United States Government to adopt the policy and strategy of 'massive retaliation' as a deterrent to all kinds of aggression. Vice-President Nixon then announced: 'We have adopted a new principle. Rather than let the Communists nibble us to death all over the world in little wars, we will rely in future on massive mobile retaliatory powers'. The implied threat of using nuclear weapons to curb guerrillas was as absurd as to talk of using a sledge hammer to ward off a swarm of mosquitoes. The policy did not make sense, and the natural effect was to stimulate and encourage the forms of aggression by erosion to which nuclear weapons were an inapplicable counter.

Such a sequel was easy to foresee, though not not apparent to President Eisenhower and his advisors when they took what was called their 'New Look' and made the decision to rely on 'massive retaliation'. To make the point—that it was

the obvious sequel—the simplest way is to repeat, in brief, what one wrote at the time in criticism of their conclusion and decision.

The most urgent, and fundamental, issue on which we need to clarify our minds, *now*, is the question of what is called the 'New Look' military policy and strategy. This vital question is close-coupled with the advent of the Hydrogen Bomb. . . . To the extent that the H-bomb reduces the likelihood of full-scale war, it increases the possibilities of limited war pursued by widespread local aggression. The enemy can exploit a choice of techniques, differing in pattern but all designed to make headway while causing hesitancy about employing counteraction by H-bombs, or A-bombs.

The aggression might be at limited tempo—a gradual process of encroachment. It might be of limited depth but fast tempo—small bites quickly made, and as quickly followed by offers to negotiate. It might be of limited density—a multiple infiltration by particles so small that they formed an intangible vapour. . . . In sum, the development of the H-bomb has weakened our power of resistance to Communist aggression. That is a very serious consequence.

For the containment of the menace we now become more dependent on conventional weapons. That conclusion, however, does not mean that we must fall back on conventional methods. It should be an incentive to the development of newer ones.

We have moved into a new era of strategy that is very different to what was assumed by the advocates of air-atomic power—the revolutionaries of the past era. The strategy now being developed by our opponents is inspired by the dual idea of evading and hamstringing superior airpower. Ironically, the further we have developed the 'massive' effect of the bombing weapon, the more we have helped the progress of this new guerrilla-type strategy.

Our own strategy should be based on a clear grasp of this concept, and our military policy needs re-orientation. There is scope, and we might effectively develop it, for a counter-strategy of corresponding kind.

A realisation of these factors and their implications was slow to develop, but quickened rapidly with the advent of President Kennedy's administration in 1961. In May the new President, addressing Congress, announced that he was 'directing the Secretary of Defense to expand rapidly and substantially, in co-operation with our allies, the orientation of existing forces for the conduct of non-nuclear war, para-military operations and sub-limited, or unconventional, wars'. The Secretary of Defense, Mr. McNamara, spoke of a '150 per cent increase in the size of our anti-guerrilla forces', while aid

to foreign guerrilla forces operating against Communist regimes was envisaged by the new administration.

The proverb 'forewarned is forearmed' applies even more strongly to guerrilla and subversive war than to regular warfare as known hitherto. The basis of preparedness is understanding the theory and historical experience of such warfare, together with knowledge of the particular situation where it is in progress or may arise.

Guerrilla warfare must always be dynamic and must maintain momentum. Static intervals are more detrimental to its success than in the case of regular warfare, as they allow the opponent to tighten his grip on the country and give rest to his troops while tending to dampen the impulse of the population to join or help the guerrillas. Static defence has no part in guerrilla action, and fixed defence no place, except in the momentary way involved in laying an ambush.

Guerrilla action reverses the normal practice of warfare, strategically by seeking to avoid battle and tactically by evading any engagement where it is likely to suffer losses. For in a fight, as distinct from an ambush, the best of the leaders and men are likely to suffer so disproportionately to the total strength of the partisans that the whole movement may be crippled and the flame of its spirit extinguished. 'Hit and run' is a better term, being more comprehensive. For a multiplicity of minor coups and threats can have a greater effect in tipping the scales than a few major hits, by producing more cumulative distraction, disturbance, and demoralisation among the enemy, along with a more widespread impression among the population. Ubiquity combined with intangibility is a basic secret of progress in such a campaign. Moreover, 'tip and run' is often the best way to fulfil the offensive purpose of luring the enemy into ambushes.

