

The U.S. Army and Irregular Warfare

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CHAPTER ONE

WRITING THE HISTORY OF CONTROVERSIAL EVENTS

War is fascinating as well as appalling, and despite my abhorrence of the violence and destruction that is the essence of warfare I have been studying it in one context or another virtually my entire adult life. In the course of that study, I developed an interest in irregular warfare, particularly in the context of revolution. This work brings together in one place some of the results of the teaching, research, and writing I have done in the field over more than thirty years.

In 1986 I had the opportunity to give a series of six lectures at Obirin College in suburban Tokyo. Those lectures and the published papers and research on which the lectures were based provide the core of this work. Some editing has been done on the previously published essays for stylistic reasons or to avoid repetition. Footnotes and a few textual references have also been added to draw the reader's attention to relevant works of particular merit published after the research for each essay was completed. In addition, a few alterations resulted from shifts in my own interpretive views over time. Finally, I have included a short introduction before many of the essays to provide some insight into the circumstances in which each was originally written or published.

The underlying theme of these collected essays is the changing nature of contemporary warfare and, in particular, the significant changes evident in revolutionary war. The focus is a contrast between two American wars. In the first, which began in the Philippines in 1899, a small army of American professionals, augmented by volunteers and Filipino auxiliaries, defeated the forces of the Philippine Revolution under Emilio Aguinaldo. In the second, the starting point of which can still be debated, a much larger American military force of immense power fought against communist revolutionaries in Indochina, with the greatest period of American involvement coming in the late 1960s. These two case studies, and the contrasts between them, form the basis for a critique of a number of conclusions that have become ingrained in American thinking about past and present military affairs.

Many of the lectures and articles contained in this work were originally aimed at one of two very different audiences. I wrote some with my professional colleagues in history and the social sciences in mind; I hoped that others would be read by individuals within and outside of the military who might at some point be responsible for decision making within the arena of foreign and military affairs. From as early as I can remember, I have viewed history as an applied study, in which the adoption or rejection of the conclusions and interpretations of historians can have significant consequences for institutions and the people who direct them. What one concludes about the past, sometimes even the terms one uses to describe it, can help or hinder people in their attempts to define and deal with the problems of the present. To ignore the relevant, applied dimension of history in favor of more antiquarian interests may well be safer for the scholars involved, but at times it may also represent scholarly behavior that borders on the socially irresponsible.^[1]

The U. S. Army has a long history of fighting against irregulars in a variety of situations and places. In the course of the 19th century, for example, it engaged a variety of Indian groups from Florida to the Pacific coast, as well as Mexican guerrillas, Confederate raiders, and Filipino revolutionaries. In virtually every case the army was successful, although at no time did the army's combined experience in operations against irregulars lead to the development of either doctrine or any less formal codification of the lessons learned. Nevertheless, although each campaign seemed to begin and end in virtual isolation from the army's previous experience, the army dealt successfully with each irregular enemy to accomplish whatever mission had been set for it. By the end of the century many of the members of the army's officer corps seemed particularly well

prepared to engage in the difficult task of pacifying the Philippines. This late-19th century experience of the army is the point of focus for Part I of the study which follows (Chapters 2-4).

In Vietnam, over a half century later, a very different army with a very different officer corps fought a campaign that proved even more frustrating than that in the Philippines. The contrast between the army's campaign in the Philippines and that in Vietnam is striking, and one can learn much more about irregular warfare in the 20th century by focusing on the differences, as is done in Chapter 5, than by the facile comparisons that have often dominated the literature. American forces in Indochina were incredibly well endowed with equipment, and the logistical support they received was truly amazing, particularly given the vast distance between the field of battle and the base of supply in the United States. The American military in Southeast Asia was equally well endowed with the tools of its trade. Both the technological complexity and the firepower of its weapons would have strained the imaginations of its counterpart decades before in the Philippines. In the end, however, the American military did not succeed in Vietnam. It proved incapable of achieving the national goal of establishing a stable, non-communist government in the South despite its success in destroying both regular and irregular units of the enemy's military forces. Part II of this study (Chapters 5-8) focuses on the Indochina War and, in particular, on some of the misconceptions that have made understanding it so difficult.

Part III (Chapters 9 and 10) represents an attempt to place the army's experience with irregular warfare into a broader historical context that will be useful for readers looking to the future as well as the past. Warfare of all types has changed significantly over time, and the changes in revolutionary warfare outlined in Chapter 9 help to explain the tendency toward stalemate or, at the very least, the increase in the level of destruction preceding the victory of one side over the other in revolutionary conflicts such as that in Vietnam or Afghanistan.

Unfortunately, given the politicization of much of the thinking on topics relating to revolutionary and other forms of irregular warfare, arriving at an understanding of the phenomenon is extremely difficult. Self-serving, ultimately self-deceiving concepts and terminology mislead both civilians and the military. The deception is particularly apparent in much of the writing about terrorism, in which terrorists are often defined more by their goals than by their actions. The problems with such an approach are the focus of Chapter 10. The final section of the book (Chapters 11 and 12) comments on the broader problems associated with conceptual confusion, not only as it applies to irregular warfare, but also as it concerns nuclear deterrence and the nature of war itself.

Controversy is at the heart of modern war. War would not take place if the disputes between two sides holding opposing views were resolved peacefully instead, and writing about such controversial events presents certain dangers for the historians who engage in it. From start to finish, a war, virtually any war, raises a number of questions that often remain undecided long after the fighting has ended, even long after all the participants who survived the war have died. People debate the origins of the conflict and the justice of each party's respective cause. They engage in various disputes over the nature of the war, the relative merits of the participants and their leaders, and a host of other topics capable of engaging the passion as well as the intellect of authors and readers alike.

The subjects treated in this book are no exception. Both the war in the Philippines and that in Vietnam were highly controversial at the time they were fought, and they have remained the subject of intense debate. Although a tendency has existed in much historical writing to strive for consensus in interpretation, all historical debate can not be resolved by the synthesis of antagonistic views. Some conclusions are not compatible with the data, while others are, and one responsibility of the historian is to identify interpretations that fail the test when subjected to critical analysis. Although historical truth may never be more than tentative, it still exists in the sense that certain conclusions fit the facts better than others.

The fit between an interpretation and the data behind it is often less important than what individuals want to believe. For that reason alone readers will find conclusions that are controversial in virtually

every chapter of this book, but that is to be expected given the nature of the subject matter. Criticism of historical acts and actors is criticism of people who often have both the desire and the ability to defend themselves. They respond by writing their own version of history or, in the case of censorship, by repressing versions they dislike.

As Aleksandr Solzhenitsyn told a *Time* interviewer in 1989, "Some people distort things consciously, others just don't take the trouble to check their sources."^[2] Solzhenitsyn was speaking of journalists, but he might well have been talking about many of the people who have written about the war in the Philippines or Vietnam. In the chapters that follow, I have tried very hard to avoid distortion, but I know that continuing controversy is inherent in writing about the topics covered here.

The experience of Capt. John R. M. Taylor provides an excellent example of the difficulties one may face in writing the history of a controversial conflict. During the war in the Philippines, Taylor had been detailed to receive and translate documents captured from the Filipino revolutionaries. In 1901 he was transferred to Washington to work in the Bureau of Insular Affairs. There he proposed to write "a history of the relations of the United States with the Philippines,"^[3] and after gaining official approval he began work on his project in 1902. By 1906 Taylor's two volume history, with three volumes of accompanying documents, had been set in galleys. At that point, however, Secretary of War William Howard Taft decided to defer publication. He did not want Taylor's history published on the eve of a congressional election, believing that Taylor's defense of the army would rekindle political issues that had just begun to subside.

Reluctant to abandon the project, General Clarence Edwards, chief of the Bureau of Insular Affairs, initiated a second attempt to publish the work in 1909, only to have publication again deferred by Taft, then President-elect, who had his secretary write Edwards to say that he was "quite willing not to have the matter published" if the general thought best.^[4] By that point both Taft and Edwards had received a long and extremely critical letter about Taylor's history from James A. LeRoy, an independent scholar to whom Edwards had sent the first two volumes for review. LeRoy had been Taft's secretary in the Philippines and was working on his own history at the time he reviewed what Taylor had written. LeRoy was emphatic in his view that Taylor's work "should not be published as it is."^[5] The Bureau then abandoned Taylor's project, and its five volumes remained unpublished until 1968, when the U. S. National Archives made a microfilm copy available. Three years later a private foundation in the Philippines funded the printing of a limited edition of Taylor's work.

Capt. Taylor paid a severe penalty for his attempt to write the history of a highly controversial event. A victim of political censorship, he died never knowing how important his work would become to a future generation of scholars. Unfortunately, authors in the employ of government are not the only people to suffer censorship when writing about controversial subjects. Rejection by journal or book editors can also be a form of censorship when the reasons for rejection are political rather than scholarly.

In 1971, when I attempted to publish a manuscript contrasting the war in Vietnam with that in the Philippines I found my efforts frustrated by such partisan responses. Several liberal, anti-war referees and editors did not find my view of the Philippine campaign sufficiently critical of the army and the United States, while referees and editors with a more pro-war or conservative orientation found my comments on the American effort in Vietnam too critical. My favorite rejection, written the same day my manuscript arrived at the journal and dated June 30, 1972, said "the President's news conference of last evening could, I hope, further reduce interest in the type of article you have written." As was the case with Capt. Taylor's work, my manuscript was eventually published in the Philippines.^[6]

Historians writing about controversial topics often face other hazards as well. When emotions and individual reputations are involved, controversies can get heated, as I learned on more than one occasion. In 1981, for example, I had the temerity to write *The New York Review of Books* to note

that Gore Vidal had grossly overestimated the number of Filipino deaths during the Philippine-American War. The figure of 3,000,000 dead claimed by Vidal was preposterous, and the source that he cited had actually listed the number of dead as 300,000. To my surprise, Vidal proceeded to place the blame for his error on "either" the authors or the publishers of a book he had once reviewed for having "added an extra naught," demonstrating in the process that his actual source was not the one he had cited. He attempted to dismiss my criticism by implying that I was a military apologist of some sort because I had presented a paper at a U. S. Air Force Academy history symposium. No matter how many Filipinos had actually been killed, Vidal seemed determined to stick to his conclusion that "our policy in the Philippines was genocide," asserting that "if we had to kill the entire population we would have done so."^[7] In a second round of the correspondence Vidal accused me of being "disingenuous--to use a tactful word" and a peddler of "neo-manifest destiny nonsense."^[8] Obviously a thick skin is helpful when one becomes involved in historical controversy. In such situations the degree to which bias triumphs over logic and data may only be exceeded by the venom unleashed when errors are revealed.

If we are to understand history, however, we must face the facts and allow the data to influence our thinking. Many of the chapters included in this book have as their primary goal the destruction of flawed conclusions by the presentation of well-documented facts in logical order. When new or better information can be used to demonstrate errors in what I have written, my work should obviously be revised. Over the years I have altered my own thinking on various points to make it consistent with new data. All I ask here is that my readers be willing to do the same.

^[1] For an articulate presentation of the argument regarding the importance of relevance see Howard Zinn, "Knowledge as a Form of Power" and "What is Radical History" in *The Politics of History* (Boston, 1970), 5-14 & 35-55.

^[2] "Russia's Prophet In Exile," *Time* (July 24, 1989), 60.

^[3] John T. Farrell, "An Abandoned Approach to Philippine History: John R. M. Taylor and the Philippine Insurrection Records," *The Catholic Historical Review*, 39 (January, 1954), 391.

^[4] William W. Carpenter to Edwards, January 21, 1909, Records of the Bureau of Insular Affairs, 2291-58, U.S. National Archives, Washington, D.C.

^[5] James A. LeRoy to Edwards, January 12, 1909, William Howard Taft Papers, Library of Congress, Washington, D.C. For an overview of the 1908-1909 decision see John M. Gates, "The Official Historian and the Well-Placed Critic: James A. LeRoy's Assessment of John R. M. Taylor's *The Philippine Insurrection Against the United States*," *The Public Historian*, 7 (Summer 1985), 57-67 and Farrell, 397-404.

^[6] John M. Gates, "The Philippines and Vietnam: Another False Analogy," *Asian Studies*, 10 (1972), 64-76.

^[7] *The New York Review of Books* (December 17, 1981), 69. The paper presented at the Air Force Academy symposium to which Vidal referred is included here as Ch. 3, and readers can judge for themselves the validity of Vidal's criticism.

^[8] *Ibid.* (March 4, 1982), 44.

CHAPTER TWO

INDIANS AND INSURRECTOS: THE U. S. ARMY'S EXPERIENCE WITH INSURGENCY

The 1983 article reprinted here was written in 1982 as a lecture in the "Voluntary Program in Military History" sponsored by the U. S. Army Military History Institute at Carlisle Barracks, Pennsylvania.[1] The paper focuses initially on an interesting problem in the history of United States military doctrine. The U. S. Army had considerable historical experience with irregular warfare in the 19th century, fighting against Indians from Florida to the Pacific coast, confronting guerrillas associated in one way or another with more regular forces in Mexico and in the Civil War, and at the century's end fighting a frustrating colonial war against Filipino revolutionaries. Surprisingly, all of that experience in irregular warfare fostered virtually no doctrinal development and produced no doctrine of pacification.

The creation of an institutional memory and the codification of lessons learned into doctrine is difficult in any circumstances, and the discontinuity of the army's 19th century pacification efforts, their diversity, and the army's focus on more traditional military matters combined to inhibit the development of doctrine. In the absence of doctrine, however, officers often discerned and implemented the techniques needed to triumph over opponents engaged in irregular operations. Tactically, for example, many officers recognized that active saturation patrolling to keep constant pressure on the enemy worked well against both Indians and other irregulars, but such lessons were usually learned anew in subsequent conflicts.

Michael Walzer's excellent article, "Two Kinds of Military Responsibility," alerted me to the presence of the less easily discerned, but no less important problem touched upon in the conclusion of the paper.[2] Finding an effective military response to enemies engaged in irregular warfare has often been difficult, but far more difficult has been the avoidance of responses that are illegal and/or immoral. The "sermon" at the end highlights my growing concern with the blatant inhumanity of many 20th century aspects of irregular warfare and my belief that historians should address ethical as well as more pragmatic questions.

* * * * *

Both during the Vietnam War and after, students of 19th-century American military history frequently claimed to see important similarities between whatever campaign they happened to be surveying and the conflict in Indochina. In his 1976 Harmon Memorial lecture, Robert M. Uteley, a distinguished historian of the Indian-fighting army, drew attention to the "parallels with frontier warfare" in the so-called "limited wars" of the nuclear age. Jack Bauer, in his study of the Mexican War, implied much the same thing in a reference to General Scott's operation to secure his line of supply from attack by Mexican guerrillas. Scott's problems, wrote Bauer, were "as complex and difficult as any faced by modern American soldiers who think the problem unique to mainland Asia." I concluded my own book, *Schoolbooks and Krags*, with the observation that a study of the army's Philippine campaign might provide insight into the solution of similar problems in the 20th century. Underlying all such observations seems to be a belief that the army had failed to learn as much as it could or should from its 19th-century counterinsurgency experience.[3]

Uteley blamed the leaders of "the Indian-fighting generations," civilian and military alike, for the failure of 20th-century counterinsurgency doctrine to "reflect the lessons" of the 19th-century experience. "Military leaders looked upon Indian warfare as a fleeting bother," he said. "Today's conflict or tomorrow's would be the last, and to develop a special system for it seemed hardly worthwhile." [4] Alternatively, one might argue that 19th century experience was absent from 20th century doctrine because of a lack of attention on the army's part to its own history of

counterguerrilla operations. For decades only nine lines have been devoted to the guerrilla war in the Philippines in the *American Military History* volume of the Army Historical Series, for example.^[5]

Probably both interpretations are correct. In the 19th and 20th centuries alike, the army's leaders do appear to have given insufficient attention to the problems of fighting unconventional wars, but there may be a third and even more important reason why no doctrine of counterinsurgency emerged from the campaigns of the 19th century to serve the purposes of those in the 20th. The army's efforts against such diverse enemies as the Mexicans, Confederates, Indians, and Filipinos took place in such different contexts and over such a long span of time that whatever common elements might have been present were either too obvious to merit discussion by the officers involved at the time or too hidden from their view to be discerned.

In the Mexican War, American soldiers faced guerrillas in the context of an international war fought between two governments, each of which acknowledged the existence and legitimacy of the other. Although the contest was quite one-sided and the Mexican government weak and frequently in disarray, the war was a conventional one in which the uniformed forces of each party, fighting in regular formations and pitched battles, carried the major burden of effort on each side. Mexican guerrillas were never more than an annoyance to the U. S. forces. The Americans could not ignore them, but the outcome of the war was not dependent on their actions. The army did an excellent job of keeping Mexican guerrillas under control and preventing them from interdicting American supply lines. It also managed to convince the Mexican population at large that a people's war against the American army was both unwise and unnecessary. For the United States, however, success in the war came, as one would expect, from the repeated defeat of Mexico's regular forces and the deep penetration of an American army into the interior of Mexico, seizing the nation's principal port and then its capital.

As in Mexico, guerrilla activity during the American Civil War drew troops away from front-line units to guard supply lines and garrison posts to the rear, but the war itself was decided by the fortunes of the uniformed forces locked in mortal combat on such battlefields as Shiloh, Antietam, and Gettysburg. Even more important was the wearing down of the Confederacy by the North's overwhelming superiority in both human and materiel resources, particularly when Sherman projected those resources into the heart of the Confederacy or when Grant threw them relentlessly against Lee's hard-pressed forces in Virginia. As it evolved in the context of the Civil War, guerrilla activity never amounted to more than harassment. Although Virgil Carrington Jones has argued persuasively that "gray ghosts and rebel raiders" operating in northern and western Virginia prevented Grant from implementing his plans for an attack against Richmond for the better part of a year, thus prolonging the war, Jones made no case whatever that such guerrilla activity was in any way decisive.^[6]

Fighting by irregulars in Missouri was so vicious that, as historian Michael Fellman observed, it destroyed any "middle ground and threw the unwilling as well as the committed into a maelstrom which surpassed understanding,"^[7] with the behavior of Union "militia" no better than that of Confederate "guerrillas." Much of the time the conflict in Missouri resembled banditry, feuding, and anarchy rather than warfare, even of an irregular type, and its military significance seemed minimal.

After Grant defeated Lee, and the South surrendered, only a full scale people's war, something as abhorrent to many Southern leaders as it was to the Northerners opposing them, might have had a truly significant impact on events, but that did not happen. The army's operations against Civil War guerrillas remained, as in Mexico, a sideshow to the real war fought by regular units on the battlefield.

One important difference between the war in Mexico and that in the United States did exist. In Mexico, the United States government did not seek to conquer the entire country, only to make the

Mexican government acquiesce in its demands regarding westward expansion into a sparsely populated Mexican territory hundreds of miles from the Mexican heartland. Not threatened by permanent conquest, Mexicans had little incentive to embark on a war of national liberation comparable to that which they launched a decade later against the forces of Maximilian. When the Mexican government admitted defeat, the American army quickly withdrew, leaving the two belligerents at peace, at least with each other.

The Civil War, however, was not an international conflict between two sovereign states, despite Southern claims to the contrary. Instead, as a war of secession it raised significant problems for army officers that had not existed in Mexico. Union commanders, for example, were unsure of the treatment to be accorded to prisoners who, under civilian laws, might well be guilty of treason. A more important, though related problem stemmed from the necessity to fight the war in such a way that reunion could be accomplished. If a people's war of resistance comparable to that faced by Napoleon in Spain had emerged in the South, a lasting peace might never have been achieved. Thus, the political problems presented by Confederate guerrillas were much more complex than those facing the army in the Mexican War.

The Indian Wars present the greatest problem for anyone seeking to generalize about the army's experience fighting irregulars. Although the Indians of North America used guerrilla tactics, they were not really engaged in a guerrilla war. Unlike the guerrillas of Mexico or the Confederacy, they were not part-time soldiers hidden by a friendly but sedentary population. Nor did they act in support of an existing regular army. Instead, they were a people under attack by a host of forces, many of which they only partially understood, and they responded with violence in a sporadic fashion, with no strategic concept to guide their actions. Often they resisted because they saw no other acceptable choice, but they fought as nomads or from insecure bases and not, like the Mexicans and Confederates, hidden in the arms of a larger population living behind the lines of their enemies. In the terms of Mao's analogy, Indian warriors were fish without a sea, easily identified as enemies, if not so readily hunted down.

In his well-known survey of primitive war, anthropologist H. H. Turney-High listed five attributes of what he called "true war": the presence of "tactical operations," "definite command and control," the "ability to conduct a campaign for the reduction of enemy resistance if the first battle fails," a clear motive that is the motive of the group rather than that of an individual member, and "an adequate supply."^[8] Applying his criteria to the Indians of North America, one sees that they rarely engaged in "true war." Although most Indian groups possessed a rudimentary knowledge of tactics, they usually lacked discipline and commanders able to exert military control over warriors in the heat of battle. In some tribes, such as the Osage, battle had evolved as a religious ritual in which, according to ethnographer Francis Lee Flesche, the pre-battle ceremonies and songs could take longer than the battle itself.^[9] In most tribes, participation in battle was usually voluntary, making either total mobilization or total war impossible. Similarly inhibiting were the lack of a clear objective, which distinguishes the more complex and longer phenomenon of "true war" from simply a successful battle, and the absence of the ability to sustain a campaign with adequate supplies. Although Indian scouting and intelligence gathering were often superb by army standards, Indians also relied upon magic to divine enemy intentions or make plans, and the absence of methodical planning was yet another negative feature of the Indian approach to battle. Widely known for their stealth and ferocity, the Indians demonstrated those characteristics in a context that was significantly different from that of the other irregulars engaged by the army in the 19th century.

Tactically, the Indians fought as guerrillas, and they often displayed tremendous skill in the process, but strategically they were not really engaged in a guerrilla war. They were not attempting to wear down the enemy by harassment, nor were they in a position to create secure base areas or win over the civilian population living in the heartland of the army they confronted. They fought as they did because it was the only way they knew to fight, and their success in keeping in the field as long as they did resulted as much from the army's meager size as from the Indians' prowess as warriors.

Much of the army's work on the frontier was that of a federal constabulary. It served eviction notices on Indians and then forcibly removed them when required. If "imprisoned" Indians "broke out" of the reservations, the army found them and coerced them back. Failing in the latter, it would attempt the equivalent of an arrest, an armed attack to force the Indians to surrender. Bands that raided white settlers, peaceful reservation Indians, or army posts engaged in criminal activity, in white eyes at least, and the army's task was that of the police officer, to track down the guilty parties and bring them back for punishment. Because of the numbers involved those activities sometimes looked like war, and in a few instances, when entire tribes fought against the intrusion of the white, it was. Most of the time, however, it was routine though difficult police work.

As the U. S. Army's only military activity between the 19th century's infrequent larger wars, the so-called Indian Wars have received far more attention than they merit in strictly military terms. At best, except for a few significant successes such as that against Custer at the Little Big Horn, the Indians were little more than a nuisance. In the final analysis, one must agree with Robert Utley that the army was only "one of many groups that pushed the frontier westward and doomed the Indian. Other frontiersmen--trappers, traders, miners, stockmen, farmers, railroad builders, merchants--share largely in the process. They, rather than the soldiers, deprived the Indian of the land and the sustenance that left him no alternative but to submit."^[10] The pressure of an expanding white civilization, not the campaigns of the army, was the primary reason for the end of Indian resistance. The Indian Wars were the most extensive but the least relevant of the army's 19th-century experiences fighting against irregulars.

In his excellent study of the army in the West, Robert Wooster found neither a significant connection between the army's Civil War experience and its approach to Indian warfare nor the development of a doctrine of irregular warfare out of its Indian fighting experience. Officers often disagreed over such fundamentals as the timing of offensives, the optimum composition of forces, and the use of Indian auxiliaries. As Wooster observed, "military success against Indians was thus not attributable to a national strategic doctrine understood and practiced by officers in the field. It was instead the result of a commander's personal experiences in the West, his perceptions of Indians and the natural environment, the abilities of his subordinates, and simple good fortune."^[11]

The army's confrontation with guerrillas in the Philippines differed markedly from all its previous experiences, being much more comparable to the guerrilla wars of national liberation waged after World War II than to any of the army's earlier campaigns. Unlike the Mexican or the Civil War, the war's outcome would not be decided by the clash of regular forces, and the outcome was not, as in the Indian conflicts, certain from the start. In the Philippines, the United States was engaged in a war of conquest, although Americans both at the time and later have seen fit to hide their actions by referring to the enemy as insurgents, or worse. There could be no insurrection, however, because the United States did not control the Islands when the Philippine-American War began in 1899. The fighting that ensued took place between two organized forces, one representing the government of the United States and the other representing the revolutionary government of the Philippine Republic under the leadership of Emilio Aguinaldo. The conflict began as a conventional war, pitting American regulars and volunteers against the Philippine army that had seized control of the Islands from Spain. Although beginning as a guerrilla force, the army surrounding the Americans in Manila had adopted conventional organization and tactics, planning to engage the American forces in regular combat and hoping to gain international recognition for the Philippine Republic as a result.

When their attempts at regular warfare ended in disaster, the Filipinos shifted to a guerrilla strategy aimed at making an occupation of the Philippines too costly for the Americans. Filipino revolutionaries hoped to achieve by a political solution what they had failed to achieve through a more conventional military approach. The problems presented by the Filipino strategy were greater than any faced by the army in its previous confrontations with irregulars. Bent on conquest of the entire Philippines, the United States could not achieve peace by arranging a partial cession of

territory as it had done in Mexico. Because the value of the Islands as a colony resided, at least in part, in the population, policies of removal or extermination were also inappropriate, even had they been acceptable on moral grounds, which they were not. Filipino numbers and the colonial nature of the conflict thus precluded a solution based on the experience of the Indian Wars. Finally, the Filipino leadership, unlike that of the South in the Civil War, had no reservations about calling their followers into the field in a people's war of prolonged guerrilla struggle. From the army's point of view, however, the Philippine situation, like that of the Civil War, demanded that the war be fought and ended in a way that would help create a lasting peace.

The tremendous differences in the army's experiences with irregular warfare make generalizing difficult, but not impossible. Some uniformities can be discerned, although frequently they are not nearly so important as the differences, a point to be doubly emphasized when one attempts to compare any of the army's earlier experiences with the war in Vietnam.

The most obvious uniformity is that of guerrilla technique; General George Crook's observation that Apaches "only fight with regular soldiers when they choose and when the advantages are all on their side" might just as easily have been made about Mexican, Confederate, or Philippine guerrillas.^[12] And a Confederate guerrilla leader spoke in terms readily understandable to the other irregulars confronting the army during the century when he described his mission against the Yankees as "to hang about their camps and shoot down every sentinel, picket, courier and wagon driver we can find; to watch opportunities for attacking convoys and forage trains, and thus render the country so unsafe that they will not dare to move except in large bodies."^[13] Whether in Mexico, the Shenandoah Valley, the Great Plains, or the Philippines, irregulars behaved much the same: fleeing from strength, attacking weakness, preying upon small isolated garrisons and poorly defended supply trains, killing the lone sentry or the unwary patrol, living off the land with the aid of their people, and terrorizing those who refused to cooperate or joined with the enemy.

A second uniformity, only slightly less obvious than the first, can be seen in the army's response to the threat posed by Indian and guerrilla bands. The actions taken to counter them were remarkably similar from place to place over time. Whether the enemy was Mexican, Confederate, Indian, or Filipino, the army responded eventually with many of the same general techniques of counter guerrilla warfare. To protect supply lines, commanders increased the size of the guard assigned to supply trains and strengthened garrisons along their routes of march. To facilitate operations against marauding bands and to provide security to populated areas, commanders garrisoned towns and built forts. To hunt down enemy units and force them to disband or be destroyed, the army sent highly mobile, self-contained units into the field to pursue them relentlessly. Often at a disadvantage because of their unfamiliarity with the terrain or the local population, army officers enlisted the support of indigenous inhabitants whenever possible. In Mexico, for example, Lieut. Colonel Ethan Hitchcock obtained the aid of the brigand Manuel Dominguez and his band, and in the American southwest General George Crook formed units of friendly Apaches to help him find and fight renegades such as Geronimo. In perhaps the most celebrated use of indigenous collaborators, Frederick Funston used a force of Filipino scouts to capture Aguinaldo in his own headquarters in 1901.

The army was relatively successful in developing methods to deal with the problems presented by hostile irregular bands in the field. A more difficult set of problems emerged, however, regarding the treatment to be accorded guerrilla combatants who had been captured, particularly part-time guerrillas, and the noncombatant population which sheltered and supported them. Throughout the 19th century tension existed between two general policies, one rooted in severity and the other more humane. The frustrations of guerrilla warfare, the ease with which guerrilla bands eluded regular troops when aided by a friendly population, the atrocities committed by irregulars, and a common assumption that irregulars were not legitimate combatants all worked to push commanders in the field toward a policy of reprisal. But recognition by officers that their enemies were frequently doing nothing that they themselves would not do in a similar situation, the need to fight and

terminate conflicts in a fashion that would bring a lasting peace, and the desire to keep one's humanity even in the midst of barbarous war all supported policies of conciliation aimed at winning over the opposition by good works rather than fear.

Nineteenth-century customs and laws of war reflected, rather than resolved, these tensions. Although the United States had yet to promulgate any official statement on the laws of war to guide officers during the Mexican War and the early years of the Civil War, by February 1863 Professor Francis Lieber, a noted authority on international law, had drafted a code that was summarized and distributed to the army in April as General order No. 100, "Instructions for the Government of Armies of the United States in the Field."^[14] It became the cornerstone of the growing body of international law upon which current practices rest, and by the time of the Philippine-American war it had become the final word for American army officers on the laws of war.

General Order 100 manifested the tension between the two different approaches to pacification. On the assumption that "sharp wars are brief," the order asserted that "the more vigorously wars are pursued the better it is for humanity." In an 1862 commentary written for General Halleck on the status of guerrilla parties in the laws and customs of war, Lieber had concluded that "armed bands" rising "in a district fairly occupied by military force, or in the rear of an army" were "universally considered" to be "brigands, and not prisoners of war" when captured. He also observed that such groups were "particularly dangerous because they could easily evade pursuit, and by laying down their arms become insidious enemies."^[15] Halleck's negative view of guerrillas carried over into General Order 100. Although item 81 of the order stated that properly uniformed "partisans" were entitled to be treated as true prisoners of war, item 82 stated that guerrillas who fought without commissions or on a part-time basis, returning intermittently to their homes to hide among the civilian population, were to be treated "summarily as highway robbers or pirates." Similarly, so-called "armed prowlers" were also denied the privileges of prisoners of war, and individuals who rose up against a conquering army were "war rebels," subject to death if captured. As item 4 noted, saving the United States was "paramount to all other considerations."

At the same time that it condemned guerrillas and sanctioned reprisals, however, General Order 100 also mandated that the conduct of officers administering martial law should "be strictly guided by the principles of justice, honor, and humanity." Although military necessity might justify destruction, even of innocent civilians, it did not sanction "cruelty . . . revenge . . . [or] torture." General Order 100 reminded officers that men who took up arms did not cease "to be moral beings, responsible to one another and to God." Unarmed citizens were "to be spared in person, property, and honor as much as the exigencies of war will admit." Retaliation, deemed "the sternest feature of war," was to be used with care, "only as a means of protective retribution" and "never . . . as a measure of mere revenge." As item 28 observed, "Unjust or inconsiderate retaliation removes the belligerents farther and farther from the mitigating rules of regular war, and by rapid steps leads them nearer to the internecine wars of savages." Lieber knew that in war the barrier between civilization and barbarism was exceedingly thin, and he provided few opportunities for conscientious soldiers to breach it.

Even before the development of the guidelines set forth in General Order 100, the army's campaigns against guerrillas had demonstrated both the severity and the humanity evident in Lieber's thinking. In Mexico, for example, captured guerrillas had been treated as criminals, either killed upon capture or after trial by military commissions. The army also resorted to more general and collective punishments, including the destruction of villages suspected of harboring irregulars and the assessment of fines against municipalities and their officials to compensate for the destruction done by Mexican guerrilla bands. At the same time, General Scott and other commanders attempted to convince Mexicans that if they remained at peace, the United States would neither interfere with their customs and religion nor subject them to exploitation.

Civil War soldiers appear to have been guided by the experience of the Mexican War, and many Union officers began the war with the hope that by treating the Confederates leniently they could achieve a swift peace. In the first months of the war, the army attempted to enforce a conciliatory policy aimed at protecting both the private property and constitutional rights of Confederate civilians. In the winter of 1861, for example, Sherman complained that his men suffered from exposure and short rations while the slaveholders of Kentucky ate fresh food in the warmth of their homes, and Grant said of his march to Missouri that "the same number of men never marched through a thickly settled country like this committing fewer depredations."[\[16\]](#)

The frustrations of trying to counter Southern guerrillas, however, soon led many officers to treat Southerners more severely. In Virginia, for example, General John Pope levied contributions on communities to compensate for damage done by guerrillas. He also decreed that male civilians within his lines take an oath of allegiance or be expelled, threatening them with death if they returned. When Confederate irregulars fired upon Union boats from the banks of the Mississippi, Sherman retaliated by burning a nearby town, and he told Grant that he had "given public notice that a repetition will justify any measures of retaliation such as loading the boats with their captive guerrillas as targets . . . and expelling families from the comforts of Memphis, whose husbands and brothers go to make up those guerrillas."[\[17\]](#)

In Missouri, following the 1863 raid on Lawrence, Kansas, by the band of William Quantrill, General Thomas J. Ewing ordered the population removed from four counties and their crops and property destroyed or confiscated. Endorsing his actions, his commanding officer, General John Schofield, observed that "nothing short of total devastation of the districts which are made the haunts of guerrillas will be sufficient to put a stop to the evil."[\[18\]](#) The following year, in Virginia, Grant demonstrated his agreement. Frustrated by Mosby's guerrillas, he ordered Sheridan to send a division "through Loudoun County to destroy and carry off the crops, animals, Negroes, and all men under fifty years of age capable of bearing arms" in an attempt to destroy Mosby's band. "Where any of Mosby's men are caught," Grant told Sheridan, "hang them without trial."[\[19\]](#) Only Mosby's retaliatory execution of some Union soldiers prevented Sheridan from carrying out Grant's order to the letter.

A special case, clearly different from the wars already described, the campaigns against the Indians displayed the same tension between severity and humanity, although in a different context. Officers were frequently appalled by Indian outrages such as those described by Sheridan in an 1870 report to Sherman: "Men, women and children . . . murdered . . . in the most fiendish manner; the men usually scalped and mutilated, their [] cut off and placed in their mouth [Sheridan's omission]; women ravished sometimes fifty and sixty times in succession, then killed and scalped, sticks stuck in their persons, before and after death." At times, however, the officers bent on the destruction of a people they saw as brutal savages also expressed a degree of understanding and even admiration. Colonel Henry B. Carrington, who viewed the mutilated bodies of the soldiers killed in the 1866 Fetterman massacre, could still say that had he been an Indian he "should have fought as bitterly, if not as brutally." And General Nelson Miles praised the Indians' "courage, skill, sagacity, endurance, fortitude, and self sacrifice," as well as their "dignity, hospitality, and gentleness."[\[20\]](#)

Historian Richard Ellis has concluded that commanders such as O. O. Howard, George Crook, and John Pope were "sincere and benevolent men performing a difficult job."[\[21\]](#) Pope observed in 1875 that only "with painful reluctance" did the army "take the field against Indians who only leave their reservations because they are starved there, and who must hunt food for themselves and their families or see them perish with hunger."[\[22\]](#) Many officers recognized, as did Crook, that hostilities could be prevented if only the Indians were treated with "justice, truth, honesty, and common sense."[\[23\]](#) But such a humane policy was impossible for the American nation of the 19th century, bent on expansion and development. Soldiers recognized that they had little control over the fate of the Indians; instead, they believed the Indian to be doomed to "extinction" by forces "silently at work beyond all human control."[\[24\]](#) Given such assumptions, Sherman's remark in

1868 that "the more we can kill this year, the less will have to be killed the next war" takes on the quality of statement of fact, rather than a cruel, unfeeling comment by a soldier committed to waging total war.[25]

At the century's end the pattern in the Philippines had much in common with events both in Mexico and in the Civil War. Many of the officers in the islands--such as General Elwell S. Otis, in command when the war began, and General Arthur MacArthur, his successor--were convinced that the swiftest way to end the war and pacify the population was to demonstrate the benefits of American colonial government; and the army put considerable effort into establishing municipal governments, schools, and public works projects. Rejecting the concept of total war implied in Sherman's March to the Sea, most officers in the Philippines, at least initially, seemed to accept the idea put forth by Captain John Bigelow, Jr., in his *Principles of Strategy* that "the maintenance of a military despotism in the rear of an invading army must generally prove a waste of power." [26]

As the frustrations of the guerrilla war increased, however, officers began either to urge upon their superiors in Manila a policy of greater severity or to engage in harsh reprisals without waiting for official sanction. As Colonel Robert L. Bullard wrote in his diary in August 1900, "It seems that ultimately we shall be driven to the Spanish method of dreadful general punishments on a whole community for the acts of its outlaws which the community systematically shields and hides." [27] A few months later General Lloyd Wheaton urged "swift methods of destruction" to bring a "speedy termination to all resistance," claiming it was "no use going with a sword in one hand, a pacifist pamphlet in the other hand and trailing the model of a schoolhouse after." [28] Fortunately, General MacArthur recognized the value of the reform programs being implemented by the army as well as the efforts being made to prevent excesses in the campaign against the guerrillas. Even he was frustrated, however, and by the end of 1900, he sanctioned the enforcement of the most severe sections of General Order 100. In areas where guerrillas and their supporters proved most intransigent, such as Batangas Province, the army even resorted to population relocation and a scorched-earth policy comparable to that of General Ewing in western Missouri. On the island of Samar the line between retaliation and revenge became blurred beyond recognition for some soldiers.

Atrocities have taken place in nearly all wars, but the frustrations of irregular warfare, in which the enemy's acts of terror and brutality often add to the anger generated by the difficulty of campaigning, create an environment particularly conducive to the commission of war crimes. In almost all such wars one can discover numerous incidents in which counterinsurgents resorted to acts of counterterror, punishment, or revenge that fell clearly outside even the relatively severe actions sanctioned by 19th-century laws of war.

During the Civil War reprisals sometimes went well beyond those sanctioned by the laws of warfare. Robert Gould Shaw, for example, witnessed the "wanton destruction," of Darien, Georgia, in 1863, an act that made him ashamed to be an officer of the Union force that committed the act.[29] According to Shaw, the city was destroyed for no apparent reason other than his commander's desire to subject the Southerners to the hardships of war. As described by Shaw, it was an act of pure revenge and a war crime. In other instances, when the enemy was perceived as savage, the army's actions could be even more severe, as exemplified by Custer's 1868 attack of Black Kettle's Cheyenne camp on the bank of the Washita. The men of the 7th Cavalry destroyed numerous Indians (including women and children), the camp's tepees (thus denying the survivors food and winter robes), and over 800 Indian ponies.

Stories of atrocities would become the hallmark of the Philippine campaign. No history of that war is complete without a description of the "water cure," in which unwilling suspects were seized and their stomachs forcibly filled with water until they revealed the hiding place of guerrillas, supplies, and arms--or, as happened on occasion, until they died. The more frustrating the campaign became,

the more frequently the Americans crossed the line separating the harsh reprisals sanctioned by General Order 100 from such crimes of war as torture and wanton destruction.

Although often quite harsh, the army's 19th-century response to the problems of irregular warfare was, in general, based upon the existing laws of war. Widely publicized, of course, have been the deviations from those laws that took place. In virtually every conflict, officers and men alike committed atrocities, such as shooting prisoners or noncombatants, or torturing people suspected of withholding information. Significantly, despite the tendency of those committing such acts and of their supporters to plead the extenuating circumstances of barbarous irregular war as a defense, few people accepted their argument that no crime or breach of the laws of war had been committed.

The conclusion that American soldiers in the 19th century made an effort to fight irregulars within the context of a set of legal and moral restraints would not be particularly significant were it not for the tremendous contrast presented by many later counterinsurgency campaigns. In places as remote from each other as El Salvador and Afghanistan, one saw the use of widespread and seemingly indiscriminate terror against civilians as a primary technique for dealing not only with insurgents and their supporters, but with the uncommitted as well. At present, the laws of war are frequently ignored, and war against potential as well as actual insurgents is fought with a barbarity associated more with the likes of Attila the Hun than the soldiers of supposedly civilized nations.

The contrast between the attitude of many American officers in the 19th century and that evident in a number of foreign armies by the 1960s, most notably, perhaps, in Latin America, highlights a moral problem of immense proportions. That American officers are not unaware of the problem has been demonstrated by events such as the 1980 West Point symposium on "War and Morality." At that gathering, Professor Michael Walzer spoke of "two kinds of military responsibility," and his approach to the subject had much more in common with the views held by most 19th-century military officers than those exhibited by many of the world's soldiers subsequently engaged in counter-guerrilla warfare. In language that Francis Lieber would have readily endorsed, Walzer observed that the military officer "as a moral agent," has a responsibility beyond that upward to the officers over him and downward to the soldiers under him. He also has a responsibility "outward--to all those people whose lives his activities affect."^[30] In the 19th century, Walzer's second kind of military responsibility was accepted by many American officers as they attempted to defeat irregulars without sinking to the level of barbarity that at a later date would be deemed "indispensable."^[31]

Military officers who fail to give careful attention to the moral problems inherent in warfare against determined irregular forces often find themselves drawn into the more inhumane forms of counterinsurgency. To avoid such a fate, they must continue to ask themselves what at first glance seems to be a very 19th-century question. When fighting irregulars they must ask--in the moral sense of these words (a sense not commonly brought to bear in gauging the potential effectiveness of military operations)--what response is *right*, *good*, and *proper*. To do less is to risk the loss of their humanity as well as any claim to be defending a government based upon the rule of law.

^[1] John M. Gates, "Indians and Insurrectos: The US Army's Experience with Insurgency," *Parameters*, 13 (1983), 59-68.

^[2] Michael Walzer, "Two Kinds of Military Responsibility," *Parameters*, 11 (March 1981), 42-46.

^[3] Robert M. Utley, "The Contribution of the Frontier to the American Military Tradition," in James P. Tate, ed., *The American Military on the Frontier* (Washington: Office of Air Force History, US Air Force, 1978), 13; Jack Bauer, *The Mexican War, 1846-1848* (New York: Macmillan, 1974), 332; John M. Gates, *Schoolbooks and Krags: The United States Army in the Philippines, 1898-1902* (Westport: Greenwood Press, 1973), 289.

- [4] Utley, "The Contribution of the Frontier to the American Military Tradition," 9. For a more detailed assessment of the Army's failure to develop a doctrine for countering irregulars published a decade after Utley's paper see Robert Wooster, *The Military and United States Indian Policy, 1865-1903* (New Haven: Yale Univ. Press, 1988).
- [5] Comparisons of *American Military History* (Washington, D.C.: Government Printing Office, 1973), 337-339 with earlier versions of *American Military History* show no changes.
- [6] See Virgin Carrington Jones, *Gray Ghosts and Rebel Raiders* (New York: Holt, 1956), *passim*.
- [7] Michael Fellman, *Inside War: The Guerrilla Conflict in Missouri During the American Civil War* (New York: Oxford Univ. Press 1989), 22.
- [8] Harry Holbert Turney-High, *Primitive War: Its Practice and Concepts* (Columbia: Univ. of South Carolina Press, 1949), 30.
- [9] *Ibid.*, 63.
- [10] Robert M. Utley, *Frontier Regulars: The United States Army and the Indian, 1866-1891* (New York: Macmillan, 1973, 411.
- [11] Wooster, *The Military and United States Indian Policy*, 213.
- [12] George Crook, "The Apache Problem," *Journal of the Military Service Institution of the United States*, 7 (October 1886), 263.
- [13] Bruce Catton in Jones, *Gray Ghosts and Rebel Raiders*, ix.
- [14] See *The War of the Rebellion: A Compilation of the Official Records of the Union and Confederate Armies* (Washington: GPO, 1880-1901), Series III, Vol. 3, 148-164 for a copy of General Order 100.
- [15] Francis Lieber, "Guerrilla parties considered with reference to the laws and usages of war," *The War of the Rebellion*, Series III, Vol. 2, 308-309.
- [16] John M. Brinsfield, "The Military Ethics of General William T. Sherman: A Reassessment," *Parameters*, 12 (June 1982), 41-42.
- [17] *Ibid.*
- [18] Charles R. Mink, "General Orders, No. 11: The Forced Evacuation of Civilians During the Civil War," *Military Affairs*, 34 (December 1970), 134.
- [19] David J. Ozolek, "Retribution at Front Royal," *Military Review*, 61 (September 1981), 69.
- [20] Thomas C. Leonard, *Above the Battle: War-making in America from Appomattox to Versailles* (New York: Oxford Univ. Press, 1978), 48 & 51.
- [21] Richard N. Ellis, "The Humanitarian Generals," *Western Historical Quarterly*, 3 (April 1972), 178.
- [22] Odie B. Faulk, *The Geronimo Campaign* (New York: Oxford Univ. Press, 1969), 26.
- [23] Leonard, 49.
- [24] *Ibid.*, 55.

[25] Russell F. Weigley, *The American Way of War: A History of United States Military Strategy and Policy* (New York: Macmillan, 1973), 160.

[26] John Bigelow, *The Principles of Strategy*, rev. ed. (Philadelphia: J. B. Lippincott, 1894), 263-264.

[27] Robert Lee Bullard, Diary, 17 August 1900, Robert Lee Bullard Papers, Library of Congress, Washington, D.C.

[28] Wheaton's endorsement, 11 January 1901, on J. M. Thompson to Adjutant General, 4 January 1901, "Diary of Events, 12-30 Jan., 1901" AGO 369140, Records of the Adjutant General's Office, Record Group 94, National Archives, Washington, D.C.

[29] Robert Gould Shaw in Henry Steele Commager, ed., *The Blue and the Gray: The Story of the Civil War as Told by Participants* (Indianapolis: Bobbs-Merrill, 1950), 497.

[30] Michael Walzer, "Two Kinds of Military Responsibility," *Parameters*, 11 (March 1981), 45.

[31] "Indispensable" was the word used by a French colonel to describe the importance of torture in the Algerian campaign. See Peter Paret, *French Revolutionary Warfare from Indochina to Algeria: The Analysis of a Political and Military Doctrine* (New York: Praeger, 1964), 69.

CHAPTER THREE

THE PACIFICATION OF THE PHILIPPINES

Of the U. S. Army's early encounters with irregulars, none is more relevant to contemporary concerns than the army's campaign in the Philippines at the end of the nineteenth century, and my study of the Philippine-American War provided the foundation for much of my thinking on irregular warfare. I began research on the topic in 1964 when I embarked upon a Ph.D. program at Duke University. At the time the army's successful campaign in the Philippines stood in marked contrast to its then stalemated efforts in Vietnam. I finished my thesis in 1967, and over the next two years I revised the manuscript for publication in the Greenwood Press military history series. Although I sent the completed book manuscript to the publisher in 1970, publication was delayed until 1973.^[1] I have no idea why publication took so long, but I have always suspected that someone at the press did not want to bring out the book until American participation in the Vietnam War had ended. Praising the U. S. Army, even for work done more than a half century before, was bound to prove controversial, as it has.

Since 1973 I have revised my views on the Philippine campaign to incorporate the work of other scholars and new research of my own. The first formal opportunity to present an updated analysis came in 1980 when I was invited to participate in the United States Air Force Academy's Ninth Military History Symposium. I revised the symposium paper, "The Pacification of the Philippines, 1898-1902,"^[2] in 1985 for presentation as one of five lectures given at Obirin College in Japan, and it has been revised further for inclusion here. Even with revision, however, my interpretation of the army's work in the Philippines remains incompatible with the popular view of the campaign as one characterized by brutality.

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The war between the United States and the forces of the Philippine revolution began in 1899 and lasted over three years. Almost every unit of the U. S. Army served in the Philippines during the conflict, as well as a number of state and federal volunteers. Of some 125,000 Americans who fought in the Islands at one time or another, almost 4,000 died there. Of the non-Muslim Filipino population, which numbered approximately 6,700,000, at least 34,000 lost their lives as a direct result of the war, and as many as 200,000 may have died as a result of the cholera epidemic at the war's end. The U. S. Army's death rate in the Philippine-American War (32/1000) was the equivalent of the nation having lost over 86,000 (of roughly 2,700,000 engaged) during the Vietnam war instead of approximately 58,000 who were lost in that conflict. For the Filipinos, the loss of 34,000 lives was equivalent to the United States losing over a million people from a population of roughly 250 million, and if the cholera deaths are also attributed to the war, the equivalent death toll for the United States would be over 8,000,000. This war about which one hears so little was not a minor skirmish.

Even if the number of dead had been lower, however, the war would still rank as an important conflict for it provides an example of a significant phenomenon taking place at the dawn of the twentieth century. On the Filipino side one sees a struggling anti-imperialist movement seeking Philippine independence, as well as peasants reacting to the stress of economic change. Pitted against the Philippine revolution in the beginning was the waning power of imperial Spain, a nation that some 300 years earlier had been the strongest in Western Europe but by the end of the nineteenth century had been in a period of decline for over a century. When the United States went to war with Spain in 1898, although the issues leading to war concerned Cuba, the United States soon found itself also embroiled in the quickly moving events of the Filipino revolution. The Philippine-American War thus represents an important event in the confrontation between Western

imperialism and Asian nationalism, a phenomenon that would become increasingly significant in the twentieth century. The war was also an important milestone in American overseas expansion and an example of that expansion in one of its most militant phases.

As important as the conflict was, however, it has long remained one of the least understood wars in American history. In most history texts, the war is given only a few brief paragraphs, commonly treated as an appendage of the Spanish-American War rather than an event with its own significance. Thus the one volume military history published by the historical branch of the U. S. Army in the 1950s contained fewer than three pages on the war. Much earlier, in 1906 and in 1908, William Howard Taft had quashed John R. M. Taylor's attempt to publish an officially sponsored history of the war, along with translations of a number of documents captured from the Filipino revolutionaries, because he thought that Taylor's work might alienate people in both the Philippines and the United States.

Although the government found the Philippine-American War too controversial for an official history, the war's anti-imperialist opponents were eager to write about it. In the decades following the war, the anti-imperialists crafted their version of the war's history. In it the U. S. Army engaged in a brutal subjugation of the Philippine people using a scorched earth policy to pacify them, and that anti-imperialist interpretation has dominated the history of the war ever since.

Overshadowed by the First World War and affected by a lingering American embarrassment over colonialism, the Philippine-American War soon faded from view. Interest in the conflict did not revive until the United States became involved in a seemingly similar conflict in Vietnam in the 1960s. At that point, a number of scholars, myself included, began to study the conflict anew. Although a number of authors accepted the prevailing anti-imperialist view of the war, my own research indicated that the traditional interpretation needed significant revision. In general, however, the war has continued to be overlooked, with only a few lines devoted to it at the end of sections devoted to the Spanish-American War, even in relatively recent works purportedly dealing with "The American Experience at War."^[3]

The conflict between Filipinos and Americans came as a result of hostilities between the United States and Spain. Many Americans were disturbed by the disastrous war for independence in Cuba and what they perceived to be the inhumane actions undertaken by the Spaniards to end it. In an attempt to solve the problem in Cuba, some 100 miles off the Florida coast, the United States Congress gave President William McKinley the authority he requested to use military force. That happened on 19 April 1898, and war with Spain was the immediate outcome. One result of that action was a successful attack on the decaying Spanish fleet in Manila by the Asiatic Squadron of Commodore George Dewey on 1 May.

Dewey's victory provided President William McKinley with both a problem and an opportunity. The problem was the need to support Dewey's victorious fleet, which controlled the waters of Manila Bay but very little of the land surrounding it. The solution to the problem was the dispatch of an American expeditionary force of some 20,000 troops to lay siege to Manila.

