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WHY BIG NATIONS LOSE SMALL WARS: THE POLITICS OF ASYMMETRIC CONFLICT

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A cursory examination of the history of imperialist expansion in the late nineteenth and early twentieth century reveals one thing very clearly: Third-World resistance, where it existed, was crushed with speedy efficiency. In terms of conventional military thinking such successes were not unexpected. Indeed, together with the Allied experience in the first and second World Wars, they served to reinforce and to rigidify the pervasive notion that superiority in military capability (conventionally defined) will mean victory in war. However, the history of a number of conflicts in the period following World War II showed that military and technological superiority may be a highly unreliable guide to the outcome of wars. In Indochina (1946–54), Indonesia (1947–49), Algeria, Cyprus, Aden, Morocco, and Tunisia, local nationalist forces gained their objectives in armed confrontations with industrial powers which possessed an overwhelming superiority in conventional military capability. These wars were not exclusively a colonial phenomenon, as was demonstrated by the failure of the United States to defeat its opponents in Vietnam.

For some idea of the degree to which the outcome of these wars presents a radical break with the past, it is instructive to examine the case of Indochina. The French successfully subjugated the peoples of Indochina for more than sixty years with a locally based army only fifteen thousand strong. The situation changed dramatically after 1946, when the Vietnamese took up arms in guerrilla struggle. By 1954 the nationalist forces of the Vietminh had forced the French— who by this time had deployed an expeditionary force of nearly two hundred thousand men—to concede defeat and withdraw their forces in ignominy. Within twenty years, a vast U.S. military machine with an expeditionary force five hundred thousand strong had also been forced to withdraw.

The purpose of this paper is to attempt to provide a "pre-theoretical

perspective" within which the *outcome* of such "asymmetric conflicts" may be explained. In the field of conflict research, the study of the outcome and the conduct of wars, as against that of their *etiology*, has received remarkably little attention.[1] The outcome of "asymmetric conflicts" as described in this paper has been almost totally neglected.[2]

Arguably, it is easier to explain why the insurgents were *not* defeated than it is to explain the related but more interesting question—namely, how and why the external power was forced to withdraw. Since the former problem has been the subject of intense investigation both by specialists in counter-insurgency and strategists of guerrilla warfare, the greater part of this paper will deal with the latter problem. However, a few fairly obvious points need to be made before going on.

In analyzing the successes of the British at Omdurman against the Sudanese and the Italians in their war against local insurgents in Abyssinia, Mao Tse-tung has noted that defeat is the invariable outcome where native forces fight with inferior weapons against modernized forces *on the latter's terms*. Katzenbach writes in this context: "By and large, it would seem that what made the machinery of European troops so successful was that native troops saw fit to die, with glory, with honor, en masse, and in vain."[3] Second, it should be noted that in general this type of war met with little domestic opposition; success only served to increase public support.[4] Two interesting exceptions were the Boer War and the Irish Rebellion (1916–22); it is significant that in these conflicts the resistance to the British was both protracted and bitter and, in the metropolis, generated domestic opposition to the war.[5] Thus, the first condition for avoiding defeat is to refuse to confront the enemy on his own terms. To avoid being crushed,

[1] See Berenice A. Carroll, "War Termination and Conflict Theory," and William T. R. Fox, "The Causes of Peace and the Conditions of War," both in *How Wars End, Annals of the American Academy of Political and Social Science*, Vol. 392 (November 1970); and Elizabeth Converse, "The War of All Against All: A Review of the Journal of Conflict Resolution, 1957–68," *Journal of Conflict Resolution*, XII (December 1968).

[2] Exceptions are found in E. L. Katzenbach, "Time, Space and Will: The Politico-Military Strategy of Mao Tse-tung," in Lt. Col. T. N. Greene, ed., *The Guerrilla and How To Fight Him* (New York 1962); Robert Taber, *The War of the Flea* (New York 1965); and Joseph S. Kraemer, "Revolutionary Guerrilla Warfare and the Decolonization Movement," *Polity*, IV (Winter 1971).

[3] Katzenbach (fn. 2), 15.

[4] See, for example, H. Wehler, "Industrial Growth and Early German Imperialism" in Robert Owen and Robert Sutcliffe, eds., *Theories of Imperialism* (London 1972).

