

NATION BUILDING AND REVOLUTIONARY WAR

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Building a nation is a pretty bit of poetry but leaves a great deal to be desired as a social science concept. The definition of a nation is rather difficult to come by and the idea of building one is clearly a gross metaphor. A nation presumably is a special form of political community associated historically, and (if properly defined) logically with the institution of the state. It is as we know opposed both in history and logic to empire. Its principle of cohesion is nationalism -- a degree of consciousness of separateness and high valuation of political autonomy. Nation building is presumably then a metaphoric rubric for the social process or processes by which national consciousness appears in certain groups which through a social structure -- more or less institutionalize -- act to attain political autonomy for their society.

We can read in history the dissolution of various great empires -- ranging from the Holy Roman, through the Turkish to the British -- by the process of nation building. In this reading of history it is worthwhile to distinguish between the processes by which Western European states made good their autonomy which seems to me -- to have been associated with the reformation of Christian authority and the exaggerated development of kingship -- from nation building which is associated with nationalism.

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Nationalism, in its ideological manifestation, is an assertion of the right of a people -- however distinguished -- to determine its political destiny autonomously. We all know the difficulties of analyzing this right as we know the difficulties of analyzing any right. At bottom, it is merely an assertion of a value to be made good in this case by a persuasive political dialectic.

Now political dialectics are not, for the most part, simply conversations. They are matters of political action by more or less organized groups of people. Political dialectics are dialogues of power.

Nationalism implies democracy in the sense of public participation in politics since its assertion of basic political right is self determination. The sources of power supporting the assertion of this right, if there are any, would presumably be the organization of the populace for political action. The ideal type of this process might be the levee en mass.

Among others, Karl Deutsch has drawn out attention to a process which he calls social mobilization and which seems to me to be a near thing to nation building. An effective national political community must be well up on the scales of social mobilization.

Parenthetically, it does not seem to me necessary for a state to be based on a nation or to be held together by nationalism in order to be significantly autonomous, even in this day and age. Traditional or coercive cohesion combined with the political competitions of the cold war provide the condition for political autonomy of elites, who regardless of what nationalist slogans they pronounce, do not base their authority

on a nation. There is some question, however, how long such a state can be maintained.

The way, or ways, in which social mobilization has come about do not seem to me to be entirely clear. There are certainly a number of distinct historical cases available for study although the complexity of the total process is a formidable challenge to social science. There is in each total process a number of sub-processes which if they can be identified and analyzed may make the work somewhat more manageable. For example, one can think of the process of capital formation, the extension of literacy, the growth of corporate institutions, parties and the like. It is one such process broken into constituent elements which I would like to discuss at some length. That is the process of revolutionary war particularly but not exclusively as practiced by certain Communists in Asia. It has been notably successful in China and Vietnam, not only in bringing Communist regimes to power, but also in advancing the process of mobilization of the societies of these states toward nationhood.

Revolutionary war understood as a method of political struggle wage primarily on the basis of mobilization of energies latent in a certain kind of society and organized and routinized can be considered a concrete example of nation building in process.

Asian revolutionary wars are struggles between conflicting elite groups for control of territory and populations. This kind of struggle, characteristic of our time, can turn on the mobilization and organization of rural populations. In the pre-revolutionary state these populations are politically immobile and passive. In many respects the political situation in Thailand may serve as a prototype of this state of affairs.

As I have described it elsewhere:

