

## Subconventional Warfare

"Subconventional war" is used as a generic term to summarize such different ones like low-intensity conflict, counter-insurgency or guerrilla-war.

### Guerrilla Movements

Most important of the implications deriving from a subconventional strategy is that the struggle will be a protracted one. ... In choosing such an approach, the actor embarks on a struggle that is more political than military in its essence. The actor must seek to create conditions for ultimate victory, avoiding a direct, decisive engagement with the military forces of the enemy. ...

Recognizing that a subconventional strategy will take a long time to produce victory, actors who choose this strategy accept a long-term undertaking. ... They may determine their short-term objectives to be mere survival of their movement. ... while it may be possible for the enemy to kill or demoralize many of the rank-and-file followers, the cadres present a hard core ... that is dedicated to the ultimate goals of the movement, no matter how dire current circumstances become. [1]

The movements humble military forces cannot compete on the conventional warfare level. Therefore they will not directly contest the enemy forces for control of key terrain or infrastructure. Refrained from base camps in difficult to access regions they don't present any targets for the enemy's conventional forces. While denying the enemy traditional military success by simply surviving over a long time, the better are the chances of achieving some sort of international legitimacy.

Organizing and maintaining structures of resistance are essential. But the most important task is to maintain a certain degree of integration with the population. Agreement with the basic aims of the movement is the key for its power. Terror will never create power but fear and obedience.

### Counter-Insurgency

The conventional military mostly terrorizes the population of the affected areas to make sure that supporting the movement is highly dangerous and that there will be no victory at all. Maintaining terror over a long time is intended to wear down and out resistance. The strategy is known as counter-insurgency, "defined by the Pentagon as 'a combination of military, paramilitary, political, economic, psychological and civic action carried on by a government in order to destroy any movement of subversive insurgency'." [2]

In 1963 the US Military Assistance Program was expanded to include training and assistance to help local armies and police forces to deal with guerrilla movements in Latin America. Grants and credits were concentrated on weapons and equipment for subconventional war, like vehicles, helicopters and communications equipment.

... Robert McNamara told the House of Representatives Appropriations Committee in 1963:

Probably the greatest return on our military assistance investment comes from the training of selected officers and key specialists at our military schools and training centres in the United States and overseas. These students are handpicked by their countries to become instructors when they return home. They are coming leaders, the men who will have the know-how and impart it to their forces. ... [3]

Thousands of officers from all over Latin America were trained and many of them have subsequently become leading political figures in their own countries. For example, most of the nine military coups in Latin America between 1962 and 1966 were conducted by recipients of US training.

Counter-insurgency techniques also included civic action programmes, such as public works and food handouts to the local peasantry, designed to improve the standing of the military among the population and to prevent radical ideas from taking root. ... [4]

## **Organization of Violence**

Organized violence and terror against the local population was part of the existing US military doctrine most commonly termed counter-terror<sup>(1)</sup>. The US-military developed and refined its techniques of counter-insurgency in Vietnam. General Maxwell Taylor told a Congressional Committee in 1963:

Here we have a going laboratory where we see subversive insurgency, the Ho Chi Minh doctrine, being applied in all its forms ... We have teams out there looking at the equipment requirements of this kind of guerrilla warfare ... so even though not regularly assigned to Vietnam, they are carrying their experience back to their own organizations. [5]

## **the example of Guatemala**

Presidential elections in Guatemala 1966 brought a victory of Julio Cesar Mendez Montenegro, which was willing to leave anti-guerrilla activities to US counter-insurgency experts.

Colonel Carlos Arana Osorio, previously the Guatemalan military attach in Washington, was appointed as head of the military command in Zacapa, where guerrilla activity was most intense. Arana found his troops in poor condition and between July and October 1966 carried out an intensive training programme. He was assisted by a contingent of Green Berets. ... [6]

The US police programme in Guatemala was sharply expanded. The Mobile Military Police was formed and the Border Patrol (Guardia de Hacienda) was brought into counter-insurgency operations. Both have been most frequently associated with the thousands of kidnappings and murders.

Death squads and other paramilitary groups first appeared in July 1966. "... There is substantial evidence that these organizations include members

.....

<sup>(1)</sup> the use of terror to fight terror

of the army, police force and government officials. An extreme right-wing party, the National Liberation Movement (MLN) is also directly involved in the organizations. ..." [7] AI estimated up to 8,000 killings during Arana's campaign between 1966 and 1968. There were also reports about the use of napalm dropped by B-26 bombers on areas where guerrillas were active.

