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The Political Weapon for Political War

In the Far East we face a hostile, revolutionary and expanding Communism. From its early set-backs in Shanghai and Canton and its withdrawal to the caves of Yenan, it has expanded over the empire of China and overlaps into Korea and Vietnam. It is currently pressing hard in South Vietnam and Laos and is an increasing threat in Indonesia, Burma and Cambodia. Along much of its periphery it faces only weak resistance from traditional social structures, antiquated government machineries and leadership elites preoccupied with internecine disputes.

Our fundamental reaction to this expanding force has been containment, not conquest. By preference stemming from a reluctance to enter, and particularly to initiate, faraway wars, the United States has not tried to conquer, overthrow and occupy the center from which this poison spreads. On the practical side, also, there is considerable disinclination to become embroiled among the vast expanses and masses of Asia. Many Americans, including many of our military, are members of the "never again" club, resolved never to repeat the Korean experience of committing American ground forces against conventional attack in Asia. Instead, we have based the military aspects of containment on air, naval, logistic and advisory actions, by which American personnel multiply their impact, rather than engaging only in individual confrontation with the Asian Communist masses. This military containment has worked against Communist conventional military pressures, especially in Korea. It has also worked where geographic trenches have existed between the poison and the target, in Taiwan and in Japan. We have a number of indications that the

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Chinese are quite cautious to avoid a direct confrontation with our military forces in Southeast Asia. We have not yet faced the problem of nuclear containment but there is at least reason for hope that the same balance of terror in this field which has been effective in Europe will become so in Asia. It is increasingly plain, however, that our techniques of military containment are not proving decisive where the Communist thrust is on an unconventional and political basis.

We have also used economic assistance as a weapon of our containment. This has been useful in certain areas but it has not proved decisive in the face of strong countervailing political or subversive forces. Thus we have seen marked contrast between the success of economic programs in countries such as India, Taiwan and Japan and on the other hand indecisive results from intrinsically excellent programs in Vietnam, Laos, Indonesia, Burma and Cambodia. In the latter group, extensive economic efforts have proved inadequate alone to counteract contrary political pressures, Communist or non-Communist. The same can be said of some of our other civilian efforts to date, in the information and diplomatic fields, for example. Despite their excellence in the narrow field of their specialties, their effect has been only partial in the face of the comprehensive political offensive they have contested.

The reason that these efforts at containment are not proving decisive is that the Communists are fighting a new style of war, especially designed to exploit the weaknesses in our arsenal and to avoid the areas of our strength. Protracted war, war of national liberation, revolutionary war, or subversion - the fact is that the Communists are conducting their campaigns in other arenas than those in which soldiers, economic technicians, administrators, propagandists or

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diplomats can be decisive. This does not imply that these specialists are not effective in their fields; indeed the Communists are implicitly indicating the opposite by their refusal to engage on these terrains. It does indicate that the comment made by a critic of French experience with this problem is applicable to all these specialists; "To recognize that war has become total is implicitly to recognize that the Army (or any other special service) can no longer handle more than a part of war". This conflict is not, then, only for the soldier or other technicians, we must look to see that the terrain chosen by the enemy is fully covered. In specific terms, as will be brought out below, this calls for the politician and policeman to supplement our current efforts.

The Vietnam example best shows the gaps in our defenses against the new Communist techniques. There containment is not working, despite the fact that its military component is actually doing its job and doing it well. The Vietnamese military forces are proving capable of preventing the Viet Cong from moving beyond the guerrilla stage of their operations, and thus are barring the legitimization the Viet Cong might achieve by seizing territory and maintaining full and overt political authority upon it. The American military advisory, logistic and technical (including planning, air, helicopters, etc.) assistance is entitled to full credit for its cooperation and support of the ARVN. At the same time it must be admitted that our forces also are stalemated, and can no more defeat or suppress the Viet Cong than can the Viet Cong do the same to the GVN. Similarly, our economic assistance, despite its considerable successes in technical terms and despite the fact that it has had a real effect on popular attitudes, is also stalemated, indeed is being curtailed by the rising

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Viet Cong strength which blocks its programs. The same inconclusiveness has resulted from our very substantial efforts at improving the Vietnamese administration, and our attempts to find a political authority with which we can work successfully. The result is a highly fragile stalemate, likely to shatter only against us.

