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THE 'WAR OF LIBERATION': A NEW TERM FOR AGGRESSION

By General Maxwell D. Taylor

SUMMARY: A distinguished United States soldier-diplomat, in this two-part article, discusses the Communist "wars of national liberation" doctrine and the threat it poses to the world's emerging nations.

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Part II -- 1,150 words

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NOTE TO PAO'S: This article, written by General Taylor at the special request of USIA, is one of a series on the "wars of national liberation" theme.

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THE 'WAR OF LIBERATION': A NEW TERM FOR AGGRESSION

By General Maxwell D. Taylor

(General Taylor is a distinguished soldier-diplomat whose career has included such major assignments as Chairman of the United States Joint Chiefs of Staff, Commander of United Nations forces in Korea and United States Ambassador to South Vietnam.)

PART I

In comparatively recent times, a new term of Communist jargon, the "war of liberation" (or its synonym, "people's war") has entered deeply into the world's political awareness.

Although this terminology appears in early Marxist-Leninist writings, the event which focused international attention on it was Hanoi's declaration in 1960 of a "War of Liberation" directed at President Diem's government in South Vietnam. This act of escalation of the war -- as we would now describe it -- resulted from the failure of five years of attempted political subversion to overthrow the Diem regime, conducted by Communist political cadres which had been left behind in South Vietnam following the Geneva Accords and the partition of Vietnam in 1954.

In spite of these efforts to drag him down, President Diem proved surprisingly tough and his young government stoutly resistant to internal subversion. Instead of collapsing, his administration gave signs of being able to unify the country and showed moderate progress in developing the economy.

In Washington, American officials did not sense the full significance or perceive the practical effects of this "War of Liberation" until early 1961, by which time the increase in Viet Cong terrorism and **guerrilla** activity showed clearly that something new and important had been added to the situation. If we needed a formal clarification of Communist intention, Soviet Premier Khrushchev provided it in his address of January, 1961, by explaining the Communist attitude toward subversive aggression. "Now a word about national liberation wars," he said. "The armed struggle by the Vietnamese people or the war of the Algerian people serve as the latest example of such wars. These are revolutionary wars. Such wars are not only admissible but inevitable. Can such wars flare up in the future? They can. The Communists fully support such just wars and march in the front rank with the peoples waging liberation struggles."

As we watched the development of the savage guerrilla warfare in South Vietnam, however, we became aware that we were merely seeing an old game played under a new name. We recognized it as the same tactic employed in the civil war in Greece, in the Huk insurrection in the Philippines, in the guerrilla warfare in Malaya and during parts of the China civil war. It could even be said that Castro had waged a "War of Liberation" in seizing the political power in Cuba. By analyzing the elements which entered into these Communist-inspired conflicts, it was relatively easy to reach a definition of the term, "war of liberation" or "people's war." Common to all was the use of subversive aggression for the overthrow of a non-Communist state, employing terrorism and guerrilla warfare supported clandestinely from an external Communist source.

As the United States became more deeply involved in South Vietnam, it was apparent that the "War of Liberation" represented a formidable threat and that one outcome of our efforts must be to find a way to cope with it and expose the myth of its invincibility. The Communist leaders had long been vocal in proclaiming its merits as a cheap and easy way for the expansion of militant Communism. It was clearly their hope that the outcome in South Vietnam would demonstrate its sure-fire efficacy.

General Giap, the Commander-in-Chief of the North Vietnamese forces, stated: "South Vietnam is the model of the national liberation movement of our time. If the special warfare that the United States imperialists are testing in South Vietnam is overcome, then it can be defeated anywhere in the world."

