THE FIVE STAGES OF URBAN GUERRILLA WARFARE:
CHALLENGE OF THE 1970s

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During the past twenty years, guerrilla war has been a major threat
to the governments of Latin America and Asia. Following the victory of
Fidel Castro in Cuba, Castro-style revolutions threatened to spread
throughout the hemisphere. Some clearly were Cuban exports. Others
were locally manufactured reproductions of the Cuban revolution. By
the mid-1960s, guerrillas roamed the Sierra de las Minas in Guatemala,
fought the Peruvian army high in the Andes, and were active in Colombia
and Bolivia as well. The victories achieved by the Communists in China
and the Viet Minh in Vietnam showed the way in Southeast Asia for guer-
rilla movements in Malaysia, the Philippines, South Vietnam, Laos, Thai-
land, Indonesia, and Burma.

The insurgent movements of Latin America and Asia were, for the
most part, rural. Their cause was that of the poor peasant farmer and
the landless tenant. Their bases were located in high mountain redoubts
or in impenetrable jungles. Their strategy was outlined in the writings
of Mao Tse-tung, Vo Nguyen Giap, Fidel Castro, and Che Guevara. So con-
vinced was Mao that successful revolution must begin with a band of rural
guerrillas that he could not even conceive of revolution taking place in
a country like Belgium: it has no countryside, he observed. As Lin Piao
later wrote, "the countryside, and the countryside alone, can provide the

broad areas in which the revolutionaries can move freely. The country-
side, and the countryside alone, can provide the revolutionary bases from
which the revolutionaries can go forward to final victory." Encircle-
ment of the cities was the penultimate phase of this doctrine. When
guerrillas entered cities they anticipated doing so in triumph, or against
the last resistance of an army already defeated in the countryside.

In Latin America, the bearded men who took to the hills in the early
sixties were still there in the late sixties, but they had advanced no
farther. They controlled mountain tops; the governments against which
they fought still controlled the nations; no cities had been encircled.
Nor could the guerrillas in Southeast Asia boast of any success beyond
survival. Counterinsurgency operations undertaken by the government
forces seemed to have worked, if not in eliminating all of the guerrilla
movements, at least in denying them success.

Unable to take over the country from the countryside, the guerrillas
of Latin America and Asia are now devoting more attention to the struggle
in the cities. To a degree, the urbanization of guerrilla warfare may
be evidence of its failure in the countryside. Government-sponsored
civic action programs have undercut the popular support given to the
guerrillas in the rural areas. Increasingly effective army patrols have
forced guerrillas to seek refuge as well as new targets in the cities.
Che Guevara, a city boy himself, had come to be a symbol for a generation
of guerrillas. His death in a ravine somewhere in Bolivia seems now
somehow symbolic of their failure. Going to the mountains lost
much of its appeal with his death.

At the same time, new groups came to realize that a large city
could offer more protection than a mountain redoubt. Vigorous offen-
sives against the guerrillas undertaken by the Guatemalan army in 1966
and 1967 were matched by increased guerrilla violence in the capital
city, culminating in the assassination of an American ambassador in
1968. By far the most spectacular of Latin America's urban guerrillas
are the Tupamaros in Uruguay. Initially, the Tupamaros operated as
rural guerrillas, finding their support among the workers on the sugar
and rice planations in northern Uruguay, but they soon realized that
Uruguay is a country like Belgium -- it has no countryside. "We do not

have unassailable strongholds in our country where a lasting guerrilla
nucleus could be installed," observed one member of the Tupamaros.
"On the other hand, we have a large city with buildings covering more
than 300 square kilometers and that allows the development of an urban
struggle."

Failure in the countryside is not the only reason why Latin American
guerrillas may be moving to the cities. The rapid shift in population
is another. Everybody is moving to the cities! Countries that were rural
five or ten years ago are today predominantly urban. In 1950, city
dwellers outnumbered rural residents in only four Latin American nations;
that number has since doubled. São Paulo, Brazil, is a typical example.
Its population has tripled in the last twenty years. It is also a theater
of urban guerrilla warfare.