The opportunity was the chance to establish a permanent American base in the Far East. The opportunity came at a time when many influential individuals in the United States had been stressing the importance of overseas expansion for economic, strategic, and ideological reasons. At the time of the Spanish-American war, European nations were expanding throughout the world in a wave of imperial competition, and for some Americans the only alternative to expansion overseas appeared to be stagnation, followed by national decline. Expand or die seemed to be the only choices.

McKinley, however, was reluctant to move too quickly, for he knew that many other Americans rejected the colonial ambitions of their compatriots. Thus, although he dispatched troops to the Philippines, the President did not have a firm policy regarding the disposition of the islands. He

might take a naval base and leave the Philippines in Spanish hands; he might become the champion of Philippine independence; or he might take the entire group of islands as an American colony. Much depended on the response he received from the American electorate regarding the various options.

Unfortunately for McKinley, he did not have the luxury of time in which to make a decision on the Philippines unhindered by events in the islands themselves. The War with Spain had revitalized a Filipino revolution that had only recently been thwarted by Spanish military action. In the last half of the 19th century, as a developing export economy spread through the Philippines, members of the local Filipino elite, particularly individuals educated in Europe or Manila (frequently referred to as *ilustrados*) had begun to agitate for reform, stimulated by the resurgence of liberalism in Spain as well as a budding Filipino nationalism.

The growing assertiveness of the *ilustrado* elite directly threatened Spaniards in the Philippines who benefited from their favored position as the dominant group in the colony. Particularly threatened were the members of the Catholic religious orders who had held land and exerted power in the countryside for over three centuries. As the cries for reform grew, so did Spanish attempts to suppress them.

One can only guess at the effect of social and economic change on the Philippine peasantry. The Hispanization of the Filipino elite probably increased the gulf between social classes, and the stress created by the change from a subsistence, rice-growing economy to one based on the cultivation of crops for export must have been tremendous.

Convinced that the Spanish government was not willing to undertake widespread reform, Filipinos in the Manila area began organizing themselves in a secret society, the *Katipunan*, hoping to achieve independence and reform through revolution. Revolutionary war began in August 1896, and when a Spanish offensive nullified early Filipino success in the area surrounding Manila, the Filipinos embarked upon a guerrilla war. Within a year, however, both Spaniards and Filipino revolutionaries were ready to negotiate a peace. As a result, Aguinaldo, who had risen to the leadership of the revolutionary movement, left for Hong Kong at the end of 1897 with a number of his associates.

As tensions between the United States and Spain mounted, revolutionary activity resurfaced in the Philippines. Dewey's victory stimulated it further, as did his transportation of Aguinaldo back to the islands. By the time the American expeditionary forces arrived, Aguinaldo had already established a revolutionary government, with himself at its head, and had an army of some 30,000 men surrounding Manila. Filipino revolutionaries had also seized control elsewhere in the islands.

The Americans, having entered into an uneasy informal alliance with the Filipino revolutionaries, landed on June 30 and joined with Aguinaldo in the siege of Manila. Acting without Aguinaldo's knowledge, they attacked the city on August 13, and, with the cooperation of the Spaniards who surrendered the city, the Americans occupied it, leaving Aguinaldo and his men in their trenches surrounding the city. The American action worked to further the growing suspicion and tension between the United States and Filipino forces, as did the mounting evidence that President McKinley intended to keep the Philippines.

Aguinaldo had hoped that the United States would champion Philippine independence. When Spain ceded the islands to the Americans, however, he knew that his hopes were misplaced. At the same time, however, the forces of the Filipino revolutionaries had gained control over most of the islands while the Americans held only Manila.

Although many Filipinos had already demonstrated in their fight against the Spaniards that they were willing to risk their lives for independence, the United States government was determined to establish its sovereignty over the Philippines. When neither side would compromise, tensions

mounted, and on February 4, 1899, an armed clash took place between Aguinaldo's revolutionary army and the American force occupying Manila.

A bloody battle followed in which the Filipinos suffered high casualties (perhaps as many as 3,000 killed) and were forced to withdraw. The Americans, hampered by a shortage of troops and the coming of the rainy season, could do little more than improve their defensive position around Manila and establish a toehold on several islands to the south. Although Malolos, the seat of Aguinaldo's revolutionary government, fell to the Americans in March, major offensive operations could not begin until the end of the rainy season in November. Then, in a well coordinated attack across the central Luzon plain, American units dispersed the revolutionary army and barely missed capturing Aguinaldo.

Seeing no obstacles remaining to their occupation of the rest of the Philippines once further reinforcement arrived from the United States, the Americans concluded that the war was at an end, but when they attempted to organize and administer the territory coming under their control, they soon realized that the Filipino army had not been defeated. It had only changed its strategy. A period of extremely difficult guerrilla warfare followed in which the American hope of using the good works of an enlightened colonial government to complete the process of pacification was shattered when revolutionary terror and propaganda persuaded potential collaborators to withhold their support. Although some Filipinos cast their lot with the American invaders despite the dangers, most did not, and as the frustrations of the guerrilla war mounted, some Americans resorted to torture and brutal retaliatory measures in an unsuccessful attempt to bring a swift end to the conflict.

The guerrillas were fighting hard to influence the forthcoming presidential election in the United States, and the army could make little progress against them as long as the future of McKinley's Philippine policy remained in doubt. Focusing on the anti-imperialist rhetoric of McKinley's opponents, the revolutionaries concluded that William Jennings Bryan and the Democrats stood a good chance of defeating the imperialistic Republican incumbent if the war in the Philippines continued. Aguinaldo urged his followers on in the hope that an all out effort by the revolutionaries might help achieve a victory for Bryan in November.^[4]

President McKinley's reelection victory dealt a severe blow to the morale of the revolutionaries and provided a perfect opportunity for the implementation of a new approach to pacification. Although the army would continue to use the carrot of a reform oriented military government to persuade Filipinos to accept American rule, more emphasis would also be given to the stick. From December 1900 onward, revolutionaries captured by the Americans could expect to face deportation, internment, imprisonment, or execution. Where necessary, population would be reconcentrated around American garrisons to separate the guerrillas from the civilians aiding them. An increase in the number of American garrisons throughout the islands would improve the army's ability to protect townspeople from guerrilla terror and intimidation, creating a climate in which Filipinos inclined to show support for the Americans could do so with greater confidence, and active patrolling by American units in the field would keep the guerrillas on the run. Swift action by military courts against the supporters, agents, and terrorists of the revolution would force Filipinos to choose between the Americans and their guerrilla opponents.

The success of the American pacification campaign was apparent almost immediately. Kept off balance, short of supplies, and in continuous flight from the army, many guerrilla bands, suffering from sickness, hunger, and decreasing popular support, lost their will to fight. By the end of February 1901, as revolutionary morale sagged, a number of important leaders surrendered voluntarily, signalling that the tide had finally turned in favor of the Americans. In March a group of Filipino scouts commanded by Frederick Funston captured Aguinaldo by a wily stratagem considered unsportsmanlike by the army's anti-imperialist critics at home.

Funston's triumph added momentum to the Filipino collapse and brigadier general's stars to Funston's shoulders. As in the past, however, American optimism was premature. Although a civilian commission headed by William Howard Taft took control of the colonial government from the military in July 1901, the army's pacification operations continued. The massacre of forty-eight American soldiers on the island of Samar precipitated a harsh campaign there at the end of the year, and guerrillas in Batangas Province were not brought to heel until much of the area's population had been reconcentrated and its hinterland scorched. Even after the Secretary of War declared an official end to the conflict in July 1902, Filipino guerrillas remained in the field.

The actions of guerrillas, bandits, and agrarian rebels in the years after 1902, however, never presented the colonial government with a challenge comparable to that of Aguinaldo. While units of the army worked to bring the warlike Muslims of the southern Philippines under American control, the civil government's security force, the 5,000 man Philippine Constabulary, maintained a fitful peace throughout the islands, with only occasional aid from the army's Philippine Scout units (totaling 5,000 men) and even less frequent help from the army's American units (some 15,000 men). The campaign to defeat the Filipino revolutionaries and secure the Philippine colony for the United States had clearly succeeded.

How is the success to be explained? For years, most commentaries on the war focused on the atrocities committed by American soldiers. During the war, anti-imperialists accused the army of having embarked upon "a perfect orgy of looting and wanton destruction of property"^[5] and spoke of the "devastation of provinces, the shooting of captives, the torture of prisoners and of unarmed peaceful citizens."^[6] Long after the war, even highly abbreviated textbook accounts of the Philippine campaign invariably included a reference to the army's "brutalities," and a popular history published in 1989 made the exaggerated claim that "the U. S. conquest of the Philippines had been as cruel as any conflict in the annals of imperialism."^[7] Descriptions of the water cure, in which the victim is held down and forced to swallow suffocating quantities of water until the desired confession or information is forthcoming, or until the victim dies or becomes too weak for the torture to continue, can be amazingly vivid, and few authors could resist the temptation to include at least a general description of the atrocity if they had the space.

During the Vietnam War a number of articles appeared which reiterated earlier anti-imperialist criticism, with references to the army's "policy of terror" or its "standard extermination policies."^[8] One author even claimed that "in some applications" the American approach to pacification was "genocidal."^[9] While such statements highlighted the unscholarly and polemical nature of much that has been written about the Philippine war, they also gained considerable acceptance. As a result, to the extent that the educated public has any view of the war at all, it is undoubtedly that of racist American soldiers subjecting innocent Filipinos to the water cure or marching along singing, "Damn, Damn, Damn the Filipinos."^[10]

Considerable evidence exists, however, to support the argument that atrocious acts of war, for all their widespread publicity, were neither the major nor the most important feature of the army's approach to pacification, as the leaders of the Philippine revolution recognized at the time. They feared what they called the army's "policy of attraction," the term used to describe such army activities as the establishment of schools, municipal governments, and public works projects. The leaders of the revolution feared that the Americans would succeed in winning Filipino acceptance of American rule through such an enlightened policy, and many guerrilla leaders ordered acts of terrorism against their own people in an attempt to counter it. Terror, however, did not prevent all Filipinos from collaborating with the Americans as the army created a positive image of the benefits of colonial rule by the reforms implemented in the occupied towns.

The reform orientation of the army's leaders, not brutality, was the most significant element in the American approach to pacification. Literally from the moment they occupied Manila, American officers had begun efforts to reform the city's government and improve the lives of the people in

their charge, initiating their work at a time when many of them assumed that the United States would not be retaining the islands. Later, as tension between the Americans and the Filipino revolutionaries mounted, General E. S. Otis, the second commander of the expeditionary force, hoped that many of the reforms implemented by his military government would obtain Filipino acceptance of American rule and avoid war by demonstrating the sincerity of McKinley's pronouncements stressing America's benevolent intentions in the islands. After hostilities began, Otis continued in his belief that enlightened government was a more important tool of pacification than forceful military operations. Even when condemned by some of his own men for being too cautious, Otis persisted in a policy of pacification emphasizing good works instead of more draconian measures, leading one correspondent to remark that the Americans were "humane to the point of military weakness."[\[11\]](#)

A number of officers shared the General's views, and as units of the army occupied territory outside of Manila, commanders organized public schools, municipal governments, public health measures, and many other projects with a reform orientation. General Arthur MacArthur, who succeeded Otis in May 1900, continued the commitment to a pacification policy relying upon the good works of the military government to bring an end to the war by convincing Filipinos that an American colonial government would have a sincere interest in their welfare and could be trusted. MacArthur consistently rejected the recommendations of those subordinates who urged him to adopt a highly repressive policy, even after he concluded that some harsher measures would be needed to break the link between the guerrillas and their noncombatant supporters. Fortunately for MacArthur, a number of officers in the field took a similar view, and during even the most frustrating period of the guerrilla war, at a time when some Americans were engaging in deplorable acts of brutality, others continued the reform-oriented work of the military government.[\[12\]](#)

Many accounts of the Philippine campaign have erred in giving the civil government of William Howard Taft credit for winning Filipino acceptance of American rule.[\[13\]](#) In reality, although MacArthur relinquished control over the insular government to Taft in July 1901, the policies followed by the Taft government after that date were in most cases little more than a continuation of efforts initiated by the army in the previous two and a half years. The work of the civil authorities did help bring about conciliation between Americans and Filipinos, and the lure of civil government was a powerful incentive to Filipinos who wanted to be free of the restrictions of martial rule, but stories of Taft saving his "little brown brothers" from the harshness of military rule are mythical. In fact, Taft advocated a more repressive policy of pacification than that conceived by MacArthur.

Taft, not the military, pushed for the deportation of captured revolutionary leaders to Guam, and Taft, not MacArthur, wanted Filipinos refusing to lay down their arms to be "treated as outlaws and subject to the severest penalties."[\[14\]](#) Taft even criticized MacArthur for being "much too merciful in commuting death sentences" of convicted terrorists,[\[15\]](#) and in his private correspondence Taft showed little respect or liking for the Philippine people.[\[16\]](#) To the extent that Filipinos were won over to the American side by the work of enlightened or shrewd colonial government, in the period before 1902 the officers of the U. S. Army deserve far more credit for the accomplishment than William Howard Taft.

Although the author of a 1980 study of American *Social Engineering in the Philippines* stated emphatically that "there was little relationship between the progressive movement in the United States and the policies introduced in the Philippines,"[\[17\]](#) the work of the military government would seem to offer numerous examples of the political and humanitarian reforms that were the essence of progressivism in America. The basic assumption underlying the military government's emphasis on education, for example, was that Filipinos must be prepared to participate in the democratic political structure that officers assumed would be established in the islands. Furthermore, the reform orientation of the army's officers was evident before McKinley's decision to take the Philippines and before the outbreak of war. The reform activity of the military also began too early to represent either an insincere or pragmatic response to the demands of pacification or

colonial government. Instead the urge to engage in progressive reform, covered in greater detail in the following chapter, was something that the officers had brought with them from home.

That the army's pacification efforts in the Philippines succeeded seems beyond doubt, although there remains considerable disagreement among historians regarding how those efforts should be characterized. As the war proceeded, Filipinos in all parts of the islands changed their minds and their allegiance, until finally, as one historian has observed, "virtually every member of the resistance cooperated with the Americans."[\[18\]](#) Unfortunately, the Filipino side of the process that eventually led to such widespread collaboration is not yet fully understood, although it seems clear that the Filipino response varied considerably depending on time, place, and circumstance.

Many of the conservative Filipino elite, fearing that an independent government might be dominated by military opportunists or radical representatives of the masses, supported the Americans, in some cases beginning their collaboration even before the outbreak of hostilities. Stability and order seemed more important to them than independence. Other Filipinos, believing that successful resistance was impossible, resigned themselves unenthusiastically to an American victory. In places, members of the elite tried to maintain a posture of watchful neutrality, choosing sides only when the threat of revolutionary terror or, particularly after December 1900, of American retaliation forced them to commit themselves. Elsewhere, the desire for independence and an embryonic sense of Philippine nationalism motivated elite leaders to continue fighting against the Americans long after most Filipinos had accepted defeat.[\[19\]](#) In general, however, members of the elite recognized that the gulf between them and their less educated, impoverished countrymen was much more difficult to bridge than that between them and their American conquerors. One by one they concluded that acceptance of an American colonial government would do more to help them retain or enhance their power and position within Philippine society than the continuation of a resistance that seemed increasingly futile.[\[20\]](#) For dedicated revolutionaries the task of collaboration was made easier by the extremely high correlation between the reforms implemented by the Americans and those demanded of Spain by the intellectual spokesmen of the revolution. Only the Filipino desire for complete independence and the immediate expropriation of the estates of the Catholic religious orders had been ignored.[\[21\]](#)

An undeniable element of opportunism existed in the positive response of many Filipinos to the Americans. People who had sought political power or increased status in the struggle for independence and the development of Philippine nationalism found that such self-serving goals could also be achieved by cooperating with the American colonial government. Filipinos who had joined the revolution for economic reasons soon saw that collaboration with the Americans could also bring material benefits or upward mobility. As the army's military success and the pressure of the pacification campaign increased, so did the number of opportunistic Filipinos willing to cast their lot with the Americans. Other Filipinos undoubtedly abandoned the revolution because they had grown weary of war or feared the consequences of further resistance.

The considerable friction apparent within the ranks of the revolution proved to be an important ally of the Americans in their campaign of pacification. The fragmentation within the revolution began as early as 1897, when Aguinaldo seized control of the movement from its founder, Andres Bonifacio, whose death at the hands of Aguinaldo's supporters created the first serious division among the revolutionaries. The death of General Antonio Luna under similar circumstances in 1899 added to the tensions, as did ethnic and socioeconomic divisions within Philippine society. The arbitrary rule of Filipino military commanders in areas under their control demonstrated that a Philippine republic under Aguinaldo and his lieutenants, many of whom were from the Tagalog speaking region of Luzon, might prove no more democratic than an American colonial government. Peasants or other Filipinos expecting a social revolution were alienated by the tendency of Aguinaldo's government to support local elites, many of whom had joined the revolution only after its success over the colonial regime of the Spaniards had been assured.[\[22\]](#)

Although tensions within the revolution were heightened by the American presence, one important division in Philippine society was masked by it, that between liberal revolutionaries seeking to enhance their political and economic power in a modernizing Philippine state and peasants longing for the stability and continuity of traditional village life. While many leaders of the revolution and their elite supporters saw themselves engaged in a forward-looking movement having as its goals such "modern" objectives as economic development, increased world commerce, and the creation of a unified Philippine state, the peasant guerrillas who followed them often sought a far different world, one rooted in a seemingly utopian but probably mythical past where life was less complex and free from the pressures and insecurities of an expanding commercial agriculture and money economy. At times the goals of the Filipino peasant, whether social revolutionary or reactionary, had little in common with the revolution of the elite, the Western educated intellectual, or the opportunist.[\[23\]](#)

As the pressures of the modern world and expanding metropolis intruded on their lives, peasants fought back, not only enlisting in the revolution against Spain and then against the Americans, but also participating in highly spiritual millennial movements or engaging in social banditry, two very common forms of resistance where peasants under stress are finally pushed to action. In the Philippines such responses had begun long before the revolt against Spain, and they continued long after the revolutionary leaders of 1896 and 1898 had joined with the Americans in the administration of the colonial government. During the Philippine-American War, the clash between tradition and modernizing tendencies, as well as that between elite and mass, formed strong undercurrents that were little understood but of great significance in undermining the strength of the Philippine revolution. The Americans, with their emphasis on progressive reform and their tendency to support the interests of the Filipino elite in its clash with the more traditional or radical peasantry, represented a haven from the vagaries of revolutionary fortune for many Filipinos.

American goals for the world in 1900 were not totally incompatible with many of the desires of the liberal revolutionaries in the Philippines, although the United States was clearly a threat to their nationalist aspirations. The intellectual roots of the Philippine revolution were in Europe, and the liberal vision of many Filipinos was shared by a number of the Americans who would eventually fight against them. That made the American task of conquest easier and the Filipino task of resistance much more difficult. The Americans could co-opt the Filipino revolutionaries because in so many areas, such as education and municipal government, American and Filipino goals were compatible.

In the 20th century, when Marxism and, later, Islamic fundamentalism replaced liberalism as the dominant ideologies of revolution throughout the world, the possibilities for cooptation decreased significantly, making successful campaigns of the kind undertaken by the Americans in the Philippines much more difficult, if not impossible. By the time of the war in Vietnam nations such as the United States would have far less in common than they once did with the revolutionaries of the world.

A second important point concerns the nature of the U. S. Army's campaign of pacification. It was not based upon a policy of terror or brutality; it was not "genocidal." Instead, it stands as an example of an approach to counter-revolutionary warfare that seemed to have been all but completely rejected less than a century later.

Many American commanders in the Philippines never lost sight of two things. First, their goal was to obtain Filipino acceptance of American rule in a way that would gain the cooperation of the Filipino people and prevent the need to hold the Philippines through the continued use of military force. Second, to accomplish that goal the army and the colonial government had to provide acceptable political, economic, and social alternatives to those put forth by the revolutionaries. Both the compatibility of American and Filipino liberalism and the progressive orientation of the army's

officers helped the Americans accomplish their goal of gaining Filipino acceptance of American sovereignty.

Unfortunately, these two conclusions point to an interesting contradiction. If countries such as the United States have nothing in common with Marxist revolutionaries or Islamic fundamentalists, then policies such as those followed in the Philippines would appear to have little value. But the alternative--brutal repression and the attempt to solve what are really political, economic, and social problems by the exclusive use of military force--raises a serious moral problem for anyone committed to the traditional liberal vision. Can the end justify the means if the means are so violent that the end itself is destroyed in the process? The question highlights the primary dilemma facing people who would attempt to thwart revolution by any means necessary.

The Americans in the Philippines were lucky; they did not have to make the difficult choice. What they stood for, although it had its sordid racist and imperialist elements, was in sufficient harmony with the desires of many Filipinos to make their conquest and pacification possible, if not easy. Great powers seeking such ends are seldom so fortunate.

[1] John M. Gates, *Schoolbooks and Krags: The U.S. Army in the Philippines, 1898-1902* (Westport, 1973).

[2] John M. Gates, "The Pacification of the Philippines, 1898-1902," in Joe E. Dixon, ed., *The American Military in the Far East: Proceedings of the 9th Military History Symposium, U.S. Air Force Academy* (Washington D.C., 1982), 79-91 & 261-264.

[3] See, for example, p. 368 of Dennis M. Drew & Donald M. Snow, *The Eagle's Talons: The American Experience at War* (Maxwell Air Force Base: Air University Press, 1988).

[4] For a more detailed overview of the revolutionary strategy and its failure see John M. Gates, "Philippine Guerrillas, American Anti-Imperialists, and the Election of 1900," *Pacific Historical Review*, 66 (1977), 51-64.

[5] Moorefield Storey and Julian Codman, *Secretary Root's Record: "Marked Severities" in Philippine Warfare* (Boston, 1902), 11.

[6] Statement of Senator George Frisbie Hoar, quoted in Richard E. Welch, Jr., "American Atrocities in the Philippines: The Indictment and the Response," *Pacific Historical Review*, 43 (1974), 233.

[7] Stanley Karnow, *In Our Image: America's Empire in the Philippines* (New York, 1989), 196.

[8] Stuart C. Miller, "Our My Lai of 1900: Americans in the Philippine Insurrection," *Transaction*, 7, (1970), 19, and Luzviminda Francisco, "The First Vietnam: The U.S.-Philippine War of 1899," *Bulletin of Concerned Asian Scholars*, 5 (1973), 12.

[9] Daniel B. Schirmer, *Republic or Empire: American Resistance to the Philippine War* (Cambridge, Mass, 1972), 256.

[10] The text this author read as an undergraduate contained such a view. See Thomas A. Bailey, *The American Pageant: A History of the Republic* (Boston, 1956), 629.

[11] Frederick Palmer, "White Man and Brown Man in the Philippines," *Scribner's Magazine*, 27 (1900), 85.

[12] For both evidence of the reform activities of army officers in the provinces and the supreme importance of the individuals concerned see Brian McAllister Linn, *The U.S. Army and Counterinsurgency in the Philippine War, 1899-1902* (Chapel Hill, 1989). See also Gates,

Schoolbooks and Krags, esp. 54-155. Attempts to demonstrate that the Army's work was unsuccessful or not oriented toward reform are sometimes undermined by their own data. See, for example, Virginia Frances Mulrooney, "No Victory, No Vanquished: United States Military Government in the Philippine Islands, 1898-1901" (Ph.D. Diss., University of California, Los Angeles, 1975), chap. 5.

[13] See, for example, William J. Pomeroy, "'Pacification' in the Philippines, 1898-1913," *France-Asie*, 21 (1967), 444, and David Joel Steinberg, "An Ambiguous Legacy: Years at War in the Philippines," *Pacific Affairs*, 45 (1972), 170.

[14] Taft to Root, 21 Sept. 1900, Elihu Root Papers, Library of Congress, Washington, D.C.

[15] Taft to Root, 31 Oct. 1900, Root Papers.

[16] Peter W. Stanley, *A Nation in the Making: The Philippines and the United States, 1899-1921* (Cambridge, Mass., 1974), 64-67.

[17] Glenn Anthony May, *Social Engineering in the Philippines: The Aims, Execution and Impact of American Colonial Policy, 1900-1913* (Westport, 1980), xvii.

[18] Glenn A. May, "Filipino Resistance to American Occupation: Batangas, 1899-1902," *Pacific Historical Review*, 48 (1979), 554.

[19] For a detailed analysis of the role of the local elite in the war see Glenn Anthony May, *Battle for Batangas: A Philippine Province at War* (New Haven, 1991).

[20] The variation in the elite response may be seen in a comparison of Teodoro A. Agoncillo, *Malolos: The Crisis of the Republic* (Quezon City, 1960), 636-653; John A. Larkin, *The Pampangans: Colonial Society in a Philippine Province* (Berkeley, 1972), 126-127; May, "Filipino Resistance," 554-556; and Norman G. Owen, "Winding Down the War in Albay, 1900-1903," *Pacific Historical Review*, 48 (1979), 564-569 and 581-589. Jane Slichter Ragsdale, "Coping with the Yankees: The Filipino Elite, 1898-1902" (Ph.D. Diss., University of Wisconsin, 1974) stresses the diversity of elite participation in the Philippine revolution. For an insightful look at the long-term effects of elite collaboration with the Americans see Steinberg, "Ambiguous Legacy," 165-190.

[21] A summary of the demands of the opponents of Spanish colonial rule appears in Teodoro A. Agoncillo, *The Revolt of the Masses: The Story of Bonifacio and the Katipunan* (Quezon City, 1956), 18-31 and James A. LeRoy, *The Americans in the Philippines*, I, 63-73.

[22] On the death of Bonifacio see Agoncillo, *The Revolt of the Masses*, chaps. 14 and 15. On that of Luna see Agoncillo, *Malolos*, 498-539. The split between peasant social revolutionaries and the more conservative revolutionary movements headed by Aguinaldo is covered in detail in Milagros Camayon Guerrero, "Luzon at War: Contradictions in Philippine Society, 1899-1902" (Ph.D. Diss., The University of Michigan, 1977).

[23] David R. Sturtevant, *Popular Uprisings in the Philippines, 1840-1940* (Ithaca, 1975), focuses on the millennial aspects of the peasant response to the revolution. See esp. chaps. 5 and 6. Guerrero, "Luzon at War," 164-168, specifically rejects Sturtevant's interpretations and argues that the peasants were social revolutionaries.

CHAPTER FOUR

PROGRESSIVES IN UNIFORM

The argument that many American army officers in the Philippines acted with humanity and wisdom in their approach to the problems of pacification is clearly incompatible with the common stereotype of the Philippine campaign as singularly brutal. If the revisionist interpretation of the previous chapter is correct, however, it raises a very important question. What had prepared the army's officer corps to identify and implement a program of reform oriented civil affairs projects that proved to be so well suited to the demands of the situation in the Philippines?

While working on my doctoral dissertation I began to notice what appeared to be a significant difference between the career experiences and attitudes of the army officers I was studying and the widely accepted view of the 19th century American officer corps as a group isolated from civilian society. I touched upon the discrepancy in the second chapter of my thesis and book when I described the American military government in Manila, but I did not attempt a more detailed elaboration of my interpretation until later, when I sent a manuscript entitled "Progressives in Uniform: Military Government in Cuba, Puerto Rico, and the Philippines" to *Military Affairs* in 1973. After waiting nine months for a reply, I heard from the editor that my paper had received no more than a "conditional acceptance." Most disappointing, however, was the recommendation of the referee that seemed to have influenced the editor most. He advised me to "forget trying to make connections with civil Progressives or adding anything about Progressives." To do that I would have had to abandon virtually the entire thesis of the paper as it was then written.

Disappointed, I put the manuscript on the shelf and returned to my teaching, looking forward to the day when I would have the time to undertake further research on the topic. Although I worked with the manuscript from time to time, I did not get back to it in earnest until 1978. In the intervening years, the focus had broadened from a study of the activities of officers in the military governments established during the Spanish American War to a more comprehensive look at officers' experiences in a host of comparable activities spanning the entire last half of the 19th century. In addition, I had developed a plan to survey the careers of a large enough sample of officers to determine where they had spent the major share of their time. I wanted to know how isolated from civilian society they really were when they developed attitudes that, to me at least, were clearly akin to those of the nation's civilian "progressives." The following paper, published in *Parameters* in 1980, was the result. I was pleased to have my perseverance vindicated when the work received the first annual Harold L. Peterson Award from the Eastern National Park and Monument Association in 1982.

* * * * *

Many scholars have portrayed the American army in the late-19th century as isolated from the society which it served. Russell F. Weigley, for example, characterized the period from 1865 to 1898 as "years of physical isolation on the frontier and deeper isolation from the main currents of American life." A few years later, Robert Utley observed that "Sherman's frontier regulars endured not only the physical isolation of service at remote posts," but also an isolation "in attitudes, interests, and spirit from other institutions of government and society and, indeed, from the American people themselves." In a study of the 1906 occupation of Cuba, Allan Millett spoke of the army as a "semicloistered" institution that had "remained outside the main stream of civil life," and one finds similar statements drawing attention to the isolation of the army's officers in the work of other authors.^[1] In fact, by the 1970s the notion of isolation had become a cliché passed on uncritically from writer to writer.

The documentation and bibliographies of the works cited above indicate that both the portrayal of post-Civil War officers as isolated and the argument that isolation stimulated professional development within the officer corps derive primarily from the work of Samuel P. Huntington, in particular *The Soldier and the State* published in 1957. According to Huntington, the officers who served in the army during the last quarter of the 19th century went about their work physically, socially, and intellectually isolated from civilian America. Huntington argued, however, that "isolation and rejection . . . made those same years the most fertile, creative, and formative in the history of the American armed forces." Isolation was "a prerequisite to professionalization," and "the withdrawal of the military from civilian society at the end of the nineteenth century produced the high standards of professional excellence essential to national success in the struggles of the twentieth century."^[2]

Huntington described the army before 1890 as "strung out along the frontier fighting Indians" and, after the war with Spain, performing similarly isolated duty in overseas garrisons. "Both these missions," he wrote, "divorced it from a nation which was rapidly becoming urbanized."^[3] A survey of readily available data, however, shows that army officers were not as physically isolated as Huntington would have one believe. Moreover, other evidence exists to challenge claims that officers were socially and intellectually isolated.

The annual reports of the Adjutant General for 1867-97 indicate that from 17 to 44 percent of all officers present for duty in established army commands during the 30-year period were serving in the Department of the East or its equivalents, living in the most settled region of the United States, often on the Atlantic seaboard. Furthermore, although the majority of officers were posted to the army's western departments, many men found themselves stationed in or near growing urban areas which provided numerous opportunities for contact with civilians and access to civilian culture (see Table I).^[4]

TABLE I

Officers present for duty in the East, the urban West, and more isolated circumstances:

	1871	1876	1881	1886	1891	1896
Total present for duty in all commands	1579	1464	1485	1604	1433	1518
Present in the East	533	400	260	295	285	435
Percentage	34	27	18	18	20	29
Present in the urban West	205	142	201	266	400	411
Percentage	13	10	14	17	28	27
Present in more isolation	841	922	1024	1043	748	672
Percentage	53	63	69	65	52	44

As early as 1871, for example, two-thirds of the officers in the Department of California (55 of the 80 present) were on duty in or near San Francisco, and by 1896 almost all of the officers in the department (85 of 89) were so situated. In other western departments the percentage of officers posted to urban areas was smaller, but the total of officers in such stations was relatively high (see Table II).^[5]

TABLE II

Officers present for duty in or near urban areas of significant size in commands other than the Department of the East or its equivalents:

	1871	1876	1881	1886	1891	1896
Chicago	12	15	12	17	53	61
Denver					21	52
Detroit					17	16
Los Angeles					17	
Omaha	41	27	33	40	48	10
Portland, OR	20	12	27	45	41	40
St. Louis	2					21
St. Paul	20	16	30	38	27	29
Salt Lake City	18	8	12	28	27	29
San Antonio	23	16	20	33	53	49
San Francisco	55	48	67	65	73	85
Total	191	142	201	266	400	411

Percentage of all officers present for duty outside the Department of the East	18	13	16	20	35	38
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In a nation that numbered only 100 cities with more than 20,000 inhabitants in the 1880 census, many of the western cities in which officers found themselves were of significant size. One should not consider individuals posted to such locations isolated.

To find the actual percentage of officers serving in isolation one must also consider the large number of men who were not present for duty, an average of 20 percent of the officer corps during the last third of the 19th century (see Table III).

TABLE III

Officers assigned to commands but not present for duty:

	1871	1876	1881	1886	1891	1896
Total number of officers assigned to commands	1902	1845	1865	1913	1816	1855
Total not present for duty	323	390	380	309	383	367
Percent not present for duty	17	21	20	16	21	19

In fact, the situation reached scandalous proportions by the 1870's, when the captain of D company of the Third Cavalry, testifying before the House Military Affairs Committee, observed: "I am absent on sick-leave; my first lieutenant is absent on recruiting service; my second lieutenant is an aide-de-camp to General Crook; and there is not an officer on duty with the company." At about the same time, Colonel Wesley Merritt noted that of 12 first lieutenants, only one was present for duty with his Fifth Cavalry regiment, while "the Seventh Cavalry went into the Battle of the Little Bighorn with fifteen of its forty-three officers absent, including the colonel, two majors, and four captains." Although some absent officers were only moving from one station to another, others were on leave visiting relatives in the East or traveling abroad (often for periods of several months at a time). More significant for an assessment of Huntington's thesis, officers listed as not present for duty included many men on assignments which placed them in close contact with civilians: teaching military science and other subjects, recruiting in eastern cities, serving as military attachés, advising state National Guard units, or representing the army at such special events as the Columbia Exposition which opened in Chicago in 1893.

After making adjustments for officers stationed in the East, those serving in close proximity to urban centers in the West, and those not present for duty, the number of officers actually on duty at isolated frontier posts seems considerably smaller than Huntington's assertions would indicate. At no time between the Civil War and 1898 does the Adjutant General's report show more than 50 percent of the army 's officers on duty in circumstances that physically isolated them from civilian society (see Table IV).

TABLE IV

Officers present for duty in isolation as a percentage of the entire officer corps:

	1871	1876	1881	1886	1891	1896
Total number of officers	2105	2151	2181	2102	2052	2169
Total serving in isolation	856	922	1024	1043	748	672
Percentage serving in isolation	40	43	47	50	36	31

Overall, the percentage of officers living in or near a large urban center may have been greater than that for the civilian population they served,^[6] and alternatives to the isolation of frontier service were available to more than a select few of the army 's officers. By 1898, for example, most of the cadets graduating from West Point from 1875 through 1879 (a total of 277 officers in five graduating classes) had served at least some of their time in the eastern United States, and roughly 30 percent had spent half or more of their careers there (see Table V).^[7]

TABLE V

Percentage of pre-Spanish-American War career spent in locations other than the United States west of the Mississippi for 1875-1879 West Point graduates:

Percentage of service outside of the West	90 or more	75-89	50-74	25-49	1-24	0
Officers in the entire sample (N=277)	37	22	24	48	60	86
Percentage	13	8	9	17	22	31

Officers remaining in the army in 1898 (N=178)	21	19	17	44	51	26
Percentage	12	11	10	25	29	15

Special assignments placing officers in close contact with civilians were well distributed throughout the group surveyed, with 85 of the 263 non-engineering officers (33 percent) having had them. Engineers, of course, spent virtually their entire careers working with civilians on a variety of public works projects.

An interesting pattern emerges from a comparison of statistics for the entire five-year group of West Point graduates with statistics for those graduates who were still in the army in 1898. As one might expect, attrition from death, disability, and resignation was highest among men serving on the frontier. The result was an increase in the percentage of officers having served a portion of their careers in the East and a marked decrease in the percentage who had spent the entire time between graduation and the Spanish American War in the West (see Table V). Further, although the reason is not clear, non-engineering officers who served a year or more in close contact with civilians were more likely to be in the army in 1898 than their classmates. Although the attrition rate for the entire group of 277 graduates was 36 percent over the period surveyed, that for officers with "civilian" assignments was only nine percent. Thus, the claim that the army officer corps was physically removed from the civilian community which it served is not supported by the available evidence; indeed, the men who helped guide the army's professional development before World War I appear to be those officers who were least rather than most isolated.

The sample of officers used here to determine probable career patterns was not chosen randomly. The West Point classes of 1875-79 were selected deliberately to include officers whose early careers fell within the period that Huntington and others identified with the army's isolation. Furthermore, officers in the sample years may have contributed more than their share to the professional development of the officer corps.[\[8\]](#)

Not only were a large number of officers not physically isolated, but they made use of the opportunities presented to establish closer contact with the civilians living near them. Although the extant evidence is fragmentary and open to subjective interpretation, material drawn from private papers, autobiographies, biographies, and miscellaneous secondary works indicates that officers became involved in their civilian surroundings more than was required by the circumstances of their assignments.

Detached service as a professor of military science, a position held by 32 percent of the men graduating from the US Military Academy between 1875 and 1879 and still on active duty in 1898, provided some of the best opportunities for officers to involve themselves in civilian activities. In his biography of General Robert Lee Bullard, Allan Millett observed that "as members of the solid middle class, army officers valued the social life of a college community, and some used the assignment to do academic work or investigate business opportunities."[\[9\]](#) John J. Pershing, for example, enrolled in the University of Nebraska's new law school while at the university as a professor of military science from 1891 to 1895, and he became friends with several local lawyers, including Charles G. Dawes and Charles E. Magoon. Like a number of other professors of military science, Pershing taught in one of the university's academic departments. In his case it was

mathematics; subjects taught by officers at other institutions included rhetoric, French, drawing, law, and forestry.[\[10\]](#)

Officers did not have to find themselves stationed at universities to partake of the educational opportunities available in many urban areas, and the ways officers became involved in civilian communities were as varied as the personalities of the individuals concerned. Pershing's friend and classmate, Avery D. Andrews, attended law school in Washington, D.C., while on assignment with the War Department, and George P. Ahern, on recruiting duty in the East, enrolled in the senior class of the Yale Law School, completing a thesis on "The Necessity for Forestry Legislation" before returning to his regiment in Montana, where he used whatever spare time he could muster to spread the gospel of conservation before representatives of mining and lumbering interests. Even isolation in Montana did not prevent Ahern from maintaining contact with influential foresters in the East such as Gifford Pinchot and Bernard Fernow.[\[11\]](#)

Social contact between officers and civilians seems to have been a part of military life in both urban and frontier assignments. T. Bentley Mott, aide-de-camp to General Wesley Merritt, noted that when the General was in Chicago they took their meals at "the famous Round Table" with "Marshall Field, George Pullman, Potter Palmer, John Clark, Robert Lincoln, and all the rest." Later, when the General moved to New York, Mott renewed his acquaintance with "the Sloanes, the J. P. Morgans, the Hamilton Fishes, and other New York people" whom he had met during his time as an instructor at West Point. Frank Vandiver's description of Pershing's work as aide to General Nelson A. Miles reinforces the impression given by Mott that the many junior officers who served as generals' aides often found themselves in the presence of powerful and prestigious civilians. General Adolphus Greely's reminiscences, as well as more recent studies of the friction between various commanding generals in the army and the heads of staff bureaus, indicate that staff service in Washington provided an astonishing array of opportunities for the integration of army officers into American civilian and political life.[\[12\]](#)

Although it helped, high rank was not a prerequisite to social contact between officers and civilians, nor was it necessary for an officer to be stationed in the East or even in a large city. Comments showing considerable involvement in social activities with civilians can be found in almost all of the reminiscences written by the wives of officers stationed in the west, no matter what their husbands' ranks might have been at the time. The *Army and Navy Journal* contained regular accounts of social affairs at frontier posts where officers and civilians could be found together.

In her description of life in the 1870s at Ft. Bayard, New Mexico, the wife of an officer in the 8th Cavalry spoke of the "many pleasant friends in the neighboring town of Silver City" with whom she and her husband exchanged visits and remarked upon her happiness "because we lived near any sort of town, instead of being cut entirely off from all outside life." Another officer's wife had similarly fond memories of her husband's service in Montana, having enjoyed their association with "five or six very fine families" in Bozeman, "people of culture and refinement from the East." Martha Summerhayes, whose account of her life in the West with her officer husband Jack is a classic of western history, was not the only officer's wife to find the social life of Santa Fé "delightful." Her guests there included the territorial governor, "the brilliant lawyer folk," prominent clergymen, officers of the local garrison, and their wives. Even at as remote a post as Ft. Bridger, Wyoming, officers found themselves entertaining a variety of civilians. General William Bisbee recalled visits there in the early 1880s by "Governor Pound of Wisconsin; Congressman John R. Thomas, Illinois; S. H. H. Clark, Union Pacific; Thomas L. Kimball, General Manager, and others."[\[13\]](#)

Officers could and did use the opportunities presented to them by the western tours of influential easterners to establish close and often beneficial relationships. Civilians in high positions seemed more than willing to aid the officers with whom they were acquainted, and the way in which officers used political pull to obtain favorable assignments, transfers, and promotions provides added

evidence of the ongoing interaction between officers and civilians. Millett's biography of Bullard and that of General Henry T. Allen by Heath Twitchell provide excellent descriptions of the phenomenon.^[14] One doubts that the use of political influence would have been so pervasive if the officer corps had been as isolated as Huntington claimed.

Huntington also asserted that, being drawn from the middle class, the officer corps was "representative of everyone" and therefore "affiliated with no one"; but officers actually had more in common with the ruling elite than with any other societal group in the nation.^[15] The process for the selection of cadets entering West Point worked to insure that the vast majority of officers would come from families with better than average incomes, connections, or both. Successful applicants needed political pull or, at the very least, acceptability in the eyes of their home community's political elite. Perhaps equally important in a nation where only a small percentage of young men received formal education past elementary school, candidates for West Point were subjected to a rigorous entrance examination. Over a third of the men selected for appointment failed the exam, and of the successful group that entered the Military Academy only three in five graduated.^[16] The hurdles that preceded a young man's entry into West Point required a certain degree of prior socialization of a nonmilitary sort which would have occurred most often in the nation's middle and upper classes, and which was very unlikely in any young man who did not aspire to membership in those classes.

At a time when less than two percent of the eligible age group received a baccalaureate, graduation from West Point had considerable status attached to it. Even though many cadets entered the Military Academy motivated by a desire for a free education rather than a military career, their decision represented a recognition that graduation from West Point would provide something not available to most of their contemporaries, the certification of formal scientific training in a nation enamored with the possibilities of science and technology. Furthermore, during their West Point years, cadets found themselves torn from their parochial communal roots and brought into the small but growing group of Americans for whom national and even international affairs were more important than local ones. In his study of Bullard, Millett noted that upon graduation, cadets became "part of a new, national, college-educated elite based on academic merit." In the process, "they had broken with their family past and local culture forever."^[17] At the same time, as one officer observed long after his own graduation, there was also the eventual recognition that political influence counted for too much for an officer to be safe in turning his back completely on his home and local community.^[18] Thus officers maintained their contacts with home, but in a context defined by their new status as West Point graduates.

In describing the isolation of the officer corps, Huntington and others focused on the many difficulties facing military reformers in a Congress unwilling to spend money on modernization or expansion of the army. As with most other political issues at the time, however, the nation's leaders were not of one mind. As Lester Langley has observed, "In the late 1870's and early 1880's, editors, writers, and a few congressmen endeavored to illustrate to a skeptical public and Congress the importance of the military as a molder of unity, a force of national integration." The goal of this pro-military group was to convince Americans that the army was "a useful power and not a constant threat to the viability of republican government." While at the University of Nebraska in the 1890's, Pershing found himself well supported by the chancellor, a man who saw the importance of military training as "a means of inculcating a sense of loyalty and responsibility among students."^[19] The acceptance of army officers as men worthy of teaching regular academic subjects in addition to their military specialty was a further indicator that officers were seen as socially and intellectually respectable; though there was no obligation to do so, schools frequently supplemented the salaries of the officers detailed to them.^[20] Neither the army nor its officers lacked a firm base of civilian support during the long years of supposed isolation.

In his 1973 study of *The Image of the Army Officer in America*, C. Robert Kemble accepted Huntington's views regarding the officers' isolation but concluded that civilian attitudes toward

officers in the period following the Civil War varied considerably. Although social theorists such as William Graham Sumner saw war as wasteful and anachronistic, they continued to admire and respect traditional military values that emphasized honorable character and discipline. Civilian opponents of the military often objected more to war or the way in which the army was used by political authorities than to its officers. Thus, pacifists such as Andrew Carnegie and anti-imperialists such as Mark Twain were critical of Regular Army officers only because of the belief that war and imperialism would be impossible without them. American labor leaders saw military officers as tools of capitalists seeking to destroy the nation's infant labor movement. Kemble concluded that "although postbellum criticism of officership was considerable, respect for the profession of arms remained firm and outspoken in important areas of American society. Influential voices frequently, publicly, and enthusiastically declared their appreciation for the military leaders."[\[21\]](#)

Contrary to the image presented by Huntington, army officers in the last quarter of the 19th century appear to have been no more isolated socially than they were physically. The evidence, though fragmentary, suggests that contact between officers and civilians was widespread; more significant, perhaps, many of the civilians with whom officers interacted were extremely well placed, often the political, economic, and intellectual leaders of the nation. In looking at the relationship between military and civilian leaders at the end of the 19th century, one does not find the "complete, unrelenting hostility of virtually all the American community toward virtually all things military" that Huntington claimed.[\[22\]](#) To the extent that military officers and their families sometimes demonstrated a tendency toward the creation of a self-contained social world on their military posts, the primary motivation for such action does not seem to have been their rejection by civilians. More likely, it flowed from the shared concerns and interests of people who increasingly saw themselves as members of the same profession. When officers and their dependents chose to spend their free time together rather than in the company of civilians, it was probably because they had so much in common and their residences were in closer proximity than those of people in most other occupations. Such self-imposed isolation is hardly unique among professional groups, civilian or military.

For Huntington and others the most important result of the supposed physical and social isolation of the officer corps was the way in which it sheltered officers from civilian intellectual influences. Officers, isolated from the main currents of American thought, are said to have developed their own uniquely military outlook, a set of views "fundamentally at odds" with those of the civilians around them.[\[23\]](#) Other work, however, has raised serious questions regarding Huntington's view of the relationship of officers to the major intellectual currents in civilian society.

In a 1951 doctoral thesis on "Social Attitudes of American Generals, 1898-1940," Richard C. Brown reached a conclusion diametrically opposed to that later reached by Huntington. Analyzing data from the careers of 465 general officers Brown found that the "basic social attitudes" of American military leaders did not differ from the attitudes held by "other leaders in American life." Brown argued that military and civilian leaders had common social origins and therefore comparable early development. He also concluded that "the training of the military leader does little to change the social attitudes he already had."[\[24\]](#) Morris Janowitz's 1960 sociological study of American officers, *The Professional Soldier*, lent support to Brown's conclusions. According to Janowitz, "The political beliefs of the military are not distinct from those that operate in civilian society. On the contrary," he said, "they are a refraction of civilian society wrought by the recruitment system, and by the education and military experiences of a professional career."[\[25\]](#)

Building upon the work of Brown and Janowitz, as well as his own research into the history of conservatism in America, Allen Guttman fashioned a direct refutation of Huntington's assertion that officers held beliefs antagonistic to those of civilians. In particular, Guttman rejected Huntington's characterization of officers as anti-business, apolitical, and opposed to the nation's liberal democratic tradition. In a wide-ranging article that drew upon such examples of American

military leadership as William T. Sherman, Leonard Wood, John Pershing, Douglas MacArthur, Omar Bradley, George Patton, and Matthew Ridgway, Guttman concluded that, while Huntington's book contained "much brilliant historical and sociological analysis" of the military, it was actually "a passionate projection of attitudes, a model of the military ethic that is an almost literary construct." [26] Guttman thus accepted Janowitz's view that "the political beliefs of the military are not distinct from those that operate in civilian society."

Despite the lack of corroboration from sociologists and others studying the officer corps, Huntington's ideas held their ground. The belief that American officers benefited from isolation in the period between the Civil War and World War I, and that the development of a unique military outlook as well as the professionalization of the nation's military institutions resulted from that isolation, became the accepted wisdom of an entire generation of military historians. One reason was that Brown, Janowitz, and Guttman had all focused their efforts on the 20th century. At no time did they directly challenge Huntington's characterization of officers as isolated before World War I. If anything, they contributed to the acceptance of Huntington's view of the 19th century by implying that the demands of modern war in the next century contributed significantly to the increasing similarity they found between military and civilian attitudes.

In the 1970s, however, Huntington's characterization of post-Civil War officer attitudes as divergent from those of American civilians was challenged by a few historians. If their studies are accurate, the actions and attitudes of officers involved in the professionalization and modernization of the army in the late-19th century corresponded much more closely to those of civilians than Huntington recognized. Scholars studying situations in which army officers were called upon to perform tasks that were more civilian than military (the administration of the insular governments established during the Spanish-American War, for example) found that officers performed such tasks exactly as one would have expected civilians to have performed them, raising even greater doubts about the validity of Huntington's conclusions.

Widespread agreement exists among military historians that the period of the late-19th and early-20th centuries was one of great intellectual ferment in the United States in which officer-reformers called for the modernization and reorganization of the army and stressed the importance of officers engaging in the systematic study of war. The phenomenal burst of professional activity at the end of the 19th century included the foundation of professional associations and journals, the strengthening of postgraduate service education through the reform of existing institutions such as the Artillery School at Fort Monroe, and the founding of new schools of which the School of Application for Infantry and Cavalry at Fort Leavenworth was the first and for many years the most important. By 1903 the legislative foundations of the General Staff had been completed, ensuring that the army would be well on its way to the reformers' goal of total reorganization by the beginning of World War I. At virtually all levels and in all of its branches, the army was on the move establishing modern systems of record keeping, choosing new weapons and equipment, and altering personnel policies with a view to the better identification and reward of merit. In short, officers were engaged in a host of activities all oriented toward the goal of creating a truly modern army led by a highly professional officer corps.

Huntington would have one believe that the wave of professional activity and modernization sweeping the army by the end of the 19th century came without any stimulus from "social-political currents at work in society at large." This view of professional developments within the army, however, is clearly open to question.

In his excellent overview of professional developments within the armed forces, Peter Karsten concluded that "the services could never have reorganized themselves without the sustained support of civilian allies in the Army or Navy Leagues, the Congress and the Executive, the world of agriculture, commerce, banking, and war-related industries." Not only did officers become "deft public relations men and lobbyists" in their struggle to reform the army, but they also recognized

that at least part of the work they were doing bore a distinct relationship to similar work being done by American civilians. Thus one finds a well-known reformer such as Lieutenant Colonel William H. Carter observing that army officers were much like railroad directors: "groups of men whose principal work was to observe rival lines, to consider state and local laws, and to prepare their systems to derive all possible advantage from future growth."[\[27\]](#)

Implicit throughout Karsten's survey is a recognition that the activities of army officers mirrored those of many reform minded civilians seen at the time and by subsequent historians as "progressives." Karsten identified his officer-reformers as "Armed Progressives"; shortly after his work appeared, Jack Lane drew an even more explicit connection between civilian progressives and members of the army 's officer corps. Similarly, in my own study of the turn-of-the-century military government of Manila, I labeled the American officer participants "Progressives in Uniform."[\[28\]](#)

Observing that "military professional reform paralleled precisely the early phase of the Progressive movement [which] one historian has termed 'business progressivism,'" Lane argued that military and civilian reform based on similar principles and occurring simultaneously was not coincidental. In an era characterized in some civilian quarters by a keen interest in "scientific" management, "army promotion and retirement reforms, the officer's examination program, and the efficiency report system all fitted closely with the progressive's drive for organization, efficiency, and the desire to provide leadership of the competent." Lane, of course, was not the first scholar to observe that the General Staff Act of 1903 was "a major piece of progressive 'efficiency' legislation." It was seen as such by civilians at the time. Russell Weigley also noted the connection between military and civilian reform, although he understated the degree to which army officers had led the way in the reform of their own institution, attributing the creation of the General Staff to the civilian Secretary of War, Elihu Root, instead.[\[29\]](#)

Although overlooked by Huntington, much of what was being done to reform the army in the last years of the 19th century represented the application of efficient American techniques of organization and administration to the business of running the army . Officers such as Lieutenant Colonel Carter saw the reforms in that light, arguing that "the war business of a nation requires trained men just as does that of great corporations," particularly if they were "to operate the army in an economical and business-like way."[\[30\]](#)

If one important characteristic of civilian progressives at the turn of the century was an emphasis on the application of science, technology, and businesslike systems for efficient organization and management to a wide variety of situations, another was the emphasis on reforms calculated to improve American living standards, distribute the benefits of economic and scientific progress more widely, and protect those Americans who were too weak, disabled, or disadvantaged to provide for their own protection. In the area of social reform one sees army officers at work on projects with a zeal, spirit, and commitment comparable to that of many civilian progressives.