The stability of Thai society, which is the bedrock of Thai politics, is to be explained by its simple structure of a proportionately enormous agrarian segment and a small ruling segment. These two groups interact in a tenuous manner so that the smaller does not irritate the larger. The character of the relationship between the two must be fully appreciated in order to understand the stability of the arrangement. The rural agrarian segment is separated geographically from the urban ruling segment. The agrarian segment is, in the main, land owning and survives by a quasi-subsistence economy, while the ruling segment is salaried (where its members own property it is usually urban and suburban) and lives on a cash economy. The cash comes from levies on rice exports and transaction taxes on imported goods which fall indirectly on the agrarian segment. The agrarian segment is uneducated (though not illiterate) and the ruling group is educated. This general social arrangement is permeated by an explanatory ideology based on the principle of differential moral worth manifested in differential status and experience. Thus the society of the Thai is characterized by a gross two-class structure, where- in the classes are physically as well as economically separated, and in which differential status is satisfactorily justified. The effect of this is a paucity of interests in the socio-economic sense which impinge on the political process. The structure of direct relationships between these two classes passes through the district office which is highly formal, and socially (and often geographically) distant. The more intimate economic relationship which transfers goods and services between town and county passes through the structure of Chinese traders. These people, as aliens, are easily contained politically, and at the same time serve the ruling group as a scapegoat for whatever hostilities the market may arouse in the rural segment.*

*D. A. Wilson, Politics in Thailand, Cornell University Press, Ithaca, New York (in press).

Put in very general terms the configuration of such societies as they exist in pre-revolutionary state of affairs contains a substantial "gap" between the urban and rural segments. The existence of the "gap" along many dimensions of social structure has been widely noted in the literature on underdeveloped societies; it seems to be a resultant of the process of modernization. This gap, a point of weakness or fragility of the social structures of such societies, is the key to the kind of revolution being discussed here. Note that at some stage modernization appears to weaken social cohesion.

The aspect of the gap I want to emphasize is that characteristic of the rural-agrarian segment which we can call its immobility, or better, its quality of being immobilized. This refers to several sub-characteristics such as economic immobility (underemployment), civil immobility (lack of political participation), status immobility (caste), and psychic immobility (superstition). In other words, the "gap" is immobility along scales of a variety of values.

Now it is into this gap of immobility that the revolution breaks with its organizing apparatus. In its ideal development it mobilizes the immobilized energies of the rural population with a set of organizations and draws them into a great structure of activity. A mere reference to the notorious mass organizations and their endless action meetings of Communist China or Vietnam should be sufficient to demonstrate the reality of this idea.

To the extent that this process of mobilization succeeds, the revolutionary movement becomes that much impenetrable and irreversible, because the mobilization process both uses human energy more fully and also educates the participants to an understanding of new frames of mind, new beliefs, and new social organizations. A nation is being built.

To carry out such a mobilization effectively demands resources of leadership with administrative ability. The communication of a charisma or a set of sympathetic symbols has received attention as an effective leadership device to arouse responsiveness in populations of underdeveloped societies. Charisma or similar symbolism is parsimonious of administrative skill, but also unstable and difficult to use in accomplishing complex social cooperation. The Communist-led revolution seems well aware of the deficiencies of this mode of leadership, as well as its strengths. A great deal of effort is directed toward the "routinization" of a charismatic or symbolic penetration of the masses by building strong organizations.

In order to accomplish this task, people of some skill are necessary; it is for this reason as much as any, it seems to me, that the revolution seeks to attract the intelligentsia in these societies. At the same time it is offering a reconciliation of the "gap" between at least a part of the modernized elite and their nation.

The tactical use of national fronts, party alliances, and analyses of class interests is directed to the problem of recruiting intelligentsia. Such devices justify support and participation from privileged classes in activities which are more or less openly aimed at the ostensible elimination of privilege, while explaining the division of educated classes into conflicting groups.

It is notable that revolution, to be successful and to be carried through to a new state of stability, must attract the support of a sizeable number of educated people. Peasant rebellions in all eras have been notoriously ineffective. But by reconciling the two segments the changes effected by the process may be stabilized.

Communist revolutionary war in Asia is a highly organized activity which in its ideal form synthesizes military, political, and administrative work. It is this organizational synthesis which makes such wars so significant as a social process. The function of this organization is to carry out a revolution -- the annihilation of existing authority and its replacement by new authority. Its importance in the success of Communist-led revolutionary wars in Asia is hard to overestimate. The cadre party organization characteristic of the Leninist party is an extremely flexible and defensible organizational structure. It is the most distinguished feature of Communist political activity.