Rapid urbanization has occurred in Southeast Asia as well. Ten
years ago, a Vietnamese revolutionary logically would have concluded
that the Chinese Communist example of rural revolution was the appropriate
model to follow in Vietnam for, like China, Vietnam was a country of
peasants. Its jungles and mountains would provide safe havens in which
guerrilla bases could be formed. Today the same revolutionary might
reason differently. Propelled by the insecurity and devastation the
war has produced in the countryside and by the economic opportunities
it offered in the cities, South Vietnam rapidly has become an urban
nation. The city of Saigon has grown from a population of 1.3 to 3
million in five years. Many of the new arrivals are displaced peasants,
disabled veterans, and army deserters. Inflation is rampant, cynicism
and war-weariness the prevailing philosophies. Indeed, Moscow and Petro-
grad in 1917 seem more relevant comparisons than does China of the 1930s.
The growing emphasis in the North Vietnamese press and radio broadcasts
on the struggle in Saigon suggests that Hanoi has reached similar con-
clusions regarding the importance of the urban front. Commenting that
"it is the struggle in South Vietnam's cities that has shaken the puppet
administration to its deep roots, brought the U.S.-puppet lairs into
disarray . . . and brought our common struggle to new and greater vic-
tories," Hanoi in recent months has exhorted the people in the southern
cities to "give full play to their General Uprising tradition."

In recent years, guerrillas have battled government forces in the cities of Algiers, Amman, Belfast, Calcutta, Caracas, Dacca, Guatemala, Montevideo, Quebec, and São Paulo. Other cities throughout the world have experienced milder forms of violence while some, like Santo Domingo and Paris, have been the scenes of full-scale urban uprisings.

No great theorist of urban guerrilla warfare has yet appeared. There is no Mao of the city. Carlos Marighella, the leader of an urban guerrilla group in Brazil, wrote a manual for urban guerrillas, but his death in a gunfight with Brazilian police prevented him from demonstrating that the principles he described would work. Urban guerrillas can offer few successes to be emulated by other urban guerrillas. They have not taken and held a single city; they have not overthrown a single government. Urban guerrilla warfare has not yet been shown to be an alternate means of seizing power. In the absence of any renowned living strategist of urban guerrilla warfare, or case study of a successful takeover, I have tried myself to distill from a variety of experiences and accounts a strategy by which urban guerrillas might take over a city. The struggle could take place in five stages: the violent propaganda stage, the organizational growth stage, the guerrilla offensive, mobilization of the masses, and the urban uprising. Each stage is marked by different objectives, targets, and tactics.

VIOLENT PROPAGANDA STAGE

The violent propaganda stage would be characterized by sporadic bombings concentrating on symbolic targets along with a few assassinations. During this stage, the city is regarded by the guerrillas as "enemy-occupied territory." Targets selected by urban guerrillas generally fall into two broad categories. Real targets are those struck by the guerrillas in order to obtain money or weapons, or to physically destroy or weaken their opponent, such as blowing up bridges or assassinating policemen. Many of these targets are symbolic as well; that is, they are a symbol of economic exploitation or oppression. Some targets are purely symbolic. They are struck to propagandize the guerrillas' opposition to a particular policy, or to commemorate a certain key date in the guerrilla struggle. For example, shortly after the 1965 intervention

in the Dominican Republic, terrorists in Guatemala City exploded bombs
at the embassies of the countries that had contributed troops to the
Inter-American Peace Force. There was little damage, and the attacks
served no purpose other than to signal the opposition of the guerrillas
to the intervention. Another example clarifies the difference: the
Tupamaros of Uruguay frequently rob banks to obtain funds for their
activities, while dissidents in the United States sometimes burn banks,
a symbolic gesture of opposition to the establishment in general.

Possibly we can deduce something about the size and level of organi-
zation of the dissidents from the nature of the targets they select.
The targets chosen by a large well-organized urban guerrilla force may
reflect their need for arms, money, and other items to sustain opera-
tions. This will be truer in countries less affluent than our own and
in countries where individual ownership of guns may be more restricted.
Concentration on purely symbolic targets could indicate a fairly low
level of organization and the guerrillas' smaller need for money. A
shift in targets may reflect changing developments within the guerrilla
organization. One group of urban guerrillas favored bank robberies until
it gained control of a university student group which gave it access to
student funds. The guerrillas then shifted to other targets.