In the military governments established during the Spanish-American War, army officers instituted numerous reforms comparable to those being implemented in America at roughly the same time. Their work in the islands occupied during the war went far beyond President William McKinley's general instructions and the military necessities of the situation.[\[31\]](#) For example, in the field of public health and sanitation American efforts to provide medical care for indigents, improve public water systems, and clean up major cities exceeded requirements for protecting the health of American troops or preventing epidemics. Efforts by army officers to revitalize educational systems also exceeded the requirements of the situation and the responsibilities of the military governments: existing school systems were repaired and enlarged; new schools were opened; and soldiers were used as instructors to compensate for teacher shortages. Much of the officers' activity indicated that their goal was the improvement of education rather than indoctrination.[\[32\]](#)

Officers in the military governments also embarked on significant economic and administrative reforms, revising customs regulations and tariff schedules, and eliminating head taxes and similar

exactions which fell most heavily on the poor. The spirit of the utopian tax reformer Henry George seemed very much in evidence in Puerto Rico, where officers attempted to classify land as to its type and usage, with a view to altering taxes accordingly.^[33] Part of the tax revenue collected by the military was regularly devoted to public works projects, including installation of streetlights, improvement of public water and transportation systems, and repair of bridges, buildings, and public monuments.

In all of the areas under the army's control, judicial and penal systems were brought into line with those American practices designed to protect the rights of the accused and minimize corruption. Other reforms, such as the legalization of divorce or the recognition of secular marriage, simply substituted what officers assumed to be "enlightened" American practices for supposedly "backward" Hispanic ones. Military governments released prisoners in cases where insufficient evidence existed for their incarceration, removed chains from inmates, and thoroughly cleaned and repaired decaying jails. Everywhere, officers sought to bring the systems they administered up to the highest standards set forth at the time by the proponents of legal and prison reform in the United States. Officers even attempted to reform public morals. Although they undertook the regulation of prostitution and alcoholic beverages primarily to protect American soldiers, the prohibition of cockfighting, closing of gambling houses, abolition of lotteries, and abrogation of the opium contracts previously issued in the Philippines by the Spanish colonial government demonstrated an equal concern for the welfare of the civilians under military control. Virtually all of these activities fell outside the scope of the officers' instructions or the demands of military necessity. The initiation of all such work could easily have been postponed until the inauguration of a civilian government, whether independent or colonial, and it certainly would have been deferred had officers not been imbued with reformist zeal comparable to that manifested by contemporary civilian activists. Reformers in the United States strove for changes that would alleviate the ills of society and afford greater economic, political, and social justice to a larger segment of the American people. At the same time the American officers in control of Havana, Manila, and other cities occupied by the army engaged in efforts to promote public health, judicial reform, tax equalization, honest government, and public education mirroring the work done in those same fields by progressive reformers at home.

The work of American officers during the Spanish-American War was not an isolated event. The progressive nature of the officer corps manifested itself on other occasions. In its contact with the American Negro and the Indian, the army had acquired a reputation for fair treatment and efficient administration. During Reconstruction and the Indian Wars, many officers had exhibited the same humanitarian traits and reform impulses as those shown overseas in 1898.^[34] The same was true in city administration. Major William Ludlow's reorganization of the Philadelphia Water Department in the 1880's was "praised by all lovers of honesty and efficiency in municipal affairs," and according to one historical study "reform literature often cited the District of Columbia, largely administered by the Army Corps of Engineers, as an excellent example of good government."^[35] More significantly, perhaps, American military interventions in the Caribbean in the early 20th century resembled the 1898 model in their attention to important political, economic, and social matters and in the interest shown by officers in reform. Between 1906 and 1908, officers in the Army of Cuban Pacification attempted reforms that went far beyond the intention of the government in Washington; when American troops landed in Veracruz in 1914 they undertook progressive measures nearly identical to those begun in Havana and Manila. Many of the officers participating in these later operations had gained their original civil affairs experience in 1898, and their work was often motivated by other than strictly military considerations. Wherever and whenever they intervened, American officers attempted widespread social and governmental reform.^[36]

Herbert Croly, a well-known progressive author, wrote in 1910 that the Spanish-American War gave "a tremendous impulse to the work of national reform."^[37] He could easily have included the international aspects of such work evident in the Philippines, Cuba, and Puerto Rico, for the same spirit was as prevalent in the army officer corps as in any other group in America. Thus, contrary to

the view presented by Huntington, officers were not isolated from the main currents of American thought and action; they were, in fact, a leading force for change in many of the same areas as the civilians being called progressive at home. At the turn of the century, as the United States entered an era of reform, its spirit was transmitted abroad by the members of the American expeditionary force.

Although not intended as a commentary on the nature of the officer corps, H. Duane Hampton's study of *How the U. S. Cavalry Saved Our National Parks* provides another example of how army officers operated in an important area of civilian concern. As early as 1875, officers could be found among those people trying to save the wonders of Yellowstone National Park from destruction by tourists; in 1882 America's premier preservationist John Muir and his protégé Robert Underwood Johnson both lauded the work of the army in the parks. One author in the *Sierra Club Bulletin* even suggested that military administration be extended to "all the national domain."^[38] According to Hampton, the National Park Service and similar agencies in other countries adopted much of the work initiated by army officers. In park administration, as in colonial government, officers demonstrated clearly that their beliefs were in harmony with those of many progressive civilians.

When faced with civilian administrative tasks, whether in national parks at home or in military governments abroad, American army officers acted as one would have expected members of the civilian elite to act, indicating that intellectually and philosophically the officers were very much a part of the American mainstream. If anything, they often behaved not just as any civilians, but as the most progressive of the nation's leaders, and they earned the praise of many American reformers for their work.

In a 1977 study of the army's role in the railroad strikes of 1877 and 1894, Jerry M. Cooper provided further evidence of the harmony that existed between the nation's military and civilian leaders.^[39] Articles in the *Journal of the Military Service Institution of the United States* during the 1880's and 1890's confirm the growing attention by army officers to the problems of urban unrest and violence generated by the conflict between capital and labor. Although reluctant to condemn laborers as a group, officers opposed any radical solution to the problems of American industrialization, rejecting socialism, anarchism, and "its kindred fallacies."^[40]

Cooper concluded that in the 19th-century conflict between capital and labor, "the officer corps, imbued with middle class values concerning the sanctity of property and the necessity of social order, all too readily identified itself with the propertied classes and negated any opportunity for the Army to appear as a third party." The broader implications of such a conclusion did not escape the author. "Despite the contentions of Samuel P. Huntington and to a lesser extent Russell F. Weigley," wrote Cooper, "it is evident that the United States Army officer corps was not an isolated social group developing a set of values and social perceptions which differed sharply from those of the dominant middle and upper classes."^[41] Thus, in almost every quarter, Huntington's vision of the officer corps seems under attack, either implicitly in studies such as Hampton's or explicitly in work such as Cooper's.

In a 1977 article in *Military Affairs*, Jack Lane called attention to the need for "new approaches" in the study of the American military past. He observed that "more work needs to be done in the areas of harmony and agreement between the trends in society and developments in the military establishment." Lane criticized Huntington for being "too abstract and too theoretical,"^[42] but a more pointed criticism would seem to be in order. Simply put, Huntington was wrong. The officer corps was not isolated in the last quarter of the 19th century. It was not a group apart, nurtured in isolation and acting primarily from corporate or strictly military motives. Though many scholars have been reluctant to accept such a conclusion, few significant differences existed between members of the officer corps and their civilian counterparts. The differences that did exist seem to be specifically related to the military tasks which officers performed as a function of their occupation.

Despite the emerging body of evidence that army officers and civilian leaders had more in common than at variance, no new synthesis has emerged to replace Huntington's characterization of the officer corps. As with their civilian counterparts, the army's progressives in uniform remain an elusive but intriguing group; perhaps one can do little more than agree with Millett, who observed that "Although the prerequisites of combat leadership (physical and moral courage, physical stamina, and competence in inspiring men and using weapons) did differentiate the officer from the civilian bureaucrat, it is doubtful that even long-term professional socialization produced a coherent philosophical point of view that was uniquely military."[\[43\]](#)

The possibility that members of the army officer corps at the start of the 20th century were not readily distinguishable from the nation's civilian elites, except, of course, in their primary concern with military affairs and their own career interests within the military context, presents military historians with a particularly difficult problem. Probably no area in the study of American history is in such a state of conceptual confusion as that dealing with the so-called Progressive Period, and many military historians might tend to shy away from the many unanswered questions that exist. Can one even speak of progressives in a meaningful way? If they did exist, who were they? What motivated the many Americans engaged in the varied efforts to come to terms with the disturbing implications of the urban-industrial society, and where did their ideas originate? Although such difficult questions may be those which are most important to an understanding of the officer corps at the time, few military historians will wish to brave the historiographical obstacles set by scholars studying the civilian history of the period, and one can hardly blame any historian for wanting to avoid what one author has called "an overgrown and treacherous field of historical controversy."[\[44\]](#) However, to understand the officer corps at the turn of the century, and probably at other times as well, one may have to spend much more time in such uninviting places as the historiographical no-man's land created by the indefatigable and garrulous students of the Progressive Period. That thought is enough to make many people wish they could go back to the trenches and curl up in their dugouts with well worn copies of Huntington.

But Huntington's interpretation will no longer work, for the Golden Age of professional development in the army came during a time of continuous interaction between the nation's military officers and its civilian elite. In the last third of the 19th century officers frequently performed jobs that were more civilian than military, and their diverse experiences prepared them well for the many tasks of a civilian nature that proved to be so important in campaigns of pacification.

Readers interested in the problems of the army officer corps in the post-Vietnam era face an equally difficult problem when they attempt to understand the significance of the argument presented here. The highly effective officer corps that directed the army's work in the Philippines may have existed only because its members were drawn principally from the established families of a self-consciously progressive society. If that is the case, then the recreation of such a corps in the more egalitarian present would appear to be both impossible and undesirable. The officer corps that succeeded in the Philippines thus represents one of the many significant points of contrast between that campaign and the less successful one fought more than half a century later in Southeast Asia.

[\[1\]](#) Russell F. Weigley, *History of the United States Army* (New York: Macmillan, 1967), 265; Robert M. Utley, *Frontier Regulars: The United States Army and the Indian, 1866-1891* (New York: Macmillan, 1973), 59; Allan Reed Millett, *The Politics of Intervention: The Military Occupation of Cuba, 1906-1909* (Columbus: Ohio State Univ. Press, 1968), 1. For other examples see Barton C. Hacker, "The United States Army as a National Police Force: The Federal Policing of Labor Disputes, 1877-1898," *Military Affairs*, 33 (April 1969), 256, 262 in particular; C. Robert Kemble, *The Image of the Army Officer in America* (Westport: Greenwood, 1973), 97; Heath Twichell, *Allen: The Biography of an Army Officer, 1859-1930* (New Brunswick N.J.: Rutgers Univ. Press, 1974), 291 n.; Jack C. Lane, *Armed Progressive: General Leonard Wood* (San Rafael: Presidio Press, 1978), 148.

[2] Samuel P. Huntington, *The Soldier and the State* (Cambridge, Mass.: Harvard Univ. Press, 1957), 229.

[3] *Ibid.*, 227.

[4] "The East" consists of, for 1871, the Division of the Atlantic and the Division of the South; 1876, the Division of the Atlantic and the Department of the Gulf within the Division of the Missouri; 1881 & 1886, the Division of the Atlantic; 1891 & 1896, the Department of the East. Officers listed for the "urban West" include those officers belonging to western commands but stationed in Chicago and Detroit. Statistics were gathered and percentages computed for all years, 1867-1897. The sample data in Tables 1-4 are representative.

[5] Officers at Jefferson Barracks near St. Louis were on recruiting duty and therefore not shown on the Adjutant General's strength report of army commands. Later the 3d Cavalry was also stationed there. The figure of 21 shown for 1896 includes only the 3d Cavalry officers.

[6] The US Census showed the percentage of the civilian population living in cities with over 8000 inhabitants to be 22.57 in 1880 and 29.2 in 1890.

[7] Career data have been taken from George W. Cullum, *Biographical Register of the Officers and Graduates of the U.S. Military Academy*, 3d ed. (Boston: J.F. Trow, 1891-1920). Percentages here and elsewhere are approximate, based on a rough count of the years of service in various kinds of assignments categorized as eastern, western, and "civilian." Owing to the unofficial nature of the source used, the number of very short assignments, considerable leave time, and many possibilities for human error in accumulating such data, the results obtained are only indicative of probable career patterns and are not definitive.

[8] Of the 32 West Point graduates mentioned specifically by name in Peter Karsten, "Armed Progressives: The Military Reorganizes for the American Century," in Jerry Israel, ed., *Building the Organizational Society* (New York: Free Press, 1972), 197-232, over a third graduated between 1875 and 1879. Statistics compiled for a control group (graduates between 1870 and 1874) indicate more officers with military science instructorships among the 1875-79 group (24 percent vs. 21 percent for the 1870-74 group) and fewer officers whose only duty among civilians was recruiting (7 percent for 1875-79 graduates vs. 25 percent for the control group). The 1875-79 group also had a lower attrition rate (36 percent vs. 48 percent). In a more general sense, however, the two groups were similar, and if one includes eastern recruiting service as duty in a civilian environment, then the 1870-74 graduates had as high a percentage of such duty as did graduates of 1875-79.

[9] Allan Millett, *The General: Robert L. Bullard and Officership in the United States Army, 1881-1925* (Westport: Greenwood, 1975), 78-79.

[10] Donald Smythe, *Guerrilla Warrior: The Early Life of John J. Pershing* (New York: Scribner's, 1973), 27-37; and Frank E. Vandiver, *Black Jack: The Life and Times of John J. Pershing* (College Station: Texas A&M Univ. Press, 1977), I, 113-15.

[11] Avery D. Andrews, *My Friend and Classmate John J. Pershing* (Harrisburg: Military Service Publishing, 1939), 49; Lawrence Rakestraw, "Forest Missionary: George Patrick Ahern, 1894-1899," *Montana, The Magazine of Western History*, 9 (1959), 36-44.

[12] T. Bentley Mott, *Twenty Years as a Military Attache* (New York: Oxford Univ. Press, 1937), 49-50; Vandiver, I, 157-68; A. W. Greely, *Reminiscences of Adventure and Service* (New York: Scribner's, 1927), chaps. 13-16. The political connections of such a powerful figure as Adjutant General Fred C. Ainsworth were almost legendary. See Mabel E. Deutrich, *The Struggle for Supremacy: The Career of General Fred C. Ainsworth* (Washington: Public Affairs Press, 1962). For a more recent assessment of the interaction between officers and civilians see Edward M.

Coffman, *The Old Army: A Portrait of the American Army in Peacetime, 1784-1898* (New York: Oxford Univ. Press, 1986), 247-248 & 264-270.

[13] For Ft. Bayard see Mrs. Orsemus B. Boyd, *Cavalry Life in Tent and Field* (New York: J.J. Tate, 1894), 233. In his biography of Pershing, Vandiver also noted the way in which a decade later officers and friends in town "frequently joined in Bayard festivities and traded invitations to town dances and dinners," I, 53. For Bozeman see Frances M.A. Roe, *Army Letters from an Officer's Wife, 1871-1888* (New York: D. Appleton, 1909), 332. For Santa Fé see Martha Summerhayes, *Vanished Arizona: Recollections of My Army Life*, ed. Milo Milton Quaife, 3d ed. (Chicago: J.B. Lippincott, 1939), 297-98. See also Lydia Spencer Lane, *I Married a Soldier* (Albuquerque: Horn and Wallace, 1964), 183. For Ft. Bridger see William Haymond Bisbee, *Through Four American Wars: The Impressions and Experiences of Brigadier General William Henry Bisbee* (Boston: Meadow, 1931), 215-26.

[14] Millett, *The General*, 80, 82, 94, 155-62, 227; Twichell, 29, 90, 273-74. For comments by officers involved see Thomas Cruse, *Apache Days and After* (Caldwell, Idaho: Caxton Printers, 1941), 253-56; Greely, 276; Hugh L. Scott, *Some Memories of a Soldier* (New York: Century, 1928), 24-26.

[15] Huntington, 227.

[16] P.S. Michie, "Education in Its Relation to the Military Profession," *Journal of the Military Service Institution of the United States*, 1 (1880), 158-59 for the period 1838-79 (cited hereafter as *JMSIUS*).

[17] Millett, *The General*, 41-42.

[18] James Harrison Wilson, *Under the Old Flag* (New York: D. Appleton, 1912), I, 30-31.

[19] Lester Langley, "The Democratic Tradition and Military Reform, 1878-1885," *Southwestern Social Science Quarterly*, 48 (1967), 192; Vandiver, I, 107.

[20] Ira L. Reeves, *Military Education in the United States* (Burlington: Free Press, 1914), 62.

[21] Kemble, 110, 133, 143-46.

[22] Huntington, 226-27.

[23] *Ibid.*, 254.

[24] Richard C. Brown, *Social Attitudes of American Generals, 1898-1940* (New York: Arno, 1979), 38.

[25] Morris Janowitz, *The Professional Soldier* (New York: Free Press, 1971 ed.), 234.

[26] Allen Guttman, "Political Ideals and the Military Ethic," *American Scholar*, 34 (1965), 226. For a short survey of other works on the professionalization of military officers, see George A. Kourvetaris and Betty A. Dobratz, "The State and Development of Sociology of the Military," in George A. Kourvetaris and Betty A. Dobratz, eds., *World Perspectives in the Sociology of the Military* (New Brunswick, N.J.: Transaction Books, 1977), 11-22.

[27] Karsten, 197, 222.

[28] Jack C. Lane, "The Military Profession's Search for Identity," *Marine Corps Gazette*, 57 (June 1973), 36-42; John M. Gates, *Schoolbooks and Krags: The United States Army in the Philippines, 1898-1902* (Westport: Greenwood Press, 1973), chap. 2.

[29] Lane, "The Military Profession's Search for Identity," 39-42; Russell F. Weigley, "The Elihu Root Reforms and the Progressive Era," in William Geffen, ed., *Command and Commanders in Modern Warfare* (Colorado Springs: US Air Force Academy, 1969), 11-27.

[30] William H. Carter, "The Training of Army Officers," *The United Service*, 2 (1902), 341-42. See also "The General Staff " by "An Army Officer" in *The United Service*, 5 (1904), 1; and Timothy K. Nenninger, *The Leavenworth Schools and the Old Army: Education, Professionalism, and the Officer Corps of the United States Army, 1881-1918* (Westport: Greenwood Press, 1978), 7-8.

[31] Except where otherwise indicated the summary of the army's work in Cuba, Puerto Rico, and the Philippines that follows is taken primarily from annual reports of the War Department for fiscal years 1898-1902. A scholarly treatment of the soldiers' work in Cuba is in David F. Healey, *The United States in Cuba 1898-1902: Generals, Politicians, and the Search for Policy* (Madison: Univ. of Wisconsin Press, 1963), in particular chaps. 5,6,and 15. See also Lane, *Armed Progressive*, chaps. 5-8. On the army's work in Manila, see Gates, *Schoolbooks and Krags*. For Puerto Rico, see H.K. Carroll, "What Has Been Done for Porto Rico under Military Rule," *The American Monthly Review of Reviews*, 20 (1899), 705-09; and Edward J. Berbusse, *The United States in Puerto Rico, 1898-1900* (Chapel Hill: Univ. of North Carolina Press, 1966), chap. 3 in particular. For McKinley's instructions, issued on 18 July 1898 after the occupation of Santiago, see *Correspondence Relating to the War with Spain, April 15, 1898-July 30, 1902* (Washington: GPO, 1902), I, 161-63.

[32] James H. Hitchman came to the same conclusion in *Leonard Wood and Cuban Independence, 1898-1902* (The Hague: Nijhoff, 1971), 56.

[33] Leo Rowe, *The United States and Porto Rico* (New York: Longman's, Green, 1904), 189-91.

[34] For examples of army humanitarianism in the Indian Wars, see George Crook, "The Apache Problem," *JMSIUS*, 7 (1886), 257-69; and Richard Henry Pratt, *Battlefield and Classroom: Four Decades with the American Indian, 1867-1904* (New Haven: Yale Univ. Press, 1964). Richard N. Ellis has argued that in their dealings with the Indians of North America officers often manifested "humanitarian attitudes," and he characterized commanders such as O.O. Howard, George Crook, and John Pope as "sincere and benevolent men performing a difficult job." See "The Humanitarian Generals," *Western Historical Quarterly*, 3 (1972), 178. In another article Ellis concluded that such humanitarian attitudes were not limited to general officers. See "The Humanitarian Soldiers," *Journal of Arizona History*, 10 (1969), 55-62. See also Gilbert C. Fite, "The United States Army and Relief to Pioneer Settlers, 1874-1875," *Journal of the West*, 6 (1967), 99-107; and James T. King, "George Crook, Indian Fighter and Humanitarian," *Arizona and the West*, 10 (1968), 333-48. On the army during Reconstruction, see John and LaWanda Cox, "General O.O. Howard and the Misrepresented Bureau," *Journal of Southern History*, 19 (1953), 427-56; and James E. Sefton, *The United States Army and Reconstruction, 1865-1877* (Baton Rouge: Louisiana State Univ. Press, 1967).

[35] Captain William V. Judson in *The Centennial of the United States Military Academy at West Point, New York, 1802-1902*, compiled by Edward S. Holden and W.L. Ostrander (Washington: GPO, 1904), 849; Stanley K. Schultz and Clay McShane, "To Engineer the Metropolis: Sewers, Sanitation, and City Planning in Late-Nineteenth Century America," *Journal of American History*, 65 (1978), 400.

[36] Robert E. Quirk, *An Affair of Honor: Woodrow Wilson and the Occupation of Vera Cruz* (Lexington, Ky.: Norton, 1962), chap. 4, contains an excellent description of the army's work in that city. For a thorough treatment of the work of the Army of Cuban Pacification see Millett, *The Politics of Intervention*.

- [37] Herbert Croly, *The Promise of American Life* (New York: Macmillan, 1910), 169.
- [38] H. Duane Hampton, *How the U.S. Cavalry Saved Our National Parks* (Bloomington: Indiana Univ. Press, 1971), 151.
- [39] Jerry M. Cooper, "The Army as Strikebreaker--The Railroad Strikes of 1877 and 1894," *Labor History*, 18 (1977), 179-96. Cooper's argument appears in greater detail in his *The Army and Civil Disorder: Federal Military Intervention in Labor Disputes, 1877-1900* (Westport: Greenwood Press, 1980).
- [40] Richard W. Young, "Legal and Tactical Considerations Affecting the Employment of the Military in the Suppression of Mobs," *JMSIUS*, 9 (1888), 250.
- [41] Cooper, "The Army as Strikebreaker," 195.
- [42] Jack C. Lane, "American Military Past: The Need for New Approaches," *Military Affairs*, 41 (1977), 110-11.
- [43] Millett, *The General*, 8.
- [44] Peter G. Filene, "An Obituary for 'The Progressive Movement,'" *American Quarterly*, 22 (1970), 20.

CHAPTER FIVE

THE PHILIPPINES AND VIETNAM

From 1964 to 1967 the contrasts between the war in Vietnam and the army's campaign in the Philippines were vivid and repeatedly before me as I left my research in the Duke library for a look at the evening television news. Each day, after reading about the army's successful work in the Philippines, I could not avoid comparing the campaign I was studying with the one that I was watching on TV. As my knowledge of the war in Vietnam increased, the striking differences between the two conflicts became more evident and, given the horrifying results of what I was seeing in Vietnam, more distressing.

My first attempt to formalize my perceptions came in 1971, motivated by my reading of two articles that seemed thoroughly wrong-headed when viewed from the perspective of my knowledge of the two campaigns. Not surprising, given the heightened emotional atmosphere of the war, attempts to get my analysis published proved frustrating. I have already characterized in this book's introduction the way in which the biases of both anti and pro-war referees and editors guided their evaluation of my manuscript. I was more than grateful when my work finally gained acceptance at *Asian Studies*, a journal published by the Asian Center of the University of the Philippines, and was printed in the April 1972 issue (which appeared in mid-1973) as "The Philippines and Vietnam: Another False Analogy."

In the intervening years, I have changed my view of the two wars on a number of points, but I have not abandoned my basic conclusion that more is to be learned from contrasting the conflicts than from facile comparisons of the kind that initially motivated me to write on the topic. In 1982 I presented a revised version of my original paper as a lecture entitled "The American Experience of Guerrilla War" at the Center of Military History in Washington, D. C., and I undertook further revisions for a presentation entitled "Two American Confrontations with Asian Nationalism: The Pacification of the Philippines and the Destruction of Vietnam" in the "Perspectives in Military History" series at the Army's Military History Institute in 1985. The version of the paper printed here was given as one of my 1986 lectures at Obirin College.

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Americans seem to have an almost perverse attachment to argument from analogy, and the mystical power and persuasiveness of that particular form of argumentation can be immense. The image of falling dominoes was all too prevalent, for example, during the long debate over United States involvement in Vietnam, and as the historian Arthur Schlesinger, Jr., observed, "the multitude of errors committed in the name of 'Munich' may exceed the original error of 1938."^[1] In the early 1970s, in the wake of the tragedy of My Lai and the trial of Lieutenant William Calley, a new analogy caught hold of the minds of many people opposing the Indochina War. What might be termed the Philippine analogy became the subject of both extended commentaries and passing references, particularly to the court martial of General Jake Smith in 1902.

The temptation to stress the similarities between the Philippine campaign and the war in Vietnam was great. The existence of a vocal opposition to both wars, the considerable publicity given to war crimes and atrocities, the evidence of American racism in the face of an Asian enemy, and many other parallels made the task a relatively easy one, leading some people to make incredible claims on behalf of the analogy. One author, for example, was bold enough to state that "rarely do historical events resemble each other as closely as the involvements of the United States in the Philippines in 1899 and Vietnam in 1964."^[2] Another author found "the similarities between the two wars . . . eerily striking."^[3]

During the Vietnam War, articles with such titles as "Our MyLai of 1900" and "The First Vietnam" presented a replay of earlier anti-imperialist criticism, with references to the army's "policy of terror" or its "standard extermination policies."^[4] One author even claimed that "in some applications" the American approach to pacification was "genocidal."^[5] The author of an article entitled "MyLai Was Not the First Time" concluded, with help from a statement by a leading anti-imperialist, that "the ultimate responsibility . . . lay with the highest authority of all, 'the people of the United States.'"^[6] The message of all the unscholarly and polemical writing was the same: not only were the two wars very similar, but the United States military had behaved atrociously in both of them. That conclusion gained considerable acceptance.

In a typical presentation of the Philippine analogy the basic argument is that the American army waged an incredibly brutal campaign against the Filipino revolutionaries between 1899 and 1902 in the face of enlightened opposition to the war by anti-imperialists at home. Usually authors emphasized the unfeeling and atrocious acts of individual American soldiers, the brutality and destructive nature of the conflict, the merit and value of the anti-imperialist opposition, and, finally, the attempts of the administration to justify its actions and bury evidence of American war crimes. Parallels to the Indochina conflict are made both explicitly and by implication.

Although arguments from analogy can be quite valuable, they do have many pitfalls. An event can easily become distorted in the process of demonstrating its similarity to a supposedly analogous happening. Perhaps even more significant in terms of the long run consequences, in arguments by analogy the similarities, even if real, may obscure more important dimensions of the phenomenon under study that do not fit into the analogy. Rather than increasing one's understanding, arguments from analogy may actually obscure important lessons to be learned from current mistakes. The Philippine analogy suffers from all of these failings.

Most commentaries comparing the American experiences in the Philippines and Vietnam are only partially correct in their overall assessment of the earlier campaign; invariably they contain important oversights that significantly alter the picture of American actions in the islands. In fact, most interpretations are inaccurate enough to make the Philippine analogy they present of questionable value at best. For example, the portraits usually painted of the American military commanders in the Philippines are uncomplimentary in the extreme and, as a result, hide much of the astute leadership given to the army's pacification efforts in the archipelago. General E. S. Otis, commanding the United States troops during the first year of the Filipino-American War, is commonly shown as an indecisive and overly optimistic antique unfit for command. In the early stages of the war, however, General Otis was almost alone among high ranking officers in seeing the true nature of the conflict that had developed. He realized that the basic issue was not military but political. He therefore stressed reform over military action and worked to increase American troop strength in the islands before embarking on campaigns to destroy the revolutionary army.^[7] The officers who criticized Otis's caution and counseled immediate offensive action against the Filipino army were certainly decisive in their intent, but they were even more optimistic than Otis in their assumption that such rash activity by an American force of some 26,000 men could bring an end to the war.

Purveyors of the Philippine analogy like to cite the dramatic statements of officers such as Captain John H. Parker to the effect that "the fundamental obstruction to complete pacification" was "the attempt to meet a half-civilized foe . . . with the same methods devised for civilized warfare against people of our own race, country and blood."^[8] Of greater significance, however, was the policy of enlightened military government and campaigning that provoked such statements. Many American officers were committed to what their revolutionary enemies identified as a "policy of attraction," the attempt to gain Filipino support by acts of mercy and reform rather than through the use of unbridled military force. This policy, begun under General Otis, emphasized the development of schools, municipal governments, public health facilities, and public works projects. General Arthur MacArthur, who replaced Otis in May 1900, was as committed to the benevolent policy as his

predecessor, convinced that severity in the treatment of Filipinos would only work "to impede the policy of the United States and to defeat the very purpose which the army is here to accomplish."[\[9\]](#)

Although obscured by hundreds of pages of anti-imperialist propaganda, cooptation and not brutality was the cornerstone of American military policy in the Philippines. The Philippine revolutionaries saw that at the time, and they resorted to widespread terrorism against their own people in an attempt to prevent them from accepting American rule. As one Filipino guerrilla leader observed, "continuous contact with our enemies may cause the gravest damage to our sacred cause" owing, in his estimation, to the American "policy of attraction."[\[10\]](#) Significantly, captured Filipino revolutionary documents contained many more references to problems caused by American benevolence than references to American brutality. One must turn to anti-imperialist propaganda and current recitations of the Philippine analogy to find the latter. Clearly, atrocities did happen, but they have been greatly exaggerated. The significant feature of American action and policy in the Philippines was not brutality but the reform orientation of the army's commanders that enabled them to end the conflict in a relatively short time using an approach in which co-option was more important than coercion.

The so-called "extreme measures" begun in December 1900 should not be equated with the shocking atrocities usually associated with the Philippine campaign. One of the "harsher" methods, for example, was the incarceration of captured revolutionaries. Prior to the end of 1900, most guerrillas taken prisoner had been disarmed and released as part of the benevolent policy. The trial of terrorists as war criminals, a perfectly legal process under the military laws of the day, was also one of the new "extreme measures." Although certainly a more questionable move, the policy of population reconcentration, used primarily in regions where recalcitrant revolutionaries refused to surrender even after it was obvious that their cause was lost, was neither illegal nor unprecedented (Americans had used it during the Civil War). Contrary to the view prevailing in most accounts, General MacArthur consistently rejected the recommendations of some of his subordinates for the adoption of a highly repressive policy. As noted earlier, William Howard Taft, head of the civilian Philippine Commission, advocated a harsher policy than that developed by MacArthur, and Taft supported the view that with McKinley's re-election "the time will have come to change our lenient policy."[\[11\]](#)

Statements of the Philippine analogy invariably present General "Howling Jake" Smith as a typical example of American military leadership and brutality, although in fact he was clearly an anomaly. Smith's Samar campaign was inept, consisting primarily of futile search-and-destroy missions. In 1902, the same year that Smith's forces were devastating much of the sparsely-inhabited interior of Samar, a more typical example of American campaigning at its harshest was taking place in Batangas Province under the direction of General J. F. Bell. Bell's Batangas campaign contained its share of atrocities, particularly after Bell resorted to population reconcentration and a scorched earth policy to deny the guerrillas the supplies they needed to exist, and Bell was criticized harshly for his actions, both by anti-imperialists at the time and by others later. Bell's campaign in Batangas, however, was not really comparable to that of Smith on Samar. Bell worked much harder than Smith to maintain control over his men and to provide for the welfare of the reconcentrated Filipino population under his supervision.[\[12\]](#) Of equal significance, the campaigns of both Smith and Bell took place at a time when the revolution had all but ended and under the overall direction of General Adna R. Chaffee, who had replaced MacArthur in 1901. Chaffee seemed to lack the perceptiveness and the commitment to the "policy of attraction" of his predecessor, and it was Chaffee who made the comment that the only way to achieve peace was to pin down the Filipinos "with bayonets for ten years until they submit,"[\[13\]](#) a statement usually attributed erroneously to MacArthur. Fortunately, many of the American officers in the Philippines retained their belief that reform was the road to peace. Bell, for example, had made it quite clear that he was not advocating torture, burning, or other unauthorized severities when he instructed his men to be "firm and relentless in action."[\[14\]](#)

One should not end a discussion of the Philippine analogy without a comment on its picture of the anti-imperialist movement. The anti-imperialists were a courageous and sincerely motivated group; the questions they raised provided a valid challenge to their more imperialistically minded countrymen. But to call the anti-imperialists "antiwar radicals," as did one author,^[15] conveys an inaccurate picture of that early peace movement. In reality the majority of anti-imperialist leaders constituted an old, backward-looking and politically ineffective minority that was localized primarily in New England. Elitists like Edward Atkinson, Andrew Carnegie, E. L. Godkin, Charles Eliot Norton, and Carl Schurz made up an important segment of the movement, and the anti-imperialist leagues contained some of the most conservative men in America. Although a current of racism and a belief in Anglo-Saxon superiority was present in American imperialism, that same stream ran through the anti-imperialist movement as well. In fact, some Southern Congressmen had opposed annexation of Spanish territories because of their desire to prevent the incorporation of more dark-skinned people into the American nation. To call such people radicals is a significant error, and to compare them even implicitly to the more forward-looking and relatively more effective members of the Vietnam era anti-war movement is misleading to say the least.

The foregoing revision of the traditional picture of American operations in the Philippines can easily be misinterpreted. The argument that the American campaign was not unduly brutal is not an apology for the imperialistic policies that provoked the conflict or the war crimes committed by Americans during the course of the war. Even more important, it is definitely not an attack on the motives of authors who, in a sincere effort to make Americans reassess the conflict in Indochina, presented the Philippine analogy to the public. Atrocities of war and American attitudes toward other peoples are an important topic for discussion, and the Philippine analogy highlights them both, but no matter how laudable the intentions of its adherents might be, the analogy itself remains fatally flawed.

Vietnam was not the Philippines, and the significant differences between the two wars should make one wary of facile comparisons. The Philippine revolutionaries had neither a place of sanctuary, free from American attack, nor material aid from the outside. Unlike the war in Indochina, the Philippine conflict did not take place in a tense international context where a small war might well be the prelude to a larger and much more disastrous one. Furthermore, it was not being fought in the shadow of nuclear arms or in the context of an ideologically and emotionally charged cold war. Whereas American leaders in Indochina were compelled to cooperate with indigenous governments that frequently proved to be frustrating beyond belief, their counterparts in the Philippines had tremendous freedom of action. They were the government.

Even the protests against the war were different. The anti-imperialists were never as numerically strong or as able to capture the attention of the nation as the people who protested against the war in Vietnam. More important, however, were the differences in the composition of the two groups. Many anti-imperialist leaders represented an older generation, and people such as Grover Cleveland, William Jennings Bryan, E. L. Godkin, or Carl Schurz would play an increasingly minor role as their powerful, industrial nation moved into the twentieth century. In contrast, the anti-war protest of the 1960s and 1970s was fueled by young people whose experiences and ideas would live on to influence subsequent policy. The anti-imperialists were an active minority, but unlike their later counterparts, they were also an insignificant one.

There are some equally striking differences between the Americans who fought the two wars. The men in the Philippines were volunteers; many of those in Vietnam were unwilling conscripts. More important, however, were the differences between the officers involved. At the turn of the century, the army's officer corps was not representative of American society but of its elite, a self-assured group with a self-conscious progressive orientation and a commitment to such traditional values as "Duty--Honor--Country." In Vietnam the officer corps represented a much more diverse cross section of the American nation. Many officers seemed to lack the self-assurance and the self-conscious progressivism of their earlier counterparts, and officers themselves have observed that a

commitment to career advancement frequently outweighed that to other values. Finally, but certainly not least important, officers often remained on duty in the Philippines for the duration. There was no revolving door or ticket punching to contend with. In 1902, the U. S. Army in the Philippines had three years of experience in fighting Philippine guerrillas, not one year of experience three times over.

The contrast in the enemy ranks was also significant. The Filipino independence movement, coming at the end of the nineteenth century, was much less sophisticated in its organization and revolutionary technique than the forces of the Vietminh. Not only were the Vietnamese revolutionaries more experienced, as a result of their long war with the French, but they also had a firmly established national base in the Democratic Republic of Vietnam. They were also the beneficiaries of a half-century of anti-imperialist and revolutionary struggle in which the Filipinos had played the role of precursor and Mao Zedong that of mentor.

A final contrast, of great importance, is the vast technological difference between the two wars, apparent not only in the weapons used, but in virtually every other dimension of the two conflicts, from communications to medical care. It seems almost absurd to compare the operations of fewer than 70,000 American troops in an archipelago of some 8,000,000 people with the work of approximately a million troops, if one includes South Vietnamese forces, in an area with a population of about 18,000,000. The absurdity becomes particularly vivid when one thinks about the weapons available to each group. The rifle and the match of 1899 can hardly be equated with the helicopter gunships, B-52s, and napalm bombs of the 1960s. For that reason alone attempts to compare rather than contrast the two campaigns have been of little value.

By stressing the atrocities committed in the Philippines, authors have concluded that revolutionary warfare is inherently atrocious, a struggle in which brute force plays the most important role. If anything, however, the Philippine experience, when contrasted with that in Vietnam, demonstrates the exact opposite conclusion. American soldiers destroyed the Filipino revolution because of their careful stress on the political dimensions of the conflict, and traditional military action or combat played a secondary role in their American success.

In Vietnam, however, despite the development of a theory of counterinsurgency in the early 1960s which stressed civic action and other political approaches, conventional military activity often predominated, and the lack of results frustrated military and political leaders alike. The highly sophisticated tools of modern war proved ill-suited to the tasks of revolutionary warfare and nation building.

The devastating results of the use of massive firepower, including the generation of hundreds of thousands of refugees, created a situation in which political solutions, including the implementation of reform, became increasingly difficult. Building schools, clinics, and roads in the midst of the destruction and turmoil present in Vietnam in the late 1960s had little value as tools of pacification. Instead, pacification was frequently no more than a sideshow to the destructive firepower displays that were a part of daily life in the Indochinese countryside.

When TV news transmitted the images of the war into American living rooms, many Americans were appalled by what they saw, and numerous reports confirmed their worst suspicions concerning the negative and destructive effects of American and South Vietnamese firepower. Unfortunately, by focusing on specific war crimes, and calling for an end to the draft and the withdrawal of American ground forces from Vietnam, war protesters often obscured the important problems caused by the use of weapons of mass destruction. The counterproductive role of such weapons in revolutionary war remains a subtle but extremely significant issue.

A more balanced view of the American campaign in the Philippines should lead to conclusions that are far different from those stressed by most adherents to the Philippine analogy. First, although the claim that "MyLai Was Not the First Time" is obviously correct, the implication that that is the

significant thing to be learned from a comparison of the American intervention in the Philippines with the war in Vietnam is not. As long as war exists there will be atrocities, and one certainly does not need to look at either the American Philippine or Vietnam experience to learn that war is horrible or that politicians and military men will do all that they can to hide their errors and to override criticism of their actions. That is apparent enough in the study of virtually any war. Second, by focusing on the atrocities committed in the Philippines and by stressing the numerous points of commonality between the American experience there and in Vietnam, authors have done much to obscure the nature of both conflicts. Why, one wonders, must the United States need to have been atrocious in the Philippines to enable Americans to understand the war in Vietnam?

If anything, the Philippine experience probably teaches a lesson exactly the opposite from the one that is usually presented. American soldiers repressed the Filipino revolution because of their careful stress on the political dimension of the conflict and their implementation of a variety of reforms, not because of traditional military action or combat. The conscious efforts of military leaders to prevent My Lai's were much more significant than the occurrence of atrocities in opposition to the stated policy. Revolutionary wars are political conflicts. Americans realized that in the Philippines and acted accordingly. In Vietnam, although the counter-insurgency theory of the early 1960s recognized the importance of civic action, more conventional military activity became the primary point of focus, and the lack of results frustrated military and political leaders alike. Thus, if one uses the Philippine analogy at all, experience seems to indicate that part of the failure in Vietnam came because the Americans fighting the Indochina war did things so differently from what their counterparts had done more than a half century before.

With the widespread destruction of Indochinese society and the region's environment, the time soon passed in which the Philippine experience could provide useful lessons for would-be counterinsurgents fighting in Vietnam. By the mid 1960s bombs, anti-personnel weapons, defoliants, inflation, the displacement of thousands of villagers, and a host of other horrors moved the situation in Vietnam too far away from what it was in the early sixties to make a political solution of the problem, even through reform, a realistic option. Consequently, one clear lesson of any comparative study should be that one could not reproduce the Philippines of 1900 or 1901 in the Indochina of the 1960s or 70s. The situations, for all their apparent similarity, are just not analogous.

General James L. Collins, Jr., has been quoted as saying that, "had we had an organized body of literature" dealing with the Philippine campaign, "we would have saved ourselves a good deal of time and effort in Vietnam." General Bruce Palmer, Jr. made a similar comment in 1989, saying "I wish that when I was the deputy chief of staff for operations at Department of the Army in 1964-1965, we had studied the US Army's campaigns in the Philippines during the insurrection." They may be correct, but one suspects that the availability of such a history would have made little difference, for it would have told Americans no more about successful counterinsurgency campaigning than the literature already available in the writings of the 1950s and 1960s. Palmer claimed that a 1988 article about the Philippine war in *Military Review* "would have been of tremendous help to us in sorting out our thoughts [on the situation in Vietnam]." [16] Palmer apparently had no knowledge of an excellent 1964 article on the war, also printed in *Military Review*. [17]

The American problem in Vietnam was not a lack of information, historical or otherwise; it was the frequent failure to act upon the sound information, useful ideas, and valid suggestions that were readily available. A detailed and candid study of the French experience in Indochina seems to have been totally ignored, for example. [18] One suspects that nothing one might have written in the mid-1960s about the earlier war in the Philippines or the ongoing war in Vietnam would have convinced U. S. Army leaders of the importance of the non-military aspects of irregular warfare and the counterproductive effects of the use of massive firepower. People in high places rarely listen to what they do not want to hear.

In Vietnam, the United States fought the war poorly and lost; that is perhaps the greatest and most important contrast of all between the two wars. Unfortunately, the publications that have compared the two wars tend more to obscure than to highlight the reasons for the American failure.

Attempts to demonstrate that the United States was as inept in the Philippines as it was in Indochina have achieved little. More understanding can be gained from an approach that emphasizes the new and unique dimensions of the Vietnam War, for the horror seen there was caused to a large extent by conditions growing out of the current state of the art of war and not, as the purveyors of the Philippine analogy would have one believe, out of some racist or imperialist stream running deep in the American past.

The dimensions of the Indochina conflict that many people found most abhorrent--the death and mutilation of thousands of noncombatants, the terror, the destruction of the environment, and the disintegration of the societies involved--were the direct result of the use of modern weaponry having massive destructive capability but lacking effectiveness and decisiveness when used in the type of conflict waged in Indochina.

The contrast between the Philippine experience and the Indochina War highlights significant problems facing any American leader contemplating the use of military force. First, the destructive capability of modern weapons is so great that *war in which a great power uses the latest weaponry that its technology can provide is no longer a legitimate or useful extension of national policy*. For over a decade military strategists have recognized that nuclear war is not a feasible policy option, but the Vietnam experience demonstrated that other forms of war may be impossible for states with the resources and weaponry of the United States. The use of fire and air power was a direct and major cause of the destruction, mutilation, and death that many Americans deplored in Vietnam and the rest of Indochina. The majority of the refugees fleeing to the cities were not running from either Viet Cong terrorism or the horror of a MyLai. Their displacement had been caused by the indiscriminate use of weapons of unimaginable destructive capability. American air power and artillery caused the major share of civilian casualties and did the greatest amount of damage to the environment. The people and government of the United States were responsible for the devastating use of air and fire power, and the withdrawal of American combat troops from Vietnam did little to end it. In fact, the fewer troops the United States placed in the zone of conflict, the more it came to rely upon massive fire and air power to keep the balance of force in the hands of the government of South Vietnam.

The destructive techniques of military force have been perfected considerably since the turn of the century, but their ability to be truly decisive when used seems to have declined. The development of air power is a case in point. World War II showed that strategic bombing was not capable of the achievements that Giulio Douhet and other theorists attributed to it. Bombing could not easily destroy the war-making capacity of a belligerent (the peak of German war production came in mid-1944), or the enemy's will to fight. The war in Korea showed that the supply line of an army that depended primarily on human beings as prime movers could not be interdicted successfully through the use of air power alone. Both of these experiences were repeated in the course of the conflict in Indochina, yet many American military officers continued to adhere to a doctrine that should have been repudiated by their own experience. Bombing and firepower can kill, but they cannot convince. They can make war more destructive than anything that people have heretofore imagined, but they cannot make war a more effective tool of policy. That fact seems to have been understood clearly by Americans in the Philippines, and their stress on reform and other political factors gave a more proper guide to their military activities. The United States did not pursue a similarly enlightened policy of imperialism in Vietnam.

A second lesson of the Philippine-Indochina comparison stems directly from the first. If firepower intensive warfare has become so destructive that it is no longer an acceptable instrument of policy, then *intervention in any situation where such warfare is a probable outcome has also lost its*

utility. In its direct impact on the people involved, the war in Indochina was a far cry from that in the Philippines. The outcome of the Indochina War indicates that the great nation relying on its massive firepower and modern weapons technology may no longer have the ability to protect its allies from either internal or external subversion, and it certainly cannot intervene successfully in the domestic affairs of another nation against any sizable opposition. It does, however, have the capacity to destroy nations and peoples in the name of protecting them. As Daniel Ellsberg observed, a national leader would be committing "an act of treachery against his society" if he called for American aid in a conflict that he knew would be long and would entail a large American military commitment.^[19]

A comparison of the war in the Philippines with that in Vietnam also highlights the conclusion that revolution has changed over time. At one point, such as the late-eighteenth century, the preponderance of power seemed to lie with the revolutionaries, at another point, such as the mid-19th century, the preponderance of power tilted toward the counterrevolutionaries. With the passage of time, revolutionaries and counterrevolutionaries perfected their technique, learning from past experience, developing new approaches and theories, and taking advantage of new forms of technology.

In the Philippines, at the start of the twentieth century, the forces of counterrevolution, represented by the American army, held the upper hand. In Vietnam, however, a very different situation existed. By the middle of the twentieth century both revolutionaries and counterrevolutionaries had found ways to achieve their goals against a weak or unprepared adversary and, with effort, to stalemate a more determined one. The result has been an era of frustration for revolutionaries and counterrevolutionaries alike. With well prepared and determined adversaries on both sides, the costs of revolution and counterrevolution are so high that only people who do not consider cost when assessing victory can look upon either goal as particularly desirable. In such a context, accommodation may be the wisest choice, as it would have been in Vietnam for either the United States or the Communist revolutionaries of the Democratic Republic of Vietnam.

At the end of the nineteenth century, war could be a relatively useful tool for accomplishing the goals of national policy, although in retrospect one may regret both the imperial policy being pursued by the United States in the Philippines and the price paid by the Filipino people who resisted it. Nevertheless, good or bad, the policy could be furthered by military means, providing, of course, that one's military leaders went about their assigned tasks in an enlightened way. That is exactly what happened at the turn of the century, and the results were decisive. The Philippine revolution was crushed; the American hold over the island was secured; and the vocal anti-imperialist minority in the United States was overwhelmed, all with considerably less destruction, death, and agony than was evident during the Indochina conflict.

In the years between the end of the war in the Philippines and the involvement of American forces in Vietnam, war changed significantly, and one of the most obvious changes took place in the destructive capability of weapons. Unfortunately, the ability of military forces to use their new weapons decisively did not keep pace with the growth in destructiveness. In Indochina, despite the employment of highly technological weapon systems that were beyond the imagination of the old army's soldiers, Americans failed to achieve their goals. A similar lack of decision has been seen elsewhere: in the Middle East, Afghanistan, Central America. Eventually even stalemated wars end, but only after prolonged periods of strife and destruction. Many wars also end without solving the problems that led to them or establishing a lasting peace.

In *Arms and Men*, Walter Millis observed that where "Polk or McKinley could use war as an instrument of politics or policy," by the time of World War II, war had become "a naked instrument of defense, of defense alone and of defense only in an extremity of crisis." With the development of nuclear explosives, said Millis, "its utility even to this end was questionable."^[20] Since the publication of *Arms and Men* in 1956, the situation would seem to have become worse rather than better.

In a look at American military history from the other side of the Vietnam watershed, Russell Weigley reached a conclusion similar to that of Millis. After noting that "at no point on the spectrum of violence does the use of combat offer much promise for the United States today," Weigley ended *The American Way of War* with the observation that "the history of usable combat may at last be reaching its end."[\[21\]](#)

Although such conclusions have yet to gain widespread acceptance, a comparison of the American military effort in the Philippines with that in Vietnam seems to support such a view. For more than two decades many strategists have recognized that nuclear war is not a valid policy option, and the writing of Soviet strategists or their Western clones about nuclear war fighting did not alter the validity of such perceptions. Equally distressing, however, is the possibility that the power of so-called conventional weapons is so great that they too can no longer serve the ends of policy. How, one wonders, is a nation as powerful as the United States to use the highly destructive weapons its technology provides in support of its national policy? With time even a seemingly successful military intervention such as Desert Storm in the Persian Gulf will appear to have achieved far less than was first thought.

Vietnam provided clear evidence of what an American military effort can mean in terms of destruction and waste of human life and resources. It was far removed from the village burning and isolated war crimes of the Philippine-American war. The emphasis in the twentieth century on firepower and the reliance on the gadgetry that modern technology can produce has changed war significantly. The change has been so extensive that great powers using the most sophisticated conventional weapons available to them seem no longer able to engage in revolutionary conflicts such as that in Vietnam without destroying the very people they are trying to aid. The same may be true of dedicated revolutionaries, particularly when opposed by equally dedicated and well-prepared opponents. Comparable problems appear to exist not only in more conventional military interventions, but also in humanitarian relief operations and peace keeping missions as well. Unfortunately, few political leaders appear to understand how little can be achieved by the use of military force, and even the few who possess such an understanding often find themselves with a lack of alternatives in a world where resorting to military action remains an acceptable response for both states and discontented groups within them.

[\[1\]](#) Arthur M. Schlesinger, Jr., *The Bitter Heritage: Vietnam and American Democracy, 1941-1966* (Greenwich, Conn., 1966), 89.

[\[2\]](#) Stuart C. Miller, "Our MyLai of 1900: Americans in the Philippine Insurrection," *Trans-action* (September, 1970), 19.

