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 guerrilla movements in Malaysia, the Philippines, South Vietnam, Laos, Thailand, 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 convinced 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

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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 offens-
vives 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 plantations 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 Petrograd 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 conclusions 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 victories," 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 organization 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 operations. 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 explain 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 effective, 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 membership 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 organization 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 countryside. 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 countryside? 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 overthrow 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 government 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, releases 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 casualties. 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 competition 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 antiguerilla 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 frequent. 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 terrorists, 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 because 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 announce 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. Demonstrations 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 demonstrations 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 overturned 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 barricades 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 consequences 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 guerrillas' 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 organizational 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 revolution. 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.