Considering the wide selection of vulnerable targets available in
any major city, urban guerrillas thus far seem to have concentrated on
a very few. These have not been the ones city and police officials worry
most about. With a few exceptions, urban guerrillas have not attacked
the water and power systems, although both are linear targets, difficult
to defend and easy to sabotage. Interruption of either the power or water
supply would greatly disrupt life in the city, causing inconvenience,
even suffering among many people. Fear of alienating the people may ex-
plain why urban guerrillas have been reluctant to attack utilities. The
targets chosen by the guerrillas must give the guerrilla movement an air
of legitimacy or at least not detract from its claim to legitimacy.
Guerrillas must not do things that a government would not do. It is
a rule sometimes broken, and it must be recognized that terrorism can
be found in the guerrillas' field manual, but even terrorism, to be ef-
fective, must be in some way selective. (At least, no instance comes

to mind where the water supply was poisoned in the name of the revolution.) The government is the enemy, not the city and not its people.

Purely symbolic targets presently predominate among those chosen by urban guerrillas, perhaps an indicator that most urban guerrilla movements today are still in a nascent stage of development and have few physical requirements. Urban guerrillas adhering to leftist political ideologies favor symbols of economic exploitation and political repression. Banks are the heart of the capitalist system; the offices of foreign, usually North American, firms are symbols of economic imperialism, both frequent targets of Latin America's urban guerrillas. Bank robberies are not only a symbolic blow against capitalism, but fill the guerrilla war chest as well. Even Marxist revolutions require cash. In Saigon, it is rumored that foreign firms buy protection for their property by paying taxes to the Viet Cong. Holdouts may be bombed. Symbols of political oppression include policemen, secret police, police stations, judges, and courthouses.

Publicity for the guerrillas is the objective of the first stage: "The whole world is watching!" Demonstrators in Chicago chanted it over and over. The demonstrators certainly were not urban guerrillas. Many were students with a peaceful intent to promote more democratic procedures in the convention, but, in a phrase, they had described the great advantage that urban guerrillas have over rural guerrillas. Arab commandos who hijacked three jetliners knew it, too. The whole world is watching. Urban guerrillas can make them watch; rural guerrillas cannot so easily. Cities are centers of communication. They have radio stations, television studios, newspapers, reporters, and an audience that reads about what happens in their own city and in other cities. Who cares about a guerrilla movement in the remote highlands? Who even knows? And few pay attention to what the government does about it. A single guerrilla attack in a major city immediately has more publicity than the organizing efforts of ten guerrilla bands in the mountains. Through urban guerrilla warfare, dissidents can make their existence known to the world. Capturing headlines, or airplanes, or getting into an embassy, can be as important as capturing villages. Publicity makes the guerrillas appear greater than they are. Even acts of nonpolitical violence will henceforth be

given a political connotation. The normal crime rate becomes evidence
of government weakness and guerrilla strength. At a certain point, such
publicity even gives the guerrillas a degree of legitimacy.

We may speak of urban guerrilla tactics in terms of the tactics of
a few, those operations that can be carried out by a single man or a
small group of men, and mass tactics as those that require many people,
but not all of whom need to be members of the guerrilla group or even
sympathizers with the guerrillas' cause initially. Tactics of a few
will predominate in the first stages. Little organization is required
to throw a bomb. The individual need not even be there when it explodes.
Bombings can be used to gain publicity, to create an atmosphere of fear,
to intimidate, and to assassinate. Bombings can hardly be prevented.
On the other hand, random bombing serves little purpose. The publicity
provided is short-lived. People can even become used to bombings and
pay no attention to them unless they are increasingly spectacular.
Spectacular bombings are more difficult to conduct and, if they produce
casualties, may alienate sympathizers. Urban guerrilla warfare, like
rural guerrilla warfare, is a form of political combat. Merely racking
up a score of bombings does not necessarily bring one closer to victory.

The government of a country resides in its cities, especially so
in Latin America and Southeast Asia where a single city often dominates
both the politics and commerce of the entire nation. Translated into
target opportunities for urban guerrillas, this means a high concentration
of political leaders, government officials, high-ranking army and police
officers, and wealthy businessmen. In turn, this dictates two other
tactics of urban guerrillas: assassinations and kidnappings.