The cadre party is an organization of disposable skills which can serve as the skeletal structure of a complex process of mobilization and action. The skills will be various and new ones may be developed as needed; but in principle these skills are devoted to the objectives of the party as a whole rather than the special form of action to which they are applied. The strengths of such a device are particularly notable in the agrarian societies of Asia, with their general paucity of indigenous organizational skills. In this sense Communist organizational work is a form of technical aid of underdeveloped societies, and as such may become a repository of a relatively high proportion of the administrative and organizational skills available in the society as a whole.

More specifically, however, in the conduct of political activity -- particularly revolution -- the capacity to carry on a great variety of activities in a coordinated manner is extraordinarily valuable. Revolutionary activity demands the capacity to sustain a tempo of development of military, agitational, and administrative work as well as the defensive capacity to withdraw intact in the face of tactical failure. These capacities are characteristic of the cadre party. Perhaps the outstanding strength of the organization is its capacity to provide leadership for new energies which become available in a society and thereby mobilize them for the revolution. The party provides the skills that transform a politically anomic and underemployed vitality into political action. In this manner it is a rationalization of human activity which, insofar as it is successful, is the revolution itself.

The aim of the revolution is to annihilate constituted authority and substitute a new authority. The simultaneity of these two aspects of the process may be critical in successful nation building. The process of annihilation is pursued by actions which on one hand seek to demonstrate the ineffectiveness of constituted authority -- such acts as sabotage, terrorism, armed raids, ambushes, and the like -- and on the other hand to destroy the concept of justice upon which constituted authority stands, by such acts as propaganda attacks on land law and other economic relationships, on the honesty and integrity of officials (corruption), on the patriotism of officials (lackeys of imperialism), and on the justice of social relations and social opportunities (class struggle, education and literacy, unemployment, wages, rents).

The concrete conditions which mold the content of revolutionary attacks vary from situation to situation. The revolution is able to adapt pragmatically

to these conditions because of its elaborate organization, which places political officers and agit-prop workers in the smallest group.

Constituted authority, by virtue of its being established, is largely bound to the conditions being attacked; its flexibility of response has several limitations. The first limit is what might be termed an inherent obtuseness. Constituted authority finds it very difficult to perceive any aspects of its position as unjust. Yet any system of authority can be explained in terms that make it seem unjust. Secondly, the constituted authority has a variety of positions both geographical and moral which it must defend, and therefore many of its resources are occupied in defense against potential attack. Finally, constituted authority, being better supplied and equipped, is likely to have made prior choices about organization, logistics, and tactics which commit it to certain directions to the exclusion of others. The revolution takes advantage of such choices by designing operations to capitalize on weaknesses -- for example, the use of highly mobile infantry bands against round-bound motorized troops.

Now in order that a revolutionary struggle may go forward it is necessary to disrupt existing structures of authority. It is a striking fact that in those areas where the revolution was carried through to a resolution satisfactory to the revolutionaries, the traditional authority had been severely disrupted before the revolution got started. In China, of course, a revolutionary process had been going on intermittently from the middle of the nineteenth century, and the dissolution of authority over the bulk of China's population was effected by the invasion and subsequent defeat of Japan. Consequently, much of China was up for grabs among Chinese elites from 1937 onward. The involutions of the Chinese

Civil War are far beyond this paper, but there is no question that established governmental authority was virtually non-existent in much of China for years before the defeat of the Kuomintang Army by the Red Army. Therefore the revolutionary leadership was not faced with dissolving such authority before it could move ahead to mobilize the population. The situation in Vietnam was similar.

