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**The Intelligence Role in Counterinsurgency:
Proposed Planning Guide in Four Phases of “National Liberation” Wars**

Walter Steinmeyer

This article, originally classified, appeared in *Studies in Intelligence* Vol. 9, No. 4 (Fall 1965). It appears here now as a continuation of the journal's contribution to Defense Department-led efforts to mark the 50 years that have passed since the conflict in Vietnam raged. This and earlier articles published from the *Studies* archive will appear in a forthcoming digital compendium of unclassified or declassified *Studies* articles related to US intelligence involvement in the conflicts in Southeast Asia. The true name behind the penname used in 1965 is Theodore Shackley, an operations officer who played important roles in Laos and Vietnam and who would eventually rise to the second highest position in CIA's Directorate of Operations.

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*Proposed planning guide in four
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**THE INTELLIGENCE ROLE IN
COUNTERINSURGENCY**

Walter Steinmeyer

Experience during the past decade in Cuba, the Dominican Republic, Indochina, the Congo, and other such hot spots has been varied enough to provide some ground for generalizing about the role an intelligence agency should play in the U.S. effort to combat “wars of national liberation.” This is the field in which U.S. security is for some time to come, under conditions of nuclear stalemate, most likely to be challenged, as the Soviet Union, Red China, and Cuba exploit for their own purposes dissension, turmoil, and impatience for reform in Latin America, Africa, the Near East, and Southeast Asia. No set of rules can be universally applicable to all the diverse situations that now exist and will arise, but an outline of the part a civilian clandestine service should take in helping meet these challenges can at least serve as point of departure in preparing to confront a particular one of them. To suggest such an outline is the purpose of this article.

Cadre Phase

The Communist-instigated “war of liberation” begins with a period in which the local Communist party or the local residenturas of the KGB or Chinese or Cuban intelligence service are spotting, assessing, and recruiting candidates for guerrilla training and political indoctrination. When such an agent has been recruited he is sent for his training to the Soviet Union, China, or Cuba, usually via a devious clandestine route. A Peruvian traveling to the guerrilla warfare schools in Cuba, for example, may fly, using his Peruvian passport, first to Paris, where his contacts from the Cuban intelligence service meet him and give him a Cuban passport with which to travel Paris-Prague-Havana. The record in the bona fide Peruvian passport thus shows no travel to Communist countries. After three to six months' training in Cuba he reverses these steps and returns to Peru as one of the hard-core cadres charged with preparing the insurgency.

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In this phase six aspects of the clandestine service mission can be specified:

- To find out what persons and procedures are used in selecting candidates for training and then to penetrate this spotting, assessment, and recruitment machinery in order to identify the cadres. This effort will include penetration of the local Communist party.
- To identify and counter, using counterintelligence techniques, cadre-phase operations of the Soviet, Chinese, or Cuban intelligence residenturas.
- To expose publicly what the Communists are doing and how, and to show how the people of the country can contribute to resisting them.
- To seek by political-action measures to orient and motivate the host government to cooperate in clandestine operations against the cadre buildup and in preparations for combatting later phases of the insurgency. This means that the government must have or develop an effective security agency with arrest powers and counterintelligence competence, sufficiently secure for liaison with the U.S. service. Ideally this agency should maintain travel controls over all citizens going abroad.
- To conduct, if necessary, political-action programs to put teeth into the country's anti-subversive laws. The government must be able to neutralize subversives not by sending them into exile but by putting them in jail.
- To help the country's military or police forces establish and train a crack guerrilla-killer unit to be deployed tactically in later phases. The unit should not exceed battalion size, about 200 men; its strength should lie in the quality of its personnel, their training and leadership, and in its mobility, fire power, communications, and tactics.