It requires only one man to carry out an assassination. The target
may be a specific individual known to the guerrillas or he may be a
person unknown as an individual but selected solely on the basis of mem-
bership in a despised organization, such as a policeman or a soldier.
Latin America's guerrillas frequently kill members of the hated secret
police, who have the mission of internal security. Blacklists captured
from the Viet Cong in Saigon and Hue included the names of senior police
officials, certain members of the Saigon police described as "tyrants,"
security agents, selected government administrative personnel, informants,

and defectors and deserters from the Viet Cong. Naxalite guerrillas
in Calcutta concentrate on policemen; in recent months they have killed
thirty-seven and wounded four hundred.

Assassination serves a variety of motives. Specific individuals
may be punished, their death serving as an example to others. An organi-
zation such as the police whose members are regularly selected as targets
may become demoralized. It may provoke them into harsh repressive measures
isolating them still more from the population. Cut off from intelligence,
afraid of moving among the people, barricaded physically and psychologically,
the police will adopt a "Fort Apache" mentality, seeing themselves as
defenders of isolated forts surrounded by hostile "Indian country." By
isolating their enemies, the guerrillas will command the streets.

Abductions require greater organization. A lone guerrilla will not
try to subdue a victim, and he needs a hideout where the prisoner can
be kept until released. Guerrillas may kidnap government officials whom
they can hold as hostages until certain prisoners held by the government
are released, or they may kidnap wealthy businessmen and hold them for
ransom. Kidnappings in Latin America seem to have increased at the same
time that external sources of support for the guerrillas were cut back.
Having made its existence and opposition to the government known in the
first stage, urban guerrillas may then try to expand their organization
so that they may undertake larger operations.

ORGANIZATIONAL GROWTH STAGE

In the organizational growth stage, the guerrillas plant larger
more sophisticated bombs and the assassination campaign is carried on
with specific tactical objectives, such as forcing government security
forces to button up. Capturing headlines continues to be an objective.
The urban guerrillas will also try to divert government forces from
campaigns against rural guerrillas if they exist. Often, urban guerrilla
warfare is only one component of a broad antigovernment struggle. Rural
guerrilla warfare and legal or almost legal political combat may be
carried on at the same time. Marighella viewed action in the cities
as a means of preserving a rural guerrilla movement, especially during
its initial phase when guerrillas are still attempting to establish a

foothold in the countryside. By attacking targets in the cities, urban guerrillas compel the government to withdraw its forces from the country- side. Troops guarding cities are troops *not* in the countryside. Probably there will not be enough troops to cover both. The question for the government then becomes: What level of guerrilla activity can it tolerate in the cities in order to defeat a major guerrilla threat in the country- side? Just as guerrillas must allocate their limited resources, so must a government.

The objective of the urban guerrillas could also be to precipitate a coup. If urban guerrillas cannot themselves replace a government, they can try to make conditions intolerable, hoping that elements within the government will overthrow it. Following a coup, the guerrillas can negotiate with the new regime, and having indirectly fomented the over- throw of one government already, their power is enhanced. Frequently, urban guerrillas and elements within the government that are sympathetic to their cause, or perhaps merely ambitious, have cemented their alliance before the coup. Young army officers who overthrew the Guatemalan govern- ment in 1944 were working hand in hand with the student rebels who led street demonstrations and carried out violent acts against the government. On the night of the planned coup, the students were promised arms and given specific missions, such as the occupation of the government radio station. Events followed a slightly different course during the 1965 revolt in Santo Domingo. For the first few hours of the revolt, the rebels consisted of a few conspirators and portions of some army garrisons. But when they saw that the government forces had a superiority of weapons (tanks and the air force), the conspirators sought to make up their deficiency with numerical superiority. They opened the arsenals and distributed arms to any who would join their revolt, thus initiating full-scale urban warfare.

Urban guerrillas may also employ violence as a means of coercing the government to pursue or refrain from pursuing a certain policy. The government is in effect warned that unless it annuls elections, re- leases guerrilla leaders held in prison, or allows prominent leaders to return from exile, it will face increasing violence. This violence is usually confined to the urban areas, especially the capital city, for

it is there that guerrillas can expect to receive the most publicity.