Colonel Carlos Arana Osorio, also known as the 'Butcher of Zacapa', in July 1970, as candidate of the MLN, became President of Guatemala. A 'state of siege' was declared in November 1970. Over 15,000 people were listed as disappeared or dead between 1970 and 1973. "... Most of the victims were trade unionists, students, journalists, social democrat politicians and especially peasants. ... rather than a specific campaign to eliminate the guerrilla movement it was an assault on the broad movement of democratic opposition to the government and the powerful economic interests behind it." [8]

see also: Operation Phoenix in Vietnam

But this strategy didn't succeed in suppressing the opposition. Trade unions and peasant organizations grew, against enormous odds, during the 1970s. And a more powerful and broadly-based guerrilla movement emerged.

## Revision of Strategy

In the late 1967 the United States' failing fortunes in Vietnam, dramatically underlined by the successful Tet offensive in February 1968, led to a basic reappraisal of its involvement in this and other theatres of conflict. ...

... President Nixon in 1969: '... We shall furnish military and economic assistance when requested and as appropriate. But we shall look to the nation directly threatened to assume the primary responsibility of providing the manpower for its defence.'

The Military Assistance Program (MAP) doubled in the early Nixon years to enable local armies to cope with their new responsibility. But following the Vietnam debacle, Congress was less willing to grant the ever increasing number of MAP requests and Nixon turned to arms sales as a means of fulfilling his commitments as military sales are less subject to congressional scrutiny. This also involved reversing the Johnson administration's decision to limit high technology military sales to Latin America and in 1973 the ban on these sales was lifted. ... [9]

US arms sales both to that region increased from an average of \$30 million in the 1960s to \$118 million in 1974.

Intensive military cooperation with Israel developed in these years. In November 1971 the US agreed to provide technical and manufacturing assistance to Israel's arms industry. Israel then became one of the main arms suppliers. This offered some flexibility in cases when political problems prevent the US from providing arms directly.

see also: Israeli arms exports to Latin America

The US recognized that, if unrest and rebellion is already spreading among the population, it may be too late for victory. Emphasize was on early identifying and oppressing social unrest combined with repressive techniques of social control. Nelson Rockefeller was send on a fact finding tour to Latin America in 1969. "... He identified the rapid urbanization in Latin America, and the unemployment and alienation which accompanied it, as one of the major threats to stability in the region. ...

Thus, the new counter-insurgency strategy stressed the maintenance of order in urban areas from where many of the tactics of rural insurgency were said to originate. The techniques of 'disappearance', torture and assassination employed by Arana in Guatemala were to be repeated elsewhere in Central and South America. ..." [10]

## **References:**

- [1] "The U.S. Military", "Global Politics and Influences for Change", , page 7/8
- [2] Under the eagle :U.S. intervention in Central America and the Caribbean /Jenny Pearce ; foreword by Richard Gott ; [maps by Michael Green]. ,0896081524 (pbk.) :, page 52
- [3] Under the eagle :U.S. intervention in Central America and the Caribbean /Jenny Pearce ; foreword by Richard Gott ; [maps by Michael Green]. ,0896081524 (pbk.) :, page 58
- [4] Under the eagle :U.S. intervention in Central America and the Caribbean /Jenny Pearce ; foreword by Richard Gott ; [maps by Michael Green]. ,0896081524 (pbk.) :, page 53
- [5] Under the eagle :U.S. intervention in Central America and the Caribbean /Jenny Pearce ; foreword by Richard Gott ; [maps by Michael Green]. ,0896081524 (pbk.) :, page 69
- [6] Under the eagle :U.S. intervention in Central America and the Caribbean /Jenny Pearce ; foreword by Richard Gott ; [maps by Michael Green]. ,0896081524 (pbk.) :, page 67
- [7] Under the eagle :U.S. intervention in Central America and the Caribbean /Jenny Pearce ; foreword by Richard Gott ; [maps by Michael Green]. ,0896081524 (pbk.) :, page 68
- [8] Under the eagle :U.S. intervention in Central America and the Caribbean /Jenny Pearce ; foreword by Richard Gott ; [maps by Michael Green]. ,0896081524 (pbk.) :, page 71
- [9] Under the eagle :U.S. intervention in Central America and the Caribbean /Jenny Pearce ; foreword by Richard Gott ; [maps by Michael Green]. ,0896081524 (pbk.) :, page 72
- [10] Under the eagle :U.S. intervention in Central America and the Caribbean /Jenny Pearce ; foreword by Richard Gott ; [maps by Michael Green]. ,0896081524 (pbk.) :, page 74