[\[3\]](#) Dino J. Caterini, "Repeating Ourselves: The Philippine Insurrection and the Vietnam War," *Foreign Service Journal* (Dec. 1977), 11.

[\[4\]](#) Miller, "Our MyLai of 1900," 19 and Luzviminda Francisco, "The First Vietnam: The U.S.-Philippine War of 1899," *Bulletin of Concerned Asian Scholars*, 5 (1973), 12.

[\[5\]](#) Daniel B. Schirmer, *Republic or Empire: American Resistance to the Philippine War* (Cambridge, Mass., 1972), 256.

[\[6\]](#) D. B. Schirmer, "MyLai Was Not the First Time," *The New Republic* (April 24, 1971), 21.

[\[7\]](#) Otis showed his interest in the political dimensions of the conflict both in his regular messages to Washington and in his annual reports. For the former see *Correspondence Relating to the War with Spain, April 15, 1898-July 30, 1902*, 2 vols. (Washington, 1902), II. For the latter see *Annual Reports of the War Department for the Fiscal Year Ended June 30, 1899*, House Document 2, 56th Congress, 1st Session, V and *Annual Reports of the War Department for the Fiscal Year Ended June 30, 1900*, House Document 2, 56th Congress, 2d Session, V.

[8] Parker to Theodore Roosevelt, October 13, 1900, found in Roosevelt to Elihu Root, November 24, 1900, Elihu Root Paper, Library of Congress.

[9] Field Order No. 26, Headquarters 2d Division, 8th Army Corps, April 22, 1899, reprinted in Senate Document 331, 57th Congress, 1st Session, Part 2, 893.

[10] R. F. Santos, Circular No. 21, August 24, 1900 in John R. M. Taylor, "The Philippine Insurrection Against the United States--A Compilation of Documents with Notes and Introduction," 5 vols. (unpublished galley proofs, 1906), 58GV.

[11] Taft to Root, October 10, 1900, Root Papers.

[12] The definitive work on the war in Batangas is Glenn Anthony May, *Battle for Batangas: A Philippine Province at War* (New Haven: Yale Univ. Press, 1991). Although critical of Bell's campaign, May has tempered his criticism over time and significantly reduced his estimate of the campaign's casualties among the Filipino population. Compare *Battle for Batangas* with Glenn A. May, "Filipino Resistance to American Occupation: Batangas, 1899-1902," *Pacific Historical Review*, 48 (1979), 531-556.

[13] Taft to Root, October 14, 1901, Root Papers.

[14] *Telegraphic Circulars and General Orders, Regulating Campaign Against Insurgents and Proclamations and Circular Letters, Relating to Reconstruction After Close of War in the Provinces of Batangas, Laguna, and Mindoro, P.I. Issued by Brigadier General J. Franklin Bell, U.S. Army, Commanding Brigade, from December 1, 1901 to December 1, 1902* (Batangas, 1902), AGO 415839, Records of the Adjutant General's Office, Record Group 94, U.S. National Archives, iii.

[15] Miller, "Our Mylai of 1900," 22.

[16] Eric C. Ludvigsen, "Vietnam--in 21 Volumes," *Army* (August 1977), 30 and Bruce Palmer, Jr., letter to the editor, *Military Review* 69 (Jan. 1989), 103.

[17] See Robert N. Ginsburgh, "Damn the Insurrectos," *Military Review*, 44 (Jan. 1964), 58-70.

[18] The Supreme Command, Far East. *Lessons from the Indo-China War*, 3 vols. (n.p., May 31, 1955), trans. by Advanced Research Projects Agency. Vol. I not yet released by French.

[19] Richard M. Pfeffer, ed., *No More Vietnams? The War and the Future of American Foreign Policy* (New York, 1968) 38.

[20] Walter Millis, *Arms and Men* (New York, 1956), 364.

[21] Russell F. Weigley, *The American Way of War: A History of United States Military Strategy and Policy* (New York, 1973), 477.

CHAPTER SIX

CAREERISTS IN UNIFORM

In 1987 I lectured on "American Military Leadership in the Vietnam War" at the Virginia Military Institute. The lecture was subsequently published as one of the John Biggs Cincinnati Lectures. [1] By that point I had been teaching general military history for close to twenty years and a course entitled "America's Vietnam War" for nine. I had also participated in a unit on military leadership in The College of Wooster's "Leadership Seminar." The most important influence on the lecture, however, was the work I had done on army officers in the nineteenth century. The contrast between their conduct in the Philippines and that of many officers later in Vietnam was striking, particularly at the top. Blaming the army as an institution or its officers as individuals would have been relatively easy were it not for my own perceptions that many of the members of my own profession and the institutions in which they teach were not all that different.

By the 1970s careerism had replaced the nineteenth century call to service in more places than the U. S. Army, and I found that the conclusions of Loren Baritz in *Backfire* mirrored my own thoughts. Thus, what at first glance may well seem a harsh critique of the army alone is in reality a critique of not only the army but the society from which it was drawn. The result, of course, is a paper that was as depressing for me to write as it may be for some to read.

* * * * *

In the age of the Great Captain, which ended more than a century ago, successful military leadership was easier to identify than at present. It may also have been easier to exercise. The Great Captains of the 18th century and earlier often had complete control, both civil and military, over forces small enough to be commanded by a single individual. They fought campaigns and battles that could be plotted on a single map and surveyed with the naked eye. Although making wise decisions in war and motivating people to fight and die in battle has always required the leader's special skills, the environment in which that activity took place has never been as incredibly complex as it is today.

Beginning in the 18th century, war began to undergo a series of changes. The effect of each was to make military affairs and the problems of command significantly more complex. National wars for survival replaced dynastic wars of acquisition. More significantly, mass armies replaced smaller professional forces, while the industrial revolution provided the means to equip and sustain them. It also provided mass produced weaponry with increasingly destructive capabilities. By the end of the 19th century, states had developed the managerial capacity to orchestrate the creation, training, mobilization, supply, and fighting of forces of immense size. Wars and the battles within them increased in scope, covering more territory, engaging more people, lasting longer and doing more damage.

By the time American military forces entered the war in Vietnam, warfare had become so complex that the exercise of military leadership comparable to that exhibited by the Great Captains of the past had probably become impossible. Whether or not that was true, the organization of the military forces fighting against the Communists in Indochina made any attempt to exercise such authority impossible.

As Marine Colonel James Donovan observed, the command structure established by the United States in Vietnam was "one of the most confusing of all wars." [2] No unified command existed to coordinate the activities of the Americans and their Vietnamese allies in the Republic of Vietnam, although the commander of the United States Military Assistance Command Vietnam (MACV) did control the principal non-Vietnamese units fighting within the country. He did not, however, have similar command of the naval forces in the South China Sea or the fighter bombers and B-52s

flying missions from outside Vietnam. They were under the command of the Commander in Chief Pacific (CINCPAC), whose headquarters was in Hawaii. Pacification, the so-called "other war," and assorted "nation building" efforts were administered throughout much of the war by a variety of civilian agencies. The not too secret "clandestine" operations in Laos were organized and controlled by the CIA. In Washington, D.C., civilians not only supervised the war, but also engaged in making many small, day to day decisions that further prevented any commander on the scene in Vietnam from coordinating the war effort.

One has little sense of the Vietnam War as a conflict fought by individual commanders or leaders. Although General William Westmoreland's name became a household word during the war, the numerous other high ranking officers who made up the chain of command and staff elements leading from Washington to the rice paddies and jungles of Vietnam remained relatively anonymous. General Earle Wheeler's name was sometimes noted in his capacity as Chair of the Joint Chiefs of Staff, and Admiral U. S. Grant Sharp gained occasional notice in his position as CINCPAC. In most cases, however, the many officers whose names appear in the post-war literature were unknown to the general public while the war was actually being fought. After General Westmoreland, Lieutenant William Calley, convicted for his role in the My Lai massacre, may be the most widely remembered American officer of the war, with the possible exception of some of the airmen held prisoner in Hanoi. Vietnam seemed to be a war fought by committee.

At one level of the war, however, one found the kind of old fashioned leadership present on the battlefields of the past, and in the work of the lieutenants and captains at the platoon and company level one sees examples of both the best and the worst of traditional military leadership. Leadership at such levels has always been anonymous, but that makes it no less important in an assessment of the quality of leadership in any war.

In *Platoon Leader*, James McDonough described his tour as a young lieutenant with the 173d Airborne Brigade in 1971-72. The book provides a masterful description of the elements of good leadership during a particularly difficult period of the war. McDonough, like many other young officers in Vietnam, found himself completely alone, the only officer in a one platoon camp adjacent to a Vietnamese village. A West Point graduate, he was well trained, if inexperienced, and his self-portrait exemplified the best that the army had to offer. He focused his attention on the two areas that virtually define good leadership at the small unit level: accomplishing his mission of destroying whatever military force the Communists sought to maintain in his area while doing his best to care for the men in his command.

To do his job well, he had to be attentive to a host of small details which, if neglected, would cost him and his men dearly. If he attended to them with care, however, he could transfer the costs to the enemy. Everything had to be considered, not only tactics, but the various daily routines that contributed to the maintenance of the health and welfare of the unit. Were the men eating right? Were they taking their anti-malarial medicine? Were they cleaning their feet as well as their weapons? Were the claymores well positioned and checked regularly? Were the men alert on guard duty or patrol? Did they understand their mission? The questions went on and on.

McDonough gave particular attention to the question of what his men might legitimately expect from him and what he needed to do to establish his authority over them. As he wrote, "I could not 'manage' my platoon up a hill. I had to lead them up there,"^[3] and to accomplish that end he had to gain their respect. At the late date that McDonough went to Vietnam, many soldiers had already concluded that they did not want to be the last man killed in the war, and combat refusal, although not epidemic, was a potential problem facing any leader.

McDonough studied his men carefully. He "listened to their stories, their hopes, their gripes," not in an attempt to be their friend, but because they were his "prime resource" and because, as their lieutenant, he was expected to be interested in them.^[4] He was their leader, and taking care of them

was one of his primary responsibilities. Later, when he was wounded, he would remember that responsibility and recognize that "concern for myself would have to come later."[\[5\]](#)

Confronted with the problem of where he belonged physically (on patrol with a squad or in camp with the majority of the unit), McDonough reached a compromise, going out, on average, with every third patrol. He saw the importance of gaining first hand knowledge of both the terrain and the way his men operated in it. He also saw the importance of "sharing in the highest-risk operations" and the danger, if he did not, of slipping "into a defensive attitude" that might "eventually overtake the entire platoon."[\[6\]](#)

McDonough's experience was certainly not unusual, nor was it the unique province of West Point graduates. In a class at The College of Wooster, a young student asked Bob Romig, another lieutenant who had also led a platoon, what he had thought "about the war" when he was in Vietnam. Romig, a product of ROTC, answered the question as McDonough might have answered it, noting that he was too busy worrying about day to day problems such as whether the claymores were out or the men awake to think about the broader aspects of the war. He too was a good leader, doing his job well and thinking first and always about his mission and his men, even after he was wounded.

In *Once a Warrior King*, another lieutenant leader, David Donovan, described an incident that had "a great impact" on him before he went to Vietnam, and his story captures the essence of good leadership at the bottom of the chain of command. Donovan, a cadet officer, had asked Maj. Anthony Herbert "what was to be done if troops under fire refused to move as ordered." Herbert's answer was simple: "If your troops are down and won't move, you simply have to stand up and lead by personal example." Herbert reminded the young cadets around him that officers have special privileges, ranging from the salute to the O-club. They received higher pay and lived in better housing than enlisted people. But, said Herbert, "When all the chips are down, when the privates won't move and the sergeants won't move and fear has taken over everything, all the responsibility falls on your shoulders. . . . You took the rank, you took the privileges, now you have to pay the dues. You've got to stand up and by God lead those men! . . . You just remember this," said Herbert, "the day you have to be the first one to stand up and say, 'Follow me,' that's the day you will earn every salute you ever get."[\[7\]](#)

For many officers that day never comes; for Donovan it came in a rice paddy in Vietnam, when the Vietnamese troops he advised and the American team he led were pinned down under heavy fire. He followed the little voice the conversation with Herbert had put into his head, and all went well. He stood up, and the men followed. He earned his salutes. For other leaders, however, the outcome is not always so benign.

Unfortunately, the countless examples of good leadership exemplified by officers such as McDonough, Romig, and Donovan must stand beside examples of incredibly bad leadership and total incompetence. McDonough, for example, mentioned two platoon leaders very different from himself that he encountered early in his tour. One had become completely unhinged by his experience, turning into a maddened brute who found the killing "wonderful" and told McDonough that "in no time at all you'll have a collection of ears that will make those rear echelon mother fuckers green with envy."[\[8\]](#) Another casualty of the war, the lieutenant that McDonough relieved, was a "blatant coward," who remained in his bunker while the men, whom he viewed as expendable, protected him.[\[9\]](#) Nothing is more damaging to the image of military leadership at the company and platoon level, however, than the story of the My Lai massacre and Lieutenant William F. Calley. Had Calley lost control of his men, the massacre would have been horrible enough, but Calley had done something even worse. He had lost control of himself, and as a result he led his men into an evil that shocked even some people accustomed to the horror and frustration of the war in Vietnam.

In contrast, McDonough recognized that an officer's responsibility to his men was even greater than the difficult, sometimes impossible task of keeping them alive. He saw that as an officer he also had

a moral duty "to preserve their human dignity." As he wrote, "War gives the appearance of condoning almost everything, but men must live with their actions for a long time afterward. A leader has to help them understand that there are lines they must not cross. He is their link to normalcy, to order, to humanity. If the leader loses his own sense of propriety or shrinks from his duty, anything will be allowed. And anything can happen."[\[10\]](#)

So far, considerable space has been devoted to the positive example of good leadership presented by McDonough for two reasons. First, one must never forget that countless individuals, most of them anonymous, exhibited the traits of good leadership described in works such as *Platoon Leader* and *Once a Warrior King*. When one hears or reads the harsh words of criticism that can legitimately be used to describe much of the military leadership in Vietnam, one must not forget those other leaders who remained true to their mission and the people under them, who exhibited the very best leadership one could hope for in any war at any level.

In no war has every leader been successful, and one has no reason to expect that to be the case. Military leaders are human beings, subject to all of the tremendous variability of the species. Collectively, they manifest to differing degrees all of the individual human traits required for good military leadership: wisdom, competence under stress, bravery, even sanity. One focuses on the McDonoughs of the war because of the stark contrast between their often superb leadership and the all too frequent examples of poor leadership at the top that was responsible at least in part for the American failure in Vietnam.

At virtually every turn high ranking American officers made decisions that hurt the war effort and led eventually to defeat. Although General Westmoreland and his high ranking compatriots were initially successful in one aspect of leadership, getting the people below them to follow their lead, they failed dismally in the other, more important aspect of leadership at the top, the setting of a wise agenda. They used their positions of command to move the people over whom they had authority in directions that were, at best, counterproductive, and at the worst, truly disastrous.

Because the officers who controlled the American war on the ground in Vietnam were so successful in getting people to follow their commands, the nature of the decisions they made has great significance. The most important of those decisions concerned the way in which the American military force assembled in Southeast Asia would be used against the Communist enemy there, and although initially one finds command references to counterinsurgency, the focus soon shifted to the large-scale operations that came to be known by the rubric "search and destroy."

As a result of the limitations imposed upon it by the President, the American ground force in Vietnam was restricted to operating within the confines of the Republic of Vietnam. It was not, however, forced by any decision made in Washington to conduct operations as it did, nor was it compelled to devote as little effort as it did to pacification operations.

For General Wheeler, "the essence of the problem in Vietnam" was "military,"[\[11\]](#) and General Westmoreland obviously agreed. Westmoreland's approach was to use "superior American firepower . . . to find . . . fix . . . and defeat" the enemy. "Our objective," he said, "will be to keep the combat tempo at such a rate that the Viet Cong will be unable to take the time to recuperate or regain their balance." Wheeler believed that Westmoreland's strategic approach gave "the best assurance of military victory in South Vietnam."[\[12\]](#) It was also an approach that seemed equally acceptable at the time to most of the corps and division commanders that served under Westmoreland.

During and after the war, however, few command decisions were subjected to such widespread criticism as the search and destroy strategy implemented during the Westmoreland years. Writing at the height of the big unit war, Marine Lieutenant Colonel William Corson criticized the strategy in vivid language, observing that "We had chosen a battering-ram to get through the door to the enemy and in so doing had made a shambles of the entire house."[\[13\]](#) An army Lieutenant Colonel, Carl Bernard, made a similar observation, condemning "the cavalier disregard of . . . US

commanders for the dictates of the 'pacification' program, in their headlong rush to 'kill VC.'"[14] Colonel David Hackworth likened the American military in Vietnam to "a blind, clumsy, superstrong giant fighting a swift little midget that was nickel and diming us to death." [15]

Eventually even officers at the top would come to realize the inanity of the American approach. General William E. DePuy, identified by General Douglas Kinnard, author of *The War Managers*, as "one of the principal architects of United States tactics and strategy in the Vietnamese War," admitted to Kinnard after the war that "he had not been perspicacious enough in those days." [16] General Bruce Palmer and Colonel Harry Summers, Jr., have both criticized search and destroy in their books on the war, and General Dave Palmer has even argued that the attrition strategy it represented was not a true strategy at all, only evidence of strategic bankruptcy. [17]

Colonel David Hackworth concluded that General Westmoreland just "didn't understand guerrilla warfare." [18] That may have been true. Thomas Thayer, Director of the Southeast Asia Division of the Department of Defense's systems analysis branch, noted that shortly after Westmoreland's arrival in Vietnam, the General "was heard to complain that he couldn't make much sense out of the briefings he was receiving." He asked Thayer "to develop a new system for him," but Thayer wrote that he too could make little sense of the war "in those early days." General Lewis Walt, who commanded the Marines in I Corps, claimed that, when he arrived in the country, he had a similar lack of understanding of the war and no "clear idea as to how to win it." The British counter-insurgency expert, Sir Robert Thompson, also noted the "lack of understanding of the nature of the war" among the Americans. [19]

Despite the criticism, however, the war proceeded as planned, although the planning was clearly not good. When General Harold K. Johnson, army Chief of Staff, met with a group of platoon and company commanders on a trip to Vietnam at the end of 1965 he was told that moving in large units they were unable to engage the enemy. Johnson supposedly "agreed with their philosophy," but he rejected their suggestions, convinced that the army would not be able to "respond to the public outcry in the United States about casualties" if it fought the war using the kind of small unit operations they recommended. [20]

Equally distressing was the way in which programs that appeared to be successful were dismantled to sustain the faulty strategic approach selected by the high command. In 1961, for example, army Special Forces teams, operating under CIA direction, had organized Civilian Irregular Defense Groups (CIDG) in villages inhabited by the hill peoples of Vietnam. By the end of 1962, the Special Forces CIDG units had secured hundreds of villages and thousands of civilians against the Communist guerrilla threat. The army high command, however, was not only distressed by the CIA control of the program, but also by its defensive nature. Even before General Westmoreland's arrival in Vietnam, the army was at work to reorient the program. Speaking for the army staff in August 1962, Lieutenant General Barksdale Hamlett told MACV, "We prefer to see special forces personnel used in conjunction with active and offensive operations, as opposed to static training activities." [21] The result, over time, was the transformation of the CIDG units into strike forces, their transfer to the control of the Saigon government, and the collapse of a successful program of village defense.

A similar disaster occurred under Westmoreland a few years later. Although General Walt may not have understood the war when he arrived in Vietnam, the Marines under his command were soon implementing an innovative program designed to protect the rural population in the I Corps area. Throughout the populated sections of I Corps, Marine squads moved into the villages to establish Combined Action Platoons, linking the Marines to local Vietnamese defense forces.

General Walt's superior, General Victor Krulak, commanding the Fleet Marine Force, Pacific, was convinced "that there was no virtue at all in seeking out the NVA in the mountains and jungle." He preferred to focus Marine efforts on "the rich, populous lowlands." He believed that if the Marines could "destroy the guerrilla fabric among the people" they could deny the Communists the food,

intelligence, and other support required to continue the war. If the Communists came down from the mountains to fight the Marines in the lowlands, Krulak was certain that the Marines would prevail, but "the real war," he said, "is among the people and not among these mountains."[\[22\]](#)

At MACV Headquarters, however, a different view prevailed. General Westmoreland wanted the Marines to participate more actively in search and destroy operations. General DePuy observed that Westmoreland was "disturbed by the fact that all but a tiny part of the I Corps area is under control of the VC." Criticizing the Marines for involvement "in counterinsurgency of the deliberate, mild sort," DePuy urged Westmoreland to direct them to launch large-unit operations. Another army general, Harry O. Kinnard, was "absolutely disgusted" with the Marine approach.[\[23\]](#)

Not wanting to "precipitate an interservice imbroglio" by dealing too abruptly with General Walt, Westmoreland "chose to issue orders for specific projects that as time passed would gradually get the Marines out of their beachheads."[\[24\]](#) Westmoreland succeeded, but at the cost of weakening one of the few American military strategies that made sense.

In 1967, the Hamlet Evaluation System showed that villages protected by Marine Combined Action Platoons were almost twice as secure on average as other villages in the region. There was also a direct correlation between the length of time a CAP unit had operated in a village and the village's security. Still, the high command at MACV continued in its commitment to the opposite approach. Other army officers were more astute, recognizing, as one lieutenant colonel wrote, that "we would have been much better off if many of our military operations had resembled a scalpel rather than a sledge hammer; if we had, for example, made wider use of the marine CAP program." He believed that the Marine approach was "far, far better than what most other American units in Vietnam were doing,"[\[25\]](#) a view shared by a number of authors loosely grouped into what the historian George Herring has termed "the counterinsurgency school."[\[26\]](#)

The bad strategic choices of the high command were made worse by the equally bad managerial decision establishing the year tour of duty with a six month rotation between staff and command positions for officers. The results of the policy were catastrophic. McDonough noted the frustration of having to leave his men in the field at the very time when he was "the most battle-experienced platoon leader in the battalion." He also noted the "hypocrisy" of leaving men who "were there for a full twelve months or until incapacitated by wounds, illness, or death . . . for a relatively safe job at the battalion base camp." McDonough was convinced that "A leader does not leave his men."[\[27\]](#) The high command, however, believed otherwise.

Although the origins of the policy and the exact reasons for implementing it are obscure, its negative impact was readily apparent. As one major declared, "All those who have talked with me about the six-month-command, six-month-staff concept agreed that it was crap. . . . a commander never really got a handle on his unit . . . by the time he was competent, he was moved."[\[28\]](#) As another officer observed, "Westmoreland couldn't have found a better way, if he had tried, of guaranteeing that our troops would be led by a bunch of amateurs."[\[29\]](#) The statistics would seem to support the charges; the rate of battle deaths in battalions in combat under experienced leaders were roughly two-thirds the rate in units with commanders who had less than six months' experience.[\[30\]](#)

Whether the rotation of officers in combat commands was done to increase the number of officers with combat experience or to enable more officers to obtain important experiences needed to enhance their careers, the results were the same. As one artillery captain observed, if you were really effective as a combat leader, you got six months. If you were the village idiot and couldn't do anything except to fly around in a helicopter and ask the troops if they were getting their mail, you still got six months."[\[31\]](#)

The short tours also distorted the military effort in Vietnam in another way. Of the infantry riflemen in Vietnam in 1969, only 2 percent were career soldiers; 88 percent were draftees and the other 10

percent were first-term enlistees. Most of the officers and NCOs leading them were similarly inexperienced.[32] One platoon sergeant, decrying the personnel policies that rotated men in and out of units as individuals, observed that "the makeup of my platoon changed almost weekly." As a result, at the end of two months, the sergeant "had more experience than half the men in my platoon." [33] In the 1986 symposium on the Indochina War, sponsored by the army's Center of Military History, Ronald Spector summed up the problem by noting that "The system produced constant personnel turnovers, broke down unit cohesion, and ensured that, at any given moment, a platoon or company 'in the bush' would be made up largely of inexperienced newcomers." [34] A personnel policy decision that itself exemplified bad leadership at the top thus worked to create a situation that perpetuated inexperienced leadership at the bottom as well. In a 1977 article in the *Military Review*, Lieutenant Colonel David Holmes noted the demoralizing effects of the rotation policy. Noting that "The short-tour policy . . . undoubtedly contributed to the instances of mutiny, corruption, drug abuse and fragging," he added that "It also probably reinforced the ticket punching careerist syndrome still visible in today's officer corps." [35]

A good leader takes care of the troops, but American commanders in Vietnam confused care with indulgence. The result was a proliferation of elaborate bases with air conditioned quarters, posh clubs, and giant PXs filled with luxury goods. Lieutenant General Joseph Heiser, who commanded the army's 1st Logistical Command in Vietnam, complained that "Too many luxuries burdened an already heavily taxed logistical system." [36] After the war General Hamilton Howze also criticized "the practice of providing too many luxuries in base camps," observing that "We fought World War II without these and they were not necessary in the soldier's short twelve-month tour in Vietnam." The result, wrote Howze, was that "Our base camps became too elaborate, soaked up too much manpower, diverted our attention from the basic mission and lessened our operational flexibility." [37] The system also fostered corruption and scandal.

Even worse, however, the contrast between the grunt's life in the field and the life of the full-time inhabitants of the bases may have eroded morale. Animosity between combat troops and support troops in safer billets has frequently been evident in war, but decisions made by the high command in Vietnam seemed to have accentuated the divisions while adding little to the ability of the American military forces to fight the war successfully.

The elaborate bases and luxuries of the Americans also had a negative impact on the Vietnamese people. American luxury items flooded the black market, while the tastes of free-spending GIs in search of sex and fun distorted the job market and fueled inflation. Instead of helping to win hearts and minds, the misplaced policies worked to destroy Vietnamese culture and self-respect.

The military's self-indulgence also combined with the emphasis on the use of firepower to restrict operations in the field. As the logistical tail of a military force grows, the number of troops able to patrol and fight on the ground declines. It is a simple problem in mathematics; each soldier diverted to supervise a club, repair an air conditioner, serve as an officer's valet, or perform some other, militarily unnecessary task is a soldier that might have been used in the field. Even the efforts of individuals tending crew-served weapons, maintaining them, and supplying them with ammunition or fuel may be misplaced if the primary war should be taking place on the ground in the bush or in the villages. Although the estimates vary, the number of combat troops available for deployment in sustained ground operations when the United States had 536,000 service personnel in Vietnam may have been as low as 80,000. [38]

In the realm of strategic decision making, in personnel policies, and even in that most basic aspect of leadership, taking care of the troops, the high ranking officers of the American military machine failed to exhibit the wisdom that is the essence of good leadership. Perhaps even worse than the poor decisions made originally, however, was the systematic self-deception that prevented the reevaluation of those decisions. The stubborn commitment of the high command to error defies belief, but the evidence of it would seem to be overwhelming.

Self-deception was apparent from the beginning of the American military commitment. A classic example from the advisory period came in 1962, when Lieutenant General Paul Harkins, then MACV commander, claimed that the South Vietnamese units clobbered at Ap Bac had actually won the battle because they had "taken the objective."[\[39\]](#) American officers advising the ARVN units in the field knew that was not the case, but their criticisms and recommendations were ignored, leading Andrew Krepinevich, Jr., to conclude in his book on the army in Vietnam that the army was "uninterested in information questioning its approach to the war."[\[40\]](#) Such self-deception continued throughout the conflict. Lieutenant Colonel Bernard, for example, told of a 1969 case in which two officers, both Senior Advisors, were "dumped unceremoniously at the insistence of the US Division Commander" because they had complained to American troop commanders about "the misbehavior of their troops, and the malcomprehension of pacification by the subordinate commanders and staffs."[\[41\]](#) David Halberstam concluded from his personal experience as a reporter in Vietnam that staff officers were "intuitively protecting the commander from things he didn't want to see and didn't want to hear, never coming up with information which might challenge what a commander wanted to do at a given moment."[\[42\]](#) Corson was convinced that "our dissembling" had "become institutionalized," with the result that "by lying to ourselves" we "played into the enemy's hands."[\[43\]](#)

Sadly, the self-deception was not only the result of bureaucratic wishful thinking, but also of outright fabrication of information. Nowhere was such willful misinformation more apparent than in the statistical reporting of body counts. Although some commanders such as Lieutenant General Julian Ewell, commanding the 9th Infantry Division, seemed to believe in the validity of the body count, the generals surveyed by Douglas Kinnard took a more skeptical view. Only two percent of them believed that the kill ratio provided a valid measure of "progress in the war," and over half of them thought it was "misleading." Over 60 percent noted that the body count was "often inflated."[\[44\]](#)

More significant, perhaps, were the subjective comments accompanying the responses to Kinnard's questionnaire. One general called the body count "A fake--totally worthless." Another called it "Gruesome--a ticket punching item," while a third said that "often" the counts were "blatant lies." One general found "the immensity of the false reporting" to be "a blot on the honor of the army," while another said it was "a great crime and cancer in the army in the eyes of young officers in 1969-1971."[\[45\]](#)

The lying, however, was not limited to the body count. One brigade historian observed that "battle news is edited and revised until it's acceptable to higher-ups," and he claimed that he "had to retype battle reports . . . turning an NVA victory over superior American forces into a U.S. victory."[\[46\]](#) Another retired officer has spoken of "a West Point classmate and friend" who admitted that "he had to be dishonest to 'do well' as a battalion commander in Vietnam." He claimed that "Everyone else was doing it," and he maintained that "he had to be corrupt" to be promoted.[\[47\]](#) For Corson, however, the problem indicated the "erosion of moral principle within the military."[\[48\]](#)

Although at the bottom one finds evidence of courage, self-sacrifice, and exemplary leadership, at the top one sees little of any of these key elements. During the Vietnam War, the lack of wisdom on the part of the American military's best and brightest was truly frightening, and the moral decay that accompanied it was even worse.

By mid-1969, William McCaffrey, Commanding General, U. S. Army, Vietnam, reported that "discipline within the command as a whole had eroded" and that "within the chain of command . . . communication has broken down."[\[49\]](#) Two years later a correspondent, Robert Heinl, Jr., would charge that "the morale, discipline and battle-worthiness of the U.S. Armed Forces" was "lower and worse than at any time in this century and possibly in the history of the United States."[\[50\]](#) Frequent news stories about racial incidents, drug abuse, fraggings, desertion and combat refusal seemed to substantiate Heinl's claim that the nation's armed forces were in a state of collapse.

Heinl blamed "leadership which is soft, inexperienced, and sometimes plain incompetent."^[51] Other critics concurred. In *Crisis in Command*, Richard Gabriel and Paul Savage observed that "disintegration seems to be clearly associated with the large numerical expansion of the officer corps to levels previously unknown."^[52] Corson observed that, despite having lowered its educational requirement for officer candidates from a bachelor's degree to two years of education beyond high school, the Marine Corps was about 800 new second lieutenants short of its 1969 target of 3,000. The army abolished its post-secondary education requirement entirely, and both services also lowered their physical requirements for officers.^[53] In 1970, the Commander in Chief, U. S. Army, Pacific blamed "the requirements imposed by Vietnam and the rapid promotions that have occurred" for "a general decline in the quality and consequently prestige of our junior officers."^[54]

As the demand for officers increased, the supply of high quality material was contracting. ROTC enrollment for all the services shrank from 230,000 to 123,000 between 1960 and 1969,^[55] and a number of campuses ended their programs. Spector noted that "output of Army Officer Candidate Schools increased by a factor of six during the first year of the Vietnam buildup," July 1965-July 1966, from 300/month to over 1,800. The next year the monthly average was 3,500.^[56] The attrition rate in the army's OCS program fell from 42 percent to 28 percent between 1965 and 1967, meaning that, at the very time that the program was becoming less selective in its admissions standards, it was also lowering its graduation standards.^[57] As one retired officer observed, "When an army is required to fight a war without the support of society, it is forced to commission its Calleys."^[58]

The debilitating increase in the officer corps, with the accompanying decline in leadership, might have been avoided, however, had leaders at the top been willing to approach the war differently. Descriptions of the Marine CAP program indicate that considerable responsibility could have been left in the hands of NCOs, and a leaner force structure, without a luxurious tail, would have needed fewer officers, as would a force in which officers remained in country longer than a single year. Although many of the problems of poor leadership at the bottom may have been the result of an increase in the number of new, inexperienced lieutenants, the need for that increase was a function of bad decisions made higher up the chain of command. No matter how bad leadership became at the bottom, leadership at the top was generally worse, if only because the adverse consequences of a single bad decision made at a high level could be so much greater.

One can not end the litany of command failure without a brief comment on the question of war crimes, for as General Westmoreland himself said, "any time there are atrocities it is the result of bad leadership."^[59] No single example in the war proves the point better than the events surrounding the My Lai massacre. The company involved and other units in the Americal Division were ill-disciplined. Incidents involving the mistreatment of Vietnamese civilians had preceded the events at My Lai but had gone unpunished. The troops involved were not only inexperienced, but also led by men who lacked the judgment and self-control required of leaders in such difficult circumstances. The result, in the Pentagon's euphemistic words, was "a tragedy of major proportion."^[60]

The problem, however, was again a result of command failure at the top as well as the bottom. Although the Rules of Engagement set down by General Westmoreland were impeccable in their attention to the need to minimize destruction and damage to civilians and their property, when violations of the rules went unpunished, the authority of the rules and the rule makers was lessened. A similar erosion took place as a result of the lavish use of artillery and air power. As Guenter Lewy observed in *America in Vietnam*, "the constantly repeated expressions of intense concern of MACV with the question of civilian casualties can be read as an acknowledgment that rules aimed at protecting civilian life and property were, for a variety of reasons, not applied and enforced as they should have been."^[61] For Lewy, the absence of significant action against violators of the rules of engagement until after the My Lai incident constituted, at the very least, a "dereliction of duty" on

the part of the officers in command at MACV. Clearly the bad leadership responsible for violations of the rules of engagement was not limited to officers of low rank.

In his provocative assessment of the American effort in Vietnam, *On Strategy*, Colonel Harry Summers, Jr., claimed that "as far as logistics and tactics were concerned we succeeded in everything we set out to do," and he wrote that "On the battlefield itself the Army was unbeatable."^[62] Unfortunately, Summers' perception is inaccurate.

The picture of the operational performance of American units provided by Shelby Stanton's very detailed work in *The Rise and Fall of an American Army* is not as affirmative as Summers led his readers to believe. In 1966, for example, the army's own data indicate that "88 percent of all fights were being initiated by the NVA or the VC, and half of these (46 percent) began as ambushes." As Stanton observed, "The NVA and VC forces were able to seek or break off combat with relative freedom." The initiative on the battlefield was in their hands, and "green" American soldiers were "faring poorly as a result."^[63] Later in the war, although more successful, the army, in Stanton's opinion, was still "fighting well below its potential." After the order to begin a withdrawal of American forces was issued, "Morale and discipline caved in on an escalating basis, and combat performance declined."^[64]

One finds a similarly dismal assessment of American battlefield performance in General Dave Palmer's work on the war. Palmer pointed in particular to the American tendency to use its own troops as bait, arguing that "the time-honored technique of fire and maneuver had switched over to one of maneuver and fire." As a result, descriptions of military engagements in Vietnam are filled with references to American troops "pinned down" by "heavy fire," unable to "maneuver decisively." As Palmer observed, "The utter dependence on firepower represented a failure of the U.S. system of fighting in Vietnam."^[65] Put another way, it represented a complete failure of American military leadership at the tactical as well as the strategic level.

Of the army generals who responded to Douglas Kinnard's questionnaire, 62% "thought that the tactics employed could have been improved in a major way."^[66] A problem of particular significance was what Edward Luttwak has termed the military's "tactical self-indulgence," in which high performance jet fighter bombers struck peasant huts and sampans and artillery barrages were brought to bear on individual snipers. Said Luttwak, "The grossly disproportionate use of firepower became the very theme of the war--and its imagery on television was by far the most powerful stimulus of antiwar sentiment."^[67] Despite Colonel Summers' claim that the Communists were defeated "in every major engagement,"^[68] American tactical decisions in Vietnam were hardly better than the strategic ones, particularly given the disastrous impact of the firepower-intensive approach on the pacification program.

One finds good and bad leadership at all levels in war, but America's Vietnam War may be exceptional in terms of the extent of the problems evident. American military leadership, particularly at the top, was significantly flawed. Not only did American commanders fail to find a strategy or tactics that could succeed in accomplishing their mission within the limitations placed upon them by the President, but they also failed to maintain the cohesion and fighting spirit of their forces as their strategic and tactical failure became apparent.

Unfortunately, identifying problems is not synonymous with explaining them. Although the lack of wisdom evident at the top provided shocking evidence that something was radically wrong with the American military system, the difficult task of delving into the causes of the problems remains.

In part, the problems of leadership faced by the American military in Vietnam may have been a function of the growing complexity of warfare and the various adjustments made to deal with it. Management and the bureaucratic organization that sustains it is necessary. Indeed it is essential in modern war, and much of what the American military accomplished in Vietnam was incredible, particularly on the logistical side. Even the flawed search and destroy strategy and the lavish use of

firepower that accompanied it would have been impossible to implement had not many officers performed their assigned tasks with great competence. As Colonel Summers has said, "management enabled the United States to move a million soldiers a year half-way around the world, and then to feed, clothe, shelter, arm, and equip them at a historically unprecedented level of abundance."[\[69\]](#)

But an institution can become over managed. Charles J. Ryan, a professor of engineering at Stanford University, has observed that initially an institution can obtain a competitive edge and improve the quality and quantity of its productive forces by adding a layer of management. As additional layers of management are added, however, increases in productivity do not continue. Instead, a kind of managerial hypertrophy sets in that eventually leads to a decline in efficiency.[\[70\]](#) One result of that phenomenon seen in Vietnam was what Luttwak called "bureaucratic deformation," in which the increased size of the military bureaucracy "drastically reduced the true number of combat troops in the country to a fraction of the ostensible troop level."[\[71\]](#) Another result appeared within the chain of command, where time that should have been devoted to innovative thought and decisive action was devoted instead to shuffling paper within the bureaucracy.

As layer upon layer of middle management was set down within the military services, the ability of officers to lead well at both ends of the chain of command was curtailed. The flow of information upward was distorted, and the ability of leaders on the spot to exercise individual judgment was restricted. Doctrine, forms, and set operating procedures became a substitute for thought. In the end, the decisions made, particularly at the top, were doomed to fail because they were the flawed product of a flawed system. Once set in motion, however, the machinery to implement the decisions worked at its managerial best, no matter how damaging the results.

The highly bureaucratic structure of modern military institutions also works in a second way to make the exercise of good leadership difficult. Robert Komer, the civilian coordinator of the American pacification program, focused much of his critique of the American effort in Vietnam on what might be termed the bureaucratic imperative, the tendency of bureaucracies to "play out" their institutional "repertoires." As a result, wrote Komer, "Such institutional constraints as the very way our general purpose forces were trained, equipped, and structured largely dictated our response."[\[72\]](#) In developing doctrine, tactics, equipment, and tables of organization the American military focused on the problems of relatively large-scale, conventional war, particularly war in Europe against the Soviets. Having developed their individual ideas of how a war should be fought, each service proceeded to act upon those ideas in Vietnam. Unfortunately, the greater the bureaucratic imperative to implement a given doctrine, the greater the difficulty will be for leaders within an institution to change direction.

Military officers, however, were as much victims of their own individual ambition as of the bureaucratic constraints of their service branches. The evidence of opportunistic, careerist behavior on the part of officers in Vietnam is truly shocking. The U. S. Army War College *Study on Military Professionalism*, completed in 1970, noted a significant divergence within the officer corps from "the idealized climate" of military professionalism, "characterized by: individual integrity, mutual trust and confidence, unselfish motivation, technical competence, and an unconstrained flow of information." The study described "the existing climate" as one characterized by the "ambitious, transitory commander--marginally skilled in the complexities of his duties--engulfed in producing statistical results, fearful of personal failure, too busy to talk with or listen to his subordinates, and determined to submit acceptably optimistic reports which reflect faultless completion of a variety of tasks at the expense of the sweat and frustration of his subordinates."[\[73\]](#)

The specific comments of officers surveyed in the Army War College study were particularly damning. One lieutenant observed that "the willingness of an officer to assume responsibility for his own plans and actions seems to vary inversely with rank up to the rank of general."[\[74\]](#) A

captain found that "military personnel, primarily career types, are too concerned with promotions, efficiency reports, and conforming to the wishes of their commander." Another captain charged that "too many officers place the value of a high OER [Officer Efficiency Report] over the welfare of their men," and a colonel noted that "everyone is afraid to make a mistake," with the result that "authority and ability are diluted at every level." A colonel spoke of "endless CYA [Cover-Your-Ass] exercises" that he believed "create suspicion and distrust on the part of juniors for the integrity and competence of their superiors."[\[75\]](#)

The study identified "the striving for personal success" as the cause of such counterproductive behavior.[\[76\]](#) As a National Guard officer who served in Vietnam later said, "regular-army officers I knew were always very career conscious, often constrained." He was "very disappointed in the caliber of those active army officers because so many gave the impression of being far more concerned with their careers than they did with doing what needed to be done from the standpoint of their troops."[\[77\]](#)

As one of the generals surveyed by Douglas Kinnard observed, "There were too many battalion and brigade commanders getting their tickets punched rather than trying to really lead."[\[78\]](#) Kinnard himself was equally critical. Speaking of the many problems plaguing the military late in the war, he wrote "It is easy to blame the quality of the enlisted men or the lack of support on the home front for all this. But let's state it straight--the problem, where it existed, was one of ineffective leadership, in large part because many leaders made a career out of their own careers rather than a career out of leading their own units."[\[79\]](#)

A few officers like David Hackworth resigned, fed up with the "ticket punchers, who run in for six months, a year, and don't even know what the hell it's all about,"[\[80\]](#) but most did not. Instead, said one officer, "opportunism appeared to be the accepted rule." As a major observed, "the professional officer went into the war to get what he could out of it." Another admitted that "many of us (me included) used the war as a vehicle for enjoying the only war we had."[\[81\]](#) Very few officers spoke out and fewer still resigned, even though many of them saw that careerism was not only undermining the military effort in Vietnam, but also threatening to destroy the nation's military institutions.

As the debate concerning the proper role of the military officer developed, some participants based their arguments on the false assumption that officers in the late-19th century had benefited from an isolation which served to protect them from the corruption of their professional military ethic by materialistic civilian influences. For example, in *Military Review* in 1972, Lieutenant Colonel Frederic J. Brown, argued that "the stimulus to overinvolvement" in civilian affairs was "the greatest current danger to the Army," and he opted instead for "the traditional isolation which has served to preserve the professional ethic." Even civilian social scientists who argued that isolation was impossible or undesirable tended to believe that officers in the past had been isolated. Thus Charles C. Moskos, Jr., for example, could reject the notion that isolation would be beneficial to officers in the post-Vietnam period while accepting the view that before World War II American officers had lived and worked in a "self-contained institution markedly separated from civilian society."[\[82\]](#)

Beginning with a faulty premise, more than one author concluded that officers should seek a rebirth of professional commitment through increased isolation from civilians and civilian-type tasks. But there were no "good old days" in which splendid isolation from civilian America contributed to the professional growth of the officer corps and strengthened its commitment to "Duty -- Honor -- Country." The Golden Age of professional development in the army noted in Chapter Four occurred during a time of continuous interaction between officers and the civilian elite, when officers frequently performed jobs that were more civilian than military.

Descriptions of convergence between civilian and military roles in the 20th century may be accurate, but they are also overdrawn. The convergence has not been as great as assumed because significant divergence did not exist prior to it, and problems within the officer corps at the time of the war in

Vietnam appear related instead to the fact that since World War II the officer corps had become much more representative of American society in general.

Many of the problems apparent during the war in Vietnam were by no means exclusive to the military. Like the problems of bureaucratic deformation and the bureaucratic imperative of the repertoire, the problem of careerism is readily apparent throughout the institutional structures of the United States, in its colleges and universities, its corporations, its government agencies, and at every level. It is a problem plaguing civilians as well as military officers, and civilian institutions have been as unsuccessful in solving it as has the military.

In 1985 Loren Baritz published a book that does much to explain the crisis in leadership facing the United States in Vietnam and at home. His thesis is summarized in the title: *Backfire: A History of How American Culture Led Us Into Vietnam and Made Us Fight the Way We Did*. American bureaucracies, wrote Baritz, "hire people sufficiently self-interested to focus on technique, not goals; on self-advancement, not group loyalty; on the career, not tradition; on their own futures, not politics, not policy."^[83] With the new professional attitudes well represented in the military, the war in Vietnam became "the most professionally managed war in history," and that, concluded Baritz, "is why it was misguided from the start and futile at the end."^[84]

Baritz's critique is a harsh one, but it should not be ignored. The United States lost the war in Vietnam, and simple-minded arguments that place the responsibility for the defeat entirely on civilians or America's Vietnamese allies will not do. As Baritz noted, "the ticket-punching careerist officers were not invented by civilians. . . . The strategy of attrition and the dizzying rotation of officers were not made in Washington. The cover-ups and deceptive optimism were the military's own. The interservice rivalries were not required by politicians."^[85] His list goes on, but the point is already obvious. The military officers who made the decisions that hampered military performance in Vietnam must take responsibility for their actions. More important, the military institutions that produced them must reform themselves if positive leadership at the top, so absent in Vietnam, is to emerge in the future.

Unfortunately, the military must work under a severe handicap, for the careerism and bureaucratic imperatives that helped foster the poor leadership evident in the Vietnam War are apparent throughout American society. The nation lost in Vietnam, and in the future it may well lose other conflicts: the war against poverty in America, the fight against foreign competition here and abroad, the struggle to maintain a position of world leadership.

If we Americans are ever to regain our stature in the world and solve the problems in our own homeland, we must first recognize the root of our problems. As Baritz observed, "We are what went wrong in Vietnam."^[86] Thus, if we expect to have better institutions with better leaders, civil or military, we must change our attitudes toward work and our definition of success. We must recapture the old idea of a "calling" and abandon the materialistic, self-serving idea of "career." We must think less about what our bosses want, and more about what is right, not for our own careers, but for our country, its institutions, and the world in which they reside. The successful leader does more than move followers in a direction. The leader must also set the direction of movement. Ultimately the success or failure of leadership rests on the judgments made regarding the wisdom of the agenda rather than the leader's effectiveness in moving toward it.

^[1] John M. Gates, "American Military Leadership in the Vietnam War," in Henry S. Bausum, ed., *Military Leadership and Command: The John Biggs Cincinnati Lectures, 1987* (Lexington, VA, 1987), 185-208.

^[2] James A. Donovan, *Militarism, U.S.A.* (New York: 1970), 148.

^[3] James R. McDonough, *Platoon Leader* (Novato, Calif.: 1985), 61.

- [4] Ibid., 59.
- [5] Ibid., 43.
- [6] Ibid., 31.
- [7] David Donovan, *Once a Warrior King* (New York: 1985), 144-145.
- [8] McDonough, 18.
- [9] Ibid., 25.
- [10] Ibid., 61.
- [11] Andrew F. Krepinevich, *The Army and Vietnam* (Baltimore: 1986), 37.
- [12] Ibid., 166.
- [13] William R. Corson, *The Betrayal* (New York: 1968), 74.
- [14] Cincinnatus, *Self-Destruction* (New York: 1981), 51.
- [15] Newsweek (July 5, 1971), 34.
- [16] Douglas Kinnard, *The War Managers* (Hanover, N.H.: 1977), 41.
- [17] Bruce Palmer, *The 25-Year War: America's Military Role in Vietnam* (Lexington: 1984); Harry G. Summers, Jr., *On Strategy: The Vietnam War in Context* (Washington: 1981); & Dave Richard Palmer, *Summons of the Trumpet* (San Rafael, Calif.: 1978).
- [18] *Newsweek* (July 5, 1971), 34.
- [19] Thomas C. Thayer, *War Without Fronts: The American Experience in Vietnam* (Boulder: 1985), 3.
- [20] Krepinevich, 172.
- [21] Ibid., 72.
- [22] Jack Shulimson, *U.S. Marines in Vietnam: An Expanding War, 1966* (Washington: 1982), 13.
- [23] Krepinevich, 175.
- [24] Shulimson, 13.
- [25] Cincinnatus, 194.
- [26] George C. Herring, "American Strategy in Vietnam: The Postwar Debate," *Military Affairs*, XLVI (1982), 59.
- [27] McDonough, 183.
- [28] Cincinnatus, 252.
- [29] Ibid., 157.
- [30] Guenter Lewy, *America in Vietnam* (New York, 1978), 118.

- [31] Cincinnatus, 137.
- [32] Ronald H. Spector, "The Vietnam War and the Army's Self-Image," in John Schlight, ed., *Second Indochina War Symposium* (Washington, 1986), 179.
- [33] *Ibid.*, 180.
- [34] *Ibid.*
- [35] Cincinnatus, 157.
- [36] Edward Doyle et al, *The Vietnam Experience: A Collision of Cultures* (Boston, 1984), 34.
- [37] *Ibid.*
- [38] Thayer, 94.
- [39] Krepinevich, 79.
- [40] *Ibid.*
- [41] Cincinnatus, 52.
- [42] David Halberstam, *The Best and the Brightest* (New York: 1973), 661.
- [43] Corson, *The Betrayal*, 244.
- [44] Kinnard, 74-75.
- [45] *Ibid.*, 75.
- [46] Cincinnatus, 85.
- [47] William R. Corson, *Consequences of Failure* (New York: 1974), 100.
- [48] *Ibid.*
- [49] Spector, 170.
- [50] *Ibid.*
- [51] *Ibid.*
- [52] Richard A. Gabriel & Paul L. Savage, *Crisis in Command: Mismanagement in the Army* (New York: 1978), 62.
- [53] Corson, *Consequences of Failure*, 85.
- [54] Spector, 173.
- [55] Thomas D. Boettcher, *Vietnam: The Valor and the Sorrow* (Boston: 1985), 391.
- [56] Spector, 177.
- [57] *Ibid.*, 173.
- [58] Michael Maclear, *The Ten Thousand Day War* (New York: 1981), 275.

[59] Lewy, 165.

[60] "Conversations Between Lieutenant General William R. Peers and Lt C Jim Breen and Lt C Charlie Moore," unpublished ms., US Army Military History Institute Senior Officers Debriefing Program, Carlisle Barracks, 1977.

[61] Lewy, 241.

[62] Summers, *On Strategy*, 1.

[63] Shelby L. Stanton, *The Rise and Fall of an American Army: U.S. Ground Forces in Vietnam, 1965-1973* (Novato, Calif.: 1985), 86.

[64] *Ibid.*, 365.

[65] Palmer, *Summons of the Trumpet*, 144-145. For a more recent but no less critical assessment of the American performance on the battlefield see Ronald H. Spector, *After Tet: The Bloodiest Year in Vietnam* (New York: The Free Press, 1993).

[66] Kinnard, 44-45.

[67] Edward N. Luttwak, *The Pentagon and the Art of War* (New York: 1985), 36.

[68] Harry G. Summers, Jr., "The Army after Vietnam," in Kenneth J. Hagan & William R. Roberts, eds., *Against All Enemies* (Westport: 1986), 367.

[69] *Ibid.*, 366-367.

[70] Charles J. Ryan, "The Overdeveloped Society," *The Stanford Magazine* (Fall-Winter 1979), 58-65.

[71] Luttwak, 32.

[72] Robert W. Komer, *Bureaucracy at War: U.S. Performance in the Vietnam Conflict* (Boulder: 1986), 48.

[73] U.S. Army War College, *Study on Military Professionalism* (Carlisle Barracks: 1970), 13-14.

[74] *Ibid.*, 14.

[75] *Ibid.*, 15.

[76] *Ibid.*, 23.

[77] Cincinnatus, 137.

[78] Kinnard, 111.

[79] *Ibid.*, 112.

[80] Haynes Johnson & George C. Wilson, *Army in Anguish* (Washington: 1972), 76.