[5] Two excellent recent studies dealing directly with domestic opposition to these wars are: Stephen Koss, *The Pro-Boers: The Anatomy of an Anti-War Movement* (Chicago 1973), and D. G. Boyce, *Englishmen and Irish Troubles: British Public Opinion and the Making of Irish Policy 1918–22* (London 1972).

the insurgent forces must retain a degree of invulnerability, but the defensive *means* to this end will depend on the conditions of the war. In guerrilla warfare in the classical sense, the "people sea" forms a sanctuary of popular support for the "guerrilla fish"; in urban guerrilla warfare the anonymity of the city provides protection. Operating in uninhabited areas and supplied from without (e.g., the post-1968 North Vietnamese operations along the Ho Chi Minh Trail in the Vietnam War), the insurgents may simply rely on the mountains and forests to conceal and protect them.

For students of strategy the importance of these wars lies in the fact that the simplistic but once prevalent assumption—that conventional military superiority necessarily prevails in war—has been destroyed. What is also interesting is that although the metropolitan powers did not *win* militarily, neither were they *defeated* militarily. Indeed the military defeat of the metropolis itself was impossible since the insurgents lacked an invasion capability. In every case, success for the insurgents arose not from a military victory on the ground—though military successes may have been a contributory cause—but rather from the progressive attrition of their opponents' *political* capability to wage war. In such asymmetric conflicts, insurgents may gain political victory from a situation of military stalemate *or even defeat.*

The most recent and obvious example of this type of conflict is the American war in Vietnam, which has brought home several important lessons. First, it has provided the most obvious demonstration of the falsity of the assumptions that underlie the "capability" conception of power.[6] Not only does superiority in military force (conventionally defined) not guarantee victory; it may, under certain circumstances, be positively counter-productive.[7] Second, the Vietnam conflict has demonstrated how, under certain conditions, the theatre of war extends well beyond the battlefield to encompass the polity and social institutions of the external power. The Vietnam war may be seen as having been fought on two fronts—one bloody and indecisive in the forests and mountains of Indochina, the other essentially nonviolent— but ultimately more decisive—within the polity and social institutions of the United States. The nature of the relationship between these two

[6] Problems with different conceptions of power in this context are examined in Andrew Mack, "The Concept of Power and its Uses in Explaining Asymmetric Conflict," Richardson Institute for Conflict and Peace Research (London 1974).

[7] The least ambiguous demonstrations of this apparently paradoxical assertion are to be found in the relatively rare cases of successful nonviolent resistance to armed aggression. See Anders Boserup and Andrew Mack, *War Without Weapons: Non-Violence in National Defence* (London 1974).

conflicts—which are in fact different facets of the same conflict—is critical to an understanding of the outcome of the war. However, the American experience was in no sense unique, except to Americans. In 1954 the Vietminh destroyed the French forces which were mustered at Dien Bien Phu in a classic set piece battle. The direct military costs to the French have been much exaggerated; only 3 per cent of the total French forces in Indochina were involved. The psychological effects—like those of the Tet offensive some fourteen years later— were shattering, however. The Vietminh did not of course defeat France militarily. They lacked not only the capability but also any interest in attempting such a move. Dien Bien Phu, however, had the effect of destroying the *political* capability ("will" in the language of classical strategy) of the French Government to mobilize further troops and to continue the struggle—this despite the fact that the greater part of the financial costs of the war were being borne by the United States. Third, the Vietnam war, which for the Vietnamese revolutionaries has now lasted over a quarter of a century, has emphasized the enormous importance which guerrilla strategists place on "protracted warfare." This is articulated most clearly in Mao Tse-tung's works, but it is also found in the military writings of General Giap and Truong Chinh and in the works of the leading African guerrilla strategists, Cabral and Mondlane. The certainty of eventual victory which is the result of intensive political mobilization by the guerrilla leadership is the key to what Rosen sees as a critical factor in such conflicts—namely, the willingness to absorb costs.[8] Katzenbach has noted of Mao's strategic theory that it is based on the premise that "if the totality of the population can be made to resist surrender, this resistance can be turned into a war of attrition which will eventually and inevitably be victorious."[9] Or, as Henry Kissinger more succinctly observed in 1969: "The guerrilla wins if he does not lose."[10]

Above all, Vietnam has been a reminder that in war the ultimate aim must be to affect the will of the enemy. Most strategic theorists would of course concur with this view. But in practice, and at the risk of oversimplification, it may be noted that it is a prevalent military belief that if an opponent's military capability to wage war can be destroyed, his "will" to continue the struggle is irrelevant since the means to that end are no longer available. It is not surprising that this

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[8] Steven Rosen, "War Power and the Willingness to Suffer," in Bruce M. Russett, ed., *Peace, War, and Numbers* (London 1972).

