Tactics of Guerrilla War Remain Unchanged

(Editor's note: U.S. forces in South Viet Nam are deeply embroiled in another in the series of Communist-inspired guerrilla wars to erupt since World War II. In the following dispatch, a veteran UPI Asian correspondent discusses the nature and historical development of these backwoods conflicts.)

By ARTHUR DOMMEN
United Press International

HONG KONG (UPI) — Since the end of World War II the technologies of nuclear war have advanced by leaps and bounds but the tactics of guerrilla war remain virtually what Mao Tse-tung said they were in the 1930s.

During this period there has been no war fought with nuclear weapons. But the other kind of war has become almost commonplace — the war fought with hand weapons by small bands of foot soldiers entering lonely villages or setting ambushes along roads.

Except for a few new techniques, such as the introduction of helicopters by the French in Indochina and Algeria, guerrilla warfare has changed hardly at all in two decades and more.

The current example is South Viet Nam, where American men and materiel are massively committed.

Pattern Is Set

The pattern for this war was set in Greece in 1946-49, in Indochina in 1946-54 and in the Philippines and Malaya during the same period. Anyone who thinks the war in South Viet Nam should be over "in another year or so" should study the record of these four "brushfire wars."

All had a lot in common:

—They were protracted (the emergency in Malaya lasted 12 years) and they involved political as well as military offensives by each side.

—They were fought in backward areas, where transport and communications were difficult, by guerrilla armies rooted into and fighting on their own soil the guerilla army was frequently all the more formidable thanks to a "sanctuary" across an international boundary.

Pit a Small Number

—They all pitted a relatively small number of guerrillas against a much more numerous regular army, navy and air force.

Consider the figures:

In Greece, between 20,000 and 25,000 Communist irregulars, mainly recruited on the spot, fought a see-saw struggle against regular forces numbering 265,000 men armed with artillery and aircraft, and assisted by American military advisers.

In Malaya about 14,000 hardcore guerrillas held off 80,000 British regulars and 130,000 loyal Malay troops; in the Philippines the guerrillas were similarly mismatched, numerically.

Army of Irregulars

When the Indo-China war began in 1946, Hi Chi Minh's motley army consisted of 60,000 irregulars armed with an estimated 4,000 rifles, most of them archaic. In time they had exhausted the will to fight off 190,000-man French expeditionary corps and of the French-Allied 200,000 Vietnamese, 15,000 Laotians and 10,000 Cambodians.

In South Viet Nam today, the hard-core strength of the Viet Cong rebels is estimated by American sources as 25,000 at most, while the South Vietnamese regular army numbers 170,000 and has attached to it about 14,000 American military advisers.

A review of the histories of these rebel movements shows that they all started with the murder of isolated officials — civil servants, local military officers, the mayors of villages. The pattern was calculated to instill the greatest amount of terror into the civilian population and to propagate a rebel image of great influence and superior force.

Deaths Followed Up

These systematic assassinations, beginning in September, 1946, in Greece and in late 1958 in South Viet Nam, were followed up by attacks on small government patrols and outposts. Then came larger raids on army posts and seizures of arms from isolated garrisons. Then came the clandestine establishment of rebel control over whole areas, protected by increasingly audacious sabotage and requisitioning.

All of them ended up with tightly knit and disciplined guerrilla bands fighting full-scale battles against numerically superior, but tactically cumbersome, government forces.

The importance to the rebels of having sanctuary across an international boundary is demonstrated by the example of Viet Minh in North Viet Nam, where the Communist victory next door in China permitted the timely supply of arms against the French in the crucial stage of the eight-year war.

Contribute to Defeat

Conversely, the lack of sanctuary is believed to have contributed heavily to the defeat of the guerrilla campaigns in Malaya, the Philippines and Greece.

The closing of the Yugoslav-Greek border by Marshal Tito in July, 1949, cut off at one blow the Greek Communists' sanctuary and doomed their entire movement.

One of the factors worrying American advisers now in South Viet Nam is that country has hundreds of miles of border with Communits controlled areas of neutralist Laos, and the the Viet Cong have the use of havens within these borders whenever they are hard-pressed by a government offensive.

Unlike the Greek communists, however, the Viet Cong find plenty of food to eat right inside South Viet Nam, which is a rich rice-growing area. This compounds the difficulty for the anti-Communist startegists.