[81] Cincinnatus, 162.

[82] Frederic J. Brown, "The Army and Society," in Richard G. Head and Ervin J. Rokke, eds., *American Defense Policy*, 3d ed. (Baltimore: Johns Hopkins Univ. Press, 1973), 603, 610. Charles C. Moskos Jr., "The Emergent Military: Civil, Traditional, or Pluralistic?" in John E. Endicott and

Roy Stafford Jr., eds., *American Defense Policy*, 4th ed. (Baltimore: Johns Hopkins Univ. Press, 1977), 528, 535. For similar views by other officers and civilian scholars, see William L. Hauser, *America's Army in Crisis: A Study in Civil-Military Relations* (Baltimore: Johns Hopkins Univ. Press, 1973), 202; John H. Garrison, "The Political Dimension of Military Professionalism," in Endicott and Stafford, 578; Philip S. Kronenberg, "The Greening of the Brass: Emerging Civil-Military Relations," in John P. Lovell and Philip S. Kronenberg, eds., *New Civil-Military Relations: The Agonies of Adjustment to Post-Vietnam Realities* (New Brunswick, N.J.: Transaction Books, 1974), 322-23, 338.

[83] Loren Baritz, *Backfire: A History of How American Culture Led Us Into Vietnam and Made Us Fight the Way We Did* (New York: 1985), 334.

[84] *Ibid.*, 337.

[85] *Ibid.*, 345.

[86] *Ibid.*, 349.

CHAPTER SEVEN

VIETNAM: THE DEBATE GOES ON

In 1982 I moderated a session on the Vietnam War at a history symposium on "The Impact of Unsuccessful Military Campaigns on Military Institutions," held at the U. S. Army War College. Colonel Harry G. Summers, Jr. gave a paper entitled "The US Army Institutional Response to Viet Nam." That was my first encounter with the Colonel and his work. Following the conference I proceeded to read both his book and an article he had just published in *The New Republic*. Being particularly troubled by some of his interpretive comments in the article, I wrote him a long letter, which he never answered. To this day I have often wondered if my reaction to his work might have been different had he responded.

Although I was convinced that on some very important points Summers' analysis was wrong, I noticed with increasing frustration that not only were his views gaining in popularity, but they were also going virtually uncontested. Finally, upon reading an article of his in the June 1983 issue of *Parameters*, I decided that I could not remain quiet any longer.

Concluding that someone had to make an attempt to rectify the errors that I found so blatant, I wrote an article of my own that was published in *Parameters* the following year.^[1] It forms the basis for the chapter that follows. Printed here is a revised version given as a lecture in the 1986 series at Obirin College. This selection would seem to highlight at least two lessons. First, an argument such as that of Colonel Summers is only as good as the research upon which it is based. Second, authors should not ignore their mail, particularly when it involves a critique of their work.

* * * * *

If the Philippine-American War that began in 1899 was one of America's least studied wars, the war in Vietnam that took place over a half century later is surely one of its most studied ones. The amount of published material on the war in Vietnam is truly amazing, with scores of new books and articles being published every year. In the spring of 1985, a decade after the fall of Saigon, the United States had what is certainly one of the most unusual phenomena in the history of warfare, a commemoration of defeat, and the resulting symposia and publications added to the growing list of material on the war. Unfortunately, even with all of the attention it has received, the war is no better understood in some of its aspects than the earlier conflict in the Philippines.

Most surprising, perhaps, is the fundamental nature of many of the current disagreements over the war. A number of very basic questions are hotly debated, and students of the war disagree over its very nature, debating whether it was a revolutionary civil war or a conventional one. The nature of American objectives in Vietnam has also been a subject for debate, as has the strategy used to obtain whatever objectives might have been in mind. In fact, one can hardly discuss the war without becoming involved in some kind of controversy.

The debate over the war has made ordinary discourse about it very difficult. One's thinking about the war is often a function of one's political views and biases rather than the factual information available. Particularly apparent in much of the writing is the unwillingness of many Americans, both those who served in the government and those having served in the military, to admit error. Thus, much of what is said about the war is more apology than analysis, more myth than history, and some insight into the ongoing debate over the war is captured, I think, in a scholarly exchange that I have had with Colonel Harry Summers, Jr., one of the leading military authors on the subject in the 1980s.

At the start of 1983, veteran correspondent Fox Butterfield surveyed what he termed "the New Vietnam scholarship" in the *New York Times Magazine*. Examining the work of "a small group of scholars, journalists and military specialists who have started to look afresh at the war," he noted their challenge to "some of the most cherished beliefs of both the right and the left."^[2] One member of the group identified by Butterfield was Colonel Harry G. Summers, Jr., then a research analyst at the army's Strategic Studies Institute and an instructor at the United States Army War College. *Parade Magazine*, not to be accused of understatement, claimed that "in military circles" Colonel Summers was "the man of the hour," saying that "in the upper echelons of the Pentagon" his book, *On Strategy*, "is considered 'must reading.'"^[3] Rarely has a military intellectual received such widespread publicity, and no one engaged in the study of the Vietnam conflict can ignore his critique of American wartime strategy.

Summers has presented his argument in a variety of published works.^[4] According to Summers, Americans were misled by "the fashionable new model of Communist revolutionary war."^[5] The work of such "counterinsurgency experts" as Sir Robert Thompson "channeled our attentions toward the internal affairs of the South Vietnamese government rather than toward the external threat" posed by the regular military forces of the Democratic Republic of Vietnam (DRV).^[6] In addition to misperceiving the conflict as a revolutionary war, American leaders also failed to establish clear objectives to guide their country's military commanders in Vietnam. As a result of these errors in strategic analysis, American military forces in Southeast Asia engaged in "faulty military operations in the field."^[7] Failing to identify the true center of gravity in the war, the Americans used the bulk of their power to attack a "secondary enemy," the Viet Cong guerrillas, leaving the enemy's real power untouched. Summers claimed that the guerrilla war in South Vietnam was a diversion. The significant Communist threat was the army of the DRV, particularly the units of that army held in strategic reserve north of the 17th parallel. Victory came for the DRV in 1975 when those regulars moved south to mount a successful conventional attack on the Republic of Vietnam (RVN).

Colonel Summers has argued his case persuasively, and his innovative use of Clausewitz to analyze the war in Vietnam broadens our understanding of the conflict. Unfortunately, two of the basic premises underlying his argument appear to be flawed. First, considerable evidence supports the conclusion that the conflict in Vietnam was always a revolutionary civil war and never a conventional one. Second, a survey of the internal documents produced by the United States government demonstrates that the American objective in Vietnam was much clearer than Summers would have one believe. One must thus look elsewhere for an explanation of the faulty military operations that took place there.

According to Clausewitz, "the first, the supreme, the most far-reaching act of judgement that the statesman and commander have to make is to establish . . . the kind of war on which they are embarking; neither mistaking it for, nor trying to turn it into, something that is alien to its nature." Determining the nature of a conflict is thus "the first of all strategic questions and the most comprehensive."^[8] Using these injunctions of Clausewitz as the starting point for his own argument, Colonel Summers asserted that the Vietnam War was not a revolutionary one. "If we apply the theoretical truths of revolutionary war to the actual events of the Vietnam war," wrote Summers, "we find that they do not fit. The Viet Cong did not achieve decisive results on their own."^[9] He presented the view that the DRV achieved victory in 1975 by a conventional attack on the forces of the RVN as evidence that the revolutionary war model was an improper one. In reality, however, what many Americans call the "conventional" outcome of the war in Vietnam was anticipated in the major writing of both Asian theorists of revolutionary war and Western "counterinsurgency experts." The fit between "actual events" and the "theoretical truths" was really very close.

Mao Zedong, Vo Nguyen Giap, and Truong Chinh all commented upon the need for revolutionaries to move from guerrilla to mobile warfare, and they also identified mobile or conventional warfare as

the more important and necessary element for success. Mao, for example, wrote that regular forces were of "primary importance" and mobile warfare "essential." He called guerrilla warfare "supplementary" because it could not "shoulder the main responsibility in deciding the outcome."^[10] In 1961, Giap had noted the progression in the Vietnamese "Resistance War" from guerrilla warfare to "mobile warfare combined with partial entrenched camp warfare," and his compatriot Troung Ching had written even earlier that in the final stage of revolutionary conflict "positional warfare" would play "a paramount role."^[11] In theoretical terms, the conventional attacks by DRV regulars in 1975 represented the revolution moving into its "final stage."^[12] According to Thompson, the defeat of government force by "*the regular forces of the insurgents . . . in conventional battle*" constituted "a classical ending in accordance with the orthodox theory."^[13] Summers erred in concluding that the conventional DRV offensive in 1975 demonstrated the inapplicability of the revolutionary war paradigm to the Vietnam War. Revolutionary war theory never implied that the Viet Cong guerrillas would "achieve decisive results on their own."

More important than evidence of the close fit between revolutionary war theory and the war's end in a conventional military attack is the revolutionary nature of Communist goals in Vietnam and their consistency. "The aim," as General Giap so cogently summarized it in 1961, "was to realize the political goals of the national democratic revolution as in China, to recover national independence and bring land to the peasants, creating conditions for the advance of the revolution of our country to socialism."^[14] Most important, the goals were to be achieved throughout the entire area of Vietnam, not only in the North, and Communist leadership of the Vietnamese revolution consistently sought the overthrow of any government standing in their way: the French, Ngo Dinh Diem, the American supported regimes that followed him.

From Ho Chi Minh's 1946 assurance that he considered the people of Nam Bo "citizens of Viet Nam" to the Vietnamese Workers Party call to "advance to the peaceful reunification of the Fatherland" in 1973,^[15] the Communist leaders in Vietnam neither swayed from their commitment to unification nor effectively hid that commitment. One thus wonders how non-Communist leaders of the National Liberation Front (NLF) such as Troung Nhu Tang could have believed they "were working for Southern self-determination and independence--from Hanoi as well as from Washington," as Summers assumed.^[16] The ten-point program of the NLF, distributed throughout the world in February 1961, called for "peaceful reunification of the fatherland," and the Communist dominated front reaffirmed its goal of a unified Vietnam in subsequent statements. On March 22, 1965, for example, it spoke of "national unification," in strong, unambiguous language: "Vietnam is one, the Vietnamese people are one, north and south are one." A very long statement of the NLF political program broadcast in September 1967 observed that "Vietnam must be reunified," calling reunification "the sacred aspiration of our entire people," and a 1969 statement called "unity" one of "the Vietnamese people's fundamental national rights."^[17] The NLF consistently spoke of self-determination for the South. The Communist commitment to a unified Vietnam could only have remained hidden from people such as Troung Nhu Tang because of their own naiveté, self-deception, or wishful thinking.

Similarly, if Americans were deceived as to the "true intentions" of Vietnam's Communist leaders, they too were primarily victims of their own, not Communist dissembling. As Wallace J. Thies observed, "DRV leaders such as Le Duan and Nguyen Chi Thanh were deeply and passionately committed to the goal of completing the revolution in South Vietnam. It was a goal they had been pursuing for virtually all of their adult lives."^[18] Pham Van Dong attempted to convey the importance of national unification to the United States when he met with Canadian diplomat Blair Seaborn in June 1964, using the French *drame* (signifying an intense unresolved crisis) in an attempt to capture the critical nature of such a "fundamental" issue.^[19]

Rather than viewing North Vietnam as a complete nation, Vietnamese Communists such as General Giap saw it as "a large rear echelon" of the army. It was "the revolutionary base for the whole

country," and it would eventually supply the forces necessary for its reunification.[20] American reports indicating the depth of the Communist commitment to a truly national revolution were ignored in the Johnson years,[21] but the truth of that commitment kept emerging. The special assessment of the situation in Vietnam prepared for President-elect Richard Nixon at the start of 1969 noted that "Hanoi's ultimate goal of a unified Vietnam under its control has not changed,"[22] nor would it change. Like Truong Nhu Tang, Americans have little excuse for their ignorance of the Vietnamese Communists' "true intentions."

The key to understanding the nature of a particular war lies not only in an analysis of the way in which it is fought, but also in a study of the people involved and their reasons for fighting. If, as Summers recognized, the First Indochina War "was a revolutionary war,"[23] then the claim that the Second Indochina War was not is illogical. The Communist goal was the same in both wars: *revolution*, the overthrow of whatever non-Communist government might exist in any part of Vietnam and its replacement by the Communist one headquartered in Hanoi. In the First Indochina War a Vietnamese movement (led by Ho Chi Minh) fought throughout Vietnam and elsewhere in Indochina to create an independent, unified, Communist state. Attempting to prevent the attainment of that goal were the French colonialists and their Vietnamese allies, some of whom hoped that they might eventually achieve independence under a non-Communist government. In the Second Indochina War, the parties on one side of the conflict had hardly changed at all.

After 1954 the movement led by Ho Chi Minh continued its attempt to achieve an independent Communist state in a united Vietnam, having failed to achieve that goal in the First Indochina War. The United States and its Vietnamese allies, grouped in the South, sought to contain the Communist revolution in the area north of the 17th parallel and create an independent, non-Communist state in the South. In Clausewitzian terms, the nature of the two wars was identical: a group seeking Communist revolutionary ends was fighting against a group trying to prevent the spread of the revolution.

The Communist goal in the Second Indochina War was clearly political, but the means used to implement it varied to fit the situation. Early in the conflict, when communist military power in the South was relatively meager, agitation, propaganda, and small guerrilla action predominated. As weakness appeared in the RVN, the Communists used infiltration from their northern base to strengthen their military capability south of the 17th parallel, moving more than once toward mobile warfare. Later, as the war became stalemated, there was a lull in the fighting after unsuccessful Communist offensives in 1968 and again in 1972, although Communist cadres continued their work to undermine the South Vietnamese government. Finally, with the RVN left unsupported by the United States, the Communists moved in for the kill in their final offensive, using everything available to them--what remained of their infrastructure in the South, guerrillas, and regular army units from the North.

Facing dedicated Communist guerrillas and cadres determined to overthrow them, the leaders of the non-Communist government in Saigon found themselves involved in a struggle for survival. To counter the Communist-led revolution, they had to build widespread support for their government, and that could not be done without pacifying the countryside. A conventional war response that would have contained the major elements of a Communist military power within the confines of the northern base was necessary, but alone it was not sufficient to secure the RVN. Behind whatever shield might have been created to protect it, the Saigon government would need to engage in effective pacification operations to prevent the internal collapse of the RVN. One cannot abandon the paradigm of revolutionary war without seriously distorting the nature of the conflict taking place in Vietnam.[24]

By the mid-1960s, however, many Americans, including Lyndon Johnson and his advisors, seemed to have abandoned the revolutionary war model. In a study of "Official Justifications for America's Role in Indochina," Professor Hugh M. Arnold found that the image of the United States engaged

in "a simple response to aggression" was "overwhelmingly the most important justification used during the Johnson Administration." According to Arnold, the Johnson government sought to make clear to the American people that the war "was not a civil war or an indigenous rebellion, but an attempt to take over a nation by force of arms."[\[25\]](#) This view of the war is basic to Summers' argument also, but the conflict in Vietnam was not a contest between two sovereign states.

After the August Revolution of 1945, the Viet Minh established their revolutionary government throughout Vietnam, although the combined action of the British and French, using Japanese forces in addition to their own, soon reestablished a French presence in the South. Nevertheless, as the Declaration of Independence of the DRV made clear, Ho Chi Minh saw himself and his government as representing "the entire people of Viet Nam," and that claim was confirmed by foreign observers at the time.[\[26\]](#) A year later, the Chief of the Division of Southeast Asian Affairs of the State Department, Abbot L. Moffat, affirmed the view that the DRV was a government for all Vietnam and not just the North.[\[27\]](#) The unity of Vietnam would be reasserted again and again throughout the war. From before the Geneva agreement, which stated clearly that the "military demarcation line" at the 17th parallel was "provisional and should not in any way be interpreted as constituting a political or territorial boundary," to after the Paris agreement of 1973, which reaffirmed that the parallel was "only provisional and not a political or territorial boundary," leaders of the DRV repeatedly claimed that there was only one, not two Vietnams. Initially that was also the view of the non-Communist leaders of the RVN.[\[28\]](#)

Believing a partitioned Vietnam to be preferable to an entirely Communist one, Americans and many of their Vietnamese allies soon came to view the 17th parallel as a border between two sovereign states. As a result, American leaders created an illusory picture of the war, portraying the conflict as the result of the aggression of one sovereign state against another. In reality, it was a civil war between two Vietnamese parties, both of whom had originally claimed sovereignty over all of Vietnam. Although the United States often envisioned a Korean-like solution to the Vietnam problem, it could not create two sovereign states in Vietnam by rhetoric alone. Until the Americans and their allies in the RVN forced the DRV to abandon its goal of creating a revolutionary Communist state in all Vietnam, the civil war would continue. From the Communist point of view, what Americans called North Vietnamese "aggression" was nothing more than the attempt to complete the process of unifying Vietnam under a revolutionary government begun at the end of World War II.

Since the Communist victory in 1975, a number of people have spoken of the conquest of South Vietnam by "North" Vietnamese,[\[29\]](#) but that too is a distortion. Leaders in the governments of both the RVN and the DRV came from all over Vietnam, not only from the region in which their capital resided. The Diem government, for example, contained many Catholics who had migrated from the North in 1954, and later Vice President Nguyen Cao Ky provided a highly visible "northern" presence in the Saigon government. More important, however, was the "southern" presence in the highest ranks of the DRV leadership. Le Duan, the First Secretary of the Central Committee of the Vietnamese Workers Party was born in Quang Tri, just south of the 17th parallel. Pham Van Dong, the Prime Minister of the DRV, was born in Quang Ngai. Pham Hung, a Vice-Premier of the DRV and member of the Political Bureau since the late 1950s, was from Vinh Long, and Ton Duc Thang, who succeeded Ho Chi Minh as President of the DRV, was born in the Mekong Delta. Nguyen Chi Thanh, the DRV military commander in the South until his death in 1967, was also a southerner. Such biographical information led one author to conclude that "in terms of the birthplace of opposing leaders, it is evident that the Second Indochina War was more of a civil war than was America's war of 1860-1865."[\[30\]](#) However much Americans would like to believe it, the war did not end with a conquest of the RVN by alien "northerners" alone. It ended when the non-Communist Saigon government was destroyed by forces of the revolutionary Communist government in Hanoi.

In a number of critiques of American strategy in Vietnam, one finds the statement that American objectives were not presented clearly. As evidence for that conclusion Summers cited "some 22 separate American rationales" categorized by Professor Arnold compared to "the *one* North Vietnamese objective of total control over all of Indochina." Summers also quoted General Douglas Kinnard's conclusion that "almost 70 percent of the generals who managed the war were uncertain of its objectives."^[31] The survey data reported by Kinnard, however, do not indicate so great a problem as Summers would have one believe. Although 35% of the respondents to Kinnard's questionnaire classified American objectives in Vietnam as "rather fuzzy," 29% found them to be "clear and understandable."^[32] The interpretation of the meaning of the statement "not as clear as they might have been," the response selected by 33%, is open to debate. To say that goals could be stated more clearly is not the same as saying one is "uncertain" regarding the objective.

The article by Professor Arnold is also not particularly supportive of the argument that American objectives were unclear. Although Arnold noted "22 separate rationales," he made clear that some of the "themes" he identified were "more concerned with means than ends." More important, a "rationale" is not necessarily an objective. One constant Arnold identified was "the Communism theme," stressed in both public and private contexts, "in every Administration, and in every year covered by this study." He concluded that "if one single reason for United States involvement in Indochina can be derived from the analysis, it would have to be the perceived threat of Communism."^[33] That is particularly true when one separates statements that deal with the American objective in Vietnam from those which attempt to rationalize or explain that objective.

One sees the clarity of American objectives in the similarity of official statements made during different administrations at widely varying times during the war. In 1948, for example, the September 27 statement on Indochina by the Department of State presented the "long-term" objective of "a self-governing nationalist state which will be friendly to the United States and which, commensurate with the capacity of the peoples involved, will be patterned upon our conception of a democratic state as opposed to the totalitarian state which would evolve inevitably from Communist domination."^[34] In 1951, the American goal for "the nations and peoples of Asia," as outlined in a May 17 annex to NSC 28/4, remained the same: "stable and self-sustaining non-Communist governments, oriented toward the United States."^[35] A decade later, as the United States became more involved in the Vietnamese situation, statements of the United States objective remained unchanged: "to prevent Communist domination of South Vietnam; to create in that country a viable and increasingly democratic society."^[36] By 1964, with an even greater American commitment, the statement of goals had not altered; the United States still sought "an independent non-Communist South Vietnam."^[37] Such statements, made throughout the war by the people involved with setting policy, should leave no doubt that any ignorance of the American goal in Vietnam did not result from a failure to set clear objectives.

As evidence of a lack of clarity in American policy, Summers observed that "when Secretary of Defense Clark Clifford took office in 1968, he complained that no one in the Defense Department could tell him what constituted victory."^[38] In fact, in the source cited by Summers, Clifford made no such claim. What he did say was that he was startled "to find out that we had no military plan to win the war."^[39] The difference is not unimportant. American leaders knew what would constitute victory--forcing the leaders of the DRV to accept the existence of "an independent non-Communist South Vietnam"--the problem was how to achieve that goal.

Clifford himself was even exaggerating when he stated that the United States lacked a plan to "win the war," as seen by his own summary of the Pentagon's answers to his questions. Clifford was told that "the enemy will ultimately be worn down so severely by attrition that the enemy will eventually capitulate,"^[40] a view that had been prevalent at least since 1965, when Secretary of Defense Robert McNamara reported to President Johnson on his conversations in Honolulu with Ambassador Taylor, General Wheeler, Admiral Sharp, and General Westmoreland. "Their strategy for 'victory,' over time," said McNamara, "is to break the will of the DRV/VC by denying them

victory."^[41] Clifford was not really reacting to the absence of a plan, but to what he perceived to be its inadequacies. Since the war, the dissection of those inadequacies and the search for better alternatives has been an important focus of many works, but one should not make the mistake of assuming that flaws in execution resulted from an absence of clear goals.

"Because we failed to correctly identify the nature of the war," argued Summers, "we also failed to identify the center of gravity." Seeing the conflict as a revolutionary war, Americans "saw the Viet Cong as the center of gravity" and "massed against this guerrilla enemy in search-and-destroy and pacification efforts." As a result, "our concentration on a secondary enemy frittered away our military resources on inconclusive military and social operations that ultimately exhausted the patience of the American people."^[42] Critics of the American approach to the war who take what may be termed a counterinsurgency view would disagree. They have argued that the response of General Westmoreland and other military leaders was not the proper one for a revolutionary war. They have been particularly critical of the military deemphasis of pacification, relegating it to the category of "the other war" and engaging in counterproductive search-and-destroy operations instead. If the critics are correct, then a number of the faulty operations Summers and others deplore could not possibly have resulted from the military becoming overly involved in a campaign of counterinsurgency.^[43]

Actually two vital centers existed. One was the Viet Cong guerrillas and Communist cadres in the South; the other was the Communist military power in the North. Success in attacking one would not assure the destruction of the other, and either could prevent the United States from achieving its goal. In the early 1960s, for example, the revolutionaries in the South had achieved considerable success without a high level of material aid from the North. In fact, the Communists might well have achieved their aim without moving from guerrilla war to regular mobile warfare had it not been for the significant increase in American aid to the RVN. Although Summers was correct to argue that pacification and the fight against the Viet Cong guerrillas were tasks that properly belonged to the South Vietnamese, the situation in the 1960s was such that the job could not be done without considerable help from the United States. The evidence that the RVN approached the point of collapse more than once before the commitment of DRV regulars to the war highlights the importance of the American contribution to pacification and nation-building. Without these efforts, the RVN might have fallen into Communist hands much earlier.

By the 1970s the situation had changed. Then, despite some progress in pacification and the virtual destruction of Viet Cong military power in 1968 and after, the government of South Vietnam was still challenged by the Communist military forces in North Vietnam. Containment of North Vietnamese military power, if not its outright destruction, was thus also necessary, and Summers was correct when he identified that mission as a logical one for the American forces in the region. Neutralization of the Communists' regular forces and their will to use them to force the unification of Vietnam was essential if the American objective was to be achieved, but nothing in the revolutionary civil war model or the frequently stated American objective of establishing a secure non-Communist state in South Vietnam precluded the acceptance of the strategy advocated by Summers. Instead, it was prevented by the President's desire to keep the war limited, a desire shared by many other Americans during the course of the war.

Although Clausewitz believed that "no matter what the central feature of the enemy's power may be . . . the defeat and destruction of his fighting force remains the best way to begin," he also recognized that in a civil conflict such as that in Vietnam the center of gravity might not be the enemy's military forces, but "the personalities of the leaders and public opinion."^[44] In the RVN, the crucial element, in addition to the Viet Cong guerrillas, was the population at large, and of particular importance were the people in a position to give support and shelter to the guerrillas. Also important were the non-Communists in the NLF and other opposition groups. Detaching them from the Communists was essential if the RVN was to emerge as a viable and secure state, and the pacification program was crucial to that end. No strictly military approach would suffice.

The will of the Communists throughout Vietnam was very strong, although a majority of the generals surveyed by General Kinnard admitted that it was "not sufficiently considered" by the Americans.[45] In retrospect, knowing the tremendous casualties taken by the Communists in the course of their resistance since 1945, one cannot even assume that the destruction of the DRV's conventional military power would have ended the war. The history of conflict in Indochina and the continuation of the fighting long after the United States withdrawal indicates that the physical conquest of the DRV base in the North might have been needed to destroy the Communist will to continue the war. From the perspective of many Americans, Communist determination in the face of such high costs may appear irrational, but people throughout the world, particularly revolutionaries, have demonstrated a capacity for such fanatical behavior too frequently for it to be ignored.

During and after the war, a number of people have argued against the limitations placed on the use of American forces in Vietnam, chiding civilian leaders for having taken counsel of their fears. Particularly committed to this point of view are members of the U. S. Air Force, and one Air Force officer, Colonel Alan Gropman, has argued that the war in Vietnam "need not have been a defeat at all." American objectives in Vietnam could have been achieved, said Gropman, had the United States used its air power, the "major unplayed trump card." [46] He also argued that the United States leaders never sought "more than a stalemate." [47] Such a statement, however, provides evidence that Gropman and his Air Force colleagues still do not understand the nature of the war in Vietnam.

The war was a limited conflict in which American leaders did not wish to run the risks of a larger war inherent in a more forceful use of air power. As General Kinnard noted in his survey, the desire to limit the use of American power to avoid widening the conflict to include China, the Soviet Union, or both was one specific objective that the United States achieved.[48] Although Colonel Gropman recognized that fear of a wider war led to the limitations he deplored, he refused to recognize the wisdom of those fears. Instead he argued that the fears "should have been dissolved by the lack of Chinese or Soviet overt moves during times of relatively intense bombing activity." [49] It is possible, however, that the Soviet and Chinese limitations he noted were themselves a result of restraint on the part of the United States

The critics provide no specific evidence that in the mid-1960s the limitations they deplore were unnecessary, while the Chinese commitment of some 30-50,000 "support troops" to the aid of the DRV after 1965 provides some evidence of the wisdom of the decision to limit the American response in Indochina.[50]

If Colonel Gropman and those who make similar arguments had been wrong about the Chinese and/or Soviet response, what then? Their apologies to the American people for involving the nation in a wider war would have provided little consolation. Even in retrospect, the worst case planning that led to caution instead of more extensive bombing would seem to be wise in a nuclear world in which miscalculation could mean the end of civilization as we know it. Gropman dismissed the well-based fears of American leaders and the high risks of his bombing strategy too lightly. Nothing was at stake in Vietnam that sanctioned the risk of World War III. To pretend that bombing on a large scale in the 1960s could have won the war in Vietnam for the United States one must ignore the probable Chinese response. It is also not a valid historical argument to claim that the level of bombing possible in the 1970s would have been equally possible five or six years earlier.

Judging the degree of risk inherent in any strategy after the fact is difficult, and one cannot know with certainty how China or the Soviet Union might have reacted in the 1960s to such forceful actions as the Linebacker bombing campaigns or the Cambodian incursion. In the 1950s and '60s, when American leaders, including some military leaders, asked themselves whether the potential risks of a less restricted war were worth the possible gains in Vietnam, they invariably answered no. Only after the international environment had changed significantly did the answer to the question also change. The diplomatic world in which Richard Nixon functioned appeared very different from

that facing Eisenhower, Kennedy, and Johnson. In a nuclear world, caution is an important survival mechanism, and critics should think twice before advocating that American leaders act more boldly.

Just as Colonel Gropman and some other Air Force officers still believe that the war could have been won by their branch had it been free to use all its power, some army officers have claimed that their branch also left Vietnam unsullied. But the myth of American military success has been challenged recently in two important ways.

Edward Luttwak, in *The Pentagon and the Art of War* argued in 1984 that the United States military in Vietnam was, among other things, incredibly inefficient. What he called "bureaucratic deformation" was responsible for reducing "the true number of combat troops in the country to a fraction of the ostensible troop level." As he noted, "at the end of 1968, with 536,000 American servicemen in South Vietnam, fewer than 80,000 served in infantry battalions, and the rest of all American troops in close-combat--the Army's Air Cavalry flight crew and airborne troops, the Marines, Special Forces, and more--would not double that number."[\[51\]](#) No matter how generously one defines combat, the number of troops in the army's supporting tail always outnumbered those actually doing the fighting.

Luttwak chided the military for "the self-indulgence that allowed the many desk-bound officers who found employment in the war zone, though far from combat, to live in surprising comfort, even outright luxury . . . Personal staffs of aides, valets, drivers, and assorted flunkies became notoriously large." The impact on the morale of the combat soldiers was "devastating."[\[52\]](#) Luttwak described what he termed "the officers' highly visible misconduct," viewing it as "the breakdown of elementary professional craft," a failure of leadership in the extreme.[\[53\]](#)

Luttwak, however, argued that "all this was trivial compared with the tactical self-indulgence that became routine: the jet fighter bombing raids against flimsy huts that might contain a handful of guerrillas or perhaps none; the fair-sized artillery barrages that silenced lone snipers"--in sum, the self-indulgence of a "grossly disproportionate use of firepower" that "became the very theme of the war."[\[54\]](#) At its peak, (1966-1971) the helicopter gunships of the army were flying almost 4,000 attack sorties a day. Such lavish use of firepower was "the most visible symptom of the inability of the American military institution to formulate a coherent strategy that would focus and control the means of war. No failure of military competence could be more complete."[\[55\]](#)

Tragically, many individuals in the American military seemed to learn very little from the disaster in Vietnam. Instead of acknowledging failure, many people have placed the blame for the nation's failure upon civilian leaders, antiwar protesters, journalists--anyone but the leaders of the military themselves. But civilian leaders, protesters, and journalists did not tell the military services how to use the power allotted to them within the limitations set down. The mistakes made in that arena were the mistakes of the military alone, and officers such as Gropman and Summers were engaged in myth-making of the worst kind when they attempted to obscure the military responsibility for the outcome in Vietnam. As Luttwak observed, "it was not the civilians who willed the hundreds of daily sorties of the fighter-bombers and the almost 4 million helicopter-gunship sorties of 1966-1971."[\[56\]](#)

Given the willingness of military leaders to fight a limited war in Vietnam rather than resign, despite their misgivings, the important question remains a military one. *Within the limitations set down*, what strategy was best to achieve the goal of destroying the enemy's will? Many authors have joined in a condemnation of the choices made during the war. In particular they have objected to controlled escalation, limited bombing of the North, counterinsurgency and a war of attrition in the South. But the course of action often suggested, using American military power to isolate the Communist base above the 17th parallel, was not really possible within the context of the specific limitations set down by civilian leaders in Washington. Without a change of parameters, the approach advocated did not represent an alternative to the flawed operations that took place.

The supreme irony of the war in Vietnam may be that despite all of the flaws in the American approach noted by a wide variety of critics, by 1969 the United States and the RVN were as well positioned to attain their objectives as they had ever been. The forces of the United States and its allies had found and destroyed thousands of Communist troops, both guerrillas and regulars, and the reorganized pacification program appeared to be making progress in the countryside. The leaders of the RVN may not have won the hearts and minds of the populace, but Communist progress in that endeavor had been slowed or stopped. As American aid improved the economic situation in the countryside, the tolerance of people for the Saigon government also increased. Thus, even after all of the perceived failures of American policy and strategy in Vietnam, the war was not lost prior to 1973, nor was it being lost, except in the crucial American center of gravity, popular opinion. In the United States, on mainstreet and on Capitol Hill, ending the war had become more important than winning it.

Although many critics have deemed the American approach to the war strategically bankrupt, by 1968 the Communists had adopted essentially the same approach: to keep fighting until the enemy became frustrated and quit. The critical difference was that the American plan failed while that of the enemy succeeded. The United States hurt the Communists, but not enough. In material terms the Communists damaged the United States far less. More important was the psychological and political damage done by astute Communist propaganda, American errors in applying force (particularly the highly visible reliance on firepower in the South), and specific events such as the Tet offensive. American will proved insufficient to sustain the nation in a protracted war. But the problem was not a faulty perception of the war's nature or unclear objectives. In fact, the major problem may not even have been flawed operations, given the absence in the United States of the kind of commitment to the war that sustained the Communists.

The final outcome of the war was primarily the result of historical events outside the realm of strategic thinking. In the United States the antiwar movement created sufficient turmoil that the functioning of government was altered if not impaired, and the Watergate scandal, which must be seen as a war-related event to be understood fully, created an environment that doomed the President's Vietnam policy to failure.^[57] Political weakness in the face of an assertive Congress and a population grown tired of the war prevented Richard Nixon from implementing a program for the protection of Vietnam based on the use of American firepower instead of manpower. The impact of Watergate could not be calculated in advance, but in the end it was decisive. Although clearly in the realm of speculation, the argument that, without Watergate, President Nixon might have successfully defended the RVN through the continued use of American air power and aid cannot be easily dismissed.

The possibility that without Watergate the United States might have muddled through to a more favorable outcome in Vietnam should not prevent one from subjecting the wartime strategy to searching criticism. The revisionist critique represented by the work of Summers and others has found a wide audience, but it does not provide an adequate model for future action. By stressing the need for a conventional military response, it diverts attention from the importance of the unconventional elements that remain primary in revolutionary struggles such as that in Vietnam. In the RVN, the problems of pacification and national development would have remained even if the United States had succeeded in containing the regular forces of the DRV above the 17th parallel. If those problems went unresolved, then internal collapse behind the American shield would have prevented the attainment of the United States' objective of creating a secure, non-Communist state in South Vietnam. At the very least, as happened more than once in the war, the threat of a collapse in the American rear would necessitate further American commitment and prolong the war, heightening the risk of a collapse of American will.

Any analysis that denies the important revolutionary dimension of the Vietnam conflict is misleading, leaving the American people, their leaders, and their military professionals inadequately prepared to deal with similar situations arising in the future. The argument that faulty strategic

assessment and poorly articulated goals doomed the American military to faulty operations in Vietnam only encourages military officers to avoid the kind of full-scale reassessment that failures such as that in Southeast Asia ought to stimulate. Instead of forcing the military to come to grips with the problems of revolutionary warfare in nations such as Guatemala or Peru, the revisionist views of Summers and others led officers back into the conventional war model that had provided so little preparation for solving the problems faced in Indochina by the French, the Americans, and their Vietnamese allies. Such a business-as-usual approach is much too complacent in a world plagued by irregular warfare.

When Fox Butterfield surveyed the authors of the "new" Vietnam scholarship he implied that somehow they had managed to place themselves above the battle and were engaged in a truly objective analysis of the war. Building upon Butterfield's work, Summers implied that his contribution to scholarship is closer to the truth than previous accounts "written in the heat of passion which too often mirror the prejudices of the times."^[58] One should be wary, however, of any author's claim to objectivity. Although Summers' analysis may lack passion, it was certainly what many people in the army and the nation wanted to hear. With the responsibility for failure in Vietnam placed squarely on "academic counterinsurgency experts" and overly timid leaders in Washington, significant military errors become a function of strategic or perceptual errors made at a higher, usually civilian level. In short, the military was absolved of virtually all responsibility for failure. A different analytical framework would make such a shirking of responsibility much more difficult, and readers should be wary of any military or other insider whose seemingly objective scholarship fits so well with what many other members of the military or the government want to hear.

[1] John M. Gates, "Vietnam: The Debate Goes On," *Parameters*, 14 (1984),43-56.

[2] Fox Butterfield, "The New Vietnam Scholarship," *The New York Times Magazine* (February 13, 1983), 26-27.

[3] "Man of the Hour," *Parade Magazine* (August 14, 1983), 9.

[4] Harry G. Summers, Jr., "A Strategic Perception of the Vietnam War," *Parameters*, 13 (June 1983), 41-46 contains an excellent summary of Summers' argument, as does "Vietnam Reconsidered," *The New Republic* (July 12, 1982), 25-31. A more extensive and detailed presentation is contained in Summers' book *On Strategy: A Critical Analysis of the Vietnam War* (Novato, Calif., 1982).

[5] "Vietnam Reconsidered," 25.

[6] "A Strategic Perception of the Vietnam War," 42.

[7] *Ibid.*, 44.

[8] Carl von Clausewitz, *On War*, ed. and trans. by Michael Howard and Peter Paret (Princeton, 1976), 88-89.

[9] "A Strategic Perception of the Vietnam War," 42.

[10] *Mao Tse-Tung on Guerrilla Warfare*, Trans. by Samuel B. Griffith (New York, 1961), 56 and 113; *Mao Tse-Tung on Revolution and War*, ed. by M. Rejai (New York 1970), 288.

[11] Vo Nguyen Giap, *People's War, People's Army* (New York, 1962), 103-104; Troung Chinh, *The Resistance Will Win in Primer for Revolt* (New York, 1963), 116.

[12] Van Tien Dung, *Our Great Spring Victory*, trans. by John Spragens, Jr. (New York, 1977), 12.

[13] Sir Robert Thompson, *Revolutionary War in World Strategy, 1945-1969* (New York, 1970), 11. Italics in original. By the time of Saigon's fall, however, Thompson appeared to have changed his mind. See the quotation from Thompson at the beginning of the next chapter. For an overview of revolutionary war strategy and a summary of its strategic phases including mobile warfare see John J. McCuen, *The Art of Counter-Revolutionary War* (Harrisburg, 1966), ch. 2, 37-44 in particular.

[14] *People's War, People's Army*, 69.

[15] "Letter from Ho Chi Minh to Compatriots in Nam Bo, May 31, 1946" in Gareth Porter, ed., *Vietnam: A History in Documents* (New York, 1981), 45 and extract of article in *Hoc Tap* (April 1973) in Gareth Porter, ed., *Vietnam: The Definitive History of Human Decisions* (New York, 1979), 626.

[16] Troung Nhu Tang, "The Myth of a Liberation," *New York Review of Books* (October 21, 1982), 32.

[17] The 1961, '65 and '67 statements are from "NFLSV Position Statements" in Part VI B, Negotiations 1965-1967, *United States-Vietnam Relations, 1945-1967*, Book 12 (Washington, 1971), 189, 197, and 233. The 1969 statement is from Appendix 17 of George McTurnan Kahin and John W. Lewis, *The United States in Vietnam* (revised ed., New York, 1969), 513.

[18] Wallace J. Thies, *When Governments Collide: Coercion and Diplomacy in the Vietnam Conflict, 1964-1968* (Berkeley, 1980), 400.

[19] George C. Herring, ed., *The Secret Diplomacy of the Vietnam War: The Negotiating Volumes of the Pentagon Papers* (Austin, 1983), 31.

[20] *The Senator Gravel Edition: The Pentagon Papers* (Boston, 1971), I, 264.

[21] Thies, *When Governments Collide*, 418.

[22] *Congressional Record* (May 1, 1972), 16751.

[23] "Vietnam Reconsidered," 26. Italics in original.

[24] Harry G. Summers, Jr., "An *On Strategy* Rejoinder," *Air University Review*, 34 (July-August 1983), 93, indicates that the author did not "intend to imply that counterinsurgency tasks like pacification and nation-building were unimportant." Unfortunately the structure, style and force of his argument lead readers to that erroneous conclusion despite his professed intentions.

[25] Hugh M. Arnold, "Official Justifications for America's Role in Indochina, 1949-1967," *Asian Affairs: An American Review*, 3 (September-October 1975), 42.

[26] Porter, ed., *Vietnam: A History in Documents*, 30 and 34-35. See also, Harold R. Isaacs, *No Peace for Asia* (New York, 1947), ch. 6.

[27] Porter, ed., *Vietnam: A History in Documents*, 47.

[28] A copy of the Geneva agreement is in *Ibid.*, 160. For the 1973 Paris agreement see Gareth Porter, *A Peace Denied: The United States, Vietnam, and the Paris Agreement* (Bloomington, 1975), 322. RVN views appear in Porter, ed., *Vietnam: The Definitive Documentation of Human Decisions*, I, 581 and 656.

[29] See, for example, Summers, "Vietnam Reconsidered," 26.

- [30] James Pickney Harrison, *The Endless War: Fifty Years of Struggle in Vietnam* (New York, 1982), 30.
- [31] "A Strategic Perception of the Vietnam War," 44.
- [32] Douglas Kinnard, *The War Managers* (Hanover, New Hampshire, 1977), 169.
- [33] Arnold, "Official Justifications for America's Role in Indochina," 48.
- [34] Porter, ed., *Vietnam: A History in Documents*, 73.
- [35] *Ibid.*, 105.
- [36] *The Senator Gravel Edition: The Pentagon Papers*, II, 642.
- [37] *Ibid.*, 412.
- [38] "A Strategic Perception of the Vietnam War," 44.
- [39] Michael Maclear, *The Ten Thousand Day War--Vietnam: 1945-1975* (New York, 1981), 216.
- [40] *Ibid.*
- [41] Porter, ed., *Vietnam: A History in Documents*, 310.
- [42] "A Strategic Perception of the Vietnam War," 44-45.
- [43] Richard A. Hunt and Richard H. Shultz, Jr., eds., *Lessons from an Unconventional War: Reassessing U.S. Strategies for Future Conflicts* (New York, 1982) makes clear that the American approach in Vietnam was not in harmony with counterinsurgency theory. See also Douglas S. Blaufarb, *The Counterinsurgency Era: U.S. Doctrine and Performance, 1950 to the Present* (New York, 1977), 288 in particular. For a survey of the debate between "The Counterinsurgency School" and "The Hawks" see George C. Herring, "American Strategy in Vietnam: The Postwar Debate," *Military Affairs*, 45 (April 1982), 57-63.
- [44] Clausewitz, *On War*, 596.
- [45] Kinnard, *The War Managers*, 172.
- [46] Alan L. Gropman, "The Air War in Vietnam, 1961-1973" (Paper given at the annual meeting of the Southeast Conference Association for Asian Studies, Raleigh, 1986).
- [47] *Ibid.*, 3.
- [48] Kinnard, *The War Managers*, 161.
- [49] Gropman, "The Air War in Vietnam," 5.
- [50] *The Senator Gravel Edition: The Pentagon Papers*, IV, 231.
- [51] Edward N. Luttwak, *The Pentagon and the Art of War* (New York, 1985), 32
- [52] *Ibid.*, 33.
- [53] *Ibid.*, 34.
- [54] *Ibid.*, 36.

[55] Ibid., 38.

[56] Ibid., 41.

[57] Seymour M. Hersh, *The Price of Power: Kissinger in the Nixon White House* (New York, 1983), 130, 195, and 637-638. See also P. Edward Haley, *Congress and the Fall of South Vietnam and Cambodia* (Rutherford, New Jersey, 1982).

[58] "A Strategic Perception of the Vietnam War," 45.

CHAPTER EIGHT

PEOPLES WAR IN VIETNAM

Perhaps because I thought Timothy J. Lomperis had made some of the same errors I had found in the work of Colonel Harry Summers, I reacted rather strongly to Lomperis' 1988 article in *Parameters*.^[1] Unfortunately, the editor of that journal did not look as favorably upon my submission as his predecessor had upon my response to Summers. Seeing what I believed to be an erroneous analysis of the Vietnam War becoming so widely accepted was too disturbing for me to give up in my attempt to present what I believed to be a more accurate alternative interpretation. Although he rejected my manuscript, the editor at *Parameters* made a number of helpful suggestions, and a revised version of my paper appeared in *The Journal of Military History* in 1990.

The argument below elaborates upon a number of points treated in a cursory manner in the previous chapter. I believe that the two chapters taken together undermine the widely held view, evident in the quotations below, that the conflict in Vietnam was a war of aggression rather than a revolutionary civil war.

* * * * *

. . . the war in Vietnam was not a true insurgency but a thinly disguised aggression --Norman B. Hannah, 1975.

However the conflict began decades earlier, it has not ended as a bonafide civil war --Colonel Robert D. Heinl, 1975.

It was not . . . a victory for people's revolutionary war but a straight forward conventional invasion and conquest --Sir Robert Thompson, 1975.

There is great irony in the fact that the North Vietnamese finally won by purely conventional means, using precisely the kind of warfare at which the American army was best equipped to fight --W. Scott Thompson & Colonel Donaldson D. Frizzell, 1977.

There are still those who would attempt to fit it into the revolutionary war mold and who blame our defeat on our failure to implement counterinsurgency doctrine. This point of view requires an acceptance of the North Vietnamese contention that the war was a civil war, and that the North Vietnamese regular forces were an extension of the guerrilla effort, a point of view not borne out by the facts --Colonel Harry G. Summers, Jr., 1982.

In Vietnam, the guerrillas largely disappeared after they rose to mount a conventional attack, and the war then had to be won by the communists in conventional, almost American, terms --Timothy J. Lomperis, 1988.

The argument that in Vietnam the communists, often seen as "North" Vietnamese, triumphed in 1975 using "a conventional-war strategy" rather than engaging in a successful people's or revolutionary war is obviously not a new one, and it may even represent the predominant view of the war among senior American military officers and government officials. At first glance the argument appears to be quite reasonable, buttressed by the credentials of the people making it, and it has great appeal to readers who may want to avoid interpretations implying that the United States lost the war in Vietnam because of its inability to combat a communist insurgency.^[2]

In 1975 American TV viewers saw the tanks of communist regular forces moving through the streets of Saigon and into the grounds of the Presidential Palace, a scene that has been rerun numerous times since its original filming. The powerful image of that particular footage, more reminiscent of World War II than the combat in Vietnam during the 1960s, lends support to the argument that people's war failed and that the war ended in a purely conventional attack. Also supporting such a view is the evidence, not widely recognized in the United States at the time, that local communist forces in South Vietnam were devastated during the 1968 Tet Offensive. Data gathered in the last years of the war indicated that many Vietnamese, particularly in the South, were tired of war, and even the communists noticed that enthusiasm for their cause was waning. It is thus no surprise that with the passage of time the proposition that people's war failed in Vietnam and was replaced by a more successful conventional-war strategy has gained widespread acceptance.

One should be wary, however, of any argument that fits so well with the long-standing conventional war bias of the American military or the individual desires of people who served in Vietnam or supported the American involvement to believe that the United States was not defeated there. As persuasive and comforting as arguments about the failure of people's war, the conquest of South Vietnam by the North Vietnamese, or the communist adoption of a conventional-war strategy may seem, they should be viewed with great skepticism, for they are often rooted in serious conceptual errors.

The war in Vietnam was not a war of aggression by the North against the South, nor was it ever a purely conventional war. From start to finish, the Vietnam War was a people's war, and the communists won because they had, as one American general who served in Vietnam observed, "a coherent, long-term, and brilliant grand strategy--the strategy of revolutionary war."[\[3\]](#)

In arguing the case that the war in Vietnam was primarily a conventional conflict, a number of authors have equated people's war with guerrilla warfare. They maintain that the inability of the communists to overthrow the Saigon government using guerrillas alone and the use of large numbers of regular troops in the final offensive of 1975 proves either the speciousness of the communist claim to have been fighting a people's war or the complete failure of people's war with the 1968 Tet Offensive. To understand people's war, however, one must view the phenomenon through the eyes of its practitioners, and the writings of well known Vietnamese revolutionaries indicate clearly that the use of guerrillas was never the principal feature of the communist approach.

In Vietnamese communist writing, people's war is defined in terms of its participants and its goals, as well as its strategies and tactics. General Vo Nguyen Giap described it as "essentially *a peasant's war under the leadership of the working class*," a view present also in the writing of Truong Chinh, another important leader of the Vietnamese communist movement.[\[4\]](#) Leadership resided in the communist party organization, as the representative of the working class, but the goal of mobilization was to create "a firm and wide national united front based on the worker-peasant alliance."[\[5\]](#)

For the Vietnamese communists, the political dimensions of people's war were particularly significant. Giap claimed that in fighting against the French, "the agrarian policy of the Party played a determining role," and he referred to the importance of building "political forces" again in a 1967 discussion of the war in the South.[\[6\]](#) Truong Chinh maintained that "military action can only succeed when politics are correct," adding that "conversely, politics cannot be fulfilled without the success of military action."[\[7\]](#) In their theoretical and historical writings, the Vietnamese communists placed such importance on the coordination of the military and political dimensions of people's war that Giap called it "a law of the revolutionary struggle in our country."[\[8\]](#)

As described by the communists, the process of people's war was always far more comprehensive than interpretations emphasizing guerrilla warfare acknowledge. Truong Chinh wrote of resistance that "must be carried out in every field: military, economic, political and cultural," and Giap observed that "the fight against the enemy on all fronts--military, political, cultural, diplomatic, and

so forth--is waged at the same time."^[9] In his description of the people's war against the French, Giap noted that "parallel with the fight against the enemy, . . . our Party implemented positive lines of action in every aspect, did its utmost to mobilise, educate and organize the masses, to increase production, practice economy, and build local armed and semi-armed forces."^[10] To focus solely on the military elements of people's war is to miss the essential comprehensiveness of the approach.

Even when writing about the strictly military aspects of people's war the communists presented a picture of the phenomenon that is totally at odds with a fixation on guerrilla warfare. If any single strategic element predominated in the Vietnamese conception of people's war, it was protraction rather than the use of guerrillas. Ho Chi Minh observed in 1950 that "in military affairs time is of prime importance," and he ranked it "first among the three factors for victory, before the terrain conditions and the people's support."^[11] Writing of "the imperatives of the people's war in Viet Nam" in 1961, General Giap placed "the *strategy of a long-term war*" first on his list, and earlier, during the war against the French, Truong Chinh observed that "*the guiding principle of the strategy of our whole resistance must be to prolong the war.*"^[12] As the latter told his compatriots, "only by wearing the enemy down, can we fulfill the strategic tasks of launching the general counter-offensive, annihilating the enemy and winning final victory."^[13] Giap presented a similar view two decades later when he noted that "protracted resistance is an essential strategy of a people . . . determined to defeat an enemy and aggressor having large and well-armed forces."^[14]

Militarily, guerrilla warfare was only one element in a comprehensive approach, and the Vietnamese practitioners of people's war never viewed it as decisive. Giap noted that the war against the French had "several phases." Guerrilla warfare was important, "especially at the outset," but with time "guerrilla warfare changed into mobile warfare." The communist military effort "passed from the stage of combats involving a section or company, to fairly large-scale campaigns bringing into action several divisions."^[15] Giap saw the move from guerrilla war to mobile warfare as necessary "to annihilate big enemy manpower and liberate land," and he claimed that "to keep itself in life and develop, guerrilla warfare has necessarily to develop into mobile warfare." For him that progression was nothing less than "a general law."^[16] Truong Chinh portrayed people's war in a similar way, calling it a "war of interlocking," in which "regular army, militia, and guerrilla forces combine and fight together." He too noted the need for guerrilla warfare to be "transformed into mobile warfare."^[17]

In commenting on the war against the Republic of Vietnam and its American ally, Giap wrote of the coordination of "guerrilla, regional, and main-force units."^[18] Similarly, in describing "the combined strength of people's war" in the final offensive of 1975, Generals Giap and Van Tien Dung noted a variety of techniques: "*military attacks by mobile strategic army columns as main striking forces, combining military struggle with political struggle and agitation among enemy troops, wiping out and disbanding large enemy units, completely liberating large strategic regions in the mountains, rural and urban areas, and winning total victory by means of a general offensive and uprising right in the 'capital city' of the puppet administration.*"^[19]

For the Vietnamese practitioners of people's war, guerrilla warfare was only one aspect of their military approach, with the military area itself being only one dimension of a much more comprehensive system of revolutionary warfare. In theory, the war moved through stages, from subversive activities that avoided direct confrontation with government military forces, to guerrilla war, and finally to mobile warfare in which regular forces predominated. In reality, however, Vietnam's communist revolutionaries were more pragmatic. They moved their strategic emphasis back and forth from stage to stage as events and circumstances warranted. At times all three stages of activity existed simultaneously. In both theory and practice, people's war in Vietnam always encompassed much more than guerrilla warfare.

