

# Counter-insurgency:

## "A REALISTIC APPRECIATION"



Dominick del Giudice

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Contributing Editor

**E**VER since the explosion of the first atom bomb over Hiroshima, paradoxes have been the order of the military day. The advent of counter-insurgency is no exception. At a time when man-made vehicles are reaching for the moon and when the state of the weapons art is so advanced as to defy the understanding of most laymen, suddenly we revert to small wars in remote areas—suddenly the individual soldier comes back into his own.

Enter Paradox Two. The old context of small war in the remote area has undergone drastic change. What used to be good for the United Fruit Company in Nicaragua has given way to issues that threaten to engulf mankind. Such is the thrust of Communism the rise of nationalism, and with it the pride of small and sometimes new countries, that today's small war becomes a

**Capt R. B. Asprey** has been the guiding hand for Lejeune Forum since its inception in Jan '62. For the past several months he has been getting a first-hand look at counter-insurgency operations in Viet-Nam ("Saga at Soc Trang," Newsletter: Dec '62) and also at the Marines who are constantly training for any kind of operation. His report on FMFLant will appear next month, to be followed by a report on FMFPac. Before Forum, he was probably best known to GAZETTE readers for his stories about renowned Marines. The first, "The Court-Martial of Smedley D. Butler" (GAZETTE: Dec '59) was a smash hit. About his own Marine background: he enlisted in 1942 and was commissioned the next year via OCC. He landed on Iwo Jima in 1944 with 5th MT Bn. After WWII he returned to college (University of Iowa), was graduated in 1949 and went on to post-graduate study at Oxford and University of Vienna. Recalled to active duty in 1952, he served two years with FMFLant in G-2 section, then as a member of Special Advisory Group to Greek General Staff. He makes his home in Bermuda.

production rather more sophisticated than firing a king-sized missile 4,000 miles on target.

The problems introduced by counter-insurgency are made abundantly clear both by the individual remarks of the Forum experts, and by the logical ease with which these remarks glide from one area of the subject to another. To Gen Krulak's assertion that counter-insurgency is a complicated war, we have Adm Libby quietly adding that counter-insurgency is but another type of war, one that should not stampede us into precipitate reorganization of the military establishment. With Mr. Galula's and Dr. Tanham's assertions that counter-insurgency must be fought as a war-by-committee, we have Gen Griffith's belief that the conventional military establishment is not the best organization to wage war-by-committee. With Gen Krulak's mention of the annoyance of enemy sanctuary in a foreign country, we have Mr. Baldwin's advice that the government should consider authorizing our forces to participate in attacks on foreign sanctuaries.

If by clarifying certain issues of counter-insurgency our experts have mingled in each other's areas, they are

merely underlining Paradox Three of counter-insurgency—its clear-cut confusion. Insurgency and counter-insurgency are as difficult to grasp as Gen Griffith's metaphorical drop of mercury. Their fragments will probably intrude on every facet of American life; yet their wholeness does not lend itself to immediate comprehension; one purpose of my few pages is to try to cite a pragmatic path to the cumulative arrow of the experts' thoughts.

The mental has always been more difficult to cope with than the physical—this, after all, is why humans are more difficult than animals. Perhaps unfortunately a mental war does not lend itself to the emotional symbols of a Berlin wall or a boy throwing a bottle of gasoline against a Soviet tank in a Budapest street. I doubt that counter-insurgency is ever going to produce such striking symbols of man's resolution and determination, and I think that this may be the first of two very real problems that plague our understanding.

The second problem, in my opinion, is the word "counter" with its defensive overtones. Mr. Galula pointed out the psychological problem of a legitimate government facing an insurgency. Not having anything



to offer, the insurgent can offer anything, especially to people who are pathetically prone to the Barnum-like promises of Communism because they have never seen a circus. The problem of the legitimate government becomes our problem multiplied by the number of legitimate governments who ask for and receive our help. This is difficult enough but the system also works the other way. Even if we pinpoint a prospective insurgency we cannot always persuade a legitimate government to act either with or without us. Further, such are the social conditions around the world that the Communists can pretty much pick and choose where they want to start trouble.