The tactics of the urban guerrillas in the second stage will reveal
their developing organization and their growing need for money and weapons.
Kidnappings followed by ransom notes and small armed assaults on banks
and police stations will predominate. Armed assaults demand greater risks
than bombings and kidnappings. They are not wasted upon purely symbolic
targets, but rather are made to fill the guerrillas' needs for funds,
weapons, the liberation of prisoners, or to cause destruction and casual-
ties. In guerrilla terminology, a bank robbery is an "expropriation"
of funds that have been stolen from the people. The guerrillas steal
them back on behalf of the people. The Tupamaros even distribute part
of their stolen loot to the poor of Montevideo and thus acquire a Robin
Hood image. It is not unlikely that urban guerrillas will face competi-
tion from common bandits who will take advantage of the guerrillas'
prestige to carry on some expropriating of their own. There is also the
possibility of competition from antiguerrilla elements who may conduct
armed assaults with unnecessary savagery in an attempt to discredit the
guerrillas. Guerrillas have attempted to overcome such competition by
announcing their own assaults and denouncing those not made by them.

THE GUERRILLA OFFENSIVE

As the guerrillas launch their offensive, bombs continue to explode,
but real rather than symbolic targets predominate. Assassinations and
terrorist campaigns continue. Armed assaults are larger and more fre-
quent. Attacks on police stations compel the police to pull more men
off the streets. Eventually, police stations are reduced to garrisons
in hostile territory. As the police are less willing to move about and
the guerrilla organization develops, the guerrillas may begin to challenge
their control of the streets. In certain areas, guerrillas even may
begin to assume some government functions such as controlling crime,
providing protection for their supporters and gathering taxes. Arms in
excess of the guerrillas' needs are stolen and stored for the uprising.

A few brief occupations of commercial radio stations may occur during
this stage to inform audiences of the guerrillas' aims.

MOBILIZATION OF THE MASSES

Mobilization of the masses marks the fourth stage as the guerrillas
seek to support their offensive with a mass movement. Provoking repression
becomes an important objective. It is a means of gaining popular support.
The guerrillas already believe that the government is, in their terms,
an oppressor. Why else would they be guerrillas? They must force the
government to act like an oppressor so that more people will share their
view. The judicial system is a primary target. If vital documents are
destroyed, judges assassinated, and witnesses intimidated, the government
may be forced to adopt extra-legal methods to deal with the dissidents
and thus become vulnerable to the charge of repression. That obviously
was the motive behind the assassinations of Vietnamese judges carried
out by the Viet Minh during the first Indochina War. Fearing for their
own lives, the judges handed down wholesale acquittals of arrested ter-
rorists, forcing the government to rely on French military courts in
order to get convictions. Responding to criticism, one judge remarked,
"I have nine children. Who will feed them if the Viet Minh kill me be-
cause of my sentences?" Continuous violence against police may cause
them to become nervous and, as a result, trigger-happy or brutal in
their treatment of all suspects. Violence against candidates and polling
places may cause the government to call off elections, perhaps even an-
nounce a state of siege, suspend civil liberties, and declare martial
law. The thought is rapture to urban guerrillas. The government then
can be denounced as dictatorial. As discomfort resulting from government
countermeasures increases, so will discontent. Numerous "just causes"
will arise for the guerrillas to exploit. The guerrillas may even launch
their own wave of terror against moderate opposition leaders, making it
look very much as if government secret police were responsible. Although
this objective is not peculiar to urban guerrilla warfare, it works best
in urban areas where the government must deal with a large population
and where countermeasures such as curfews disrupt life more rapidly.
Simply, a government may tolerate more disruption in the countryside
than in the city.