The role of the Democratic Republic of Vietnam (DRV or North Vietnam) in the people's war after 1954 is also frequently misunderstood by Americans. In part the problem is a function of the

tendency of many Americans to see North Vietnam as a separate country bent on the conquest of its southern neighbor. Those same Americans have also tended to describe the 1975 offensive as an attack by "North" Vietnamese, implying that the leadership of the Vietnamese communist movement had regional rather than national roots.

In the eyes of Vietnam's communist leaders, however, the DRV was never a complete state, and their conception of Vietnam always included the territory governed by Saigon as well as that administered by Hanoi. General Giap characterized the North as "the liberated half of our country," seeing the DRV as "a firm base of action for the reunification of the country."^[20] In 1956 Ho Chi Minh told the southern cadres regrouped above the demilitarized zone that the North was "the foundation, the root of the struggle for complete national liberation and reunification of the country." It was to become, he told them, "a strong base for our entire people's struggle."^[21] Later, General Giap would refer to the North as "the vast rear of our army" and "the revolutionary base for the whole country."^[22]

During the war against the French, Truong Chinh had noted Lenin's remark that "to wage a real war, we must have a strong and well organized rear," deeming it "very precious counsel for us in this long-term resistance war."^[23] In the people's war for unification that followed the French withdrawal, the communists would not forget that "precious counsel." At the 1963 meeting of the Central Committee of the Vietnamese Worker's Party in Hanoi, the Third Party Congress recognized the special role of the DRV, saying the time had arrived "for the North to increase aid to the South" and "bring into play its role as the revolutionary base for the nation."^[24] Communist leaders did their best to maintain the fiction that the war in the South was being waged only "by the people and liberation forces of South Viet-Nam under the leadership of the National Front for Liberation," as Ho Chi Minh told a Western correspondent in 1965. Pham Van Dong had been equally disingenuous when he told Bernard Fall in 1962 that "the heroic South Vietnamese people will have to continue the struggle by their own means."^[25] In the United States many opponents of the American war in Vietnam, including more than a few scholars, appear to have been deceived into accepting what George Kahin and John Lewis claimed was "the inescapable conclusion that the Liberation Front is not Hanoi's creation." They argued instead that the Front "has manifested independence and it is Southern."^[26]

The fiction could not be maintained, however, and by 1967 General Giap would openly portray the war as a "revolutionary struggle" waged by "people throughout the country," both North and South. As he wrote at the time, "to protect the north, liberate the south, and proceed toward reunifying the country, the northern armed forces and people have stepped up and are stepping up the violent people's fight."^[27] The United States government was correct in its claim that the communist guerrillas and cadres in the South, as well as the National Liberation Front, were operational elements of the DRV. Clearly people in the American anti-war movement often had difficulty distinguishing between reality and communist propaganda, but they did not have a monopoly on self-deception. Americans supporting the war also failed to distinguish between reality and their own propaganda, refusing to see that a sovereign and independent Republic of Vietnam (RVN) could only exist if the Saigon government and its American ally won the war. The RVN was not a state to be defended but a state to be created. For Vietnam's communist leaders, a divided Vietnam was a Vietnam in agony, and as noted in the previous chapter, they were firmly committed to the goal of unification.

Authors who write of "the partitioning of Vietnam at the 17th parallel as a result of the Geneva Accords of 1954" and "North Vietnamese bent on reunifying the country," as one scholar has recently, need to give more careful attention to the available evidence.^[28] The Geneva Accords created a situation in which two governments existed within Vietnam, but the Geneva documents did not "partition" the country. In 1954, neither communist nor anticommunist Vietnamese accepted the idea that their nation had been partitioned. As a U.S. National Intelligence Estimate noted in November 1954, "Partition at the 17th parallel is abhorred by all Vietnamese, who regard unity of

the three regions of Vietnam as a prerequisite of nationhood."[\[29\]](#) Leaders of the rival governments in Hanoi and Saigon both viewed the 17th parallel dividing line as it was defined in the Geneva declaration: a "military demarcation line" that was "provisional and should not in any way be interpreted as constituting a political or territorial boundary."[\[30\]](#)

Communist leaders repeatedly claimed that only one, not two Vietnams existed, and initially non-communist leaders in the South took the same position. Communist strength in the North precluded unification of Vietnam on terms acceptable to the United States and its Vietnamese allies in the South. In explaining the war, American leaders created a grossly oversimplified and inaccurate picture of the war as the result of aggression by the sovereign state of "North" Vietnam against an independent and sovereign South. American leaders denied the civil nature of the conflict and worked for a solution to the Vietnam conflict similar to that achieved earlier in Korea. That outcome could only be achieved, however, if the United States succeeded in forcing the communists to abandon their goal of creating a revolutionary state in all Vietnam, a difficult task to say the least.

Significantly, the war in Vietnam was never a war of northerners against southerners. Before World War II, members of the Vietnamese communist party could be found throughout all of Vietnam. According to William Duiker, the Vietnamese Revolutionary Youth League, formed in 1925, "had sunk its roots in all three regions of Vietnam,"[\[31\]](#) and Ho Chi Minh's August 1945 revolution was a nation-wide movement.[\[32\]](#) Not only was communist leadership in Vietnam national rather than regional from an early date, but it remained very stable throughout more than two decades of conflict. Except for a few readjustments after the death of Ho in 1969, it changed little from the 1950s to the mid-1970s.[\[33\]](#) Although the war in the South was directed by communists in Hanoi, that did not mean that the war was directed by "North Vietnamese." In fact, the group "bent on reunifying the country" was never composed solely of "North Vietnamese" or even led by them.

Although biographical information on Vietnam's communist leaders is incomplete, the data that do exist support the conclusion that the people who controlled the DRV and the war to overthrow the government in South Vietnam came from all regions of the country. Both before and after Ho's death four of the eleven members of the politburo came from south of the 17th parallel (36.4%), as did six of fourteen members of the politburo at the time of the communist triumph in 1975 (42.9%). In 1973, a majority of the nine member Secretariat of the Vietnamese Workers Party (VWP) came from the South, as did half of the members whose place of birth can be determined (20 of 38) elected to the Council of Ministers following the communist triumph.[\[34\]](#)

As a 1973 analysis of VWP leadership by the U.S. mission in Vietnam observed, one fact "that leaps out of the data about VWP Central Committee members is the large number of them, including Ho Chi Minh himself, who were born or were first active politically in Central Viet-Nam." The study noted that "a disproportionate number of the leaders of Vietnamese communism," including "leaders of the Party and government in the DRV, and of the People's Liberation Armed Forces and the People's Revolutionary Party in South Viet-Nam," were drawn from the "central provinces in both North and South Viet-Nam."[\[35\]](#) Individuals from central Vietnam constituted a majority in the Politburo and the VWP Secretariat during the war and in the Council of Ministers elected after it. Although the seat of the communist government that conquered the South resided in North Vietnam, its leadership was national, not regional.

The names of some of the individuals from south of the 17th parallel who held high positions in the communist leadership during the war are well known. One was Pham Van Dong, "probably Ho's closest associate since 1955," according to Bernard Fall.[\[36\]](#) Another was Le Duan, who became the Party's leader following Ho's death in 1969, while the southerner Ton Duc Tang assumed Ho's title as president. Other southerners among the communist leadership, less well known to most Americans, included two central committee members (Hoang Anh and Tran Quoc Hoan) and six leaders of the National Liberation Front and/or the People's Revolutionary Government in the South

who also joined the government of the unified communist Vietnam after the war (Nguyen Thi Binh, Nguyen Van Hieu, Vo Van Kiet, Tran Luong, Huynh Tan Phat, and Tran Dai Nghia).[37]

Other communist southerners also gained widespread recognition. Colonel Bui Tin, a journalist who found himself the ranking regular officer at the Presidential Palace in Saigon, became prominent when he accepted the surrender there in April 1975, and General Tran Van Tra's history of the final offensive has become an important source for American scholars researching the war. Countless southerners also served in the ranks, not only as political cadres and guerrillas, but also as regulars. No knowledgeable author disputes the fact that southerners provided the vast majority of the combatants in the Viet Cong units that carried the major burden of the war before 1969, just as widespread agreement exists that the communist leadership in Hanoi initiated and directed the war in the South from its inception.

The regular forces that moved down the Ho Chi Minh trail to participate in the large unit war against the Americans contained soldiers returning to the South as well as combatants from the North. Xuan Vu, for example, described the high morale of southerners in late 1965, "dying to go back . . . motivated by the idea of the great General Uprising." [38] Even the White Paper issued by the Department of State in 1965 provided evidence that the communists infiltrating the South were not northerners, although that was not the document's intention. Although the White Paper claimed that "as many as 75 percent" of the Viet Cong entering the South from January through August 1964 "were natives of North Viet-Nam," the eighteen cases given as specific examples consisted overwhelmingly of individuals born south of the 17th parallel. Southerners made up eight of the document's nine "individual case histories" and seven of an additional nine "brief case histories of typical Viet Cong" presented in an appendix.[39]

The conclusion from the available evidence seems clear: the communist movement in Vietnam was not directed by northerners, although the communist seat of power and government was in Hanoi, and the war that ended in 1975 was not a conquest of the South Vietnamese by the North Vietnamese. The war ended in a communist victory, but the leaders of Vietnam's communist movement came from both sides of the 17th parallel, with the central region of the nation predominating. As historian Warren I. Cohen has observed, "if analysts persist in the notion that two separate nations existed in Vietnam in 1954, they will never understand the United States defeat there." The war between communist and anti-communist Vietnamese "was not a war of aggression by one nation against another. Separateness was something to be won on the battlefield by the secessionists, not proclaimed by others or imposed from outside." [40]

Although the communist goal of unification under a revolutionary government was remarkably consistent, flexibility, rather than rigid commitment to guerrilla warfare or any other particular approach, was the hallmark of the people's war in Vietnam. Thomas K. Latimer highlighted that flexibility in his survey of the ongoing debate within the leadership of the Vietnamese Workers Party over the proper strategy in the struggle for unification. From 1954 to 1958, the communists undertook political organization and mobilization in the South while building socialism in the base area of the North and awaiting the collapse of the Ngo Dinh Diem government in Saigon. When that collapse did not take place, the communists adopted a more forceful approach, beginning with guerrilla warfare in 1959 and attempting to shift to mobile warfare in 1964. That move was thwarted by the United States, as was an attempt to gain a decisive victory early in 1968. The 1968 failure led to the recognition by leaders of the Party that negotiation and not general uprising might be the key to "push the Americans out of South Vietnam by coordinating the political struggle with diplomacy." [41] Latimer viewed the strategic shift following the 1968 Tet offensive, outlined in a May 1968 report authored by Truong Chinh, as "a half-step retreat." [42] At the time, the communist leadership reaffirmed the value of the protracted war model and focused their attention on the United States as the primary enemy to be negotiated or manipulated out of Vietnam. Political events within the United States made the achievement of that goal possible, but not before another communist move to mobile warfare was thwarted in 1972.

Given the flexibility inherent in the communist approach, none of the defeats proved decisive. Instead, the communists regrouped to make a successful bid for victory in 1975. As Latimer observed, "it was this ability to remain flexible, to fall back to a protracted war strategy, to beef up the political struggle aspect, as well as plunge ahead from time to time in an all-out military effort, which enabled the Vietnamese communists to sustain their 'revolution' in the south."[\[43\]](#) Another American scholar, Patrick J. McGarvey, had reached a similar conclusion even earlier. He concluded after the Tet offensive of 1968 that "Communist strategy will remain a dynamic one," in which "decisions will continue to be based on the realities of the battlefield." At about the same time Douglas Pike observed that "none of these three means--diplomacy, proxy struggle, or direct military--is mutually exclusive."[\[44\]](#) Pike noted that the communist leadership in Vietnam "has no hesitation about abandoning one method or policy when another appears more promising."[\[45\]](#)

Just as people's war appeared to be nothing more than guerrilla warfare to some Americans, and the communist leadership appeared to be "North" Vietnamese, the communists seemed to have triumphed in 1975 by using a highly conventional approach. One author has even described the winning communist strategy as "an American one."[\[46\]](#) The Vietnamese communists' own descriptions of the final offensive, however, support a very different conclusion.

The local communist apparatus in the South was hurt badly during the 1968 offensive, with high casualties and resulting demoralization, and the damage had not been completely repaired by the time of the 1973 cease fire agreement. In his study of the war in Long An province, Jeffrey Race noted that "the revolution movement in late 1970 was in a difficult position,"[\[47\]](#) a view confirmed by captured communist documents.[\[48\]](#) In his memoir, General Tran Van Tra, commanding communist forces in the region surrounding Saigon, observed that as late as 1973 "all units were in disarray, there was a lack of manpower, . . . shortages." According to Tra, mid and lower level cadres, seeing the enemy "winning many new victories," concluded "that the revolution was in danger."[\[49\]](#) That did not mean, however, that the Viet Cong had been totally destroyed.

The estimate of relative strength that appears in Colonel William Le Gro's study *Vietnam from Cease-Fire to Capitulation* indicates that local forces of one kind or another still made up a substantial portion of communist strength in South Vietnam, particularly outside of Military Region I. Although the Viet Cong constituted only 16.9% of total communist combat troops in January 1973, local forces provided more than 50% of the administrative and service personnel. In Military Region III, local forces supplied 20% of the combat troops and 68.8% of the administrative and service personnel. In Military Region IV the percentages were 40.7 and 92.3 respectively.[\[50\]](#) The ARVN Chief of Staff for II Corps estimated that in 1975 communist regular units constituted no more than 46% of the forces he faced in his area.[\[51\]](#)

Such estimates indicate that Viet Cong strength after Tet had recovered far more than advocates of the conventional war thesis would have one believe, particularly in the heavily populated region of the Mekong Delta and the area surrounding Saigon. Furthermore, estimates such as Le Gro's are of military strength, and they do not appear to include the communist political infrastructure. Although the Viet Cong had been devastated at Tet and hard pressed afterward, they had not been destroyed.

The strength and value of local irregular forces would become apparent in 1975 when the communists began their final offensive. Although the American military has used irregular forces in mounting a conventional attack, it does not rely upon aid from guerrilla forces, popular militia, and political cadres in the enemy's homeland to facilitate and sustain the offensive movement of its regular forces. In Vietnam in 1975, however, communist regulars were not only dependent upon the aid received from irregulars, but their success was the result of years of unconventional warfare that had severely eroded the will and fighting ability of their anticommunist opponents. To call the communists' 1975 offensive "conventional" completely ignores both the events that had made the offensive possible and the role of irregular forces in supporting the final attack.

In assessing the successful campaign in the South, Generals Giap and Dung claimed that "*everywhere regional forces, militia, guerrillas and self-defense units* seized the opportunity to hit the enemy." They gave local forces credit for having "seized control in many places, wiped out or forced the withdrawal or surrender of thousands of garrisons, shattered the coercive machine of the enemy at the grassroots level, and smashed their 'popular defense' organizations." The result of that activity was "better conditions for our regular units to concentrate their attacks on the main targets of the general offensive."[\[52\]](#) General Tran Van Tra described the 1975 offensive in a similar way, noting the use "of combined forces--both armed forces and the political forces of the people--in a widespread general offensive and uprising." Tra claimed that the communists "prepositioned" regular forces "in each area, in coordination with extensive local [forces] and militia" to create "an extremely potent revolutionary people's war."[\[53\]](#)

Communist descriptions of specific battles during the 1975 campaign also noted the involvement of irregular forces. According to General Tra, the successful attack on Phuoc Long province that preceded the 1975 offensive was the work of two "understrength" divisions, "in combination with the local forces," and he noted similar cooperation between local and regular forces in the Mekong Delta at the time of the general offensive.[\[54\]](#) Further north, according to General Dung, the liberation of Tam Ky and Tuan Duong, and the defeat of the 4th and 5th regiments of the ARVN 2nd division on March 24 and 25 was the result of attacks by the 2nd division of Zone 5 "in coordination with regional forces." He also gave credit for the liberation of the northern part of Quang Ngai province to "regional forces, in coordination with the masses."[\[55\]](#) Dung and an official history published in Hanoi both noted the coordination of regular units with attacks by local forces in other battles in Zone 5, including the attack on Danang.[\[56\]](#) Interviews with RVN officials and military officers confirmed the important role played by communist irregulars, sustaining the conclusion that ARVN forces in III and IV Corps were so "hard pressed and tied down by local Communist forces" that they "could not be disengaged to form reserves to meet the fresh enemy divisions moving down from the north."[\[57\]](#)

Irregulars were particularly active as the communist attack converged on Saigon. In 1972 communist forces in the Mekong Delta had not supported the offensive elsewhere, and RVN units from IV Corps had been used to reinforce III Corps. According to the ARVN Commander of the Capital Military District, in 1975 the communists "tied up those troops by the activities of the local Communist forces." Later those same local forces moved in captured vehicles into Long An province to threaten Route 4 and support the offensive against Saigon.[\[58\]](#)

General Dung also noted that in the provinces surrounding the city local forces at all levels increased in size and engaged in "continuous activities" that "tied down and drew off a number of enemy main-force units in IV Corps" and elsewhere, while "special action and sapper units" worked within the city.[\[59\]](#) Another communist history noted the way in which local forces helped to create "a staging area for our main-force units" by their attacks on "outposts, subsectors, and district capitals."[\[60\]](#) A specific example of such an attack, in which guerrillas surrounded an enemy post at Bo Keo, appeared in the diary of Tran Ham Ninh, aide to General Vo Van Thanh, commander of the column attacking Saigon from the south.[\[61\]](#)

According to General Dung, following the fall of Saigon, in the Mekong Delta and throughout the southern region the communists "mounted a series of attacks under the direct leadership of the local party branches." He claimed that by "coordinating these attacks with uprising by tens of thousands of the masses, they liberated all cities and towns, captured all big military bases, all district towns and subsectors, and all enemy outposts."[\[62\]](#) Although General Tra's claim that "the spirit of the masses were seething" and the statement in an official communist history that "in addition to the military attacks, millions of people arose" in the final days of the campaign may well be exaggerations,[\[63\]](#) the important work of communist cadres and irregulars in the 1975 offensive should not be underestimated.

In addition to the role that irregulars played in intelligence gathering, logistical support, and combat, communists at the local level engaged in significant political activity directly supporting the 1975 offensive. Giap and Dung observed that local political forces "carried out a campaign of agitation among enemy ranks to bring about their disintegration," helping to destroy the agencies of enemy political power and helping "set up revolutionary power in various locations."^[64] General Tra claimed that during the offensive "many villages set up revolutionary administrations," and General Dung noted that by the time of the attack on Saigon "our political infrastructure existed in every section of town." Inside the city, he wrote, "there were dozens of members of the municipal party committee and cadres of equivalent rank, members of special war committees, hundreds of party members, thousands of members of various mass organizations, and tens of thousands of people who could be mobilized to take to the streets."^[65]

The cadres and their followers not only took political power as the offensive proceeded and the Saigon government collapsed, but they acted in advance to undermine the morale of the enemy's armed forces. Tran Ham Ninh referred in his diary to "coordinating combat and the proselyting of enemy troops," and according to General Dung, during the attack on Saigon people within the city "used megaphones to call on Saigon soldiers to take off their uniforms and lay down their guns." Such popular action, wrote Dung, "created a revolutionary atmosphere of vast strength on all the city's streets."^[66]

To call the communist offensive in 1975 a conventional attack one must ignore the numerous references in communist sources regarding the important contribution made by local forces and political cadres. One must also ignore statements in which Vietnamese communists specifically characterize the attack as one falling outside the traditional category of conventional war. General Tra, for example, maintained that the 1975 offensive was "not a plan to launch a general counteroffensive . . . as in a regular war." Instead, it embodied "parallel military and political efforts."^[67] General Dung described the campaign as one in which "our forms and methods of fighting and style of attack bore the spirit of the rules of revolutionary warfare in the South," and the March 1975 description of the attack provided by the Politburo in the midst of the campaign described it as a "general offensive and general uprising." By "coordinating offensives and uprisings" the communists saw themselves "striking from the outside in and from the inside out."^[68]

In describing their defeat in interviews after the war, officials and officers of the RVN stressed their own failures in ways that also emphasized the unconventional aspects of the war. Their stories of panic, disorder, demoralization, defeatism, paralysis, and incompetence seemed to confirm the communist view that the war was won as much by political and diplomatic maneuvers as by military ones. According to the RVN respondents, the collapse of the South was caused more by internal problems that had developed over many years than by the weight of the final communist offensive. General Tran Van Don lamented the "incompetence on our military side," while another anonymous respondent spoke of "lazy, corrupted and unqualified generals." The Speaker of the House, Nguyen Ba Can, believed that by 1975 there existed a "psychological collapse that struck every South Vietnamese," seen, among other things, in the "widespread" draft dodging noted by Buu Vien and other officials. Despite strong communist pressure, leaders were "unwilling or afraid to take any initiative."^[69] The problems described by the ARVN officers and government officials, including the abandonment of South Vietnam by the United States, were the results of years of protracted war and not a function of the final communist offensive. The 1975 attack was the *coup de grace* of a successful people's war rather than the *coup de main* depicted in many recent American accounts.

Although the 1975 communist offensive relied upon regular units attacking in very conventional ways, the descriptions of the offensive by the men who directed it and by those who tried to counter it indicate that the communists were definitely not engaging in conventional war as that term is understood in the United States. American conventional war doctrine does not anticipate reliance upon population within the enemy's territory for logistical and combat support. It does not rely

upon guerrilla units to fix the enemy, clear lines of communication, and maintain security in the rear. And it certainly does not expect enemy morale to be undermined by political cadres within the very heart of the enemy's territory, cadres that will assume positions of political power as the offensive progresses. Yet all of these things happened in South Vietnam in 1975, and to call the offensive that orchestrated them a conventional attack, as that term is normally understood in the United States, is to misunderstand the reasons for communist success. As William Duiker has observed, "the fact that the 1975 campaign was primarily a military offensive should not obscure the fundamental reality that the Party's success over a generation was attributable, above all, to nonmilitary factors."[\[70\]](#)

Despite the evidence contradicting their views, some people will no doubt continue to believe that North Vietnamese communists conquered South Vietnam with a conventional strategy. That interpretation of the war, carrying with it the implication that the United States might have won in Vietnam had it recognized at the onset that the conflict would be a conventional one, explains the American failure in a way that does not mandate significant change in the future. If the United States military was fighting the wrong kind of war, rather than fighting the wrong way, then future problems of a similar kind can be solved without retooling and retraining. By ignoring facts that do not fit their interpretation, leaders and followers alike can thus avoid the reassessment of doctrine and policy that a significant defeat ought to stimulate.

To learn from the American experience in Vietnam one must understand the nature of the war that was fought there. At no time was it a conventional war; from beginning to end it was a people's or revolutionary war in which both irregular and conventional forces played important roles. It was also not a war between North and South; it was always a conflict between Vietnamese communists from all parts of Vietnam and anti-communists, also from all parts of Vietnam but located geographically in the nation's southern half. Although the communist war effort was directed from Hanoi and depended on northern as well as southern resources, the war was fought and won in the South by the application of a strategy incorporating political and diplomatic as well as military struggle over a prolonged period of time. In short, it fit the model of people's war articulated by both Asian theorists and their Western interpreters. The conflict ended in 1975 after a communist offensive by regular units and local irregulars quickly demolished a dispirited opposition worn down by more than a decade of protracted war.

Long after the war, in 1988, General Phillip B. Davidson concluded that "our defeat in Vietnam has taught us nothing."[\[71\]](#) If that pessimistic conclusion is true, then certainly some of the blame must rest with those who refuse to recognize the true nature of the war. No matter how much people might wish to believe that the communist strategy of people's war failed in Vietnam or that communists from the North conquered the South in a conventional invasion, those views are not well supported by the evidence. To understand the war, one must first abandon the view that the conflict was a war of aggression, North against South, and recognize that the communist triumph was the result of the successful implementation of a strategy of people's war.

Unfortunately, to learn from the past one must have more than an accurate historical assessment. For accurate histories to be of value, people must be willing to accept them, and that will often require the rejection of more comfortable interpretations which buttress existing preconceptions or allow institutions to avoid rigorous reassessment and reform. To date, the agony of Vietnam remains too vivid for many people to make the conceptual readjustment needed to understand America's longest and least successful war. Until that readjustment is made, one can only hope that an ignorance of the past does not condemn the American nation or its people to repeat the agonies of Vietnam in some other place at some future date.

[\[1\]](#) Timothy J. Lomperis, "Giap's Dream, Westmoreland's Nightmare," *Parameters*, 18 (June 1988), 18-32.

[2] For examples see Anthony T. Bouscaren, ed., *All Quiet on the Eastern Front: The Death of South Vietnam* (Old Greenwich, CT, 1977), particularly Robert D. Heinl, Sir Robert Thompson, & Norman B. Hannah, pp. 64, 119, & 148-149; W. Scott Thompson & Donaldson D. Frizzell, eds., *The Lessons of Vietnam* (New York, 1977), p. 279; and Harry G. Summers, Jr., *On Strategy: A Critical Analysis of the Vietnam War* (Dell Pub. Co., 1984), pp. 121-122; and Timothy J. Lomperis, "Giap's Dream," 30.

[3] Phillip B. Davidson, *Vietnam at War: The History: 1946-1975* (Novato, CA, 1988), p. 796.

[4] Vo Nguyen Giap, *People's War, People's Army* (New York, 1962), p. 27 (italics in original) and Truong Chinh, *Primer for Revolt* (New York, 1963), p. 109.

[5] Giap, *People's War*, p. 33.

[6] *Ibid.*, p. 31 and Vo Nguyen Giap, *"Big Victory, Great Task"* (New York, 1968), p. 73.

[7] Chinh, *Primer*, p. 179.

[8] Giap, *"Big Victory,"* p. 52.

[9] Chinh, *Primer*, p. 11 and Giap, *ibid.* See also, Giap, *People's War*, p. 97.

[10] Giap, *People's War*, p. 145.

[11] "Instructions Given at the Conference Reviewing the Second Le Hong Phong Military Campaign," in Bernard B. Fall, ed., *Ho Chi Minh on Revolution: Selected Writings, 1920-1966* (New York, 1968), p. 188.

[12] Giap, *People's War*, pp. 5-46 and Chinh, *Primer*, p. 111 (italics in originals).

[13] *Ibid.*, p. 180

[14] Giap, *"Big Victory,"* p. 55.

[15] Giap, *People's War*, pp. 29-30.

[16] *Ibid.*, pp. 106-107.

[17] Chinh, *Primer*, pp. 139 & 153.

[18] Giap, *"Big Victory,"* p. 74.

[19] Vo Nguyen Giap & Van Tien Dung, *How We Won the War* (Ypsilanti, 1976), p. 41 (italics in original).

[20] Giap, *People's War*, pp. 49 & 34.

[21] "Letter to the Cadres from South Vietnam Regrouped in the North" (June 19, 1956), in Fall, *Ho*, pp. 272-273 & 274.

[22] Giap, *People's War*, p. 146. Although it denied the legitimacy of such views, the United States government recognized them, quoting passages from Giap and others in a section entitled "North Viet-Nam: Base for Conquest of the South" in Department of State Publication 7839, *Aggression from the North: The Record of North Viet-Nam's Campaign To Conquer South Viet-Nam* (Washington, D.C., 1965), pp. 20-21.

[23] Chinh, *Primer*, p. 211.

- [24] Thomas K. Latimer, "Hanoi's Leaders and Their South Vietnam Policies: 1954-1968" (unpublished doctoral thesis, Georgetown University, 1972), p. 154.
- [25] Fall, *Ho*, p. 322.
- [26] George McTuran Kahin & John W. Lewis, *The United States in Vietnam*, rev. ed. (New York, 1969), p. 120.
- [27] Giap, "*Big Victory*," pp. 47 & 28.
- [28] Lomperis, "Giap's Dream," 25.
- [29] "National Intelligence Estimate, 23 November 1954, Probable Developments in South Vietnam, Laos, and Cambodia Through July 1956," in United States State Department, *Foreign Relations of the United States, 1952-1954, Volume XIII, Indochina* (Washington, D.C., 1982), Part 2, p. 2289. For early RVN statements on Vietnam as a single nation see Gareth Porter, ed. *Vietnam: The Definitive Documentation of Human Decisions*, vol. 1 (New York, 1979), pp. 581 & 656.
- [30] "Final Declaration of the Geneva Conference on the Problem of Restoring Peace in Indochina, July 1954," in Gareth Porter, ed., *Vietnam: A History in Documents* (New York, 1981), p. 160.
- [31] William J. Duiker, *The Communist Road to Power in Vietnam* (Boulder, 1981), p. 25.
- [32] The early years of Vietnamese communism are described fully in Huynh Kim Khanh, *Vietnamese Communism, 1925-1945* (Ithaca, 1982). See also Duiker, *Communist Road to Power*, chs. 1-5.
- [33] "VWP-DRV Leadership, 1960-1973," Document No. 114, *Viet-Nam Documents and Research Notes* (Saigon, July 1973), 8.
- [34] Data compiled from *ibid.*; Central Intelligence Agency, *Reference Aid: Council of Ministers of the Socialist Republic of Vietnam* (Washington, 1977); Borys Lewytzkyj & Juliusz Stroynowski, eds., *Who's Who in the Socialist Countries* (New York, 1978); and P. J. Honey, *Communism in North Vietnam: Its Role in the Sino-Soviet Dispute* (Cambridge, MA, 1963), ch. 2.
- [35] "VWP-DRV Leadership," 3-4.
- [36] Fall, *Ho*, p. 319.
- [37] See Central Intelligence Agency, *Reference Guide* for confirmation.
- [38] David Chanoff & Doan Van Toai, *Portrait of the Enemy* (New York, 1986), p. 179.
- [39] *Aggression From the North*, pp. 6-11 & 33-37.
- [40] Warren I. Cohen, "Vietnam: New Light on the Nature of the War?" *The International History Review*, IX (1987), 116.
- [41] Latimer, "Hanoi's Leaders," p. 235.
- [42] *Ibid.*, p. 343.
- [43] *Ibid.*, p. 195.
- [44] Patrick J. McGarvey, *Visions of Victory: Selected Vietnamese Communist Military Writings, 1964-1968* (Stanford, 1969), p. 57.

- [45] Douglas Pike, *War, Peace, and the Viet Cong* (Cambridge, MA, 1969), pp. 34-35.
- [46] Lomperis, "Giap's Dream," 19.
- [47] Jeffrey Race, *War Comes to Long An: Revolutionary Conflict in a Vietnamese Province* (Berkeley, 1972), 276.
- [48] See, for example, "Directive 10/CT-71" and "Recapitulative Report on the Reorientation Courses Concerning the New Situation and Missions Conducted" in *Viet Nam Documents and Notes, Number 102, Part III* (Saigon, 1973).
- [49] Tran Van Tra, *Vietnam: History of the Bulwark B2 Theatre, Vol. 5: Concluding the 30-Years War* (Ho Chi Minh City, 1982 in JPRS No. 82783--2 February 1983), p. 33.
- [50] William E. Le Gro, *Vietnam from Cease-Fire to Capitulation* (Washington, D.C., 1985), p. 28.
- [51] Stephen T. Hosmer, Konrad Kellen, & Brian M. Jenkins, *The Fall of South Vietnam: Statements by Vietnamese Military and Civilian Leaders* (New York, 1980), p. 168.
- [52] Giap & Dung, *How We Won*, p. 41 (italics in original).
- [53] Tra, *Vietnam*, p. 151.
- [54] *Ibid.*, pp. 132 & 147.
- [55] Van Tien Dung, *Our Great Spring Victory* (New York, 1977), p. 105.
- [56] *Ibid.*, p. 109 and War Experiences Recapitulation Committee of the High-Level Military Institute, *Vietnam: The Anti-U.S. Resistance War for National Salvation 1954-1975: Military Events* (Hanoi, 1980 in JPRS 80968--3 June 1982), pp. 173 & 176-177.
- [57] Hosmer, Kellen, & Jenkins, *Fall of South Vietnam*, p. 231.
- [58] *Ibid.*, p. 232.
- [59] Dung, *Great Spring Victory*, p. 249.
- [60] War Experiences Recapitulation Committee, *Vietnam*, p. 180.
- [61] Ninh's diary entries are in Tra, *Vietnam*, pp. 178-185. The guerrillas surrounding Bo Keo are noted on p. 178.
- [62] Dung, *Great Spring Victory*, p. 249.
- [63] Tra, *Vietnam*, p. 162 and War Experiences Recapitulation Committee, *Vietnam*, p. 182.
- [64] Giap & Dung, *How We Won*, p. 42.
- [65] Tra, *Vietnam*, p. 196 and Dung, *Great Spring Victory*, p. 172.
- [66] Ninh in Tra, *Vietnam*, p. 182 and Dung, *Great Spring Victory*, p. 244.
- [67] Tra, *Vietnam*, p. 94.
- [68] Dung, *Great Spring Victory*, pp. 186 & 133.
- [69] Hosmer, Kellen, & Jenkins, *Fall of South Vietnam*, pp. 100, 75, 56, 119, & 71.

[\[70\]](#) Duiker, *Communist Road to Power*, p. 319.

[\[71\]](#) Davidson, *Vietnam at War*, p. 811.

CHAPTER NINE

THE CHANGING FACE OF REVOLUTIONARY WARFARE

I am not really certain how I arrived at the thesis of this paper or when, although I know I concluded that the phenomenon of revolution had changed over time at a relatively early point in my academic career. Notes in my files indicate that I incorporated some of the ideas here in a lecture given at Muskingum College in 1970. The teaching of military history, as well as an occasional seminar focusing more specifically on revolution, also influenced my thinking on the topic, as did my research on the wars in the Philippines and Vietnam. The significant contrast between those two revolutionary conflicts, separated by roughly half a century, indicated that in that interval of time some kind of fundamental change had taken place in the nature of revolutionary warfare.

The work of Walter Millis, although focused almost exclusively on conventional warfare, provided a model for analysis that proved to be extremely important, and I am also indebted to the authors of selected chapters in the original edition of *Makers of Modern Strategy*.^[1] I am equally certain that the vast majority of the literature on revolution that I read for my courses contributed very little, except in the negative sense of showing me how not to study the subject historically. As is true of many ideas, however, the exact origin of the argument presented here remains a mystery. All I know for certain is that the paper proved very difficult to write and was in gestation an extremely long time before its 1986 publication, in an abbreviated form, in *Comparative Studies in Society and History*.^[2]

* * * * *

Revolution is a historical phenomenon of great importance, and no historian is likely to argue that revolutions have not had a significant influence on the history of nations and regions, even on the history of the entire world. Unlike other forms of warfare, however, revolution has no coherent chronological history, and there are no studies of the subject comparable to William McNeil's *The Pursuit of Power* or Theodore Ropp's older but equally important *War in the Modern World*.^[3] Despite volumes written on the subject of revolution by historians, political scientists, sociologists, and others, one searches in vain for a comprehensive history of the phenomenon.

In the study of revolution, as Robert Blackey observed in his extensive bibliography devoted to the subject, "there has been a conflict between those who perceive revolutions as such unique occurrences that they defy comparison and those who seek to find certain uniformities, consistencies, and broad theories." Perez Zagorin, in an earlier review of the literature, wrote of "three possible lines of inquiry . . . the investigation of a specific individual revolution" (the most common approach taken by historians), comparative studies in which one takes two or more cases in an attempt to find "the relationship between them," and, finally, studies seeking to develop a theory of revolution. Others might lump Zagorin's three categories into two, arguing that both comparative and theoretical studies seek to develop generalizations applicable to all revolutions.^[4] What is absent from the literature is a historical approach which assumes that revolution, like many other phenomena, evolves over time, changing as a result of changes in the political, social and economic circumstances in which revolutions develop. Viewed historically, revolution also appears to change as a result of the practice, study, and preparation of revolution. At present, however, we know relatively little about the historical dimensions of revolution because scholars studying the subject have given them so little thought.

To date, despite the significant and abundant historical literature on individual revolutions, the scholarly study of revolution as a phenomenon has remained almost a monopoly of psychologists, sociologists, and political scientists, although the results of their work have not been encouraging,

particularly given the significant scholarly effort devoted to the topic. In 1973, Zagorin concluded that "the general theory of revolution remains subject to confusion, doubt, and disagreement." He observed that "even elementary questions of definition, terminology, and delimitation of the field to be explained are still not settled." In a review of the literature three years later, William E. Lipsky came to a similar conclusion. Scholars, he observed, could only agree "that revolutions have taken place and that a few movements, at least, have been revolutions." They disagreed, however, "on just what has taken place, how it did so, why it did so, what results it produced, and whether or not these results could or would have been achieved in any case and under other circumstances." In another article published the same year, Elbaki Hermassi observed that, "although few fields in social science have produced a comparable array of theories and findings," the sum total of the work was "quite unimpressive."^[5]

Despite the excellent work of a number of scholars in the years that followed, general assessments changed little. In a 1979 review of the literature, for example, Rod Aya concluded that "available theories of revolution and collective violence" were "deeply defective." Blackey echoed those sentiments in his 1982 bibliography, claiming that "any examination of studies concerned with the nature and idea of revolution will invariably result in considerable confusion." My own reading tended to confirm Blackey's warning that "whether the student is a jaded professional or an uninitiated fledgling, the experience can be intellectually traumatic." I have never encountered such a jargon-ridden and soporific body of scholarly literature nor one so extensive. Despite the abundance of their work, the students of revolution have still not reached agreement on a definition of the phenomenon they are attempting to study.^[6]

Virtually every study of revolution begins by giving attention to the problem of definition, and no matter how much one might wish to avoid it a repetition of that tedious and unproductive task seems essential. Fortunately, the argument that the study of revolution has suffered from insufficient attention to its historical dimensions does not require precise agreement on a definition. For that reason, there will be no review of previous attempts at definition and no effort to add another one to the growing but as yet unsatisfactory list of contenders.

Unfortunately, two problems of definition exist which one cannot ignore. One is the tendency of some analysts to define revolution in terms of outcomes, insisting that a certain amount of a specific kind of change must occur for an event to be classified as a revolution. As Aya has noted, such an approach "obscures the political crux of revolutions: namely, an open-ended situation of violent struggle wherein one set of contenders attempts (successfully or unsuccessfully) to displace another from state power."^[7] To insist that the term revolution be tied to specific results, linked, generally, to the triumph of revolutionaries in their struggle against the state, ignores, by definition, numerous examples of the revolutionary process. It is akin to defining war to include only those violent conflicts in which the state seeking to overthrow the status quo achieved its end, an approach that would exclude World War II. If revolutionary goals must be achieved before an event may be considered a revolution, then one can never speak of "unsuccessful revolutions," although the process at work in both success and failure would appear to be identical in many respects. Surely no definition is suitable that ignores all of the revolutionary situations which result in a violent confrontation but not in the success of the revolutionaries.

A second common problem relating to definition concerns the way in which scholars have separated the study of revolution from that of counterrevolution. One can never gain more than a partial understanding if those who actively resist the revolutionaries are ignored. A few scholars have recognized the error of such an approach. Hermassi, for example, observed that "the study of revolution--especially with respect to its outcome--must include consideration of counterrevolutionary activities," and he concluded that "a study of the efforts to effect change must incorporate an analysis of the resistance to such change, both within and between nations."^[8] The forces opposed to revolution represent an important part of the revolutionary dynamic.

At present, the situation still resembles that described by Lipsky in 1976, when he noted that "terminology remains a basic problem" and that "no consensus exists as to just how to define revolution," although some progress has been made. More authors now recognize the need to define the term by something other than outcome and to consider all parties to any revolutionary conflict rather than focusing exclusively on the revolutionaries. Zagorin feared that establishing "a completely satisfactory definition" might be impossible because of the complexity of "the phenomena and variables to be included," but some students of revolution have recognized that the difficulty of definition stems from something more than complexity. Instead, they have identified the historical nature of the phenomenon as the root of the problem.[\[9\]](#)

In 1969, Jacques Ellul concluded that "we must accept as revolution what men of a certain period experience as revolution and so named it themselves." For him, the "historical reality" of revolution was a function of "the way men perceived it at the time, in the way they believed it and transmitted it to us." As an example, he wrote that "it is utterly absurd and pretentious to state that the revolution of 1830 was not a revolution," if "those who made it" believed it was. Later, James Farr focused on the way in which disagreements over "revolution" have existed because of differences in "revolutionary beliefs and practices." He concluded that "the meaning of 'revolution' was a complex and historically evolving product." As a result, there could be "no single meaning timelessly available for the forging of a truly general theory of revolution." Revolution was a concept with a history of its own.[\[10\]](#)

Historians are thus left with a term that is, as John Dunn observed, "irretrievably elastic in application," and they may be forced to accept Peter Amann's view that there can be "no 'true' definition of an abstraction" such as revolution. Amann may even be correct that the term revolution has been "broadened to the point of hopeless imprecision." Despite the problems of definition, however, historians and others have recognized that there is a phenomenon to be identified and studied which, at the very least, embodied the elements that Amann included in his own definition of revolution: an effective though not necessarily successful challenge to the power of the state.[\[11\]](#)

One of the most common approaches to the study of revolution, that based upon the analysis of case studies, frequently gives the impression of being historical, but in reality it is not, for it fails to take into account the effect on the phenomenon of changes over time. Ironically, an historian, Crane Brinton, was among those most responsible for establishing the ahistorical approach to the subject that has dominated most other studies. In his 1974 synthesis of research on revolution, Mark N. Hagopian credited Lyford Edwards, George Pettee, and Brinton, among others, with having "produced an intellectual scaffolding of revolutionary theory" that was amazingly resistant to what Hagopian called "the rude storms of the last three decades." Although Morris Janowitz may be correct in his assertion that Edwards' book, *The Natural History of Revolution*, served as "the prototype" for Brinton's *The Anatomy of Revolution*, he recognized the validity of Zagorin's claim that Brinton's volume was "still probably the most influential as well as the most widely read book on revolution to have been written in this country." Lipsky agreed, observing that "while most of Brinton's conclusions have been discounted in the more than thirty-five years since they first appeared, his work established the area of study, the methodology for investigation and the basic working premises."[\[12\]](#)

Although Brinton focused the attention of the historical profession on the phenomenon of revolution in a context broader than the study of individual revolutions, he oriented their thinking about the topic away from its historical dimensions. He and most other people who have studied revolution viewed the phenomenon as uniform over time. Their goal became the discovery of generalizations which, taken together, would make possible the construction of a valid model. Studies of revolution focused primarily on causation and outcome rather than on the revolutionary process or technique. Techniques, if only because some of them relate to technology and are thus obviously changing, did not fit easily into a model that was not restricted by chronological

boundaries. Scholars preferred to treat revolution as a phenomenon largely unaffected by historical change and the passage of time.

Eventually, however, scholars began to recognize the importance of the phenomenon's historical dimension. In 1976, for example, Lipsky drew attention to "the possibility that there may be important causes outside the revolution that influence its course, that revolution is the tip of the historical iceberg and not the iceberg itself." The same year Hermassi noted that, for purposes of comparison, it was useful to conceive of revolutions not merely as internal confrontations between groups with competing claims concerning values and social structures in a given society, but also as world-historical phenomena. Relating revolutions "to the degree of national integration," he concluded that they were a relatively recent phenomenon dependent on "the emergence and consolidation of the nation-state." Similarly, Charles Tilly wrote of the relationship between the nature of collective action such as revolution and both the "rise of national states to preeminent positions in a wide variety of political activities" and "the increasingly associational [as opposed to communal] character of the principal contenders for power at the local as well as the national level." Earlier, Barrington Moore had drawn attention to the connection between routes to modernization on the one hand and existing political and other structures on the other. Although not focusing specifically on revolution, Moore's approach had significant implications regarding the importance of its historical dimensions.[\[13\]](#)

Building upon the work of Moore, Theda Skocpol concluded in her study of revolution in France, Russia, and China that the causes of revolution "necessarily vary according to the historical and international circumstances of the countries involved." Observing that "patterns of revolutionary causation and outcome are necessarily affected by world-historical changes in the fundamental structures and bases of state power as such," she noted that "the likelihood and the forms of revolutions tend to change over world time." But Skocpol's view was only partially historical, for she denied the importance of the conscious human dimension of revolutionary actions. Although she recognized that revolutions occurred "in unique world-historical contexts that change over time," she seemed to forget, as one of her critics observed, "that human beings thinking and acting (however haphazardly) are the mediating link between structural conditions and social outcomes." As a result, she seriously underestimated the role of such important historical variables as "ideology, political organization, and self-conscious social action."[\[14\]](#)

The role of changing structures is only one of the historical dimensions recognized by scholars. Hermassi, for example, noted the way in which revolutions "introduce new political ideals and principles of legitimacy which threaten existing power arrangements by their explosive novelty or demands for societal restructuring." Revolutions thus had what he called "a demonstration effect beyond the boundaries of their country of origin, with a potential for triggering waves of revolution and counterrevolution." Revolutions also create models and ideals which influence subsequent revolutionary theorists.[\[15\]](#)

In 1973, Sheldon Wolin observed that "learning the 'lessons' of revolutionary experience, incorporating them into theoretical form, searching for the close integration of theory and *praxis* became permanent features of the revolutionary tradition." Revolutionary action became bureaucratized, and as a result, wrote Wolin, "revolutionary theory . . . became essentially a body of strategic and tactical doctrines, a quasi-military way of thinking about action . . . conceived in terms that stressed organization, planning, secrecy, and discipline." The changes in the phenomenon can be seen in comparisons of one revolution with another, later one, or in individual revolutions, such as that in Vietnam, which evolved over a relatively long period of time.[\[16\]](#)

A perfect example of the historical dimension of revolution is evident in the comparison of the 1899-1902 American conflict with Filipino revolutionaries and the later struggle against the forces of revolution in Vietnam highlighted in Chapter Five. As historian Glenn A. May observed when he compared the two, "the passage of time meant that Vietnamese military leaders had a much more

sophisticated approach to unconventional warfare than the Filipino leaders. Giap," wrote May, "fought more ably than Aguinaldo, in large part, because he had at his disposal a body of military doctrine on 'people's war' that was based on the mistakes and successes of others." May concluded that "the spread of Marxist-Leninist ideology and the development of Communist organization techniques had fundamentally transformed the nature of the national liberation movements."^[17] As seen in earlier chapters, differences in the course of the two revolutions were also the result of changes taking place in the international balance of power between 1899 and the 1960s, as well as changes in warfare itself.

Unfortunately, although many scholars have noted briefly the way in which revolution changed over time, the stranglehold of the comparative approach used by Brinton and others remained unbroken. Even a number of the authors who drew attention to various historical aspects of the phenomenon continued to approach the subject in an ahistorical manner. In 1977 historian Walter Laqueur could observe that studies of political violence were "one-dimensional with regard to the time factor, i.e., synchronic instead of dichronic," without abandoning traditional assumptions. He too sought uniformities instead of the historical roots of significant contrasts, and he devoted his monumental study of guerrilla warfare to the search for "common patterns." One finds a similar orientation in his work on terrorism. Although Zagorin rejected the idea of "a universal typology or structural model comprehending all the forms of revolution," he nevertheless sought uniformities within the taxonomy of political violence that he created. Harry Eckstein also hoped to identify "common features" in "all cases of internal war," and Skocpol acknowledged her "urge to clarify the general logic" in the revolutions that she analyzed. Like so many others, she sought "causal regularities across the various historical cases."^[18]

The results of all the work done to date are too meager to sustain a continuation of the commitment to past approaches in the study of revolution, and the time is long overdue to make research into the phenomenon more compatible with what we know about its historical, i.e. changing, nature. The first step is to abandon efforts to force the phenomenon into the ahistorical mold of traditional comparative studies. The second step is to recognize that the development of a general theory of revolution may be impossible, as some scholars have begun to suspect.^[19]

The sources needed for the development of a history of revolution exist in abundance. As was the case with the history of war at the point when authors brought forth the first comprehensive studies, an extensive secondary literature treating a number of important aspects of revolution is readily available. In addition to countless volumes treating individual revolutions, one finds many broader studies. Some, such as *The Age of Democratic Revolutions* by R. R. Palmer or Zagorin's *Rebels and Rulers, 1500-1660*, focus on periods of conjuncture or revolutionary upheavals in a limited chronological period. Others, such as Laqueur's *Guerrilla*, deal with specific aspects of the revolutionary process, such as strategy or tactics. Similarly, James H. Billington's *Fire in the Minds of Men*, one of the few volumes that actually approaches being a comprehensive history, treats the "origins of the revolutionary faith" from the late eighteenth century to the 1905 revolution in Russia. The building blocks for a comprehensive history thus await the builders. What is needed is a change of assumptions so that historians might begin research into the phenomenon of revolution on a new and more profitable tack, comparable to that taken decades ago by historians studying war.^[20]

The brief survey that follows is meant to be suggestive of what one might see when revolution is viewed as a historical phenomenon that changes over time. It provides no more than a set of tentative conclusions. To simplify the task at hand, the chronological scope of the example has been limited to the period since the seventeenth century, and it focuses primarily on the process of revolution rather than its causes, which, as is the case with war, may be more event specific than the technique. Particular attention is given to the results of the conscious study of the phenomenon and reflection upon experience gained by revolutionaries and counterrevolutionaries. Finally, the

historical overview presented here clearly reflects the author's many years as a student of military history.

Revolutionary outbreaks in the seventeenth century tended to be spontaneous; the response by government, when initially challenged, was often weak. Both revolutionaries and counterrevolutionaries proceeded by *ad hoc* arrangements, responding to situations as they developed. Because of the balance of power that existed, civil war was a likely outcome of any intense confrontation between government and a large revolutionary group. Religion acted as an important organizing force, related both to the causes of revolt and the revolutionary process itself, with Protestant churches playing a role akin to that taken much later by revolutionary parties.

The balance of power between seventeenth century revolutionary and counterrevolutionary forces appears to have been roughly equal. Although slow communication initially hampered the government by delaying its response, later it also worked to prevent the rapid spread of revolution and the linkage of revolutionary groups. Other counterrevolutionary strengths included the psychological one of acceptance of and obedience to traditional authority, and the military value of cavalry, a branch of the service not easily developed by either peasant or urban rebels. At the same time, however, the general flux in military organization and tactics, as well as the simple technology of seventeenth century weapons, enabled revolutionaries to challenge the military power of the state, just as the high degree of political and religious fragmentation in the seventeenth-century state enabled them to challenge its authority.

In the first half of the eighteenth century, the forces of order, the status quo, the counterrevolutionaries (call them whatever your politics might dictate) seemed to have gained the upper hand. Although challenges to government did take place, they were met effectively. The increasing strength of central authority and its manifestation in well-trained standing armies gave government greater power than it had been able to exercise a century earlier. Improved communication, though not rapid by any means, did enable central governments to move forcefully against rebels, quashing potential revolutionary upheavals before they could grow.