[9] Katzenbach (fn. 2), 18.

[10] Henry A. Kissinger, "The Vietnam Negotiations," *Foreign Affairs*, XLVII (January 1969), 214.

should be a prevalent belief in modern industrial societies: strategic doctrine tends to mold itself to available technology, as critics of strategic weapons deployment have forcefully pointed out. Neither is it surprising that guerrilla strategists should see strategy in very different terms. Lacking the technological capability or the basic resources to destroy the external enemy's military capability, they must of necessity aim to destroy his political capability. If the external power's "will" to continue the struggle is destroyed, then its military capability—no matter how powerful—is totally irrelevant. One aim of this paper is to show how and why, in certain types of conflict, conventional military superiority is not merely useless, but may actually be counter-productive. The implications for those military systems which rely almost wholly on industrial power and advanced technology need hardly be spelled out.

As I have noted above, in none of the asymmetric conflicts did the local insurgents have the capability to invade their metropolitan opponents' homeland. It *necessarily* follows that insurgents can only achieve their ends if their opponents' *political* capability to wage war is destroyed. This is true whether the insurgents are revolutionaries or right-wing nationalists, whether they rely on guerrilla warfare, urban terrorism, or even nonviolence. The destruction of the external power's forces in the field places no *material* obstacle in its path which will prevent it from simply mobilizing more forces at home and dispatching them to the battlefront. The constraints on mobilization are political, not material. In none of the conflicts noted was more than a fraction of the total *potential* military resources of the metropolitan power in fact mobilized. The U.S. war in Vietnam has by any measure had the greatest impact on international and American domestic politics of any conflict since World War II, but the maximum number of U.S. troops in Vietnam at the peak of the ground war in 1968 amounted to less than one quarter of one per cent of the American population. The political constraints operating against full mobilization of the metropolitan forces arise as a consequence of the conflicts in the metropolis—both within the political elite and in the wider society—which the war, *by its very nature*, will inevitably tend to generate. To paraphrase Clausewitz, politics may become the continuation of war by other means. Therefore the military struggle on the ground must be evaluated not in terms of the narrow calculus of military tactics, but in terms of its political impact in the metropolis: "Battles and campaigns are amenable to analysis as rather self-contained contests of military power. . . . By contrast, the final outcome of

wars depends on a much wider range of factors, many of them highly elusive—such as the war's impact on domestic politics. . . ."[11] The significance of particular battles does not lie in their outcome as "self-contained contests of military power." Thus, although the United States could contend that the 1968 Tet offensive marked a dramatic defeat for the revolutionary forces in terms of the macabre military calculus of "body counts," the offensive was in fact a major strategic defeat for the U.S., marking the turning point in the war. The impact of Tet on American domestic politics led directly to the incumbent President's decision not to stand for another term of office. And, for the first time, military requests for more resources (a further 200,000 men) were refused *despite the fact* that the military situation had worsened.

Even where military victory over the insurgents is unambiguous— as in General Massu's destruction of the FLN infrastructure in the notorious Battle of Algiers—this is still no sure guide to the outcome of the conflict. Despite the fact that the FLN never regained the military initiative, the French abandoned their struggle within four years. Indeed, the barbarous methods used by Massu to achieve that victory, including the widespread use of torture, were instrumental in catalyzing opposition to the war in metropolitan France.

The Algerian war is an instructive example of our thesis. Between 1954 and 1962 there was a radical shift in the balance of political forces in metropolitan France. The *colon* (white settler) class of Algeria was the chief political victim. A few days after fighting broke out, the leftist Minister of the Interior, François Mitterand, responded to a suggestion that Paris should negotiate with the rebels by stating flatly that in the Algerian *départements* "the only negotiation is war." Yet seven and a-half years later, De Gaulle had not only granted the rebels all their initial demands (including some they had not even considered when fighting broke out), but received overwhelming support from the majority of the French population in doing so. Significantly, the last task of the French Army (which had itself attempted a coup against the Gaullist government) was to hunt down the terrorists of the OAS— the diehard remnants of the *colon* class in whose interests the military had intervened in the first place.