Radio stations are seized and held for longer periods during
this stage. General strikes are called to paralyze the economy and
provide a pool of unoccupied workers for street fighting. Demonstra-
tions and riots also occur with more frequency. They may have occurred
previously, and they may have no apparent connection with the cause
of the urban guerrillas, but the guerrillas now seek to foment and
sustain them. Riots provide a noisy background against which urban
guerrillas can carry out more precise operations such as assassinations
and armed assaults. These will of course provoke violent repression,
the guerrillas hope, against all of the demonstrators. Dissidents in
Guatemala City showed considerable skill in mobilizing mass demonstra-
tions against the government in 1962. Roads leading to the city were
blocked and busses were seized and driven to the zones of the cities
where opposition to the government was traditional and virulent. There,
agitators recruited demonstrators, sometimes paying them, and had them
driven to assembly points in the capital city. Other dissidents over-
turned cars and burned busses in the streets to restrict all traffic
except that along their own line of supply. Radio-dispatched cabs
under control of the dissidents coordinated the operation. To help
substantiate their accusations that the government was repressive,
high school students and women university students frequently were
deployed in the front ranks and on the flanks of marching demonstrators
and were given antigovernment signs to carry, a shrewd maneuver which
guaranteed that any police moves against the demonstrators would find
the police fighting women and children first.

Widespread riots quickly wear out the police force, allowing
urban guerrillas greater freedom of action. The police may even be
driven entirely out of certain areas by rioters, allowing the guerrillas
to assume temporary control over parts of the city. The better organized
guerrillas can move among the rioters, encouraging acts of violence
and directing them toward specific targets. A mob tearing down an
embassy is preferable to a terrorist bomb blowing one up.

At some point, barricades are thrown up. The building of barri-
cades conjures up images of the French Commune, or even earlier visions
of Bastille-storming days. Modern military hardware such as tanks,

helicopters, and tear gas would seem to have made barricades obsolete, yet the past few years have seen a renaissance of barricades in Santo Domingo, in Paris, in northern Ireland. Although it is true that government forces can employ their weapons to crush and roll or fly over street barricades, a premature application of military power on the government's part could lead to open warfare between it and a portion of its citizens. Besides, it looks bad. If those behind the barricades are nothing more than a handful of malcontents as the government probably has been telling everyone, why are tanks needed? It is the government's desire to minimize the seriousness of the situation, if not the casualties that constrain the use of weapons. With the government's hands tied by its own propaganda, street barricades seem not so obsolete. But what is their function? Primarily it is to provide direction to the rioters. Rioting is directionless. Rioters exhaust themselves quickly and will disperse out of not knowing what to do next. At this point, the riot is vulnerable and government security forces can begin moving in. Urban guerrillas can prevent this by erecting barricades giving the rioters a front on which to face, and giving them arms to defend that front. In this manner, rioters are made into soldiers.

If the "terrain" is right, it appears that barricades can be thrown up with remarkable rapidity. In 1968, demonstrators in Paris tore up cobblestones, overturned automobiles, and cut down trees to build some sixty barricades in approximately three hours. The barricades were eleven deep on some boulevards. Previously soaked in gasoline, each was ignited as the demonstrators retreated before barrages of tear gas cannisters.

URBAN UPRISING

The urban uprising and full-scale urban warfare are the final assaults on the government. The masses are armed. Radio stations are occupied to broadcast instructions to the dissidents. The guerrillas destroy or occupy government installations and assassinate key officials while government forces battle dissidents in the streets. The rural guerrilla army attempts to enter the city now. It is what the rebel

colonels hoped would happen in Santo Domingo in 1965 and what the
Viet Cong hoped would happen in Saigon in 1968. The objective is
takeover, and a rival government is formed to stand by.

CONSTRAINTS ON URBAN GUERRILLAS

It seems unlikely that a dissident group would be able to take
over a government by urban guerrilla warfare alone. Not because the
obstacles to achieving tactical successes are so much greater in urban
guerrilla warfare than in rural guerrilla warfare, but because the con-
sequences of even small failures are greater. Everything happens so
much faster in the city. Transportation is better and communications
swifter. The concentration of government forces is greater. Potential
informers are more numerous and harder to detect in the city than in
the countryside simply because people with whom the guerrillas come in
contact are more numerous. Under such conditions, prolonged conflict
is more difficult. Realizing this, an urban guerrilla must be careful
not to undertake actions that may alienate the people, an important
constraint. To take over the entire government in a single strike is
incredibly difficult unless the guerrilla group has substantial help
from organized forces within the government. Any country is more
vulnerable to a military coup than to a takeover by urban guerrillas;
it is simply a matter of power and organization.