Guerrilla war, too, inverts one of the main principles of orthodox war, the principle of 'concentration'—and on both sides. Dispersion is an essential condition of survival and success on the guerrilla side, which must never present a target and thus can operate only in minute particles, though these may momentarily coagulate like globules of quicksilver to overwhelm some weakly guarded objective. For guerrillas the principle of 'concentration' has to be replaced by that of 'fluidity of force'—which will also have to be adopted and modified by regular forces when operating under a liability of bombardment by nuclear weapons. Dispersion is also a neces-

sity on the side opposed to the guerrillas, since there is no value in a narrow concentration of force against such elusive forces, nimble as mosquitoes. The chance of curbing them lies largely in being able to extend a fine but closely woven net over the widest possible area. The more extensive the controlling net, the more likely that anti-guerrilla drives will be effective.

The ratio of space to forces is a key factor in guerrilla war. This was vividly expressed in Lawrence's mathematical calculation about the Arab Revolt—that to hold it in check, the Turks would 'have need of a fortified post every four square miles, and a post could not be less than twenty men', so the requirement would be 600,000 men for the area they were trying to control, whereas they had only 100,000 available. 'Our success was certain, to be proved by pencil and paper as soon as the proportion of space and number had been learned'. Such a calculation, although oversimplified, embodies a general truth. The ratio of space to forces is a basic factor, but the product varies with the type of country and the relative mobility of the two sides, as well as their relative morales. Rugged or forest country is the most favourable to guerrillas. Deserts have diminished in value for them with the development of mechanised ground forces and aircraft. Urban areas have mixed advantages and handicaps, but tend on balance to be unfavourable to guerrilla operations, although good ground for a subversive campaign.

Although rugged and forest areas are the best by nature for the security of guerrillas and in providing opportunities for surprise, the advantages are not unmixed. Such country tends to be difficult of access for supply routes and distant from key objectives. Those objectives include not only the targets presented by the occupying power—particularly its communications—but the people who have to be induced to co-operate against the occupying power. A guerrilla movement that puts safety first will soon wither. Its strategy must always aim to produce the enemy's increasing overstretch, physical and moral.

The mathematical-cum-geographical factors and situation represented in the ratio of space to forces cannot be separated from the psychological-cum-political factors and situation. For the prospects and progress of a guerrilla movement depend on the attitude of the people in the area where the struggle takes place—on their willingness to aid it by provid-

ing information and supplies to the guerrillas by withholding information from the occupying force while helping to hide the guerrillas. A prime condition of success is that the enemy must be kept 'in the dark' while the guerrillas operate in the light of superior local knowledge combined with reliable news about the enemy's dispositions and moves. That mental light is all the more necessary because guerrilla moves must be carried out largely at night for security and surprise. The extent to which they obtain the details and speedy news required depends on their progress in gaining the aid of the local population.

Guerrilla war is waged by the few but dependent on the support of the many. Although in itself the most individual form of action, it can operate effectively and attain its end only when collectively backed by the sympathy of the masses. That is why it tends to be most effective if it blends an appeal to national resistance or desire for independence with an appeal to a socially and economically discontent population, thus becoming revolutionary in a wider sense.

In the past, guerrilla war has been a weapon of the weaker side, and thus primarily defensive, but in the atomic age it may be increasingly developed as a form of aggression suited to exploit the nuclear stalemate. Thus the concept of 'cold war' is now out of date, and should be superseded by that of 'camouflaged war'.

This broad conclusion, however, leads to a far-reaching and deeper question. It would be wise for the statesmen and strategists of the Western countries to 'learn from history' and avoid the mistakes of the past when seeking to develop a counter-strategy in this kind of warfare.

The vast extension of such warfare during the last twenty years has, to a large extent, been the product of the war policy of instigating and fomenting popular revolt in enemy-occupied countries that Britain, under Churchill's leadership, adopted in 1940 as a counter to the Germans—a policy subsequently extended to the Far East as a counter to the Japanese.

The policy was adopted with great enthusiasm and little question. Once the German tide of conquest had spread over most of Europe, it seemed the obvious course to pursue in the effort to loosen Hitler's grip. It was just the sort of course that appealed to Churchill's mind and temperament. Besides his instinctive pugnacity and complete intentness on beating

Hitler—regardless of what might happen afterwards—he had been a close associate and admirer of Lawrence. He now saw the chance to practise on a large scale in Europe what the latter had demonstrated in a relatively limited part of the Arab zone.

To question the desirability of such a policy was to appear lacking in resolution and almost unpatriotic. Few dared to risk such an imputation, even if they doubted the ultimate effects of the policy on the recovery of Europe. War is always a matter of doing evil in the hope that good may come of it, and it is very difficult to show discrimination without failing in determination. Moreover, the cautious line is usually a mistake in battle, where it is too commonly followed, so that it rarely receives credit on the higher plane of war policy, where it is more often wise but usually unpopular. In the fever of war, public opinion craves for the most drastic measures, regardless of where they may lead.