French policy throughout this conflict—as metropolitan policy in other asymmetric conflicts—was beset by what Mao Tse-tung calls "contradictions." The initial military repression directed against the rebels achieved for the militants what they had been unable to achieve

[11] Fred Charles Iklé, *Every War Must End* (London 1971), 1-2.

for themselves—namely, the political mobilization of the masses against the French.

As the rebellion became more broadly based, more numerous forces and ever more extreme methods were used to attempt to quell it. The French also tried to buy off nationalist aspirations by offering to grant some of the political demands which had initially been made by the insurgents—only to find that these had been radically escalated. Offers of concessions were—as is frequently the case in such conflicts—both too small and too late. The more forces the French deployed (ulti- mately four hundred thousand men), the greater was the impact which the war had in the metropolis. It was not so much the inhumanity of the war *per se* that generated opposition in France; the majority of French men and women were no more sympathetic to the FLN than were the majority of Americans to the NLF in Vietnam. The major cause of opposition lay not in the enormous costs of the war to the *Algerians* (though this was a factor), but in the costs of the war to the French themselves. The progressively greater human, economic, and political costs gave rise to the phenomenon of "war weariness" which many writers have described without analyzing, and to the "loss of political will" of the government to which the military invariably ascribed the defeat. Thus it can be seen that the shift in the balance of political forces in metropolitan France was of critical importance in determining the outcome of the war. Political leaders in such conflicts do not grant insurgent demands because they undergo a sudden change of heart. They concede because they have no choice.

Why are asymmetries in structure important, and what do we in fact mean by "asymmetry" in this context? We must first note that the *relationship* between the belligerents is *asymmetric*. The insurgents can pose no direct threat to the survival of the external power because, as already noted, they lack an invasion capability. On the other hand, the metropolitan power poses not simply the threat of invasion, but the reality of occupation. This fact is so obvious that its implications have been ignored. It means, crudely speaking, that for the insurgents the war is "total," while for the external power it is necessarily "limited." Full mobilization of the total military resources of the external power is simply not politically possible. (One might conceive of cases where this is not the case—as in a popularly backed "holy war" for example— but such possibilities are of no relevance to the present discussion.) Not only is full mobilization impossible politically, it is not thought to be in the least *necessary*. The asymmetry in conventional military capa- bility is so great and the confidence that military might will prevail

is so pervasive that expectation of victory is one of the hallmarks of the initial endeavor.

The fact that one belligerent possesses an invasion capability and the other does not is a function of the differences in level of industrial and technological capability of the two sides. The asymmetric *relationship* is thus a function of the asymmetry in "resource power."

Some strategic implications of symmetric and asymmetric conflict relations may now be spelled out. The insurgents, faced with occupation by a hostile external power, are able to capitalize on those powerful forces to which political scientists have given the label "nationalism." What this means essentially is that disparate and sometimes conflicting national groups may find a common unity—a national interest—in opposing a common enemy. In that case the cohesion generated is only *indirectly* a consequence of the asymmetry in resource power: its social and psychological bonds are to be found in the common hostility felt toward the external enemy.

Clausewitz noted that war only approximates to its "pure form" when a "grand and powerful purpose" is at stake.[12] Only then will the full mobilization of national resources become a possibility, and only then will the diverse and sometimes conflicting goals that various national groups pursue in time of peace be displaced by a single overriding strategic aim—"the overthrow of the enemy." In a *symmetric*, "total war" situation where the survival of *both sides* is at stake, both have a "grand and powerful purpose" to defend. Thus, other things being equal, the potential for internal divisions arising in either camp is small relative to the potential for domestic conflict in the homeland of the metropolitan power involved in an *asymmetric* conflict. In symmetric conflicts, *ceteris paribus,* the absence of constraints on the mobilization and the use of conventional military force maximize the strategic utility of conventional warfare. Examples of *symmetric* "total wars" are the first and second World Wars and civil wars in which the struggle can be seen in zero-sum terms—as one of survival. However, although the external-enemy/internal-cohesion thesis of sociologists like Simmel and Coser has been widely accepted, the relationship is not as simple as some writers appear to think. Coser follows Williams in agreeing that there has to be a minimal consensus that the group (or nation) is a "going concern," and that there must be recognition of an outside threat which is thought to menace the group *as a whole*, not just some part of it. Coser notes of the second World War that "attempts at centralization by the

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[12] The final chapter of Boserup and Mack (fn. 7) discusses Clausewitzian strategic theory and its application to "asymmetric conflicts."