I doubt that either of these problems grew by chance, and I doubt that either is incapable of solution (by education in the first instance, more positive action in the second). To anyone familiar with Russian cunning and patience, the appeal of either industrial or agrarian insurgency to the Communists is obvious. Its present emphasis can be explained by a variety of reasons: the domestic setback in the Russian and Chinese economies; the frustration experienced in other areas of the

cold war; the theory, increasingly popular among western scientists of Pavlovian diplomacy, of "creating neurosis on a global scale"; an attempt to smokescreen more conventional efforts: for example, a push into Iran.

Whatever the reasons, the admixture of these problems seems to have dissipated further the already nebulous issues of counter-insurgency. As of this writing, what Adm Libby calls the Great Debate is still going on. This means that counter-insurgency is fast becoming a political issue—a fate that Mr. Baldwin logically warns will "doom it to futility." Worse, the bulk of the American public appears as yet to have very little idea of even the basic issues. In a private survey I found that some otherwise educated Americans don't know the geographical location of Viet-Nam, don't know this nation's obligations under the SEATO treaty, don't know the term much less the meaning of counter-insurgency.

In monitoring California newspapers and TV programs off and on for two months I was struck by the absence of foreign affairs coverage. Rather than pursuing this subject I would recommend Bill Lederer's *A Nation of Sheep* and comment only that if Viet-Nam had received half the coverage recently devoted to the suicide of a film star many segments of the American public would be more healthily informed.

This clear-cut confusion is limited neither to American politics nor to the American public. What S. L. A. Marshall calls "the dogfight within the services over the right to stake a claim on guerrilla warfare" is also in full bloom as of this writing. While not suggesting a settlement, I will point out a few of the shibboleths that are complicating the fight.

The first is the confusion of military with police action in an insurgency. Mr. Galula has pointed out that a legitimate government, including its police force, is often not large enough to combat an insurgency; therefore its armed forces are called on. I know most of the arguments to the contrary, but it seems to me that the onus of actually fighting the insurgents must be borne by the military, particularly when the insurgency enters the so-called military phase. To superimpose civil authority on top of military tactical operations is comparable to calling out a fire brigade, then allowing laymen to direct its operations.

I have never been sold on the theory that conventional forces cannot successfully fight counter-guerrilla actions—I don't say win them in entirety but rather achieve a degree of stability where other healthy activities can assert themselves. A recent article on the subject offered Samar as an example and went on to say that the Philippine Insurrection was downed by irregular warfare under the aegis of Philippine Scouts. In fact the Samar insurrection was downed by irregular warfare by a battalion of Marines under Maj Tony Waller. The only real danger of collapse faced by Tito's guerrillas during WWII was when German forces made a concerted effort to capture his mountain headquarters. The closest the French came to a positive, major success in Indochina was their organized attack in strength against Viet Bac. That these two attacks failed to gain their objectives is, in my opinion, due more to such factors as second string troops in the case of the Germans, insufficient and worn troops and lack of arma-

ment and equipment in the case of the French, than to any failure of an organized offensive against any enemy.

Who is to conduct the organized offensive or any other facet of the actual fighting in a counter-insurgency? Obviously, ground troops supported by naval and air power. I don't see that it makes one whit of difference what ground troops conduct it so long as they ultimately do the job. At this stage of our counter-insurgency effort, to say that one set of ground troops can do the job better than another seems to me unsubstantiated by experience. Leaving out the Navy and the Air Force, which perforce are confined to the secondary if vital role of support, this leaves the Army and the Marines.