There are examples, however, of successful containment of Communism's revolutionary pressures. In both Malaya and the Philippines, Communist revolutionary threats were eliminated. Although small vestiges of these organizations may still remain, their main strength was isolated, suppressed and rejected by the population. A careful look at how these were accomplished reveals a strong political component in these counterinsurgency campaigns; in fact the political component can be considered the decisive one, with necessary and effective military and economic actions in support. In the Philippines, the local armed forces had proved ineffective and helpless before the Huks prior to Magsaysay's appointment as Secretary of Defense. He revitalized the Army, which then played a full role, but he also pressed a whirlwind political program of appealing to the individual Huk with solid economic promises. The intensity of the attraction of the carrot (and its appearance as an individual benefit rather than a faraway national economic improvement) made the stick (or gun) both less needed and more effective. In Malaya, the political component of the Federation political structure reached to the grass roots through the police, with its population control techniques. It is revealing that the anti-Communist forces in Malaya were on the order of 40,000 regulars who supported 60,000 police and 250,000 home guards. The local and civilian orientation of the effort is further displayed in the structure of emergency

committees at district, state and federation level, each under the political authority of the area, and with the military in a supporting rather than leading role. The Greek experience of 1946-1949 may not fit this pattern, as there the military component dominated, but the critical development there was a premature Communist emphasis on the military approach, even as occurred in Java in 1948. When the Communist guerrillas thus separated themselves from the population and assumed the character of an opposing conventional military force, they became an appropriate target for the Greek and Indonesian military. This is the moral carefully drawn by the Communist concept of the protracted war, designed not to repeat such premature ventures into military action.

Even in the difficult arena of Southeast Asia, the techniques of civilian counter-insurgency with military and economic support have been effective when consistently applied. In the tribal areas of Laos, a people-oriented program has effectively isolated the Pathet Lao, and put it into the frustrating position of the occupying army amid an unfriendly populace. In Vietnam, the strategic hamlet program, despite weaknesses, began to turn the tide against the Viet Cong in the Spring of 1963. The lessons of these successful containments of Communist revolutionary subversion point up the importance of the political component of counterinsurgency. The question is how to apply these lessons in specific terms.

In broad terms the political component of counterinsurgency can be characterized as "political development", as it covers the growth of all of the elements of a strong government and loyal citizenry. It does not merely refer to the building of the governmental administrative and political structures; it also includes the development of the

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multiple political, social and economic groupings and organizations whose interaction and mutual cooperation and control provide the cement which holds the separate elements of societies together. Through these, the individual finds the intermediary to represent his interests vis-a-vis the government, his neighbors, his enemies and the elements. Political development must of course be buttressed by economic development to work on the root causes of dissidence, and military action to deter or repel overpowering conventional or guerrilla attack. It is, however, the fundamental element of a defense against the type of revolutionary war or subversion the Communists are now waging, which neither military nor economic action can meet alone.

The "political development" is, of course, revolutionary, in its development of the attitudes and mechanisms through which the individual and his intermediaries contest the established administrative, political and even social order, seeking a better future for himself and his children than the status quo. By identification with responsible mechanisms which offer hope of change and betterment, however, the individual is incorporated into a society advancing toward freedom rather than being tempted into allegiance to Communist subversion. There is a delicate problem of timing involved in the stimulation of such pressures for change, however, /too great a demand for change risks absorption into the Communist movement, as well as suppression by the responsible elements we seek to support. But too static a posture risks loss of initiative, interest and allegiance to a more appealing Communist alternative. It is clear that an optimum must be sought between deliberate change and adequate reflection of the urge for betterment on the part of masses whose appetites

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have been awakened by education, communication and "rising expectations". Since the primary challenge for their allegiance comes from the Communists, however, it is clear that our primary concern must be to develop a comprehension and consensus that the path to satisfying the demand for change follows the road to freedom rather than the blind alley of Communism. While this may involve both risk and distasteful aspects of rapid change, it is necessary to avoid the greater evils of subversion and violence.

The above analysis is by no means novel nor has the lesson been unappreciated. Efforts along these lines have been made in various countries on the periphery of communism in Asia. Most of these efforts, however, have been deficient in two major respects. In the first place, their primary emphasis has been on the development of the structure of authority and only secondary emphasis has been on the development of the political consensus toward change. Thus we have put considerable emphasis on programs to improve government administrations, police and security services and even propaganda and information services. The direction of effort, however, in these cases has generally been from the top down or the center outwards, with the individual citizen considered as the passive recipient of the administration, the police control, the information, or the economic benefit from larger economic programs. In only a few cases have programs been oriented upon the local population, seeking to inspire a consensus and promote political changes stemming from local needs and local desires. Even when our programs have advocated change rather than the status quo, the change has been one brought to the locality rather than one the locality originates and causes to prevail against the established, far away and older "order". The Communists of course advocate revolution in precisely these terms,

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emphasizing that change will be brought about by the work of the individual party members and sympathizers working in unity. Even when our programs may provide greater changes, they have the weakness of being imposed rather than fought for. There have been efforts by the Peace Corps, AID community development programs and others which have tried to apply the Communist approach. It must be admitted however that there is a vast fallow and untilled field for the development of political, economic, social and defense organizations based on local communities and pressing their interests in local terms. This would include such structures as farmers' organizations, cooperatives, irregular defense elements, local elections, etc.