French Government were unavailing and could not mend the basic cleavages nor remedy the lack of social solidarity."[13] We may add to this two more conditions which will affect national unity in the face of external threat. First, resistance must be perceived as a viable alternative to surrender. It is noteworthy that after the collapse of the Nazi-Soviet Pact in the second World War, resistance to the Nazis in occupied Europe was very often led by Communists for whom surrender meant extermination. A majority of the population of the occupied countries perceived surrender as a more viable alternative than resistance—at least until it appeared that the tide of the war had turned against the Nazis. Resistance movements whose members share a revolutionary ideology which has as one of its basic tenets the belief that "protracted war" will ultimately be victorious, will, by definition, see resistance as an obvious alternative to surrender. Second, since occupation is likely to have adverse consequences for all groups, but much worse for some than for others, such national unity as does occur will not be unshakable. But it will be enormously reinforced by what may be called the "bandwagon effect."[14] Dissent will be heavily proscribed and sanctioned socially as well as by the leadership.

Even though it is not possible to be precise about the conditions which *necessarily* generate national solidarity in the face of an external threat, we may note the following two points with respect to asymmetric conflicts:

(a) An external threat is a necessary if not sufficient condition for the emergence of a popular front.

(b) Occupation and military repression by the metropolitan power has *in fact* produced the nationalist unity predicted by the Coser-Simmel thesis. (One interesting exception is the confrontation in Malaysia, where there was a deep cleavage dividing the Chinese insurgents from the Malays.) Indeed, it is possible to argue that in some cases the repression did not so much intensify a pre-existing basic consensus as create one.

(c) More importantly, there was no comparable unifying external force in the case of the metropolitan power. On the contrary, in every case where the insurgents won, the war was a profoundly divisive issue.

Those scholars who are expounding the "paradox" that external conflict will both increase and decrease domestic conflict (see below) are guilty of creating a false dichotomy. Contrast the situation in the United

[13] Lewis A. Coser, *The Functions of Social Conflict* (New York 1956), 87-110.
[14] Boserup and Mack (fn. 7), chap. 1.

States, as the war escalated in Vietnam, with that of Britain facing the Nazis in the second World War. In the former case we see the progressive escalation of domestic opposition to the war creating deep divisions within U.S. society. In the latter, "The Nazi attack appreciably increased the internal cohesion of the British social system, temporarily narrowing the various political, social and economic fissures that existed in British society."[15] In Britain the electoral process was suspended for the duration of the conflict in order to form a coalition "national government." In the various "wars of national liberation" we see precisely the same process in the formation of "popular fronts." Indeed, the label "National Liberation Front" is found in some guise in nearly all these conflicts, though rarely in civil wars.[16]

It is my contention that the process of political attrition of the metropolitan power's capability to continue to wage war is *not* the consequence of errors of generalship, though these may well occur. Rather, it is a function of the *structure* of the conflict, of the nature of the conflictual relationship between the belligerents. Where the war is perceived as "limited"—because the opponent is "weak" and can pose no direct threat—the prosecution of the war does not take automatic primacy over other goals pursued by factions within the government, or bureaucracies or other groups pursuing interests which compete for state resources. In a situation of total war, the prosecution of the war *does* take automatic primacy above all other goals. Controversies over "guns or butter" are not only conceivable in a Vietnam-type conflict, but inevitable. In a total-war situation they would be inconceivable: guns would get *automatic* priority. In contrast to the total-war situation, the protagonists of a limited war have to compete for resources—human, economic, and political—with protagonists of other interests—governmental, bureaucratic, "interest groups," and so forth. Clearly, if the war is terminated quickly and certain benefits are believed to be accruing from victory (as in the case of the mini-wars of colonial expansion) the *potential* for divisive domestic conflict on the war issue will not be realized. But this is simply another way of stating that if the insurgents are to win, they must not lose.