The state of affairs that shaped the development of revolution in Laos is little known in the literature; on the basis of what information is available, however, it seems a reasonable conclusion that there was not much in the way of an effective administrative apparatus to provide substance to the authority relationship of the traditional monarchy of Luang Prabang and its government at Vientiane. The kingdom of Laos is an accident of history, and during the years of the French protectorate there seems to have been little effort to modify the traditional way of life. Therefore the machinations of the various personalities, parties, and political movements ought probably to be understood, at least in their earliest stages, as pure clique politics with little relationship to any social changes. What is involved has been the exercise of traditional loyalties and hostilities. To what extent the instrumentalities of the Pathet Lao movement have adopted the techniques of mobilization characteristic of its Vietnamese and Chinese mentors in the process of fighting in recent years is a subject worthy of investigation.

In Thailand the situation is different in a number of ways from the situations in China, Vietnam, or Laos. In Thailand the problem facing the revolutionaries is one of do-it-yourself disruption of authority and its related social structure. In this respect the rough analogue for any future revolution in Thailand is more likely to be found in the experience

in Cuba and Algeria (or the Philippines and Malaya) rather than in the neighbor societies of former French Indochina. At the same time the possibilities for infiltration of critical elements are extremely great in Thailand because of the unsettled state of affairs along the Mekong frontier and the ethnic geography of that area, which finds the same cultures flowing back and forth across the borders.

The difficulties of analyzing the potentials of do-it-yourself disruption are very great, involving the factors of latent conflict related to the organization of authority in the form of civil, police, and military structures. Nevertheless, the possibility cannot be rejected. The techniques of terrorism against authority's personnel, combined with other destructive activity (destroying crops, communications, and other property), certainly might increase the general state of insecurity sufficiently to stimulate anxiety and erode the basis of authority in the psychological acceptance of it as effective. At the same time propaganda aimed at symbolizing the government as unjust, corrupt, and alien could match the subversion of the acceptance of authority's effectiveness with a conscious rejection of its justice.

The revolutionary organization is ready to substitute authority for that annihilated. As soon as the opportunity arises, new governmental institutions at the local, intermediate, and national levels are established. These institutions will produce policies which initially should probably be understood as part of the attacks on established authority, since they will suggest to the people the feasibility of alternative social, economic, and political relations. But as the process goes forward, they can constitute an emerging national entity.

Several characteristics of warfare are notable within the context of processes of political change. Warfare in some form is known in almost all cultures. Considered as such it may be prosecuted in more or less sophisticated forms but it is a familiar phenomenon. In addition, in all but their most recent manifestation, the techniques of warfare are relatively simple. At the guerrilla level, they remain so since the technologically primitive people, can very soon become adept in the use of small arms. Finally, the place of war in the cultural structure of peasant peoples is marginal. It is less likely, particularly in modernizing societies characterized by the "gap" mentioned before, to be deeply involved in rigid traditional social structures. Therefore warfare might be termed a conceptually familiar and socially flexible activity which can in practice move people from one kind of social structure to another by way of "emergency" measures and practices which continue ostensibly only "for the duration."

The relationship between certain characteristics of underdeveloped agrarian societies and guerrilla warfare techniques common in revolutionary war is quite clear. For example, the existence of widespread peasant agriculture of a quasi-subsistence type makes the logistics of food and other personal needs of guerrilla troops relatively simple. Moreover, the heavy concentration of rural population, together with characteristic rural underemployment, provides a reservoir of manpower from which combatants and service personnel can be recruited. The primitiveness of communications also gives the guerrillas an advantage over organized troop units that may be vastly stronger over all, but are mechanized, dependent on more complex logistics, and required to defend the life-
liness of urban elements of the society. These characteristics merely

permit guerrilla activities to be maintained, however; despite their advantages, it appears highly improbable that guerrillas can do anything decisive to the main elements of an organized military force. Guerrilla warfare, if it is to amount to anything more than banditry, must therefore become part of a combined activity.

In revolutionary war the guerrilla forces serve a central function. The evidence from both China and Vietnam is that the guerrilla forces serve as the major organizational core for the mobilization of the rural population to participate in the revolutionary activity. This mobilization process of the revolution seems to me to be the critically distinguishing feature of revolutionary war as a mode of political conflict. The potentialities of mobilization are also peculiarly characteristic of underdeveloped agrarian societies.