In the article quoted above, S. L. A. Marshall says "the Army was in on the ground floor, having started ten years ago to build a small anti-guerrilla corps of highly trained specialists." In this Forum, Gen Griffith suggests that a special organization is needed to fight counter-insurgency, and that its military nucleus exists in the Army's Special Forces. I want to know who is kidding whom. Quite by chance I went into the field with Special Forces in 1956, at a time when most Army officers had never heard of this organization; not quite by chance I visited this same Special Forces again just over one year ago. If the reader is interested in the *raison d'être* of Special Forces up to a few months ago he should read my article in the January, 1962, *Army* magazine. Since its beginning ten years ago Special Forces has trained solely to be able to generate guerrilla movements hundreds of miles behind the enemy line—"to harness guerrilla activities direct to [the] conventional military effort." My friends in Special Forces know what I think of them—they are a superb outfit well-trained to carry out their mission. But not once in my association with them, not once in the numerous articles later written about them, was the claim made that they were counter-guerrilla specialists. Certainly the old corps of Special Forces soldiers—and less than a year ago this was a pitifully small corps—has studied guerrilla warfare to a fare-thee-well. However, the experienced Mr. Galula points out that "when the counter-insurgent attempts to copy [the rules of the insurgent] he falls into a disastrous trap. . . ." I doubt that without further specialized training the Special Forces unit is any more qualified to field a counter-guerrilla operation than would be either a well-trained Army battle group or a Marine battalion.

What about the Marines? We like to talk about Nicaragua and Haiti. If a reader has studied these cam-

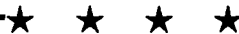
paigns he knows instantly that counter-banditry is but a poor relation of counter-insurgency. Our experience here, of course, was valuable. It also was limited, and I doubt that many of today's generals or sergeants-major, not to mention the rest of the active Marine Corps, fought in either place. Certainly we do have a proud small-unit tradition, and certainly today's organization includes certain prerequisites demanded by counter-insurgency. Both the Thailand and Viet-Nam expeditions irrefutably showed to the world our training and readiness. At the time of this writing our helicopter pilots in Viet-Nam are daily displaying a courage and perseverance that stand in the highest tradition of the globe-and-anchor.

Having seen something of the FMF within the last few months I am quite convinced that our divisions and wings have taken the new bit in the teeth and are running ably and intelligently with it. I would guess the same is true with the Army. But I am also quite convinced in either case that for this effort to pay its fullest dividends, a great deal more work will be necessary.

The months and years ahead hold plenty of challenge for all hands, military and civil. In our own sphere, as shown by the Thailand expedition, intelligence (particularly counter-intelligence, including linguists) leaves something to be desired. In the military-civil sphere our lack of people trained in military government and civil affairs is obvious. Thailand showed that our weapons (but not the new family), rations, and equipment were up to the task of rice-paddy warfare. It also demonstrated that our dungarees are too hot for certain climates, that our boots can't take the water treatment. Thailand showed, and Viet-Nam is showing, the incredible importance of helicopters to counter-guerrilla warfare. We must ask Congress to understand our interest in this problem. At this moment our people in Viet-Nam are being shot at daily. We must consider taking more active counter-measures, and we must ask the government to understand our interest here.

A veteran counter-guerrilla fighter, Col N. D. Valeriano of the Philippine Army, has recently written to me as follows: "I belong to that school of thought that democracies and their respective military forces, provided that they have a realistic appreciation and approach to Communist revolutionary warfare and doctrines, can beat or at least stem off all these small wars or limited wars or shadow wars all over the world."

Something of that realistic appreciation and approach has been the purpose of this Forum. USMC



### *Deflated*

☛ Two doctors who had participated in an air-ground exercise had returned from the field and were sitting in the BOQ reporting how tough the maneuvers had been.

"For five days we ate nothing but C rations. We even shaved from helmets!" one explained.

"We slept on the deck and it seemed we hoofed it 100 miles in one night. Talk about mosquitos and ticks, they're all over the place," his sidekick chimed in.

Another doctor who also had gone on the exercise, but who had been assigned to a permanent aid station at the beach grew tired of hearing the pair's lament and decided to end it all.

"If you fellows think you had it tough," he piped, "you should have seen what happened to me. One night I discovered a hole in my air mattress!"

The pair never mentioned the maneuver again.

\$15.00 to Capt Carl R. Venditto