The second aspect in which our political efforts have been deficient is in terms of scale, especially in contrast to the energy and effort expended on military and economic programs. While political development programs would require only a fraction of the American wealth and personnel used in military or economic programs, they have had far less even than this minimum.

One major reason for the minor role political development has played in containment has been organizational. The military aspects of containment are prosecuted by large staffs of qualified personnel under high level leaders and advocates. The economic development aspects of containment have had considerable attention within the American body politic and government. The political development aspect of containment, however, has been divided among the Foreign Service, AID, USIS, the Organization, Peace Corps and / with a tendency by each to emphasize its technical specialty rather than overall political development. To this drawback, one must add the long-established shibboleth against interfering in the internal affairs of other countries,

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although since most American programs have considerable impact on the internal political balance of recipient countries, this must be seen to bar only conscious and direct interference, no unconscious interference as a result of programs justified on economic or military grounds. As a result of all these drawbacks, one sees that conscious programs of political development as an element of containment have not been pressed.

It is tempting to consider the formation of a new corps of political development specialists, comparable perhaps to the British Colonial Service, but in the context of independent emerging nations rather than colonial territories, to bring new emphasis to this field. Aside from the impracticality of any such new bureaucratic venture and the confusion that would be generated among the current organizations, it would not be necessary at the outset, at least. Relatively small organizational changes in American missions overseas can achieve a substantial increase in attention to this neglected field.

American military operations are under a clear-cut command structure and in each country recipient of American military assistance there is a single point of command, with adequate staffs to conduct a coordinated and consistent program in the military field. The same can be said of most of our economic assistance programs. On the political side, there is no similar single point of contact. The heads of the various agencies in the country, AID, Peace Corps, USIS, / , are each semi-autonomous, prosecuting only facets of a political development program. The Ambassador has a supervisory role over all these agencies through the Country Team concept but his attention is divided between these responsibilities and his diplomatic duties vis-a-vis

the local government. In some countries an effort has been made to establish the DCM as the operational manager of the overall American mission but his time is also taken with the administrative duties of running the Mission, serving as overall deputy to the Ambassador and supervising directly the operations of the Foreign Service contingent. When either the Ambassador or the DCM seeks to exert an influence over the programs of subordinate agencies he generally must use as a staff the Foreign Service personnel in the Political or economic Section of the Embassy, who are however primarily oriented to view political problems as international rather than internal in nature and are conditioned to the function of a detached "representation" of American interests rather than full engagement in the travails of local political conflict. If any extensive work is required, the staffs of the agencies concerned normally end up doing it. There is no qualified review and program staff responsive at the Ambassador level rather than the agency head. All local agencies also retain command lines running to their parent agencies in Washington, which control budgets, promotions and reassessments. The Ambassador therefore has had a veto, being able to block actions of which he disapproves, but he has found it most difficult to assume full authority to include the power of initiative, over the programs of his subordinate agencies.

To secure appropriate overall direction of the political component of containment, a United States mission should have a civilian "Chief of Operations". He should be at least co-equal with the senior American military officer for the area and have full authority and responsibility over the programs of all civilian agencies, with responsibility for insuring the coordination of these programs with military programs in the area. The Station Director of AID, the Peace Corps Chief, the PAO and the Chief of / should report through

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him to the Ambassador on all programs of economic and political development nature. The Chief of Operations should have a special staff drawn as necessary from the Foreign Service, AID, USIS, the military or CIA. These officers should report directly to the Chief of Operations and be utilized by him for planning, review, and control of overall programs, to be executed by the various agencies. The officer himself could be a Foreign Service Officer or an assignment from another civilian agency, with a heavy emphasis on his having a pragmatic approach towards political and economic development as an element of strengthening the local nation against Communist subversion. A special course of preparation should be given to such officers to encourage them to approach the job of civilian political development both from top to bottom and from bottom to top, to espouse the causes of nationalism and national development, and to inspire and support revolutionary changes to preempt the appeals of Communist subversion. As our experience expands, it could be expected that the corps of Americans qualified to direct, execute and exploit comprehensive political development programs would increase, and that the effectiveness of this element of containment would improve.

Many of the mechanisms through which a program of this nature should be conducted now exist, especially in the operational posture which has been taken by many AID Missions and their rural representatives. Firmly integrating these efforts into consistent political development programs supported by the economic programs currently under way can provide the basis for a bottom to top development of the strength of consensus. These then will supplement the development of the political, administrative, and police structures of the countries we are committed to assist, and

be further buttressed by the vigorous support currently provided by the military. In this manner we can achieve the creation of fully operative counterinsurgency programs to fill the existing gaps in our containment of Communism in East Asia.

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