With time the balance again shifted, and the late-eighteenth and early-nineteenth centuries were indeed an "age of revolution," if not necessarily an age of "democratic" revolution. Not only were revolutions apparent throughout Europe and America, but the revolutionaries often succeeded. Many historical developments appear to account for that success. Growing national feeling and its reinforcement by both revolutionary rhetoric and the process of revolt itself gave strength and power to revolutions as they emerged. The revolutionaries' firm base in liberal ideas also gave them a clarity of objectives as well as a wide appeal that added to their power. Improved communication and literacy further strengthened the revolutionary causes, and organization was facilitated by all of these developments. The superior organization of the revolutionaries, compared to those of earlier centuries, combined at times with unconventional military technique to further enhance revolutionary power. Able to organize nations and field large armies (forces that would later be called people's armies) revolutionary governments benefited from the relatively simple military technology of the day that enabled rebels to acquire and master the use of arms equal to those of the professional military units of the counterrevolutionaries. Existing governments were surprised by the force and vigor of the revolutions, and in Latin America both the region's isolation and Spanish preoccupation with problems in Europe gave a significant boost to the fortunes of the revolutionaries.

As the nineteenth century progressed, however, the environment in which revolution took place altered significantly. Attempts to copy the successful movements of the period before Napoleon's defeat were often met with swift repression and the more effective use of armed force. Metternich and the other leaders of monarchial Europe created an international system for enforcing the status quo. The active response of their governments, aided by the force of their allies when needed, prevented less formally organized revolutionaries from gaining the upper hand. Also, although its

effects were not really felt until mid-century, technology played a role in the enhancement of counterrevolutionary power. Numerous inventions such as the railroad, steamship, and telegraph would enable the state to move its military forces to respond with greater rapidity to threats of rebellion. Weapons were also changing, and whatever arms one found over the hearth or in the cupboard were no longer a match for the rifles and mobile artillery of the standing armies.

Fitting the events of 1848 into the historical evolution of revolution presents a problem. The revolutions did not fail because of faulty military technique or the superiority of counterrevolutionary weapons. They did, however, suffer from inadequate pre-revolutionary planning, insufficient groundwork among the people expected to bear the principal burden of the upheavals, and poor organization. Still, the revolutionaries of 1848 presented the forces of counterrevolution with difficulties. Barricade warfare in urban centers, for example, posed a significant problem for professional armies. In the end, the counterrevolutionaries proved themselves capable of retaining power, signaling would-be revolutionaries that the revolutions of the past could not be easily duplicated. The ability of the counterrevolutionaries to organize internationally gave them a distinct advantage over the revolutionaries, whose nationalistic endeavors lacked coordination.

For revolutionaries, 1848 was a disaster, but the study of those events led to a more thoughtful approach to the whole problem of revolution. The work of Marx and Engels is undoubtedly the most well-known of the revolutionary reassessments, although it did not stand alone, and the themes that emerged provided the text for the revolutionaries of the next two generations and more. Much of the post-1848 revolutionary literature stressed the need for planning. It also emphasized timing, noting the need for patience and a period of prolonged ideological struggle. In 1848, the forces of counterrevolution had found the peasants their willing allies and an important source of recruits. The lesson flowing from that realization stressed the importance of creating greater union between urban workers and peasants. Also, given the final results of the battle of the barricades, revolutionaries emphasized the need for offensive rather than purely defensive action. The focus, however, was on the initial phases of revolutionary activity. Little thought was given to techniques for seizing power if the initial moves of an uprising failed.

Frightened by 1848 and the revolutionary stirrings brought on by industrialization, governments also gave more attention to the problem of revolution. The construction within cities of long, straight, and wide boulevards which could accommodate rifle and cannon volleys, as well as provide avenues for the rapid movement of troops, was not a coincidence. Urban planning was consciously counterrevolutionary. Political, social, and economic reform was also a potent counterrevolutionary weapon, particularly when added to armed force and increasingly professional police work in a comprehensive approach to the problem of preventing revolution. Welfare capitalism undermined the revolutionaries by mitigating some of the worst evils of industrialization. At the same time, increasing technological change continued to provide advantages in weaponry and mobility to standing armies.

In the struggle to gain and maintain colonies, European governments met challenges similar to those provided by revolutionaries at home, and their response was comparable. Mixing reform with military advantage, European colonial governments pacified large sections of Asia and Africa despite the resistance of the local inhabitants. Even when they resorted to the technique of guerrilla warfare, which presented Europeans with a frustrating problem that was rare though not unknown in Europe, the locals failed. By the end of the nineteenth century, European governments had become skilled in the conquest and governance of resistant people, at home and abroad.

The frustration of revolutionaries in the period after 1848 is perhaps best seen in their resort to terrorism. Faced with governments that were either too powerful or too astute to be overthrown, the frustrated agents of rebellion lashed out in destructive terrorist activity which did little to further revolutionary progress, although it may have provided revolutionaries with an outlet for their

hostility. Despite attempts to legitimize terrorist activity and demonstrate its revolutionary potential, the advocates of terrorism were never able to develop it into an effective tool. Alone, terrorism was little more than a nuisance to governments prepared to fight revolution forcefully.

When revolution did come in the late-nineteenth and early-twentieth centuries, it took place where government was weak and unable or unwilling to utilize effectively the techniques of repression and co-optation. Such was the case in Mexico in 1910 and in Russia in 1917. In Cuba, in 1898, foreign intervention first aided and then stifled the revolution. The same thing happened in the Philippines. Elsewhere, particularly in Latin America, revolution was possible because the military itself was the motivating force behind the overthrow of government.

The success of revolution in Russia stimulated revolutionary activity throughout the world. As had been seen earlier, at the time of the American and French revolutions, a highly visible revolution prompts others to emulation. Initially, however, the forces of revolution outside the U. S. S. R. and colonial independence movements after World War I were both countered by a continuation of the repressive and co-optative measures that had proved so successful at the end of the nineteenth century. Revolution from the right, best exemplified by Italian fascism and the Nazism of Hitler, was more successful than that from the left, in part because it could be presented as a restoration of past glories instead of a radical leap into an unknown future. Elsewhere, revolutionaries continued to find themselves frustrated in their attempts to seize power.

A breakthrough in the development of revolutionary theory and practice came, finally, in China, where the writings and activities of Mao Zedong and the Chinese Communist Party demonstrated a new approach. It embodied a combination of two elements, the focus on preconditions and prior planning inherent in the works of Marx, Engels, and Lenin and the technique of guerrilla warfare used throughout the nineteenth century to resist the expansion of industrial Europe. The link between the partisan guerrillas of Napoleonic Spain and Russia and the anti-colonial guerrillas of the Philippines and Vietnam, on the one hand, and the revolutionary theory and organizational skill of the Communists created a revolutionary instrument of great power.

Developed for an agrarian and semi-colonial nation lacking in national organization, Mao's theory had widespread application, particularly after World War II put a severe strain on the resources of the Western colonial powers. Where Lenin had seen the value of the people's war and guerrilla techniques in the post-revolutionary civil war in Russia, Mao saw that they might actually provide the mainstay of revolutionary activity. To the traditional Marxist stress on organization, propaganda, ideological struggle, and timing, he added a stress on guerrilla war from base areas in a rural setting and a recognition that any such struggle would be a protracted one. In the process, the Marxist concept of patience in waiting for the moment of revolution was transformed into a new type of patience in fighting for the moment of revolutionary victory.

Mao's theory, the example of Communist success in China, and the collapse of Western colonial power led to a series of guerrilla conflicts in the post-World War II period. A second age of revolution, comparable to that at the end of the eighteenth century, began. It was a period of manufactured revolution in which individuals and groups set out to overthrow their respective governments using the new techniques. The works of such theorists as Ché Guevara and Vo Nguyen Giap augmented the original work of Mao, but the general focus remained the same, revolution through protracted people's war.

Strongly challenged for the first time in many decades, the forces of counterrevolution attempted to offset the advantage gained by the revolutionaries through their mix of traditional revolutionary methods with the neutral military techniques of the guerrilla. The result, based upon such notably successful counterrevolutionary campaigns as those in Greece, Malaya, and the Philippines, was the doctrine of counterinsurgency, which combined all of the military, political, economic, and social approaches of the past. In practice, however, the doctrine proved extremely difficult to implement, as the United States discovered in Vietnam.

Much has been written about revolutionary warfare as a Communist weapon of the Cold War, but in reality East-West tension and rivalry aided counterrevolutionaries as well as revolutionaries. Both groups were virtually assured of support if they could convince one of the superpowers that its aid would help erode the power of the other. Eastern bloc support for anti-imperialist and anti-capitalist revolutionaries was thus balanced by Western support for anti-Communist regimes, even when those regimes were illiberal or only nominally pro-Western. The Cold War thus had much less influence than once believed on the fundamental balance of power between the forces of revolution and counterrevolution. If anything, it enhanced the ability of both sides to sustain protracted and bloody stalemates.

In the face of potential stalemate in their respective activities, the parties involved in revolution and counterrevolution were forced to reassess their various approaches and the theories behind them. Perhaps because stalemate was more frustrating for revolutionaries seeking change than for counterrevolutionaries committed to the status quo, the most visible attempts to find a way around the impasse took place in the revolutionary camp. Faced with evidence of counterrevolutionary success in detaching people from the revolution through the use of a variety of techniques including propaganda and civic action, revolutionary theorists began to incorporate into their writings specific warning against such nonmilitary techniques used by counterrevolutionary forces. Frantz Fanon, for example, warned specifically against being deceived by enemy civic action operations and psychological warfare. Marxist and "neo-Marxist" theory, such as the work of Régis Debray, increasingly stressed the need to be uncompromising in the struggle for the goals of the revolution.

In the 1960s, the success of counterinsurgency efforts in the countryside of Latin America led to the development of a theory of guerrilla warfare in which Mao's traditional base, the rural populace, was ignored in the initial stage of warfare. The peasants were no longer seen as a hospitable sea for the guerrilla fish. Thus, Ché and Debray advocated the development of isolated guerrilla *focos* of 20 or 30 individuals who would operate independently of any political party, rural base, or other group that might compromise them in the face of well-trained counterinsurgent forces. With Ché's death in Bolivia and the failure of other *focos* elsewhere, revolutionaries in Latin America attempted to move the locus of revolution into the cities, while discontented members of urban-industrial societies elsewhere also gave new attention to the problems of urban revolution, something which had not been attempted in such earnest since the nineteenth century. In practice, however, the urban guerrillas proved no more effective than the rural *focos* in precipitating revolution.

In Vietnam, the forces of revolution also faced a situation that demanded a reassessment of concepts regarding how revolutionary wars end. The revolutionaries were unable to mobilize a mass uprising or to move successfully to the regular or third stage of revolutionary warfare as long as the United States resisted. In the end, the struggle became a contest of will, pure and simple, and the will of the revolutionaries proved to be greater than that of the most powerful force against them. But the destruction of the long war was truly horrible, and no revolutionary movement can engage in such carnage without a superhuman commitment. Whether the fruits of victory in such situations are worth the costs should be a matter of debate for revolutionaries and counterrevolutionaries alike.

Counterrevolutionaries found the new dimensions of the struggle equally frustrating. To the extent that reform was an important counterrevolutionary device, the general problem was one of how much reform was possible. If, to end a revolution, counterrevolutionaries had to resort to political, social, and/or economic changes that were almost as radical as those advocated by the revolutionaries, a policy based on reform quickly lost its appeal. One cannot expect those defending the status quo, and profiting from it, to make the revolution. An alternative approach, based on terror, proved more attractive. It had seemingly proven its value in the Battle of Algiers, and it became the mainstay of repressive military regimes in such places as Brazil, Argentina, and Chile.

By the 1980s revolutionaries and counterrevolutionaries alike found themselves frustrated by the alertness, preparation, and will of their opponents, and they could see no clear pattern indicating the

future course of either revolution or attempts to stop it. In strong, authoritarian states, such as South Africa or the Soviet Union, revolution proved impossible as long as government remained able and willing to use the full repressive force of the state. For decades the leaders of both nations, and many more like them elsewhere, showed that they had the will needed to maintain their power by the most brutal means necessary. In relatively strong, democratic states, such as the United States or the United Kingdom, revolution appeared to be impossible as long as government retained the allegiance of a large majority of the population. Although revolutionary terrorists continued to be a deadly annoyance, they were not really a threat to the state. If anything, their actions were more likely to bring about repression than revolution.

Only where government was weak, in will or means, did the struggle between revolutionary and counterrevolutionary forces manifest itself in a context where revolutionaries stood a chance of achieving their aims. That was possible, however, only as long as counterrevolutionaries did not receive significant outside help, but until the 1990s such situations were unlikely, given the way in which Cold War politics made many weak states the focal point of international intervention and involvement as well as the focal point of revolutionary activity. The most probable result was thus the prolonged carnage of an El Salvador or Afghanistan. There, as in Vietnam, pure will was the most important weapon in the arsenal of both revolutionaries and counterrevolutionaries, and the cost of exercising it was horrendous for each nation's population.

Because the phenomenon of revolution is still evolving, as demonstrated so vividly by events in Eastern Europe and the Soviet Union, a historical overview of revolution cannot be brought to a definite conclusion. Currently situations in which a revolutionary challenge is met by a counterrevolutionary response augmented by outside aid will almost invariably result in the creation of a balance of power that prevents the triumph of either side. Similarly, stalemate will emerge without outside intervention where a balance of power exists between the forces of revolution and counterrevolution. Given this pessimistic assessment of the revolutionary process at the end of the twentieth century, one is left with no clear indication of how to avoid stalemate or minimize the horror and destruction of contemporary revolutionary violence. All that can be said with confidence is that revolution has changed significantly over time, and many attempts to generalize about the phenomenon have accomplished very little because so few scholars have studied revolution as a historical phenomenon.

[1] Walter Millis, *Arms and Men* (New York, 1956) and Edward Mead Earle, ed., *Makers of Modern Strategy: Military Thought from Machiavelli to Hitler* (Princeton, 1941), particularly chs. 7, 10, & 14.

[2] John M. Gates, "Toward a History of Revolution," *Comparative Studies in Society and History*, 28 (1986), 535-544.

[3] William H. McNeill, *The Pursuit of Power: Technology, Armed Force, and Society since A.D. 1000* (Chicago, 1982) and Theodore Ropp, *War in the Modern World* (Durham, NC, 1959).

[4] Robert Blackey, *Revolution and Revolutionists: A Comprehensive Guide to the Literature* (Santa Barbara, 1982), p. xvi; Perez Zagorin, "Theories of Revolution in Contemporary Historiography," *Political Science Quarterly*, 88 (1973), 28; and, for an example of the two categories, William E. Lipsky, "Comparative Approaches to the Study of Revolution: A Historiographical Essay," *Review of Politics*, 38 (1976), 495. For a comprehensive review of the literature through 1979 see Ekkart Zimmermann, *Political Violence, Crises, and Revolutions: Theories and Research* (Cambridge: Schenkman Pub. Co., 1983).

[5] Zagorin, "Theories of Revolution," 29; Lipsky, "Comparative Approaches," 508; and Elbaki Hermassi, "Toward a Comparative Study of Revolutions," *Comparative Studies in Society and History*, 18 (1976), 211.

- [6] Rod Aya, "Theories of Revolution Reconsidered: Contrasting Models of Collective Violence," *Theory and Society*, 8 (1979), 41, and Blackey, *Revolutions and Revolutionists*, p. xiv.
- [7] Aya, "Theories of Revolution Reconsidered," 40.
- [8] Hermassi, "Toward a Comparative Study," 217.
- [9] Lipsky, "Comparative Approaches," 508, and Zagorin, "Theories of Revolution," 28.
- [10] Jacques Ellul, *Autopsy of Revolution* (New York, 1971, Patricia Wolf Trans.), p. ix, and James Farr, "Historical Concept in Political Science: The Case of 'Revolution'," *American Journal of Political Science*, 26 (1982), 700-701.
- [11] John Dunn, "Understanding Revolutions," *Ethics*, 92 (1982), 312, and Peter Amann, "Revolution: A Redefinition," *Political Science Quarterly*, 77 (1962), 36-37, and 39. For Amann, revolution is the result of competing power blocs. See 44-45.
- [12] Mark N. Hagopian, *The Phenomenon of Revolution* (New York, 1975), p. viii. The classics to which Hagopian refers are Lyford P. Edwards, *The Natural History of Revolution* (Chicago, 1929); George S. Pettee, *The Process of Revolution* (New York 1938); Crane Brinton, *The Anatomy of Revolution* (Englewood Cliffs, 1938); Morris Janowitz, "Military Institutions and Citizenship in Western Societies," *Armed Forces and Society*, 2 (1976), 198; Zagorin, "Theories of Revolution," 30; and Lipsky, "Comparative Approaches," 499.
- [13] Lipsky, "Comparative Approaches," 500; Hermassi, "Toward a Comparative Study," 212-213; Charles Tilly, "Revolutions and Collective Violence," in Fred I. Greenstein and Nelson Polsby, eds., *Handbook of Political Science* (Reading, Mass., 1974), p. 509; and Barrington Moore, *Social Origins of Dictatorship and Democracy: Lord and Peasant in the Making of the Modern World* (Boston, 1967).
- [14] Theda Skocpol, *States and Social Revolutions: A Comparative Analysis of France, Russia, and China* (Cambridge, Mass., 1979), pp. 288 and 39, and Jerome L. Himmelstein and Michael S. Kimmel, "Review Essay: States and Revolutions: The Implications and Limits of Skocpol's Structural Model," *American Journal of Sociology*, 86 (1981), 1153. See also, Dunn, "Understanding Revolutions," 299-315.
- [15] Hermassi, "Toward a Comparative Study," 214. See also Skocpol, *States and Social Revolutions*, p. 3; Carl Leiden and Karl M. Schmitt, *The Politics of Violence: Revolution in the Modern World* (Englewood Cliffs, 1968), p. 212; and Jack A. Goldstone, "The Comparative and Historical Study of Revolutions," *Annual Review of Sociology*, 8 (1982), 204.
- [16] Sheldon S. Wolin, "The Politics of the Study of Revolution," *Comparative Politics*, 5 (1973), 348 and 353. For examples of the changing nature of revolution see William H. Friedland, et al., *Revolutionary Theory* (Totowa, N.J., 1982), p. 173; Glenn A. May, "Why the United States Won the Philippine-American War, 1899-1902," *Pacific Historical Review*, 52 (1983), 353-377, which compares the revolutionary war in the Philippines with that in Vietnam a half-century later; and William J. Duiker, *The Communist Road to Power in Vietnam* (Boulder, 1981), ch. 13 in particular.
- [17] Glenn A. May, "Why the United States Won the Philippine-American War, 1899-1902," *Pacific Historical Review*, 52 (1983), 376.
- [18] Walter Laqueur, "Interpretation of Terrorism: Fact, Fiction, and Political Science," *Journal of Contemporary History*, 12 (1977), 11; Walter Laqueur, *Guerrilla: A Historical and Critical Study* (Boston, 1976) p. v, and Walter Laqueur, *Terrorism* (Boston, 1977), ch. 3 in particular; Harry Eckstein, "On the Etiology of Internal Wars," *History and Theory*, 4 (1965), 133; and Skocpol, *States and Social Revolutions*, p. xiv. See, for other examples, D. E. H. Russell, *Rebellion*,

Revolution, and Armed Force: A Comparative Study of Fifteen Countries with Special Emphasis on Cuba and South Africa (New York, 1974); Jeffrey M. Paige, *Agrarian Revolution: Social Movements and Export Agriculture in the Underdeveloped World* (New York, 1975); and Jack A. Goldstone, "Theories of Revolution: The Third Generation," *World Politics*, 32 (1980), 425-453.

[19] See, for examples, Zagorin, "Theories of Revolution," 52; Farr, "Historical Concepts," 706; and Dunn, "Understanding Revolutions," 303-306.

[20] R. R. Palmer, *The Age of Democratic Revolution: A Political History of Europe and America, 1760-1800*, 2 vols. (Princeton, 1959 and 1964); Perez Zagorin, *Rebels and Rulers, 1500-1660* (Cambridge, 1982); James H. Billington, *Fire in the Minds of Men: Origins of the Revolutionary Faith* (New York, 1980). The literature of revolution is immense. Although Blackey, *Revolutions and Revolutionists*, contains over 6,000 entries, students of specific revolutions will find a number of important works that have not been included. Documentation of a historical overview such as that presented in the last half of this chapter is a truly impossible task, and no attempt will be made to provide specific citations for the material presented. It rests upon a wide variety of sources read by the author in his more than twenty years as a student and teacher of United States, Latin American, and military history.

CHAPTER TEN

UNDERSTANDING TERRORISM

Terrorism became a hot topic in the 1980s, and as a result the number of publications devoted to the subject far outweighed the merit of their contents. If the topic were purely historical, with no applied dimension whatsoever, that shortcoming would be more tolerable, if no less unsettling for scholars. Unfortunately the problem of terrorism is too important to be ignored without significant consequences in the so-called "real world" that exists outside of the academic's study. In its campaigns against irregulars, the U.S. Army has frequently found its enemies resorting to terrorist acts. Sadly, some members of the army have responded in kind. Although not officially sanctioned, terror was used at times by soldiers in virtually all of the army's major campaigns against irregulars. In Vietnam, however, the destructiveness of modern weaponry worked to blur the line between terror and legitimate warfare beyond recognition. Even when employed in ways sanctioned by common usage, if not always in accordance with the strictest interpretations one might make of the laws of war, modern weaponry inflicted a devastating toll on the innocent.

My experience with the literature devoted to terrorism mirrored to some extent that with the scholarly literature on revolution. As far as I could see, analysts too frequently took not only an ahistorical view, but also a highly political one. As a result, the popular understanding of the phenomenon is frequently distorted. The first publication to break through the fog created by the self-serving literature that I remember encountering was an article by Frederic C. Hof, a U.S. Army officer writing in *Parameters* in 1985.^[1] Later I discovered the equally perceptive work of Professor Michael Stohl.^[2] Between those two events I prepared the lecture that is the basis for this chapter. As will soon be clear, my views on terrorism are much less developed than they are on revolution or the specific campaigns surveyed in other chapters. I am certain of one thing, however. We will never understand terrorism until we depoliticize our thinking about it. The material which follows has that objective in mind, and in its original form it made up one of the six lectures delivered in Tokyo in 1986. It is presently undergoing revision, but because of the relevance of the topic, I have included the original in the book on a temporary basis.

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In the 1980s perhaps no problem related to the use of violence concerned the developed world as much as that of terrorism. People who engaged in terrorist acts were viewed in a variety of ways, depending as much on the perspective of the person making the assessment as on the terrorists themselves. Thus, the same individuals could be described as valiant revolutionaries or champions of the weak by some people and insane murderers or criminals by others. As one American scholar observed, "one man's terror is another's patriotism."^[3] The kinds of activities in which terrorists have engaged are similarly varied, including bombings, assassinations, hijackings and other forms of hostage taking.

For the people who perceive themselves to be the victims of terror, reactions also vary. Many individuals take a rather fatalistic view, particularly when the terror confronting them is sanctioned by or implemented by their own government. Other people, however, can not overcome the frustration that accompanies the threat of terrorism. They are filled with anger and manifest a tremendous desire to fight back. Often, however, the target against which they can release their rage remains obscure.

The frustration has been clearly evident in the response of the United States to acts of terrorism. The American people do not want to remain unresisting victims. They want to fight back, but against whom? Sometimes they are not even able to identify the motivation for what they perceive to

be terrorist acts (not knowing whether they are the victims of the criminal actions of individuals, the work of revolutionaries, or well hidden acts of warfare against the U.S. by some enemy nation). Finding the agents responsible for acts of terrorism and punishing them has proven even more difficult.

The analysis presented here attempts to do at least three things. First, it seeks to develop a definition of terrorism that will improve understanding of the phenomenon. Much of the current frustration of many individuals comes from the failure to comprehend the nature of terrorism and its place in the contemporary world. People can only develop a meaningful response to terrorism if they understand it.

Second, this essay will try to place terrorism in the framework of the evolution of war and revolution presented in the previous chapter. Part of the failure to understand contemporary terrorism comes from a failure to understand the greater phenomena of which it is often a part. Unlike war or revolution, terrorism is not an entity in and of itself. Instead it is a tactic or a method that can and has been used by a variety of people in a variety of contexts. A final point to be made concerns the primary question often asked in Washington and at international conferences: "What is to be done about terrorism?" Should one's response be moderate, calculated to save lives even at the risk of letting terrorists go free, or should it be more forceful? Should one think of terrorism as a police problem or as a military one?

For many people in the United States, terrorism is defined by acts such as those occurring the mid-1980s. They think of such events as the hijacking in June 1985 of a TWA jet carrying 153 passengers. The two Lebanese Shiite Moslems who seized the plane killed one passenger and held the rest hostage, demanding the release of some 700 Moslems held prisoner by Israel.

The summer of 1985 seemed to be a period of particularly intense terrorist activity. In one day, for example, on June 19, a bomb exploded in the international airport in Frankfurt, West Germany, wounding 42 people and killing 3, while in El Salvador guerrillas gunned down 13 people including 4 U.S. Marines in a street cafe in the capital. Only a few days later, on June 23, an Air India jet travelling from Toronto to Bombay crashed into the sea, killing all 329 passengers on board, the suspected work of Sikh terrorists, and at almost the same time a piece of luggage from another flight from Canada exploded in Japan's Narita airport.

In October Palestinian terrorists seized an Italian cruise liner, the *Achille Lauro* and killed an elderly American before surrendering to Egyptian authorities. The U.S. later forced an Egyptian airliner to the ground to take the terrorists prisoner. During 1986 comparable acts of terrorism took place, including the bombing of a disco in Germany and an explosion on a TWA jet over the Mediterranean. All of these examples highlight the kind of actions that Americans and many other people in the world think of when one speaks of terrorism.

When many Americans and others think of terror, however, they frequently ignore another form of the phenomenon that is no less frightening and disturbing to the people who suffer its consequences: the use of terror by governments against their own citizens who oppose them. In the mid-1960s, for example, when the Uruguayan government found itself engaged in a struggle with the leftist revolutionary movement of the *Tupamaros*, torture was used as a police method for interrogation. When the Uruguayan military took control of the anti-revolutionary campaign in 1971, the use of torture increased, and by 1975, according to Amnesty International, torture had become "routine treatment for virtually any peaceful opponent of the Uruguayan Government who fell into the hands of military units." [4] In Guatemala, army counterinsurgency units terrorized the rural population to keep it from supporting leftist guerrillas, while in Guatemalan cities right-wing death squads assassinated suspected opponents of the government. Throughout the country agents of the police and military tortured people as a punishment or a warning to others. Similar government terror has been evident in other Latin American countries, including Argentina, Brazil, Chile and El Salvador.

Such terror, of course, is not limited to governments in Latin America. Amnesty International has noted that torture was used in Afghanistan "to obtain intelligence information about the guerrillas, to intimidate the population from supporting them, and to discourage strikes and demonstrations in the towns."^[5] In the Republic of Korea students demonstrating or distributing anti-government leaflets were tortured by police; in the Soviet Union political prisoners were administered pain-causing drugs during confinement in mental institutions. In the summer of 1986, TV viewers in the United States witnessed the beating of peaceful and unresisting student protesters by police in South Africa. From the victims' point of view, all of these actions are examples of terrorism comparable to the hijacking of a TWA jet or the explosion of bomb in an airport.

In defining terrorism, however, people frequently speak of the phenomenon in ways that limit understanding. As J. Bowyer Bell, a student of revolutionary warfare, observed, the term terrorism "has become a convenient means to identify evil threats rather than to define a special kind of revolutionary violence . . . the very word," wrote Bell, "has become a touchstone for postures and beliefs about the nature of man and society, and the relation of law, order, and a justice."^[6] Few people can speak of terrorism without a degree of emotional involvement, and there is a strong tendency on the part of potential victims to associate the technique only with enemies who might use it against them.

Much of the writing on terrorism in the United States, for example, would lead readers to conclude that acts of terrorism are only undertaken by people who oppose the United States and its domestic or foreign policies. Such a viewpoint was captured vividly in a 1986 editorial cartoon that appeared in many American newspapers. It was labeled "The Reagan Guide to World Affairs." In one frame a rough looking man in dark glasses appeared with a rifle. Under the picture was a definition: "Terrorist . . . One who subverts governments and kills innocent people for a cause we don't like. (ex.) A PLO member." A duplicate picture of the same rough looking man in dark glasses appeared in the cartoon's second frame. Under that picture, however, one found a different definition: "Rebel . . . One who subverts governments and kills innocent people for a cause we do like and deserves over \$90 million in Federal aid. (ex.) A contra."^[7] Surely in the eyes of the people being terrorized little significant difference exists between living in fear of leftist revolutionary guerrillas or right-wing counterrevolutionary death squads.

In the political rhetoric of the United States, however, violent actions of American allies or actions that further government policy are rarely identified as terrorist, even when those actions are calculated to influence the observers politically through the inducement of fear. During the Cold War, for example, American leaders portrayed Soviet support of "wars of liberation" and the actions of revolutionaries on the left very differently from the fundamentally similar actions of the United States in support of counterrevolutionary "freedom fighters." The absurdity of such an emotionally laden and politically charged approach to defining terrorism would seem to be obvious were it not for the large number of so-called experts and government officials who have adopted it.

One definition claimed that "terrorist violence" is meant to "create widespread disorder that will wear down a society's will to resist terrorists, and to focus attention on the terrorists themselves."^[8] In fact, however, such a statement is only true of some terrorists. The terrorists who constitute the death squads and torturing security forces of existing governments have a different goal. They seek to create order through fear, and they would prefer that the press not report their activities. Unlike many revolutionary terrorists, the repressive terrorists of counterrevolutionary and totalitarian states do not seek media publicity. In fact, they attempt to do their dirty work in secret. Where the state controls the media, a repressive government will try to convey to the world an image of a country that is not terrorizing its citizens. The agents of such repression are terrorists none the less, and nothing is achieved but self delusion if they are defined out of a discussion of terrorism.

Although some terrorists wish to destroy the status quo and resort to terrorism because of their weakness, others seek to protect existing systems and act from the strength they possess as agents

of government. Thus, the ranks of international terrorism have included more than the members of groups such as the PLO, Moslem fundamentalists, or the IRA. They have also included agents of established regimes such as the Pinochet government in Chile and the racist government in South Africa. All such groups are terrorists because all seek to gain their ends through engendering widespread fear by their violent and often indiscriminate actions.

Still, because the entire discussion of terrorism has been so emotional and political, no widely accepted definition of it exists. In December 1985, for example, at a meeting of the Ohio Arms Control Seminar that focused on terrorism, one speaker, Professor Abraham Miller of the University of Cincinnati, a political scientist, called terrorism a form of theater, a substitute for political impotency. He viewed it as a tactic of people who wanted to change the political balance without the power needed to accomplish that end.

Such a definition limits one's thinking about terrorism, however, because of the assumptions included in the definition. It assumes, for example, that terrorists must be people without power who, as theatrical producers or news makers, seek media coverage of their acts. The use of terror thus becomes a barometer of the strength of a political movement, an indicator of weakness.

An overly narrow conception of terrorism led the highly regarded historian Walter Laqueur to make statements that defy common sense. He claimed, for example, that "effective dictatorships are immune to terror"[\[9\]](#) and that terrorism is only successful "against democratic regimes and ineffective (meaning obsolete or half-hearted) dictatorships."[\[10\]](#) With a better definition of terrorism, Laqueur would have recognized that the very power of strong dictatorships and totalitarian regimes is based on their effective use of terror.

Agencies of the United States government have also adopted seriously flawed definitions of terrorism. The U.S. Defense Department, for example, defined it as "the unlawful use or threatened use of force or violence by a revolutionary organization against individuals or property, with the intention of coercing or intimidating governments or societies, often for political or ideological reasons."[\[11\]](#) As Lt. Col. Frederic Hof observed in a 1985 article in the U.S. Army War College Journal, however, "by limiting the applicability of the term to the activities of 'revolutionary organizations,' the directive [of the Defense Department] was overlooking the obvious: that states are fully capable of using terrorism; that they have used it and continue to use it both against their own citizens as well as against other states."[\[12\]](#) Unfortunately, the problems identified by Hof continue to exist in such fundamental statements of military doctrine as the joint U.S. Army and Air Force publication *Military Operations in Low Intensity Conflict*.[\[13\]](#)

Ironically, attempts to define terrorism have been so muddled that an event that provoked considerable discussion of terrorism in the United States in 1983 and after was not really an act of terrorism at all. The October 1983 bombing of the U.S. Marine headquarters in Beirut, which killed 241 Americans, took the Marines completely by surprise, but the use of a very unconventional method of attack did not make the highly successful bombing an act of terrorism. The attack was not carried out against innocent civilians or in a nation nominally at peace. A number of the warring factions in Beirut believed that the United States was taking sides in an ongoing conflict, and in their eyes that made the U.S. Marines a legitimate military target. Instead of terrorism, the bombing was an act of war, carried out in a war zone against uniformed troops perceived to be taking sides in the conflict. For similar reasons, the shooting of the four American Marines in El Salvador in 1985 was also not an act of terrorism, since at the time of the killings the United States was aiding the Salvadoran government in an ongoing war. The inability of the U.S. to take proper security precautions or to understand its own role in such situations does not make the attacks upon it in such circumstances terrorism, and people will never understand terrorism or learn how to respond to it if they do not adopt a clearer and less politicized definition.

Unfortunately, many claims about terrorism only make sense if one ignores the terror of governments against their own citizens or if one defines the term in some way that leaves out many

examples of the very activity to be understood. To comprehend terrorism, however, one must look at more than highly selective examples, particularly if the examples are selected for political rather than intellectual reasons, as has frequently been the case in the United States. If the Sandanistas in Nicaragua were terrorists, as President Reagan proclaimed, then so were the Contras he supported. If the rebels in El Salvador were terrorists, then so were the death squads and torturers of the government's security forces.

Only with a broad but clear definition of terrorism can one gain significant insight into it. Most useful would seem to be a definition such as that provided by Benjamin Netanyahu when he was Israel's Ambassador to the UN. Ambassador Netanyahu defined terrorism as "the deliberate and systematic murder, maiming and menacing of the innocent to inspire fear for political ends."^[14] When applied apolitically, Netanyahu's definition includes the terror used by governments and agents of states against their own citizens. It includes terror used both for revolutionary and counter-revolutionary purposes. It includes terror as an act of war, but by using the term "innocent" to describe the victims of terror, it wisely excludes clandestine operations against military forces such as the 1983 bombing of the Marine barracks in Beirut.

Thomas Milburn, an Ohio State University professor of psychology at the Mershon Center in Columbus, Ohio, has observed that "terrorist acts are . . . intended to influence politically the observers and audiences to the violence, more than the victims who are its primary targets."^[15] His statement highlights an extremely important dimension of terrorism: terrorist attacks are intended to influence audiences by engendering fear. The victims of terrorism are what Prof. Jordan Paust of the University of Houston law school has called "instrumental" targets. They are attacked "in order to communicate to a primary target a threat of future violence." The objective is "to use intense fear or anxiety to coerce the primary target into certain behavior or to mold its attitudes in connection with a demanded power (political) outcome."^[16] As the French scholar Raymond Aron noted, "the lack of discrimination helps spread fear, for if no one in particular is a target, no one can be safe."^[17]

Considerable confusion will continue to exist regarding the nature of terrorism, however, as long as people refuse to recognize it for what it is: a violent method that can be used by any group (weak or strong, in or out of power, politically left or right of center). Unfortunately, in the United States terrorism has been perceived as a technique of revolutionaries so often that Americans frequently overlook the fact that anyone can use terror in an attempt to further widely varied, even opposing goals.

Of interest also is the question of why terrorism seems to have increased in the last third of the twentieth century. One explanation, of course, is that no rise in terrorism has taken place, only an increase in media reporting and popular awareness of terrorist incidents. In the past, travellers were often at risk, and for centuries both governments and revolutionaries used terror in their attempts to accomplish their respective ends. At the same time, one senses something is different about the current situation in the world, although a change is not easily documented.

The primary reason for the existence of widespread terror in the late twentieth century would appear to be the breakdown of other methods for solving various kinds of national and international political problems. Chapter Nine briefly described the way in which revolution became stalemated through the development of improved techniques of both revolution and counterrevolution. One result of that change has been the resort to terror by revolutionaries who see no other alternatives for action and counterrevolutionaries who are unable or unwilling to use reform and cooptation to preserve their wealth and power.

War between nations has undergone a similar evolution. The coexistence of antagonistic superpowers armed with extremely dangerous nuclear explosives helped make war too dangerous to contemplate, even in situations where it would certainly have been used as an instrument of state policy in the past. The United States and the Soviet Union, for example, were enemies that had to

avoid open warfare at all costs because of the risk of nuclear disaster that such a war would create. As enemies, however, they continued to vie with each other for advantage on the international stage. In that Cold War struggle acts of terror provided a means of conflict that avoided the risk of nuclear holocaust.

Nonnuclear states and revolutionary governments that aspired to be states often lack the conventional power to fight against each other or the nuclear giants in total war, or they do not want to run the risks of total failure inherent in such conflicts. They have also found terror to be a weapon of war that appears to have relatively low risk coupled with potentially high reward.

The world is filled with discontented states and groups, each seeking a redress of grievances from the governments that they believe are responsible. Communist and other revolutionaries, Islamic fundamentalists, ethnic or sectarian nationalists including such diverse groups as Basques, Kurds, and Palestinians have all used terror as a weapon, as have the forces fighting against them. As world problems of immense proportions have furthered world-wide discontent, the result has been global warfare in which the use of terror has played an important role.

World War II, the war in Vietnam, and other twentieth century conflicts have blurred distinctions between combatants and noncombatants until even within the existing laws of war the distinction between legitimate and illegitimate targets is no longer clear. By the end of World War II, it was difficult to find any act of violence that some people would not argue was legitimate in a total war for survival. By the 1990s the ethical limits of violent conflict had become exceedingly difficult to define, leaving people with no clear standards for behavior. As Benjamin Netanyahu observed, for the terrorist who has declared "total war on the society he attacks . . . everyone is a legitimate target. A baby is fair game; he may, after all, grow up to be a soldier. So is the baby's mother; she gave birth to this future soldier. No one is spared, ordinary citizens and leaders alike."[\[18\]](#) Because so many people appear to take the view Netanyahu described, terror has become an integral part of modern warfare.

The twentieth century has become an age of total war in which no weapon has been too horrible to be used if the user thought it would be effective and advantageous. In fact, in some circles terror has been incorporated into military doctrine. Roger Trinquier, a French military officer who authored an influential text in the 1960s, called terrorism "the principal weapon of modern warfare."[\[19\]](#) For him, the terrorist who placed a car bomb in the middle of a crowded city was no different from the pilot who dropped similar devices from a plane. To fight against such terror, Trinquier advocated the use of torture to force information from captured terrorists that could be used to destroy their organizations. In short, he proposed that the terror of the bomb be met with the terror of interrogation at the hands of professionals skilled in the art of torture. It was only a small step from Trinquier's theorizing to the repressive governments established throughout the world in the last third of the century.

In some situations the use of terror was certainly encouraged by the fact that it seemed to work. In Latin America in the 1970s, for example, governments using techniques such as those advocated by Trinquier managed to stop the wave of revolutionary activity evident in such countries as Argentina, Brazil, Chile, and Uruguay. Even earlier, terrorist acts had played an important role in the development of many successful revolutionary and independence movements in places as widely divided in time and space as Russia before the revolution of 1917, Ireland before its independence, Cuba before Castro's 1959 revolution, and Vietnam from the 1950s onward. Aspiring revolutionaries and counterrevolutionaries thus had little incentive to avoid using a technique that had proven effective in the hands of others.

A few scholars have argued that a certain degree of violence is a part of normal democratic politics. Clearly terror is a part of normal totalitarian and dictatorial politics, but it may also play a role in the evolving discussion of political problems within established, nonviolent channels. Providing it is kept under control and used in moderation, terror or threats of violence can result in reforms or

compromises that might otherwise have been unattainable, although one should not confuse success, even in a good cause, with moral or ethical affirmation.

Without doubt terrorism is an exceedingly complex phenomenon that can and has been used to accomplish a variety of ends. Governments and revolutionary organizations have used it to coerce mass acceptance, gain obedience, enforce discipline, display their power and undermine that of their opponents. The phenomenon's complexity may even help to explain why the many authors who have attempted to categorize terrorists and their motives have met with limited success.

People seeking generalizations, however, can think of terrorism being used in at least three distinct situations: first, by people not in power seeking to establish their movements and subvert the existing political, social, and/or economic order; second, by regimes and self-selected defenders of the status quo to quash opposition by their own citizens; and third, by national governments and other groups to fight against their enemies in a state of declared or, more likely, undeclared war. Unfortunately, in many instances more than one party is involved in the terrorist activity, leading to a blending of motives. Warring parties in Nicaragua and El Salvador, for example, used terror for the first two reasons, while their supporters in the United States, Cuba, and the Soviet Union were engaged in activities that fit better into the third category.

Writing in the U.S. Army's *Military Review*, Stephen Daskal identified a subgroup within terrorism that he labeled the "urban terrorist," people "motivated by a desire to rebel regardless of whether a clear or rational grievance warrants armed action. They are, virtually without exception, the products of middle-class or wealthy families and are often well-educated and intelligent. Yet, they reject their background and potential and assault the society that gave them these benefits." Their demands are often vague and sometimes "inconsistent." It is even possible that "their real motivation is the excitement and 'romance' of being a noble revolutionary." Daskal noted that "some psychological experts believe they are subconsciously trying to punish their parents or gain their attention."[\[20\]](#)

Daskal's "urban terrorist" is of particular importance because of the implications of the description, for many of these individuals seem to have turned to terrorism out of frustration in situations where no reform or compromise could satisfy them. Unable to achieve their goals, they lash out in rage. Their terrorist acts become goals instead of means, and they engage in terror for its own sake. Such terrorists may even recognize that their ends can not be accomplished, but they continue to engage in acts of terror to prevent their enemies from enjoying the benefits of peace and order.

After noting that urban terrorists were "more oriented toward anarchy than justice," Daskal concluded that "no amount of reform is likely to prevent urban terrorism or significantly curtail it." So defined, the urban terrorist is more accurately described as a sociopath rather than a revolutionary, and Daskal's conclusion that they "must be treated as violent criminals rather than political or military opponents" would appear to be a valid one.[\[21\]](#) From the viewpoint of the society in which they operate, sociopathic terrorists are little more than criminals or outcasts, to be hunted down and captured or killed.

Other forms of terrorism are clearly different. Rural guerrillas or government security forces using terror in the midst of a revolutionary war are engaged in a struggle in which issues are paramount. The problem presented is political in nature. From the point of view of government, the revolutionary terrorists who seek change through specific programs identify a set of issues that must be addressed by the forces of government if order is to be achieved without resorting to a policy of unenlightened repression, itself a form of terrorism. Military force may work to hold the revolutionary terrorists in check, but reform is needed if cooptation is to take place and a lasting peace is to be achieved. In the absence of reform, brutal repression would seem to be the only significant policy alternative.

In the late twentieth century organizing and carrying out terrorist acts became easier, complicating efforts to deal with the problem posed by terrorism. In an age of virtually instantaneous world-wide

communication, efficient global transportation, and relatively cheap but highly destructive weapons, terrorists have many advantages not available to them in the past. They can strike targets far from home using methods limited only by their imaginations in many cases. Miniaturization and other high-tech applications that revolutionized conventional warfare revolutionized terrorism as well. As terrorist threats increased, the means of carrying them out multiplied as well.

One result is that terrorist attacks increasingly kill and wound larger numbers of people than they did in the past. Where a few individuals might be taken hostage or assassinated in the past, now entire plane loads of people can be victimized by terrorism. Where only the most outspoken political dissidents might have been victims of government repression in the past, now entire nations can be terrorized by their own governments. Increasingly people worry that some group will escalate terrorism to the point where entire cities are subjected to chemical, biological, or nuclear threats or attack. Even where the daily level of terrorist violence appears to be relatively low, the costs can be high over time. In Northern Ireland, for example, approximately 2,500 people have died since 1968. If an equal percentage of the population in the United States had been lost in a conflict at that level of violence, the total having died would be close to 400,000.

The problem is compounded as various purveyors of terrorism have begun to cooperate, each for his or her own particular reasons. Nations, revolutionary groups, and even sociopathic urban terrorists have cooperated, supplying weapons, funds, and other support, even carrying out missions for one another. The fear engendered by such developments can be tremendous.

The frustration that has been created by the terrorist threat is itself a danger in a world where miscalculation in a response by a nuclear power could mean disaster. Nevertheless, in the United States the pressures to respond forcefully to acts of terrorism grew so great that by 1986 Secretary of State George Shultz had evidently become convinced that "if you raise the costs, you do something that should, eventually, act as a deterrent." [22] Commenting on the American air strikes against Libya following the disco bombing in Germany, President Reagan claimed the action "will not only diminish Colonel Gaddafi's capacity to export terror, it will provide him with incentives and reasons to alter his criminal behavior." [23] Defending the President's actions, Secretary Shultz said "if you let people get away with murder, you'll get murder." [24]

Unfortunately, even if one penalizes people for murder, one still sees murder, as states with capital punishment have discovered. If Secretary of Defense Casper Weinberger was correct when he observed in 1986 that the wave of terrorism against the United States is "a method of waging war," [25] then President Reagan and Secretary Shultz should have concentrated on identifying the warring parties and the issues causing the war rather than on finding ways to retaliate. Seeking ways to end a war is clearly preferable to developing better techniques for fighting it.

Instead of assuming that forceful action will deter terrorists, one might more logically conclude that an escalation of force will take place on both sides, leading to an undeclared war of attrition. The commission of acts of terror as well as acts of retaliation is relatively cheap and easy, both within nations and outside of them. But a country such as the United States cannot stop every act of terror against its citizens without achieving both the total destruction of all anti-American terrorists and also the deterrence of all the regimes supporting them. Destroying the regime of a Colonel Gaddafi or a Saddam Hussein, for example, would not be sufficient.

Leaders attempting to deal with terrorism often find themselves pursuing more than one goal. First, they want to prevent acts of terror. One approach to achieving that end would aim at resolving the problems that have led terrorists to act in the first place: resolving differences between Israelis and Palestinians in the Middle East, for example. Obviously, given the extent of discontent in the world and the diversity of the issues that motivate the terrorist response, such an approach is more easily described than implemented.

Another policy aimed at preventing terrorism would emphasize the enhancement of security. Better intelligence, better police work, improved security at key targets and other, comparable activities would obviously help to prevent certain acts of terrorism. Unfortunately even the most astute methods, well applied are unlikely to prevent all terrorist action, although in the United States such preventative measures might well entail a significant diminution in civil liberties. At best, enhanced security is only a partial solution to the problem.

A third approach relies on deterrence. This particular approach is evident in the rhetoric of the United States and the actions of Israel; its essential element is the promise of swift retaliation. The problems with such a policy are many. First, one can not always identify the proper target for retaliation. Second, to the extent that the retaliation kills, maims, or terrorizes innocent people, it is itself an act of terrorism. Third, a number of terrorists are willing to give up their own lives for whatever cause they serve, and they are therefore not deterred by the thought of death through retaliation or any other means. Finally, in some cases terrorists hope to bring about retaliation, particularly if they believe that the victims of the retaliation will be perceived as innocent. As a result, the promise of swift retaliation may sometimes act as an incentive rather than a deterrent to terrorism.

When prevention fails, as it most surely will in at least a few cases, one must focus on a second general goal: the solution of whatever problem the acts of terrorists present. In the case of a hijacking or hostage taking, for example, one has the lives of the hostages to consider. In a bombing, one must deal with the casualties and disruption caused. In an environment of torture based repression, one must deal with the refugees that are invariably produced. Rarely, however, does the resolution of specific crises prove to be a satisfying response to terrorism, and it clearly does very little to solve the problem of terrorism itself.

When acts of terrorism are planned and/or committed, the people who are the targets want to bring the perpetrators to justice and punishment, but the urge to punish is a highly emotional one. It matters little to angry citizens and leaders whether or not the act of punishment helps or hinders in pursuing the broader policy goal of abolishing terrorism. The urge to punish may even contribute to the continuation and escalation of terrorism, but that will often make little difference to the frustrated individuals crying out for retribution. As one might guess, the desire to punish can easily disguise itself as a seemingly more rational policy of deterrence.

In the final analysis, how one responds to terrorism may depend upon how one views the phenomenon. Viewing terrorism as an act of war to be deterred by threat of retaliation or, deterrence failing, to be met with a military response seems relatively unproductive. It provides neither a means of dealing with any underlying problems that might cause terrorism nor a method for minimizing the damage that results from terrorism that is not deterred.

If one sees the terrorism one confronts as a tactic of individuals or groups who are involved in a rational, goal oriented action, then a political or diplomatic approach would seem to be indicated. If one can solve whatever problems led the terrorists to undertake their attacks on innocent civilians, the terrorism should disappear.

Some terrorism, however, may not appear to be the result of rational, goal oriented behavior. In such cases, terrorism becomes a phenomenon much like crime; it can be controlled but not eliminated. One must take a police approach to the problem and develop an ability to live with a low level of terrorist activity in the same way people adjust to living with a degree of criminality in their societies.

Before effective remedial action can be taken against terrorists that will help diminish the problem throughout the world, however, many of the people concerned with the problem will need to alter their perceptions of it. People in the United States, for example, must recognize that they cannot obtain support in their efforts to end terrorism in one area or of one type if they are not willing to

condemn terrorism of other kinds in other places. As Americans have found in the past, gaining allies to fight against Islamic terrorists in Europe and the Middle East was sometimes made more difficult by U.S. support of counterrevolutionary terrorists in Central America and the reluctance of U.S. leaders to work more forcefully to end government terror in countries such as South Africa. At the very least, consistency in defining terrorism and greater uniformity in dealing with terrorists of all kinds would base United States policy on principle instead of expediency.

People who live in the developed world should recognize that they can do a great deal more than they are now doing to help solve a number of serious global problems. At times, inhabitants of wealthy nations lose sight not only of the problems plaguing people throughout the world, but also of the way in which the wealthy can be perceived as being responsible for the continuation of those problems. Unless people are willing to attempt to view their own behavior through the eyes of their critics, even if the critics are also terrorists, they may never gain the understanding needed to curb terrorist attacks and the steady erosion of civilized life that those attacks have caused. At best, solving the problem of terrorism promises to be a very long and difficult task, and we can only hope that it will not prove to be an impossible one.

[1] Frederic C. Hof, "The Beirut Bombing of October 1983: An Act of Terrorism?," *Parameters*, 15 (Summer, 1985), 69-74.

[2] See, for example, Michael Stohl, "Demystifying the Mystery of International Terrorism" in Charles W. Kegley, Jr., ed., *International Terrorism: Characteristics, Causes, Controls* (New York, 1990), 81-96. Intelligent analysis of the topic can also be found in Robert O. Slater & Michael Stohl, eds., *Current Perspectives on International Terrorism* (New York, 1988).

[3] J. Bowyer Bell, "Transnational Terror and the World Order," *South Atlantic Quarterly*, 74 (1975), 405.

[4] Amnesty International, *Torture in the Eighties: An Amnesty International Report* (1984), 5.

[5] Ibid.

[6] J. Bowyer Bell, "Trends of Terror: The Analysis of Political Violence," *World Politics*, 29 (1977), 477.

[7] 1986 newspaper cartoon signed Meddick I D.

[8] "International Terrorism: In Search of a Response," *Great Decisions '86* (1986), 36.

[9] Walter Laqueur, "Interpretations of Terrorism: Fact, Fiction and Political Science," *Journal of Contemporary History*, 12 (1977), 15.

[10] Ibid., 14.

[11] Hof, "The Beirut Bombing," 71.

[12] Ibid.

[13] See, in particular, Ch. 3 of Departments of the Army and Air Force, *Military Operations in Low Intensity Conflict* (Washington, D.C., 1990).

[14] Benjamin Netanyahu, "Terrorism: How the West Can Win," *Time* (April 14, 1986), 48.

[15] *The Daily Record* (Wooster, Ohio, February 5, 1986).

[16] Hof, "The Beirut Bombing," 72.

[17] Ibid.

[18] Netanyahu, "Terrorism," 49.

[19] Roger Trinquier, *Modern Warfare: A French View of Counterinsurgency* (London, 1964), 16.