What were the results? The armed resistance forces undoubtedly imposed a considerable strain on the Germans. In Western Europe, the strain was most marked in France. They also proved a serious menace to the German communications in Eastern Europe and the Balkans. The best tribute to their effect comes from the evidence of the German commanders. Like the British commanders in Ireland during 'the troubles', they were acutely conscious of the worry and burden of coping with guerrilla foes who struck out of the blue and were shielded by the population.

But when these back-area campaigns were analysed, it would seem that their effect was largely in proportion to the extent to which they were combined with the operations of a strong regular army that was engaging the enemy's front and drawing off his reserves. They rarely became more than a nuisance unless they coincided with the fact, or imminent threat, of a powerful offensive that absorbed the enemy's main attention.

At other times they were less effective than widespread passive resistance—and brought far more harm to the people of their own country. They provoked reprisals much more severe than the injury inflicted on the enemy. They afforded his troops the opportunity for violent action that is always a relief to the nerves of a garrison in an unfriendly country. The material damage that the guerrillas produced directly, and indirectly in the course of reprisals, caused much suffer-

ing among their own people and ultimately became a handicap to recovery after liberation.

But the heaviest handicap of all, and the most lasting one, was of a moral kind. The armed resistance movement attracted many 'bad hats'. It gave them licence to indulge their vices and work off their grudges under the cloak of patriotism, thus giving fresh point to Dr. Johnson's historic remark that 'patriotism is the last refuge of a scoundrel'. Worse still was its wider effect on the younger generation as a whole. It taught them to defy authority and break the rules of civic morality in the fight against the occupying forces. This left a disrespect for 'law and order' that inevitably continued after the invaders had gone.

Violence takes much deeper root in irregular warfare than it does in regular warfare. In the latter it is counteracted by obedience to constituted authority, whereas the former makes a virtue of defying authority and violating rules. It becomes very difficult to rebuild a country, and a stable state, on a foundation undermined by such experience.

A realisation of the dangerous aftermath of guerrilla warfare came to me in reflection on Lawrence's campaigns in Arabia and in our discussion on the subject. My book on those campaigns, an exposition of the theory of guerrilla warfare, was taken as a guide by numerous leaders of commando units and resistance movements in the last war. Wingate, then only a captain serving in Palestine, came to see me shortly before it started, and was obviously filled with the idea of giving the theory a fresh and wider application. But I was beginning to have doubts—not of its immediate efficacy, but of its long-term effects. It seemed that they could be traced, like a thread, running through the persisting troubles that we, as the Turks' successors, were suffering in the same area where Lawrence had spread the Arab Revolt.

These doubts were deepened when re-examining the military history of the Peninsular War a century earlier and reflecting on the subsequent history of Spain. In that war, Napoleon's defeat of the Spanish regular armies was counter-blanced by the success of the guerrilla bands that replaced them. As a popular uprising against a foreign conqueror, it was one of the most effective on record. It did more than Wellington's victories to loosen Napoleon's grip on Spain and undermine his power. But it did not bring peace to liberated Spain, for it was followed by an epidemic of armed revolu-

tions that continued in quick succession for half a century, and broke out again in this century.

Another ominous example was the way that the *franc-tireurs* created in France to harass the German invaders of 1870 had turned into a boomerang. They had been merely a nuisance to the invaders, but they had developed into the agency of the appalling fratricidal struggle known as the Commune. Moreover, the legacy of 'illegitimate' action has been a continuing source of weakness in the subsequent history of France.

These lessons of history were too lightly disregarded by those who planned to promote violent insurrections as part of our war policy. The repercussions have had a shattering effect in the postwar years on the peace policy of the Western Alliance—and not only in providing both equipment and stimulus to anti-Western movements in Asia and Africa. For it early became apparent in the case of France that the military effect of the Maquis as an instrument against the Germans was outweighed by the political and moral ill effects on the future. The disease has continued to spread. In conjunction with an unrealistic view and treatment of external troubles, it has undermined the stability of France and thereby dangerously weakened the position of NATO.

It is not too late to learn from the experience of history. However tempting the idea may seem of replying to our opponents' 'camouflaged war' activities by counter-offensive moves of the same kind, it would be wiser to devise and pursue a more subtle and far-seeing counter-strategy. In any case, those who frame policy and apply it need a better understanding of the subject than has been shown in the past.