Definite Positive Factors

Aside from the factor of sanctuary, there were definite positive factors which made for the defeat of the Communist insurgents in Malaya, the Philippines and Greece.

The most important may have been dynamic leadership and imaginative planning.

In Greece, for instance, it was not until Field Marshall Papagos took over command and reorganized his troops along lines better suited to irregular warfare that the balance began to tip. Even American material help on a massive scale, American military advisers with Greek general, units down to company level and an American veto over the Greek general staff had been insufficient.

In the Philippines, it was the foresighted leadership of President Ramon Magsaysay which made all the difference in the struggle against the Juks. Magsaysay continually got out among the peasants, heard out their complaints, gave them land and at times risked ambush to meet the rebels in their own countryside and outsmart them.

Training Major Factor

Training is a second major factor in "brushfire" wars. Guerrillas traditionally operate in terrain and under conditions in which a regular army might face piecemeal disintegration. In Indo-China, whole French battalions combed certain areas in vain attempts to pin down and destroy a single Viet Minh company. Success was rarely commensurate with men and material expended.

Insurgents operate as individuals, or in small groups, carrying their own food, using camouflage, light weapons and the most weighty knowledge of the countryside. They have historically depended on a "reservoir" of sympathetic manpower in the countryside far larger than their own combat effectives.

To combat such guerrillas requires special training, including familiarity with the local language and customs. Since the guerrilla leans heavily on the peasant, it is necessary to win the peasant away from the guerrilla.

Third Decisive Factor

This leads to the third decisive factor in effectively countering Communist guerrillas: good intelligence.

A reliable intelligence network that will inform the security forces where the guerrillas are hiding can only be built on the confidence of the population. British military advisers in Malaya found that once they had demonstrated to the population that they could be counted on, constantly, for protection and support, the intelligence so desperately needed began to filter in. From that point on, the terrorists were lost because they had no place to hide.

A fourth factor of inestimable importance is the ability to starve out the guerrillas. This was done in Malaya by constructing fortified villages and checking who went in and out, who took his food with him, by rationing certain staple foods, and by imposing controls that went so far as requiring grocers to open tin cans of food when sold to prevent them going into communist caches. Half a million people were resettled in Malaya.

Strategic Hamlets

In South Viet Nam, the government has been following the same lines by constructing "strategic hamlets." Already, however, it reported that many of these hamlets have been successfully infiltrated by the Communists.

U.S. military advisers in South Viet Nam say the nature of the guerrilla war there is that of "buying time" until the anti-Communist Diem government can win the support of the people. The recent bitter dispute between the Roman Catholic presidential family and the Buddhists, who constitute 80 per cent of Viet Nam's population, raises grave questions about whether that is possible.

Military action against the Viet Cong insurgents has progressed reasonably well, but the guerrillas seem to have little trouble supplying themselves from the peasant population and, because of fear or hostility, government forces get precious little intelligence from the peasants.

Not Won By Might

The protracted, unbalanced and bloody struggles in Greece, Malaya, the Philippines, Indo-China and South Viet Nam have shown that brush-fire wars are not won by military might alone or by political propaganda alone, but by a judicious blending of military, political and social means.

It was Sir Henry Gurney, British high commissioner for Malaya, who spoke the now-famous words, "This is a war for the hearts and minds of the people."

Marysville Man Gets Prison Term

Richard Ralph Bryant, 29, Marysville, Calif., was sentenced to three years in the Oregon state penitentiary Thursday in circuit court after his probation was revoked.

Bryant originally was placed on probation on a charge of receiving and concealing stolen property. He was charged with violating his probation by "absconding from supervision" of his probation officer, and failing to make restitution as directed by the court.

Imposition of sentence was suspended for three years and Anne Belle Brennan, 47, of 3523 Grant rd., Central Point, was placed on probation on a charge of uttering and publishing a forged check. She had pleaded guilty earlier.

The court directed her to make restitution, refrain from drinking and associating with "persons of ill repute."

Imposition of sentence was suspended for three years and Nancy Lee Kime, 19, of 1464 Orchard Home dr., was placed on probation for attempting to obtain property by false pretenses. She had pleaded guilty earlier.

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