[20] Stephen E. Daskal, "The Insurgency Threat and Ways to Defeat It," *Military Review*, 66 (1986), 38-39.

[21] Ibid., 39.

[22] "Hitting the Source," *Time* (Apr. 28, 1986), 23.

[23] Ibid., 17.

[24] "Targeting Gaddafi," *Time* (Apr. 21, 1986), 20.

[25] "Hitting the Source," *Time* (Apr. 28, 1986), 23. Shultz also saw terrorism as "a form of warfare," *The New York Times* (Apr. 4, 1984), 13.

CHAPTER ELEVEN

THE CONTINUING PROBLEM OF CONCEPTUAL CONFUSION

Conceptual confusion resulting from misperception and misunderstanding can create serious problems, particularly in the arena of military affairs and defense analysis. For all its dangers, however, such confusion is to be expected. Perfection is too much to expect from even the best of analysts. More disturbing by far are those situations in which the underlying problem is a result of closed or partisan minds refusing to look at theory, doctrine, or events in a new or different way.

The dangers of conceptual confusion in thinking about military affairs should be obvious. They can include unnecessary death and destruction, as well as defeat and the loss of all that a society or group may hold dear. Unfortunately, potentially dangerous misperceptions are not always evident, particularly to the people who are most closely associated with them.

The more I became involved in the study of contemporary military affairs, the more I became convinced that conceptual confusion was all too common among both civilians and the military. Just as many common perceptions of terrorism noted in the previous chapter can be seen to be misleading, the terminology often used to analyze conflict across the so-called "spectrum of conflict" are similarly flawed, and at times I wondered if rational discourse was even possible in debates over such varied topics as the proper way to fight irregulars or the optimum nuclear deterrent. I addressed the nuclear dimension of the problem in my final lecture in Tokyo, entitled "Prisoners of Language," and I noted problems at the other end of the spectrum in a short essay published in 1988.^[1]

In some ways the problem of conceptual confusion reminds me of the problem of careerism in the Vietnam era officer corps. Both appear to be manifestations of broader problems evident in the society at large. If confusion exists in military discourse, it is by no means unique. One can find ample evidence of semantic confusion and calculated distortion in political discourse, which few Americans should find surprising. More disturbing is the extent to which similar semantic confusion exists in academic and scholarly dialogue.

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In the traumatic aftermath of the war in Vietnam, the American military seemed to turn away from its recent experience with revolutionary warfare to concentrate on preparation for more conventional conflict. Irregular warfare could not be ignored entirely, but it could be relegated to a grab-bag category of conflict with terminology that was not immediately reminiscent of events in Indochina. Long standing, well understood terms such as pacification and counterinsurgency were subsumed under the rubric of "low-intensity conflict" or, given the modern military's love affair with acronyms, LIC.

Although a term's public relations value would certainly not head a list of criteria for the naming of doctrinal categories, the American experience in the Vietnam War should have convinced both military and political leaders that such considerations can not be ignored. As a 1986 issue of *Oxfam America News* indicated, however, the choice of "low-intensity conflict" as a rubric for the grab bag doctrinal category covering a wide variety of operations from peacekeeping to counterrevolutionary warfare would seem to have been a predictable error.^[2] As the authors of the Oxfam report noted, the view of such conflicts "at the grassroots level" was entirely different from that implied by the new American terminology, and by using a term such a "low intensity conflict," representatives of the military had only opened themselves to the charge of the Oxfam authors that they were using a term with "a misleadingly benign ring" as a way of manipulating language "in support of these wars." The sarcasm evident in the caption "'Low-intensity' Scorched Earth in Central America" in an

Earth Island Journal article indicated that such criticism would not end without a change in terminology or policy.^[3]

The choice of "low-intensity conflict" as a term to describe the subversion, insurgency, guerrilla warfare, and terrorist operations that have predominated in nuclear age conflict indicated, at the very least, a high degree of insensitivity to the subtleties of language and, at its worst, a lack of sensitivity to the suffering endured by the people in whose homelands such activities take place. Equally disturbing, of course, was the possibility that over time the use of the term would distort the perceptions of the Americans who used it. If the majority of the world's wars were continually referred to as "low-intensity conflicts," at some point American leaders might actually begin to believe that the terminology being used provided an accurate indication of the intensity of the wars.

Many commonly cited examples of "low-intensity conflict," however, were definitely not fought at the low level of violence that the term implies. In fact, when one looks at a number of examples from the tumultuous 1980s one finds conflicts that are very high in intensity when measured by the number of people killed in them, even after allowances are made for the difficulty of obtaining accurate data.^[4] During the Soviet intervention in Afghanistan's civil conflict, for example, some 200,000 people were killed in a population of approximately 15 million. That is the equivalent of more than 3 million dead in the United States, more than seven times the number of Americans that died in World War II. The civil war in El Salvador may have killed as many as 75,000 people, an equivalent of approximately 3.75 million deaths in United States terms, and in Nicaragua Sandinista leaders said they lost 10,000 people to attacks by the Contras, a figure comparable to a loss of almost 800,000 people in the United States. Even in Northern Ireland, where at first glance the number of people killed seems small indeed (c. 2,500), the United States equivalent approximates a shocking 400,000. In short, no matter what one might call these conflicts, they are certainly not conflicts of "low" intensity.

Implicit in the criticism appearing in the Oxfam and Earth Island Institute publications was an important point. The words we use help to determine the way in which we think, and the repeated use of "low-intensity conflict" to categorize many of the wars that have been fought since 1945 could eventually mislead not only civilians but members of the military as well.^[5]

For the military officer, however, the problem with the term "low intensity conflict" was not only that it created a public relations liability, but also that it proved too lacking in descriptive specificity to be useful in the creation and implementation of doctrine. Although officers charged with the development of doctrine seem to have recognized that fact, they continue to have difficulty creating valid doctrines for dealing with the various types of conflicts that have predominated in the years since the end of World War II.

Greater attention to conceptual clarity is needed. "Intensity," for example, had serious yet predictable problems of ambiguity when used in a military context, for the word has two possible meanings. It may be used to describe input, in which case it refers to the intensity of effort or the amount of force to be applied to achieve one's goal (basically a political rather than a military decision). But one may also use the term to describe output, in which case the focus is on the intensity of the fighting or the amount of damage being done. Since the casualty statistics of many "low intensity conflicts" have been too high for the term to be an accurate description of output, one must assume that when used as a doctrinal category it described input. Intensity of effort, however, is a political as well as a military variable. Furthermore, it is a variable over which neither the American military nor the United States government has total control. Overlooking such seemingly obvious points, both civilian and military analysts appear to have assumed that the United States could create and sustain the type of environment postulated by its terminology or that the environment would necessarily remain static should the United States be lucky enough to find one that suited its definitions.

Although the United States can control the level of intensity as far as its own efforts are concerned, the overall intensity of a conflict is often beyond its unilateral control. In revolutionary wars such as that in Vietnam, for example, revolutionaries have used techniques of varied intensity (including underground political organization, armed propaganda, terror, guerrilla warfare, and mobile or regular warfare), combining methods and moving up and down the intensity of effort continuum to suit the situation. Countering such an approach demands a similar flexibility on the part of the counterinsurgents. Thus an American effort may begin as one of low intensity, but at some point the failure of one's ally or the success of one's enemy may necessitate a greater effort. By definition, the doctrinal category in which the guidelines for that greater effort reside would appear to be something other than either "low intensity conflict" or traditional conventional war.

Even without the conceptual problems noted so far, a serious, unsolvable problem existed. The various operations included in the "low-intensity" doctrinal category were too diverse to be lumped together. The problem was particularly significant given the difficulty many individuals in and out of the military have often had recognizing the important difference between techniques such as terror or guerrilla warfare, which can be used by parties on all points of the political spectrum in all kinds of conflicts, and the types of conflicts in which those techniques are used, conflicts which are more properly defined in terms of their aims, such as wars of national liberation and revolutions.^[6] In the past such confusion has led both governments and their military to focus on countering particular techniques rather than on the more comprehensive problem of fighting particular types of conflict.

The "low-intensity conflict" concept seemed to represent a doctrinal dumping ground into which military and civilian leaders had thrown all types of conflict that they hoped they would never have to fight. If that is in fact the case, then they had obviously learned little from the history of the nuclear age or their nation's experience in Vietnam. One would like to believe that is not what happened, but the tendency in military journals to focus on more conventional topics and the quality of much of the writing on "low-intensity conflict" is not reassuring.

Like "low intensity conflict," the term "military operations short of war" also represents an ill-defined grab bag in need of specification. For the purpose of operational planning, as well as doctrinal development, military officers need to know exactly what type of operation is being considered, be it a rescue, a retaliatory strike, or a *coup de main*. As in the case of "low intensity conflict," the concept of "military operations short of war" postulates an environment that neither the United States government nor its military can guarantee. Other parties can easily turn an operation "short of war," such as peacekeeping, into war, and American military forces must be prepared for that eventuality.

The concept of "military operations short of war" can easily become a significant liability if it fosters a state of mind that assumes such operations will be free of the risks associated with war or demand less attention to security than wartime operations. In Lebanon and in Saudi Arabia Americans saw the kind of disaster that can result when American troops are attacked by suicidal bombers who rejected the view that the American forces were engaged in a "military operation short of war."

A wide variety of irregular conflicts have taken place since World War II, and a need certainly exists for the development of doctrines to deal with them. To date, however, the United States military has seemed determined not only to minimize the doctrinal variety required, but also to define the conceptual categories used in ambiguous ways. Neither "low intensity conflict" nor "military operations short of war," for example, provide the kind of clarity needed by the military personnel who must use the concepts.

For doctrine to guide officers in the accomplishment of their missions, its terms should not only be unambiguous, but they should also be task oriented. Goals should be both tangible and well defined. Field manuals should be clear as to their purposes. Although Army field manuals from the

pre-Vietnam era focused on specific kinds of operations (psychological, guerrilla, civil affairs) or defined operations in terms of goals (combating insurgent forces), post-Vietnam concepts such as "low intensity conflict" and "military operations short of war" have been suited to neither approach.

Not only must doctrine be clear regarding its purposes and the operational techniques to be employed, but it must also be based on a valid understanding of contemporary conflict. Unfortunately, concepts like "low intensity conflict" and "operations other than war" seem to embody the faulty premise that an American involvement in someone else's war is not war if Americans choose to call it something else. Such an approach is infinitely more suited to the creation of fiction, as Lewis Carroll demonstrated so well in *Through the Looking Glass* than to the development of military doctrine. Humpty Dumpty could tell Alice that a word "means just what I choose it to mean--neither more nor less,"^[7] but military officers and civilian officials should prepare for a great fall if they take a similar approach to the development of doctrine and policy.

Concepts like "low intensity conflict" and "military operations short of war" appear to be based on wishful thinking and a desire to avoid unpleasant situations, such as that which developed in Vietnam, where the goal was not achieved despite the significant involvement of American forces in sustained combat. Like that euphemism of the Korean War, "police action," both "low intensity conflict" and "military operations short of war" appear to have more political than military value. They identify what policy makers want conflicts to be and not the real environment in which the American military must operate. No matter what the United States calls the nuclear age conflicts in which it plays a role, and no matter how minor its part may be, those conflicts are still wars. When the United States participates in them, it becomes a belligerent, even if no declaration of war is forthcoming. In fact, a formal declaration of war now occurs so infrequently that it no longer appears to have any place in the definition of war.

When the United States enters into someone else's war, even in a peacekeeping role, it may not be seen as neutral in the eyes of some belligerents, and its operations should not be seen as activities "short of war," no matter how minimal its involvement. Similarly, if the efforts of an ally or that ally's enemy are great or the devastation of the war is high, then the United States should not pretend it is involved in a conflict of "low" intensity, no matter what the level of American involvement may be.

To understand a conflict fully, one must be able to see it as one's opponent sees it. Such a view is essential to thwarting the enemy's strategy and overthrowing it by a superior strategy of one's own. Although American forces may see themselves engaged in "low intensity conflict" or "military operations short of war" (whatever one decides those terms may mean), opponents may still see the United States as a belligerent enemy and act accordingly. In such situations the resulting conflict may also be of significantly greater intensity than that postulated by American doctrine.

One suspects that some of the pressure to embrace such vague terminology as "low intensity conflict" is a result of the American defeat in Vietnam. Not wanting to think about a similar involvement elsewhere, civilian and military analysts devised categories that implied an ability to avoid the sustained use of American combat forces in such conflicts, a goal that was both laudable and unrealistic.

Assuming involvement outside of the United States will continue, the American military needs doctrine that uses more precise, goal oriented terms (such as counterinsurgency, counterrevolution, or pacification), although the legacy of Vietnam may make that difficult. In the past, both the American people and their soldiers have sometimes been uncomfortable when faced with the fact that their government is involved in counterrevolutionary war in support of unpopular, corrupt, and/or exploitive regimes. If that is the nation's policy, however, no one, particularly Americans risking their lives in the field, will be served by pretending that the nation is doing something else, calling a bitter internal war a "low intensity conflict," or labeling a potentially costly involvement a military operation "short of war."

More time and evidence is needed to tell if the conceptual confusion noted stems from an improper choice of terminology and superficial thinking or from a continued inattention to conflicts that are too painful a reminder of the American failure in Vietnam. Whatever the reason, the result so far has been the creation of a doctrinal morass that may well be of more use to the military's critics and the nation's enemies than it is to the people charged with the defense of the United States.

A more dangerous example of conceptual confusion and the use of inappropriate terminology came at the other end of the spectrum of conflict in analyses of nuclear deterrence and the attempts to develop a doctrine of nuclear war fighting. Although the collapse of the Soviet Union and the end of the Cold War worked to moot some of the controversy, the relationship between the conceptual confusion evident in the discourse surrounding deterrence and the potential for nuclear disaster present during the Cold War is still worthy of analysis. Although the dangers of nuclear holocaust have abated, the dangers inherent in flawed thinking about nuclear explosives remains.

In a text published in the United States in 1985 the editors referred to the system of international relations of the nuclear age as one of "structural terrorism." They argued that by holding entire populations hostage, forcing people to live in fear of nuclear annihilation, "the terror of the nuclear age has also become part of the international system's *structure*."^[8] Whether or not the editors were correct in their assessment, one cannot deny that the invention of the atomic bomb and the many devices that followed it, including the hydrogen bomb and the ICBM, created new and unprecedented dangers in the world.

Before the breakup of the Soviet Union, the two major superpowers had approximately 50,000 nuclear devices with a total yield of some 15,000 megatons (the equivalent of 15 billion tons of TNT). Add to these numbers the warheads of other nuclear nations such as Britain, France, and China, and the dangers that existed are readily apparent. During the presidency of Jimmy Carter, for example, the National Security Council estimated that a nuclear exchange between the United States and the Soviet Union would kill over 250 million people in those two countries alone (about 140 million in the United States and some 113 million in the Soviet Union). Such statistics become more sobering when one realizes that the number of Americans killed in all the wars in United States history number only a few hundred thousand more than one million, and despite very heavy losses in both world wars and the civil war following its revolution (over 30 million people in all), the Soviet Union had lost less than a third of the people it might have lost in a nuclear exchange with the United States.

A conflict in which nuclear devices were used over a wider area than the home territory of the two superpowers would have been even more disastrous. In fact, the World Health Organization estimated that as many as 1.1 billion people could be killed, with many more injured (perhaps another 1.1 billion). In other words, approximately half of the entire population of the earth could have been killed or injured in the direct effects of a nuclear holocaust. The psychic numbing that would afflict the remainder of the population might have been great enough to prevent any attempt at reconstruction. Even the use of fewer and smaller devices in a so-called "tactical" role in Europe could have led to as many as two to 20 million deaths, with some estimates ranging as high as 100 million.

Although such statistics are frightening, even worse outcomes might have occurred. Scientists have spoken of the possibility of a nuclear winter, in which the smoke and dust created by nuclear explosions would create a cloud in the troposphere and stratosphere capable of absorbing sunlight and lowering the temperature of the earth. The scientist Carl Sagan noted that "the explosion of the Tambora volcano in Indonesia in 1815 led to an average global temperature decline of only 1° C, yet due to the obscuration of sunlight by the fine dust propelled into the stratosphere the hard freezes the following year were so severe that 1816 became known in Europe and America as 'the year without a summer.'^[9] The results of a nuclear winter would be far worse. In fact, many estimates

indicate that temperatures might drop as many as 8° to 45° C, with the drop in temperature lasting as long as a year or more.

Nuclear winter might give way to a nuclear summer. The high temperatures of the nuclear fireballs could destroy the ozone gas of the middle stratosphere. The result would be an increase in ultraviolet radiation on the surface of the earth, affecting both plant and animal life. Whether it brought on a nuclear winter, a nuclear summer, or both in succession, a large scale nuclear exchange could do potentially fatal ecological damage to the earth and its many plant and animal populations.

Most frightening, perhaps, given the number of nuclear warheads remaining today, is the point at which some scientists assume such ecological devastation might take place. Sagan noted that the "very rough threshold at which severe climatic consequences are triggered" is relatively low. All that would be needed to bring about such a disaster would be the detonation of "a few hundred nuclear explosions over cities, for smoke generation, or around 2,000 to 3,000 high-yield surface bursts at, e.g., missile silos, for dust generation and ancillary fires."[\[10\]](#)

Sagan concluded that "we have, by slow and imperceptible steps, been constructing a Doomsday Machine."[\[11\]](#) By continual deployment of more and more warheads, the world's nuclear nations and their leaders created a situation that threatens climatic disaster, and, as Sagan observed, "beyond the climatic threshold, an increase in the number of strategic weapons leads to a pronounced decline in national (and global) security."[\[12\]](#) Unfortunately, the climatic threshold of 500 to 2,000 warheads is far below the number of warheads presently available.

During the course of the Cold War a number of so-called experts argued that the dangers were not as great as presented because an exchange of nuclear devices could and would be controlled to limit damage and restrained to prevent the use of all the warheads available. As the strategic analyst Desmond Ball noted, however, "a strategic nuclear war between the United States and the Soviet Union would involve so many novel technical and emotional variables that predictions about its course--and especially about whether or not it could be controlled--must remain highly speculative."[\[13\]](#) Ball observed that it would require only between 50 and 100 warheads to destroy the national command system of the United States or to impair the communication between the nation's leaders and nation's nuclear forces. Anyone who placed his or her faith in the ability to control a nuclear exchange once it began would appear to have been engaging in a dangerous act of self-deception. One would have done better to accept the view of nuclear war that General A. S. Collins, Deputy Commander of the U. S. Army in Europe from 1971 to 1974, said he had developed "as a soldier." Collins said that he "never considered nuclear war to be a rational form of warfare or a rational instrument of policy."[\[14\]](#)

Certainly the military use of nuclear explosives does not fit into a traditional model of war. Karl von Clausewitz, the nineteenth century German officer whose treatise *On War* is still the primary work of military theory in the west, saw war as a continuation of politics or policy by other means. If the destructive potential of nuclear devices even approaches the levels that some scientists have predicted, however, a nuclear exchange would not be an act of rational policy. There is no political goal that could possibly be achieved by such environmental suicide. Similarly, although Clausewitz spoke of the goal of disarming one's enemy in war, such disarmament would seem to be an impossibility in the nuclear age, and by the 1980s the recognition of the logical fallacy of nuclear war had thrown strategic theory into "a state of arrested ambiguity."[\[15\]](#) Authors labeled it a "morass"[\[16\]](#) and argued that it had reached "a state of confusion amounting almost to disintegration."[\[17\]](#)

For decades two approaches had dominated thinking about nuclear devices. The strategist Bernard Brodie presented the first, stressing deterrence, as early as 1946. The awesome potential of nuclear power for destruction formed the basis for a doctrine in which fear combined with uncertainty to

deter war. Should deterrence break down, however, the result would be devastating. A common acronym for the doctrine was MAD, for Mutually Assured Destruction.

The other view, first articulated by William Liscum Borden, took an opposite approach. Borden concentrated on the military potential of nuclear power, attempting to integrate it into traditional military theory. As the Cold War intensified the thought of deterrence based upon a doctrine of mutually assured destruction became more frightening, leading some theorists to argue that a less dangerous alternative existed in a doctrine of nuclear use. Nuclear-use theorists, nicknamed NUTS by a few of their MAD detractors, devoted their energies to the development of ways in which nuclear devices might be used to fight, survive, and prevail in a war.

Both approaches were doctrines for disaster, for neither doctrine provided a means of survival should deterrence fail. In MAD, suicide was assured by the very nature of the doctrine. Although the doctrine of the NUTS did not intend suicide, that was still the most likely outcome given the probable consequences of even a limited nuclear exchange.

Unfortunately, a number of people continued to adhere to the flawed concept that explosive nuclear devices could play a role in international relations in addition to that of a deterrent. One of the most forceful statements of that position came in an article entitled "Victory Is Possible," published in 1980 in *Foreign Affairs*. Its authors, Colin Gray and Keith Payne, argued that "the West needs to devise ways in which it can employ strategic nuclear forces coercively, while minimizing the potentially paralyzing impact of self-deterrence." They wanted American nuclear power "to support U.S. foreign policy objectives," and to do that "the United States must possess the ability to wage nuclear war rationally."[\[18\]](#) Gray and Payne sought "a plausible theory of how to win a war or at least insure an acceptable end to a war," and they wanted the United States "to plan seriously for the actual conduct of nuclear war."[\[19\]](#) In fact, they argued that the United States should plan "to defeat the Soviet Union and do so at a cost that would not prohibit U.S. recovery."[\[20\]](#) In short, they hoped to achieve an outcome that the work of Sagan and others indicated was impossible.

What had enabled people like Gray and Payne to ignore the frightening possibility that the use of nuclear explosive devices could mean the end of civilization as we know it, perhaps even the end of the human species? Paul Chilton, a linguist at the University of Warwick in England, argued that in "both official and popular utterances about nuclear weapons and war" people have used language "in such a way that nuclear weapons and war are familiarized and made acceptable." He called the phenomenon "nukespeak."[\[21\]](#)

Chilton observed that people used language to talk about nuclear devices that represented "an attempt to slot the new reality into the old paradigms of our culture."[\[22\]](#) The process began in 1945, immediately after the first atomic bomb was dropped in Japan. Often individuals spoke of the bomb "in terms of religious awe . . . One useful consequence of such language, if not one of its actual motivations," wrote Chilton, "was to appear to diminish human control, responsibility, and guilt."[\[23\]](#)

Over time, something even worse happened to the language. A trend began toward what Chilton identified as "the *acculturation* of the nuclear phenomenon. Instead of being symbolically classified as objects of supernatural awe," wrote Chilton, nuclear weapons came "to be classified as safe and usable instruments." The change, argued Chilton, "accompanied the gradual shift in strategic doctrine toward a more pronounced doctrine of war fighting."[\[24\]](#)

Use of the language of the prenuclear age in discussions of nuclear questions made understanding of the nuclear dilemma more difficult. Many of the terms used in speaking about the nuclear phenomenon had been used for a century or more. Frequently the terms had meanings as a result of their history or usage that had little relevance in an age of ICBMs with thermonuclear warheads, yet analysts and leaders, both civilian and military, used them in their new context with little hesitation.

The use of the term "weapons" to describe nuclear explosive devices provides a perfect example of the way in which language helped to obscure the nature of the nuclear forces that threatened the world. Traditionally the word "weapon" has identified a tool used in combat. A weapon derives its utility from its use against an enemy, but if that is the case, then one could only speak of *nuclear* "weapons" in extremely limited situations, such as that existing in 1945 when the United States possessed the world's only atomic bombs and could use them without fear of retaliation.

President Eisenhower once said that he saw "no reason why [nuclear weapons] shouldn't be used just exactly as you would use a bullet or anything else."^[25] In a world in which many nations possess nuclear devices, however, one is at a loss to see how they can be used against an enemy to accomplish an end worth attaining given the risks inherent in their use. As the American scholar Theodore Draper noted, "nuclear weapons are too effective to be used."^[26] Robert S. McNamara, Secretary of Defense under two Presidents, reached a similar conclusion, saying that "*nuclear weapons serve no military purpose whatsoever. They are totally useless--except only to deter one's opponents from using them.*"^[27] And such opinions are not limited to civilians. Admiral Noel Gayler, Commander of all United States forces in the Pacific from 1972 until 1976, observed that "there is no sensible military use for nuclear weapons, whether 'strategic' weapons, 'tactical' weapons, 'theater' weapons, weapons at sea or weapons in space."^[28] If such statements are correct, then explosive nuclear devices can not be called weapons at all, for weapons, by definition, are instruments intended for use in combat.

A similar problem of linguistic confusion exists with other military terminology. In virtually all cases, the minute the adjective "nuclear" is applied to a term, it ceases to mean what it has traditionally meant. For example, the term "strategy" is used to describe "the way in which military power is used by government in the pursuit of their interest."^[29] That being the case, one must believe that nuclear power can be used in the pursuit of one's interest before one can speak of "nuclear strategy." But almost anyone having written on the topic agrees that nuclear power does not have such utility. As the political scientist Robert Jervis observed, "a rational strategy for the employment of nuclear weapons is a contradiction in terms."^[30] The term nuclear strategy really has nothing to do with war; it is only applicable when one speaks of deterrence.

"War" is another term that loses its traditional meaning when the adjective "nuclear" precedes it. War is supposed to be a purposeful act, calculated to make one's enemy do one's will, to paraphrase Clausewitz. In its traditional meaning, war is an extension of politics and diplomacy, a violent attempt to achieve one's goals when other methods fail. Given that definition, however, the phrase "nuclear war," like "nuclear strategy," becomes an oxymoron. If both parties to a conflict possess nuclear explosives (or have allies possessing them), then the use of those explosive devices might well prove suicidal, and suicide is not a rational extension of policy. General Collins appeared to come to the only reasonable conclusion possible when he rejected nuclear war as "a rational form of warfare or a rational instrument of policy."^[31] An exchange of nuclear explosions is not an example of rational, goal oriented behavior, and therefore such an act is not war. One can speak rationally about nuclear disaster, but talking rationally about nuclear war is more difficult.

Similarly, terms such as "victory" or "win" lose their meaning when used in conjunction with the term "nuclear." One wins by accomplishing one's goals, which is also how one defines victory. One has difficulty imagining how any nation might accomplish a set of goals through an exchange of nuclear explosions, despite the attempt by contemporary strategists such as Colin Gray to make the case for a "Theory of Victory" and comments by Caspar Weinberger, Secretary of Defense under President Reagan, about using American "nuclear capabilities" to "prevail." Weinberger's assertion that nuclear devices could be used "to achieve political objectives and secure early war termination on terms favorable to the United States and its allies" was nothing short of ludicrous given the incredible dangers inherent in their use.^[32] More useful is the conclusion of Rear Admiral Eugene Carroll, once director of military operations for all United States forces in Europe and the Middle East. Said Admiral Carroll, "there is no safety, no survival, if both sides continue to build and

deploy war-fighting forces designed to prevail in a nuclear conflict. Safety lies ultimately in changing our way of thinking about the role of military power in the nuclear age."[\[33\]](#)

Another term that loses its meaning when used in the nuclear context is "superiority." In military affairs, the term "superiority" is usually associated with weapons and combat. One gains victory through superiority. It helps one win. In reference to nuclear devices, however, the term, like so many others, has little meaning. As Henry Kissinger, former U. S. Secretary of State, once asked: "What in the name of God is strategic superiority? What is the significance of it, politically, militarily, operationally, at these levels of numbers? What do you do with it?"[\[34\]](#) The answer, of course, is that no one really knows what it means to be superior or inferior as far as the deployment of nuclear devices is concerned.

Throughout the Cold War, people continued to talk about the importance of nuclear force for "national defense" and "national security," although one could neither defend a nation by using nuclear explosives nor guarantee its security by threatening to use them. Gwyn Prins, the editor of *The Nuclear Crisis Reader*, observed that security is "a state of mind," not to be equated "with military force and its attendant supports. Security is produced by general social well-being. . . . the sum of individual fulfillment, which depends upon the civilized arbitration of conflicts of interest in society, which in turn depends upon a just provision of goods, services and opportunities for all." Security, for Prins, was also "intimately bound up with . . . freedom. Freedom from want, freedom of thought, freedom from fear."[\[35\]](#) The deployment of explosive nuclear devices and their delivery vehicles would seem to have nothing positive to contribute to the concept of security as defined here.

Even the discussion of nuclear devices as deterrents was often muddled because of the language involved. In the United States, for example, one can find numerous references to the "Triad" of land-based ICBMs, the SLBMs of the submarine fleet, and the airborne bomber force. In the defense debates of the Cold War the concept quickly became an unassailable holy trinity, and few if any individuals were willing to challenge the need to maintain it.

By the 1980s, however, the kinds of delivery systems available for nuclear devices and the various methods of basing them indicated that the Triad, if it ever existed, existed no longer. In its place was an amazing array of possibilities which can best be described as a series of "duads." With the technology available in the last quarter of the twentieth century, nuclear devices could be kept on the earth or above it; on earth they could be deployed on land or at sea, on the earth's surface or beneath it. Deployment vehicles could be mobile or static; deployment could be hard (i.e. defended by concrete and earth) or soft. The delivery devices deployed could be with or without crews, recallable or non-recallable. They could move their deadly payloads through the atmosphere or above it. Only one's imagination seemed to limit the possibilities for thinking about ways in which nuclear devices could be deployed and delivered. The number of possibilities that existed seemed too large to list, but it should have been quite clear that there were many more than three.

In addition to the various "duads" described above, one could also identify a number of "spectra" or continua along which various delivery systems fell. On one spectrum, for example, one could plot the size of the explosive device, from extremely small artillery shells of a fraction of a kiloton to ICBM warheads and bombs of many megatons. On another spectrum one could plot the distance a delivery vehicle might cover (from stationary mines to globe circling planes), and on another one could measure the speed of delivery (measured in minutes for SLBMs and hours for manned bombers). All of these possibilities help to demonstrate the fallacy of thinking and talking in the simplistic terms of the Triad, yet even today one still hears references to the importance of "maintaining the Triad."

The analysis contained here obviously rests on certain assumptions, the most important being a belief in the possibility, if not the certainty, of retaliation in most situations in which nuclear devices might be used and of a high level of destruction accompanying such usage. At the very least, it

assumes that the degree of probability of a negative outcome occurring is so high that the use of nuclear devices as an act of war would be foolish. It also assumes that the dangers inherent in such weapons of mass destruction are independent of the Cold War that gave rise to their proliferation.

Unfortunately, both the end of the Cold War and the terminology used to discuss nuclear explosives diminishes popular awareness of the many conceptual problems that continue to exist. The inappropriate terminology and the conceptual confusion accompanying it distorts reality, and by doing so both create added dangers that someone might actually set in motion a series of events ending in the nuclear holocaust every sane individual wants to avoid. The dangers diminished with the end of the Cold War, but they did not disappear.

To solve the frightening problem of the nuclear threat, people need terms that they can use to speak and write about explosive nuclear devices that indicate how very different those devices are from anything heretofore invented. Ending all references to nuclear weapons, substituting a term such as nuclear explosives or nuclear deterrents in their place, represents an important first step. Similarly, one should never speak of nuclear war, only of deterrence, the possible breakdown of deterrence, and the possibility of a nuclear exchange. (I am not happy with the phrase "nuclear exchange" because it ignores the horrible consequences of the use of nuclear explosive devices, but "nuclear holocaust," a more vivid term, might not be accurate enough to cover all eventualities.)

In any case, one should not speak of "nuclear strategy," but of strategies for deterrence. Nuclear devices and their delivery vehicles must be designed in terms of their actual use, as deterrents, and terms such as "prevail," "victory," or "win" should never be linked to nuclear explosives or their use.

Recent world events, particularly in Eastern Europe, would seem to have created a perfect opportunity for making the shift from the deceptive nuclear language of the Cold War to a more accurate, less dangerous terminology that might eventually help people develop new ways of thinking about nuclear explosives as well as talking about them. With time people might even recognize that the military defenses they have developed, including the deterrent forces of the nuclear nations, are not a means to security but the essence of insecurity, fragile methods for preventing unthinkable but no less possible consequences. People may also recognize that security is not a function of superior military power, for such a concept has also lost its meaning in the nuclear age. A degree of conventional military power may be needed for defense, but it will not be so great as is often thought after the military realities of the nuclear world have been properly understood.

Assuring deterrence will remain difficult, however, if people continue to conduct their nuclear discussions in prenuclear language, and we must therefore break out of the linguistic prison we have constructed for ourselves. No one can guarantee that new terms will enable people to think in new ways, but the innovative thinking needed to insure human survival may not be possible within the prison of existing military terminology that in both the arena of irregular conflict and nuclear deterrence frequently distorts rather than enlightens.

Discussions based on inappropriate terminology and confused concepts lead all too readily to the development of inadequate doctrine. At best, such flawed doctrine will lead to military defeat; at worst, in the nuclear context, it might well result in an even worse outcome, inflicting the destructive consequences of a nuclear holocaust upon hundreds of millions of uninvolved and innocent people. Even with accurate terms and concepts, avoiding such catastrophes will not always be easy, but a reorientation of the way in which civilian and military leaders think about warfare is a necessary first step toward the development of an intellectual system to avoid disaster.

[1] John M. Gates, "'Low Intensity Conflict' and 'Military Operations Short of War': The Humpty Dumpty Approach to the Development of Doctrine," *Military Review*, 68 (May 1988), 59-63.

- [2] "Oxfam America Special Report: "Low-intensity conflict," *Oxfam America News* (Fall 1986).
- [3] "Militarization: The Environmental Impact," *Earth Island Journal*, 1:5 (Fall 1986), 4 of "Special Section."
- [4] Statistics for deaths and populations vary from source to source, but the numbers used, taken from a variety of press reports in this case, need not be all that accurate to sustain the point being made here.
- [5] For an example of ways in which terminology has affected thinking about nuclear explosive devices see Paul Chilton, "Nukespeak: Nuclear Language, Culture, and Propaganda" in *Nukespeak: The Media and the Bomb*, Crispin Aubrey, ed. (London, 1982) and Carol Cohn, "Slick 'ems, Glick 'ems, Christmas Trees, and Cookie Cutters: Nuclear Language and How We Learned to Pat the Bomb," *Bulletin of the Atomic Scientists*, 43:5 (June 1987), 17-24.
- [6] Some analysts of the war in Vietnam have exhibited such confusion in their false distinction between "conventional war" (in which the conflict is defined by the technique being used) and "revolutionary war" (in which the goal defines the conflict). Excellent examples of such false distinctions can be found in Harry G. Summers, Jr., "A Strategic Perception of the Vietnam War," *Parameters*, 13 (June 1983), 41-46 and Timothy J. Lomperis, *The War Everyone Lost--And Won* (Baton Rouge, 1984).
- [7] Lewis Carroll, *Through the Looking-Glass and What Alice Found There* (London, 1973 ed.), 114.
- [8] Charles W. Kegley, Jr. and Eugene R. Wittkopf, "Strategy, Weapons, and War in the Nuclear Age," in Charles W. Kegley, Jr. and Eugene R. Wittkopf, eds., *The Nuclear Reader: Strategy, Weapons, War* (New York, 1985), 6.
- [9] Carl Sagan, "Nuclear War and Climatic Catastrophe: A Nuclear Winter," in *ibid.*, 318.
- [10] *Ibid.*, 320.
- [11] *Ibid.*, 328.
- [12] *Ibid.*, 329.
- [13] Desmond Ball, "Can Nuclear War Be Controlled?" in *ibid.*, 271.
- [14] A. S. Collins, "Current NATO Strategy: A Recipe for Disaster," in Gwyn Prins, ed., *The Nuclear Crisis Reader* (New York, 1984), 29.
- [15] Charles W. Kegley, Jr. and Eugene R. Wittkopf, "Part I: Strategy," in *The Nuclear Reader*, 9
- [16] *Ibid.*, 10.
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- [34] Ibid., 12.
- [35] Gwyn Prins, "Introduction: The Paradox of Security," in *ibid.*, xiii.

CHAPTER TWELVE

THE ULTIMATE DECEPTION

With the end of the Cold War, perhaps no topics in military affairs have demanded more thought or energy than those concerned with the future of war. As the size of the American military establishment declines, the importance of answering questions related to the future environment of conflict increases.

The material which follows originated in a speech given to the University of Otago branch of the New Zealand Institute for International Affairs. It is presently undergoing revision, but because of the current interest in the topic, I have decided to include the original in the book on a temporary basis.

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All too often thinking about the future of war resembles science fiction, with wars described as high tech affairs dominated by lasers, robot weapons, computerized decision making, neutron bombs, energy beams, and fighting space stations. Unfortunately, such fantasies have their counterpart in normal military thinking. For decades both American and Soviet planners viewed war as something involving large numbers of troops, the latest in weapons technology, and, if worst came to worst, the use of nuclear explosives. Both sides spent billions preparing for large scale conventional and nuclear conflict; both spent billions more fighting unsuccessful unconventional and limited wars in Vietnam and Afghanistan.

That highly abbreviated bit of Cold War history highlights a very important distinction between "imaginary war" and "real war." Often the conflicts we worry about and prepare for exist only in our imaginations, but with so much effort devoted to thinking about the imaginary wars we are frequently unprepared for the real conflicts when they come.

The tendency to plan for imaginary war continues, however, stimulated, among other things, by the example of the Gulf War. Despite its futuristic look, however, the Gulf War is a poor model for future conflict, although it appears to be the primary model in the industrialized West as far as planning and weapons development is concerned.

The waning of the Cold War has lessened the probability of a global nuclear holocaust. Many individuals continue to focus on nuclear threats, particularly proliferation, as in the case of North Korea, but worry about proliferation seems exaggerated. Although proliferation may increase the risks of nuclear explosives being detonated, either intentionally or accidentally, such a catastrophe could have a beneficial "revaccination" effect. Like the use of the atomic bombs in WW II or the Chernobyl disaster, any future nuclear event would have an important sobering impact, particularly on groups controlling nuclear explosives. Better to have a nuclear exchange between two small states in some global backwater than the nuclear holocaust so feared during the Cold War.

The history of the Cold War provides an even better reason for not worrying too much about proliferation. Mutual possession of nuclear explosives made both sides cautious at a time of great antagonism. War might easily have resulted had the fear of the potential nuclear consequences been absent. Assuming that similar fears will accompany the acquisition of nuclear explosives by others, the fears associated with proliferation appear to represent another manifestation of imaginary war thinking that diverts our attention from the real wars in our future.

While politicians worry about North Korea with the bomb and military planners study the lessons of the Gulf War, every day on television and in the newspaper we see what war has become, and it

bears little resemblance to the conflicts often studied in war colleges and national security think tanks. Most of the real wars around us are small in terms of the absolute numbers of combatants involved, but they are protracted, fought over periods of years, even decades. In many places warfare appears to be endemic, continuing over generations, often in a discontinuous and episodic way, with an ebb and flow that defies description. Negotiation has been subsumed into fighting, and instead of lasting peace one sees only periods of rest and recuperation, followed by renewed fighting. Because the real wars around us frequently involve multiple parties rather than two distinct belligerents, the conflicts are particularly confusing to outsiders and more difficult to end, through intervention or mediation.

Although the weapons used are rarely the most sophisticated in the global arsenal, contemporary wars are fought with a devastating intensity. Where in WW I over 90% of the casualties were military, at present the vast majority of the casualties are non-combatants. Today's wars also produce vast numbers of refugees.

Many contemporary wars remain hidden from view in global backwaters away from the prying eyes of reporters and TV cameras--in Kurdistan, the southern Sudan, or the high Andes. In some places they are guerrilla wars; elsewhere they are wars of terrorism, pitting small bombs and snipers' bullets against the torturers and death squads of authoritarian governments. Such wars are rarely amenable to solution through the use of the high tech military power of the modern state, and the supposed military prowess of the great powers seems almost irrelevant in such conflicts.

Because international politics takes place in an environment containing no ultimate authority or universally accepted method of peacefully reconciling conflicts of interest, the final arbiter of disputes is too often a resort to violence. Although war is avoided in many situations, the possibility of war exerts a continuous influence on interaction in the international arena.

The environment within states is not fundamentally different from that in the international arena, particularly in states that are highly polarized along ethnic, religious, class, or comparable lines. Both the threat of violence and the reality are a part of normal state politics, even in liberal democracies.

The nature of contemporary conflict in the dog eat dog environment of the post-Cold War world can be explained by reference to a number of historical trends that have altered the face of war. The major changes in interstate war were evident by the 1950s, at least to Walter Millis, whose brilliant analysis in *Arms and Men* remains one of the most intelligent surveys of the history of modern warfare.

Millis showed war developing through a series of interconnected stages, each providing a greater capacity for violence than the previous stage. The revolutionary nationalism of the late 18th and early 19th centuries enabled the state to tap a vast reservoir of manpower; the industrial revolution provided the means to equip and sustain ever larger armies and increasingly powerful navies. A managerial revolution in the last half of the 19th century provided both the techniques and the technology needed to pull together the human and material resources made available by the two revolutions that preceded it.

The mechanization of war, evident in World War I, and the Second World War's scientific revolution greatly increased war's destructive capacity and its global reach, so that by 1945 the entire process had led to what Millis deemed the "hypertrophy of war." War had become "a naked instrument of defense," and then "only in an extremity of crisis." With nuclear explosives, said Millis, "its utility even to this end was questionable."^[1]

Recent examples of conventional battle support Millis's conclusions. In three days of fighting on the Golan Heights during the 1973 October War, for example, Israel lost some 93 of 100 tanks engaged; Syria lost about 500 of some 900. Syrian tanks were destroyed on average within five

seconds of being identified. In a single month of the Iran-Iraq war in 1984 some 20,000 Iranians and 7,000 Iraqis died in a Somme-like battle of attrition. Although technology provided an equalizer for the combatant with the lower population, the outcome of both conflicts was indecisive.

Nevertheless, the use of force as a tool of policy continues, and many leaders still believe that war can decide issues when diplomacy has failed. A belief in the efficacy of war may also remain because of an absence of clear alternatives, although the respective great power military disasters in Vietnam and Afghanistan have made many military and civilian leaders in the industrialized world more acutely aware of the unpredictable nature of war, leading them to counsel restraint and caution. When looking to war as a potential instrument of policy, leaders in nations such as the United States no longer seem confident that they possess the necessary tools to achieve their goals, particularly without a significant political as well as material cost.

My own studies of revolutionary warfare have revealed a more cyclical pattern that produced results similar to those Millis saw in the more linear evolution of interstate war. Although the balance of power between revolutionary groups and established governments has shifted more than once over the past five centuries, at present stalemate is the most probable outcome of attempts to overthrow all but the weakest states. Recent revolutionary conflicts have been highly destructive and protracted until at least one party has lost its will to fight or both have become too war weary or exhausted to continue.

In the February 1994 issue of *The Atlantic Monthly* an article by Robert D. Kaplan mirrors much of my own thinking on the probable nature of war in the not so distant future. Entitled "The Coming Anarchy," it began with an exceedingly dismal description of West Africa. Kaplan's image of Sierra Leone stands as a quick summary of things to come: the government, "run by a twenty-seven-year-old army captain, Valentine Strasser, controls Freetown [the capital] by day and by day also controls part of the rural interior. In the government's territory the national army is an unruly rabble threatening drivers and passengers at most check points. In the other part of the country units of two separate armies from the war in Liberia have taken up residence, as has an army of Sierra Leonian rebels. The government force fighting the rebels is full of renegade commanders who have aligned themselves with disaffected village chiefs. A pre-modern formlessness governs the battlefield, evoking the wars in medieval Europe."^[2]

For Kaplan the environment is "the national-security issue of the early twenty-first century," as surging populations, spreading disease, deforestation and soil erosion, water depletion, air pollution, and, possibly, rising sea levels in critical, overcrowded regions like the Nile Delta and Bangladesh" trigger "mass migrations and, in turn, incite group conflicts." (p. 58)

Historian Paul Kennedy has argued that these transnational problems "cannot be met by military force," noting that "carrier task forces and armored divisions" can not prevent such international problems as "the global demographic explosion" or "stop the greenhouse effect."^[3] That is not to say, however, that state leaders will make no attempt to deal with such transnational problems by resorting to the use of national military power. Moreover, the effects of such problems on states and people will surely create new reasons for war, while traditional rivalries and tensions will remain or increase, particularly with the growing number of actors on the international stage.

We know less about the causes of interstate war than we would like, but we do know that as new states proliferate the number of conflicts over boundaries also increases. Similarly, as the total number of states increases, so does the overall number of interstate conflicts. The heightened nationalism of exceedingly small units, combined with the absence of the empire building, consolidating forces of the past, will feed the process of collapse outlined by Kaplan.

Traditional analyses of national security concerns have focused primarily on states, but in the future non-state actors will be of increasing importance. Access to highly sophisticated weapons has given dissidents greater power to disrupt than at any time in history, and in the future non-state violence

may spread with a speed and scope heretofore unknown, a result of increases in communication, human mobility, and weapons' availability.

Because fewer people with smaller forces can do more damage than in the past, vast armies are no longer needed to make war. As a consequence, the wars of the future will often bear little relationship to what we have historically come to know as war. Instead of a well defined phenomenon in which the organized forces of an existing state fight on one or both sides, war will increasingly take place within states incapable of maintaining order. To understand war in its new, mutated form we must revise our existing definition of war to incorporate such concepts as gang warfare and mob violence. As states break down, so will the various conventions and organizational forms of traditional inter-state warfare, as armed political, social, and cultural actors confront each other in a confusing collage of violence.

In the new environment, the high tech military forces of the great powers will be increasingly irrelevant to the outcome of most conflicts, although they will still enable industrialized states such as the United States or Great Britain to defeat third and fourth rate powers such as Grenada, Panama, or Argentina in interstate conflicts. As they have already demonstrated in Vietnam and Afghanistan, however, those same forces will be less likely to defeat determined enemies fighting protracted unconventional wars.

The most significant military result of post-WW II arms development has been a certain leveling of the playing field, as the relatively cheap and easily deployed mid tech weapons developed in the industrialized world find their way into the hands of virtually anyone who can buy or steal them, including not only such traditional non state actors as revolutionaries and nationalist separatists, but also drug cartels and fringe groups totally unrepresentative of the societies giving birth to them. As a consequence, the costs of war in human life and misery escalate, accompanied by an incalculable negative impact on the environment, and when the fruits of past progress are destroyed, the burdens of reconstruction fall upon an earth increasingly depleted of resources. To build a clinic, school, or power plant, only to have it destroyed and rebuilt, is a waste of resources which, multiplied many times over in conflict after conflict, may be a greater evil than the taking of human life that accompanies such destruction. The lives are more easily replaced than the infrastructure, and there is no guarantee that the rebuilt structures will survive subsequent conflicts.

In the developed world, modern military forces continue to spend millions to deploy a single high tech weapon. New Zealand, for example, has contemplated spending NZ\$32 million for two Phalanx air defense Gatling guns for its frigates. Such expenditures take place at a time when the high tech approach to war continues to fall short of the promised outcomes. A recent book by a member of Britain's Special Air Service, one of those elite forces that like to think of themselves as "the best of the best," demonstrates that the military benefits of high tech capabilities may be vastly overrated. During the Gulf War an eight man force was inserted into an area filled with far more Iraqi troops than the highly touted resources of modern intelligence gathering machinery anticipated. The team's equally modern radios failed to function, which meant that it could not be withdrawn. The result: three dead, four captured, one escaped.[\[4\]](#)

More recently we have seen an air strike in Bosnia in which one bomb failed to release, and only one of the other three exploded. Shortly after that, American planes in northern Iraq shot down two of their own helicopters, killing 26. Earlier in the year, when UN peacekeepers ambushed in Bosnia called in planes to aid them, the planes did nothing because no target could be identified.

In the most likely future of war--long, drawn-out conflicts that are rarely decisive but highly destructive--some stable and relatively prosperous states may decide to pursue policies of nonintervention, even at the cost of allowing forces they deplore to run rampant. Alternatively, states, either individually or working through regional or global organizations such as the UN, may attempt to help whatever side they believe to be right, providing they can make such difficult political decisions and also find ways to use their military forces effectively.

Pressures for UN action appear to be increasing, and when Terrance O'Brien spoke to the Institute of International Affairs branch in Dunedin he identified Bosnia as "a defining moment for the UN." The probable results of the defining process are less clear. O'Brien observed that many donors are already suffering from what he termed "aid fatigue," manifesting a decreasing willingness to meet the growing global demands for help. Intervention fatigue is also evident, particularly in nations such as the United States, where people assumed that the end of the Cold War would bring a "peace dividend" of significantly lower defense expenditures.

While states as individual actors appear to have lost power, as an organization of recognized states the UN is poorly positioned to play the role of a neutral outsider. Many UN members already face threats of their own from groups seeking autonomy or separation, and as a representative of collective state power the UN is unlikely to champion the interests of dissident factions within states. Also, as Paul Kennedy and others have noted, past experience with international treaties such as the Washington and London naval agreements and with earlier international organizations such as the League or the court at the Hague indicate that neither can keep sovereign states from going to war. Such instruments would appear to have even less ability to pacify militant nationalists and sectarian groups within states.

In the United States people talk a lot about "the Vietnam syndrome," the widespread reaction against overseas intervention that followed the American failure in Indochina. Many people decry its paralyzing effects, but examples of the use of military power by the United States in local conflicts over the past century highlight the value of caution. In the American experience, military power has been most effective in its more negative aspects. At the turn of the century, for example, the United States military could destroy the Philippine revolution, but it could not achieve President McKinley's rhetorical vision of "benevolent assimilation." Later, in the Caribbean and Central America, the results of intervention invariably fell far short of the high minded goals articulated by American leaders.

In Vietnam the United States failed miserably in its application of military force, proving incapable of establishing a non-communist democratic state in the South. It could not even establish the kind of stable dictatorship that it had created and defended more than once in Latin America. Furthermore, the American failure in Southeast Asia came at significantly greater cost to the people in whose territory the United States fought and to the United States itself.

The limits of military power are great, even when it is used for the best of motives, and as Paul Kennedy observed, the development and use of military power eventually undermine the productive and growing economy which constitutes the true foundation of state power. Nevertheless, given the volatility in the international system, the complexity of the changing international environment, the growth of regional powers, the declining power of many long established states, and the pressures created by militant nationalism and sectarian fanaticism, both governments and non state actors will undoubtedly continue to prepare for war and devote precious resources to military purposes.

At the same time, the chances of using military power to any truly good result have diminished to the point that one can question the entire concept of intervention. Whether such power can still be used to resolve many international disputes in the post-Cold War world remains to be seen, but one should not be overly optimistic about the possible outcomes.

As long as it avoids internal collapse, New Zealand would appear to have little to fear in the future I envision. Large scale, global conflict is unlikely, as is war in which an external enemy directly threatens New Zealand. Equally unlikely is that New Zealand will be able to use military force to accomplish whatever goals it might have outside the very limited geographic area of the South Pacific. The ability of the United States to use its military power to achieve significant ends in an increasingly anarchistic world may be only marginally greater than that of smaller states such as New Zealand. For the United States today internal collapse, although unlikely, is a far greater danger than either large scale global conflict or attack by an external enemy.

We face an age old problem. Ethical concern and power are two separate entities. We may abhor what we see and wish to change it, but that does not mean that we have the power to engage in effective action. For the foreseeable future we may have to recognize and live with our powerlessness. Realizing that all human problems may not be amenable to solution, I turn for comfort to the words of the American philosopher J. Glenn Gray: "the larger purposes of the universe, though far transcending our weak powers of comprehension, may, after all, not be dependent on the history of man."[\[5\]](#)

[\[1\]](#) Walter Millis, *Arms and Men* (New York, 1956), 364.

[\[2\]](#) Robert D. Kaplan, "The Coming Anarchy," *The Atlantic Monthly* (February 1994), 46.

[\[3\]](#) Paul Kennedy, *Preparing for the Twenty-First Century* (New York, 1993), 129.

[\[4\]](#) Andy McNab, *Bravo Two Zero* (London, 1993).

[\[5\]](#) J. Glenn Gray, *The Warriors* (New York, 1967 ed.), 230.