Marshal Lin Piao, the Chinese Communist Minister of Defense, expressed the hope that "Wars of Liberation" waged in numerous parts of the world could result in the depletion of U. S. strength and its ultimate defeat. He stated: "The more successful the development of people's war in a given region, the larger the number of U. S. imperialist forces that can be pinned down and depleted. Everything is divisible and so is the colossus of U. S. imperialism. It can be split and defeated." Lin Piao also had the feeling that the "War of Liberation" was relatively safe. He wrote in September, 1965: "There have been Wars of Liberation for twenty years since World War II. Has any single one developed into a world war?" As recently as December 8, 1965, in an interview he gave to Mr. James Reston of the New York Times, Soviet Premier Kosygin put himself on record as

having confidence in the future of "Wars of Liberation." He said, in a virtual paraphrase of Mr. Khrushchev: "We believe that national liberation wars are just wars and that they will continue as long as there is national oppression by imperialist powers."

These statements of the Communist elect show clearly that they take very seriously the "War of Liberation" concept and view it as the preferred tactic for Communist expansion in the future. It appeals to them as being cheap -- since guerrilla forces can be trained, equipped and maintained at a relatively low level of cost in comparison to the great expenditures necessary on the part of the government under attack to defend against them. There is also the political advantage that a clandestine communist ally can disavow participation in the guerrilla warfare it has inspired -- as Hanoi has tried to deny complicity with the Viet Cong in South Vietnam. Hanoi's participation in reinforcing, supplying and directing the Viet Cong guerrillas is now so obvious, however, that the brassiest of Communist apologists have been reduced to silence. But for a time, at least, their disavowals confused and misled the unwary international public. The final advantage perceived in Communist support of a "War of Liberation" is the relative safety of such a course. As noted by Lin Piao, the very ambiguity of guerrilla warfare makes it difficult to confront with conventional military force. And because of the sporadic nature of guerrilla combat, it is not likely to expand into a large scale war which in turn might escalate to the great nuclear holocaust which all parties wish to avoid.

If this new aggressive technique promises so much to the Communist leaders, it becomes even more necessary to expose its weakness and to demonstrate in South Vietnam and elsewhere that far from being cheap, disavowable and safe, "Wars of Liberation" can be made costly, dangerous and doomed to failure.

PART II

In developing a defense against the "War of Liberation" technique, it is first necessary to learn to recognize the conditions which are favorable to its development. This kind of aggression is essentially a threat to weak governments and thrives on poverty, social injustice and all related conditions which encourage popular discontent. Since these are conditions endemic in many if not most of the emerging countries, of which there are some eighty in all, the communist threat obviously concerns a very large number of possible target countries where a "War of Liberation" might be undertaken under conditions favorable to its success.

By studying the tactics and techniques of subversive aggression, one can readily determine those elements which the communists regard as most important. The first requirement, from the point of view of the aggressor, is the creation of a clandestine political structure in the country under attack, covertly imbedded either in urban or rural society, but usually in the latter. Following the creation of this underground political structure, the leaders of the subversion must make provision for raising or introducing guerrilla forces to act as the military arm of the conspiracy. As we know

from case studies, the Communist leaders try to develop these forces progressively so that, little by little, they increase the harassment of the government forces, obtain willingly or by force a certain cooperation from the people and, in the ultimate stage, become able to destroy the target nation's defenses as well as the confidence of the people in the ability of their government to protect them. To do all these things, however, it has usually been found necessary for the guerrillas to receive support from a base outside the country. The most favorable situation is one where an external sanctuary exists, such as the Greek insurgents had in Yugoslavia or the Viet Cong in Laos and North Vietnam.

Given the conditions favorable to a "War of Liberation," the problem is to eliminate them and to marshal a successful counter-campaign. Derived from experience gained in South Vietnam and elsewhere, the first prerequisite for success is a reliable system for an early recognition of the danger of subversion in any emerging country. This danger needs to be perceived both by the local government and by its allies. The importance of an understanding and cooperative attitude on the part of the local government can hardly be exaggerated, since it is obvious that the best plans and intentions of the United States and other defenders of national rights will be ineffective unless the local authorities view the problem in a similar way and with a comparable sense of urgency.

Assuming that both parties are animated by this common sense of urgency, the next step is to develop jointly effective preventive measures to eliminate the conditions which are favorable to the germination of insurgency.