The fact that widespread urban terrorism has not occurred in cities
such as Saigon or Bangkok cannot be offered as evidence that police
and army protection is adequate, but neither does the vulnerability of
most cities mean that guerrillas can, at any moment they choose, launch
a campaign of terror and destruction in the urban areas. We always
think of constraints in urban conflict as applying only to the forces
in the government -- government countermeasures must not be overly
destructive, must not alienate the people, and so on -- but what
constraints apply to the guerrillas?

Two kinds of constraints can be examined. First, there may be
constraints against bringing the insurgencies, which in Latin America
and Asia thus far have been largely rural movements, into the cities.
Second, there may be constraints that limit the kinds of things
guerrillas can do in the cities.

Lack of targets would not seem to be a constraint. Cities offer
numerous symbolic and real targets. Nor do the contents of the guer-
rillas' arsenal seem to be a major constraint. Highly destructive
explosives are readily obtainable or easily manufactured. Effective
sabotage may not require any weapons at all. On the other hand,
organizational constraints may be a factor. The membership of the
guerrilla movement may preclude urban operations. Obviously, dissident
movements founded on ethnic minorities like Meos in Thailand or Khmer
Loeu in Cambodia would be unable to carry their struggle to urban
areas. Easily identified, they would be too vulnerable.

As one component of a larger struggle that could include rural
guerrilla warfare and legal or almost legal political activities as
well, the proponents of urban guerrilla warfare may have to compete with
proponents of other activities for resources. Such a struggle seems
to be taking place in Guatemala today where advocates of urban guerrilla
warfare are arguing with advocates of rural guerrilla warfare and their
Cuban advisors over the amount of emphasis that should be given to the
revolutionary struggle in the cities. Distribution of these resources
will depend on the leaders' assessment of risks involved versus potential
achievement. Guerrilla acts in cities may be good for publicity by
calling attention to the existence of opposition to the government, but
how far do they advance the guerrillas' ultimate goal of taking over
that government? A high-risk versus small-payoff assessment by the
leaders may discourage them from giving too much attention to urban
guerrillas. Urban guerrilla warfare is riskier than rural guerrilla
warfare, and the leaders may fear that spectacular success by urban
guerrillas could provoke a government crackdown in the cities which
could interrupt the rural guerrillas' underground logistics system.
A large guerrilla movement in the countryside lives off the cities
only slightly less than government forces. Da Nang, Vietnam, was free
of Viet Cong terror reputedly because the Viet Cong in the surrounding
countryside were dependent on the local logistics system for everything
except Soviet and Chinese weapons and ammunition. An elaborate system
of payoffs and accommodations reputedly kept things quiet.

Psychological constraints may also preclude urban operations.
Part of the mystique of guerrilla warfare, for the last two or three
decades has been the image of the austere peasant soldier. For many
guerrillas, fighting in the cities will necessitate a significant
change in attitude. To rural guerrillas, the city has always been a
place of "unrevolutionary" evil: the austere peasant soldier versus
the corruption and decadence of Shanghai, the casinos and gangsters
of Havana, the nightclubs and bar girls of Saigon. It is an old theme.
So convinced were the Viet Cong that delta peasants would be put off
by the spectacle of limousines, foreign troops, and prostitutes in
Saigon, that they bought bus tickets for the peasants to visit the
city. More recently, the same theme has been adopted by Prince Sihanouk
who, from exile in Peking, denounced the "traitorous reactionaries"
in Phnom Penh, whom he accuses of leading "a luxurious life of feudal
lords . . . completely indifferent to the extremely miserable fate of
the 6,500,000 compatriots living outside Phnom Penh who are suffering
from the catastrophic consequences of a cruel and devastating war."
Good guerrillas spend little time in the cities lest they themselves
become soft or corrupted by water faucets and easy women. The first
advance of the Viet Cong into the cities may have embarrassed the
United States, but as an urban uprising, it failed. As though seeking
revenge, the Viet Cong later began to punish the cities with rocket
attacks directed at random against the civilian population. Their
purpose, one said, was to show the people living in the cities that
they could not live in peace and security while a war raged in the
countryside; if they would not participate, they would be punished.
It was revealing of their attitude toward cities as well as a certain
doctrinal rigidity. Cities were there to be encircled. They were to
be the targets of punitive rockets. Can they now become theaters of
revolutionary combat?