Incipient Phase

When the guerrilla trainee returns to his homeland he is usually tied into the local Communist party or the Soviet, Chinese, or Cuban intelligence residentura to get funds and guidance in developing the support structure for an active guerrilla campaign. (Sometimes his support and guidance come from an adjacent country.) In this incipient phase the returned agent begins his procurement of weapons, ammunition, and safehouses and settles on a rural area for his initial operations. Within this area he picks a location for his base camp

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and begins to cultivate the sympathies of the peasantry around it within radius of a six-hour march. He will need these peasants for logistical support and tactical intelligence.

When the groundwork is completed, the agent moves in with five to ten companions. After orienting itself in its surroundings, this incipient guerrilla band begins its political indoctrination of the peasants and the terrorizing with raids and burnings of all who remain hostile. Gradually it gains new recruits, trains and equips them, and puts them into the field. When it has grown to more than 20 men and survived what initial measures the conventional military or police forces could take against it, it has matured as a guerrilla unit and completed the incipient phase.

In this phase, the U.S. service, if feasible jointly with the government's security agency, should undertake the following kinds of operations:

Identify the guerrilla agent as he returns from training or as soon thereafter as possible. Sources may be travel-control data or penetrations of the Communist party or recruitment machinery.

Identify rural and urban safehouses established in support of the guerrilla program. This can be done through surveillance of the returning agent, through penetrations, or through informant nets set up in likely rural areas (see below).

Identify and block the guerrilla's channels for arms and ammunition procurement. This can generally be done by the government's customs and border patrol forces. Intelligence penetrations will help.

Survey rural areas suitable for guerrilla bands and gather terrain intelligence, with emphasis on such things as water sources, potential ambush sites, and possible drop zones for the guerrilla-killer unit. Bear in mind that the guerrilla usually cannot operate farther than a six hours' march from his base.

Establish highly selective informant networks in potential guerrilla areas as a source of tactical intelligence for the guerrilla-killer unit if guerrillas do begin operations there. Such a network can be handled by the police units in the area in question, or some other apparatus can be set up for this essential job.

Mount organized, professional civic-action programs to promote loyalty to the government among the populace of potential

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guerrilla areas. Convince the people that steps are being taken to right social, economic, and political wrongs.

Begin guerrilla-killer operations as soon as intelligence indicates the presence of an incipient guerrilla band. Tactics are sustained pursuit, ambushes, destruction of the base camp, denial of water and supplies, and finally direct confrontation in a fire fight. Nothing is so effective in stopping the development of guerrilla bands as eliminating those who have just finished training and taken to the field for the first time.

Operational Phase

If the guerrilla movement is successful, in spite of all countermeasures taken during the cadre and incipient phases, in establishing several bands of twenty or more men each in some region, it has become a real threat to the country. In this operational phase, the guerrillas try to consolidate their control of the region. Though they keep the individual bands compartmented, they coordinate their activities so as to make the maximum political and tactical impact on the area. They may thus drive the government forces out of the area completely; at least they break down the government's control over it at night. Area consolidation, in turn, enables the guerrilla to expand his supply mechanism, improve his collection of tactical intelligence, and obtain new recruits for his units.

This, in essence, is the tactic Fidel Castro used so successfully when he went into the Sierra Maestra. It is also what the FALN did in Falcón state in Venezuela. The longer the guerrillas can keep operating in one area, the more likely they are to consolidate a political and operational base there and then break out to other areas. When they get to the point that they can move with some freedom at battalion level in an area, the operational phase of insurgency gives way to one of covert warfare.

During the operational phase, the U.S. clandestine service and the host government need to take the following actions:

Intensify the effort to get intelligence on the guerrillas' strength, disposition, and plans.

Step up counterintelligence operations against the guerrillas' logistic support apparatus.

Mount psychological operations to keep the pro-government flame of resistance alive in guerrilla-controlled areas. A portion of the psychological effort should also be targeted against the

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insurgents themselves, offering them rehabilitation if they surrender. (Those who do should be sent to training centers for vocational and political reorientation.)

Intensify civic-action programs in the areas adjacent to those the guerrillas hold in order to prove to the populace in both that sustained cooperation with the government will produce a better and freer economic and social way of life than the guerrillas can offer.