Most of these measures are non-military in character and, in the aggregate, constitute little more than the measures which any effective government should take if it sincerely wishes to help its own people. Good government is the best antidote to subversive/insurgency, but, unfortunately, good government is often hard to come by -- particularly in the short run. But some things can and should be done fairly quickly. For example, there is always the need and the possibility to strengthen the forces of security, primarily the local police, but also the military forces which may be called upon to support the police in an emergency.

If, in spite of preventive measures, insurgency breaks out and, as is always likely, the subversion is supported from outside the country under attack, an early decision must be made on how to cope with this external threat.

When a government mission of which I was chairman visited South Vietnam in October, 1961, at the direction of President Kennedy, my colleagues and I were struck at that time with the need to do something eventually about the assistance which North Vietnam was giving to the Viet Cong forces in the South. Our report to the President included the following words: "While we feel that the program recommended herein represents those measures which should be taken now, we would not suggest that it is the final word. If the Hanoi decision is to continue the irregular war declared on South Vietnam . . . with continued infiltration and covert support of guerrilla bands in the territory of our ally, we will then have to decide whether to accept as legitimate the continued guidance, training and support of a

guerrilla war across an international boundry. Can we admit to establishment of the common law that the party attacked and his friends are denied the right to strike the source of aggression after the fact that external aggression is clearly established?"

Although there was no answer to our rhetorical question at the time, the answer came later in the decision of our government in February, 1965, to initiate air attacks against military targets in North Vietnam in order to limit the infiltration of men and supplies from the North and to impose a price on the Hanoi Government for the continued support of the aggression. Our action in this case will, I hope, establish a precedent for future behavior in similar situations when a Communist source external to a country under attack supports forces of subversion directed at overthrowing a government which it is in the United States' interest to support.

In carrying out programs to resist subversive aggression, there will always be certain problems difficult to resolve. The first is the problem of anticipation and prevention. How can the United States, or any nation, identify in time those among the some eighty new or weak governments of the world which are most likely to be next on the Communist schedule for subversive attack? To make such an identification, we will need better observation posts and sharper-eyed observers than in the past, capable of directing continuous attention across the entire horizon of the underdeveloped areas of the world. In terms of vulnerability, we think particularly of the new governments of Asia, Africa, Latin America and the Middle East. It

is probable that we neither can nor should attempt to police this vast area. It is most important, therefore, that we be selective in deciding what countries to help and how to help them. We should not forget Lin Piao's hope that "Wars of Liberation" will lead the United States to disperse its forces and expose them to defeat. Also, by some touchstone, we must learn to distinguish between the threat of Communist subversion and truly indigenous revolutionary trends which may appear in any of the developing countries. Although we are always sensitive to the charge of being defenders of the status quo, we have yet to develop a sure method for distinguishing between the revolutionary patriot and the camouflaged Castro-type subversive. But the fact that we do recognize that these problems exist offers the hope that sure ways to avoid potential miscalculations can be developed.

If the Communist leaders have taken the idea of "Wars of Liberation" seriously, so also has the United States Government. President Kennedy enunciated our attitude toward the threat in the following words: "The great battleground for the defense and expansion of freedom today is the second half of the globe: Asia, Latin America, Africa and the Middle East -- the lands of the people who harbor the greatest hopes. The enemies of freedom think they can destroy the hopes of the newer nations and they aim to do it before the end of this decade. This is a struggle of will and determination as much as one of force and violence. It is a battle for the conquest of the minds and souls, as much as for the conquest of lives and territory. In such a struggle, we **cannot** fail to take sides."

In South Vietnam, the United States has indeed taken sides. We expect to continue to take sides until we have exposed the myth of the invincibility of the "War of Liberation" doctrine and have also assured the independence of South Vietnam.

Undoubtedly, we shall have to take sides elsewhere against subversion and aggression until such time as the Communist leaders are convinced that the emerging countries of the world are not a happy hunting ground for their subversive agents and guerrilla warriors.

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