Mao Tse-tung once fought over the same ideological battleground
with Li Li-san, one of the early leaders of the Chinese Communist
Party and a principal organizer of the Nanchang Uprising in 1927.
At that time, conventional Communist wisdom dictated that only the
urban proletariat could lead the revolution. The peasants were usually

considered inherently conservative and petty bourgeois in orientation.
Li Li-san recommended what was essentially an urban strategy, composed
of attacks by the Red Army against major cities, coordinated with
workers' uprisings from within. On the other hand, Mao argued in favor
of a rural strategy, because he was convinced that with proper organiza-
tional tactics, peasants could be mobilized into reliable revolutionaries.
Li's urban uprisings failed and he was exiled from China, while Mao's
rural strategy, after many reverses, ultimately succeeded.

In the mythology that inevitably follows victory, the notion of
the peasant as the primordial source of revolution was born. It was
urban party leadership that was now suspect in its devotion to revolu-
tion. A shift to an urban strategy will entail a similar shift in
revolutionary thought.

A NEW ENVIRONMENT FOR THE GUERRILLA

The guerrilla has found a new environment in the cities, as well
as new dangers. The government will no longer be the remote entity it
was in the countryside, nor will its army ever be far away. It is the
custom of many countries to garrison most of the army, air force, and
especially the elite troops judged most loyal in or near the capital
city precisely for the purpose of preventing the government's overthrow.
The government's secret police are most efficient in the cities. The
urban guerrilla must also deal with a population different from the
peasant. Unlike the peasant, for whom the government and the guerrillas
constitute the only organizations competing for his loyalty, the city
dweller is subject to many competing promises and demands. The urban
guerrilla will find himself in competition with political parties,
always best organized in the cities, with labor unions, radical priests,
and student groups. Will the city dweller risk his life for land reform,
a usual cause of rural guerrillas? Or will urban guerrillas adopt
new causes -- the cause of the urban squatters, slum conditions, the
plight of urban workers -- and can they offer more than, say, existing
labor unions or political parties?

Few guerrillas, whether they started out in the countryside or
the cities, have ever been able to repeat the success achieved by

China's Communists. And even in China there were many special circumstances that contributed to their victory,only one of which was Mao's mobilization of the peasants. Japanese invaders helped galvanize peasant nationalism, and Japan's defeat left a vacuum in China; the assistance provided by the Soviet Union was undoubtedly a contribution to Mao's victory as was the decline of the Nationalists, which was only partially a product of Communist victories. And ultimately, the Nationalist Army was defeated by a conventional army, not by any sort of guerrilla warfare. There were special circumstances in Vietnam as well. Only in Cuba did a band of rural guerrillas succeed in creating an army and toppling a government although, again, they did so ultimately through conventional warfare.

True, there have been numerous nationalist movements employing the tactics of rural guerrilla warfare, which succeeded in convincing some European powers that it was expedient to withdraw from their colonies. But the era of formal colonies is over. Guerrillas now have to deal with indigenous governments less amenable to liquidating themselves.

This side of 1789, urban strategists have even fewer successes to offer. In Petrograd a city was taken and a government was overthrown, but conditions in Russia were again so special as to disqualify it as an example. Russia was in the process of losing a war, resistance had become widespread in the countryside, and the rebels possessed an army. Although the Algerian rebels ultimately won their point in Paris, they lost the battle of Algiers, and likewise, the guerrillas failed in Caracas.

To fight in the cities, guerrillas must develop an urban strategy. What I have described from the guerrillas' point of view is of course a textbook model. It assumes organizational development and a single-mindedness to pursue their objectives that is not yet apparent in existing urban guerrilla groups. Some individual, or some group, must develop a practical doctrine and demonstrate that it can be implemented successfully. In the coming decade, the action is likely to be in the cities. We must not overlook both the possibilities and the potential threat raised by urban guerrilla warfare.