Step up the number and intensity of guerrilla-killer operations, using the killer unit at maximum capacity to eliminate guerrilla bands in fire fights. Give victories wide publicity in all media throughout the country.

If the guerrillas are receiving logistical support from a contiguous country, and if their supply depots there can be identified, mount hit-and-run commando raids against them. Whether the commandos are drawn from the military establishment of the country in question or brought in for the purpose from a third country, they should use bandit cover in order to provide for plausible denial. Nevertheless the raids, in addition to their primary objective of destroying the depots, are intended to call attention to the supplying nation's interference in the affairs of its neighbor.

Establish population controls, giving priority to districts adjacent to the guerrilla area. The key item in the control system is an identification document issued within a limited time to all residents of a given area. This census certification, as it were, not only makes it more difficult for guerrillas to pass themselves off as innocent local farmers during the daytime but provides a point of departure for systematic counterintelligence operations.

Organize popular self-defense forces, or citizens' militia, in districts adjacent to the guerrilla areas. Controlled by the conventional military establishment and properly motivated, these forces can contribute to containing the guerrillas through a strategic hamlet program, creating strong points for protection of the people and as bases for offensive operations.

Bring the conventional military forces into full play in large sweep and encirclement operations mounted in coordination with the guerrilla-killer unit. As the guerrillas are dispersed

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by the sweep and are heading for safe areas the guerrilla-killer force can both set up ambushes and engage in hot pursuit. With its superior training and equipment it should generally outrun and outfight the scattering guerrilla.

Covert Warfare Phase

When the insurgents get to operating in battalion strength in two or more large regions and running raids and terror into other areas in preparation for expansion, when pitched fire fights are held between them and the government's conventional troops and the latter begin to suffer heavy losses, when a guerrilla-killer force of battalion size is no longer adequate, then covert war is in full swing, exceeding the scope of a civilian agency's paramilitary capability. This means that the U.S. military establishment must begin to provide the government forces with large amounts of equipment and send out advisers to work with them at company level.

In this phase there is still, however, more than enough work for the U.S. civilian service to do:

Provide airlift capacity, usually under commercial cover, to move government forces and supplies to combat areas or to bring in mercenaries as combat troops or as advisers.

Furnish demolition technicians and other instructors for expanded training programs among the government forces.

Continue and expand intelligence collection, counterintelligence operations, psychological programs to arouse a sense of national unity and purpose, civic-action enterprises, and "bandit" raids on adjacent-country supply depots.

Conventional Warfare Phase

When the enemy decides that his strength is sufficient to confront the government forces in decisive battle, as at Dien Bien Phu, and the United States decides to intervene in this overt conventional warfare, then the U.S. manpower needed can come only from the defense establishment. At this point the civilian intelligence agency's resources in the country are put at the disposal of the U.S. military commander. At his direction they will carry out intelligence collection, counterintelligence operations, and covert psychological and political programs. Their paramilitary operations will be redirected to raids and harassments, the promotion of escape and evasion, and the development of resistance nuclei in the enemy's rear.

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Faced with almost any concrete situation, this general statement will be found at many points inapropos. In some ways it is too incomplete, in others too inclusive. It is not meant to imply, for example, that a U.S. clandestine service should direct overt propaganda or civic action campaigns if the appropriate U.S. agencies are there to do these things. But in some times and places it must.

The outline calls for some actions that have been tried in the past in concrete situations and have failed. But it may be the situation, not the course of action, was wrong. Or maybe the actions were carried out less than perfectly.

The outline concentrates on the rural aspects of insurgency. This does not mean that urban terrorism is of little importance. But "wars of national liberation" must take and hold territory if they are to succeed, and there is established doctrine competent to deal with urban terrorism as an adjunct to insurgency.

We hope, as we said, that our generalizations may be useful as a point of departure. But if the essay even contributes to focusing thought on the problems that occasioned it, it will, despite acknowledged limitations, serve a purpose.

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