In his highly prophetic paper published in 1969, Henry Kissinger observed of America's war in Vietnam: "We fought a military war; our opponents fought a political one. We sought physical attrition; our opponents aimed for our psychological exhaustion. In the process, we

[15] Coser (fn. 13), 87-110; quotation from p. 95.
[16] The obvious point here is that "nationalism" is normally a meaningless concept except in relation to an external environment. "Nationalism" may be significant in civil wars that are based on an ethnic conflict but not on class conflict.

lost sight of one of the cardinal maxims of guerrilla warfare: the guerrilla wins if he does not lose. The conventional army loses if it does not win."[17]

In a similar vein, E. L. Katzenbach in 1962 described Mao Tse-tung's general strategic approach as follows: "Fundamental to all else, Mao says, is the belief that countries with legislative bodies simply cannot take a war of attrition, either financially or, in the long run, psychologically. Indeed, the very fact of a multi-party structure makes commitment to a long war so politically suicidal as to be quite impossible. . . . When the financial burden increases from month to month, the outcry against the war will itself weaken the ability of the troops to fight. The war that Mao's theory contemplates is the cheapest for him to fight and the most expensive for the enemy."[18]

In order to avoid defeat, the insurgents must retain a minimum degree of invulnerability. In order to *win*, they must be able to impose a steady accumulation of "costs" on their opponent. They must not only be undefeated; they must be *seen* to be undefeated. Strategically, the insurgents' aim must be to provoke the external power into escalating its forces on the ground. This *in itself* will incur economic and political costs in the metropolis. Such a process of escalation did in fact mark the history of the conflicts in Indochina, Algeria, Portuguese Africa, Vietnam, and the current conflict in Ulster. The *direct* costs the insurgents impose on the external power will be the normal costs of war—troops killed and matériel destroyed. But the aim of the insurgents is not the destruction of the military capability of their opponents as an *end in itself*. To attempt such a strategy would be lunatic for a small Third-World power facing a major industrial power. Direct costs become of strategic importance when, and only when, they are translated into indirect costs. These are psychological and political: their objective is to amplify the "contradictions in the enemy's camp."

In the metropolis, a war with no visible payoff against an opponent who poses no direct threat will come under increasing criticism as battle casualties rise and economic costs escalate. Obviously there will still be groups in the metropolis whose ideological commitments will lead them to continue to support the government's war policy; others (munitions manufacturers, for example) may support the war because they have more material interests at stake. But if the war escalates dramatically, as it did in Algeria and Vietnam, it makes a definite impact on the economic and political resources which might otherwise have been allocated to, say, public welfare projects. Tax increases may be

[17] Kissinger (fn. 10), 214.   [18] Katzenbach (fn. 2), 18.

necessary to cover the costs of the war, a draft system may have to be introduced, and inflation will be an almost certain by-product. Such costs are seen as part of the "necessary price" when the security of the nation is directly threatened. When this is not the case, the basis for consensus disappears. In a limited war, it is not at all clear to those groups whose interests are adversely affected why such sacrifices are necessary.[19]

But that is only part of the story. Just as important is the fact that the necessity for the sacrifices involved in fighting and risking death will appear less obvious to the conscripts and even the professional soldiers when the survival of the nation is not directly at stake. American soldiers fought well in the second World War, but the last years in Vietnam were marked by troop mutinies, widespread drug addiction, high levels of desertion, and even the murders of over-zealous officers intent on sending their men out on dangerous patrols. This in fact led to a strong feeling among some senior U.S. Army officers that it was necessary to get out of Vietnam before morale collapsed completely. It is impossible to explain such a dramatic deterioration of morale within the army and the massive opposition to the draft without reference to the *type* of war being fought.

There is also the question of the morality of the war. When the survival of the nation is not directly threatened, and when the obvious asymmetry in conventional military power bestows an underdog status on the insurgent side, the morality of the war is more easily questioned. It is instructive to note that during World War II the deliberate Allied attempt to terrorize the working-class populations of Dresden and other German cities generated no moral outrage in Britain. This despite the fact that the thousand-bomber raids were designed to create fire storms so devastating in effect that more people died in one night of bombing over Dresden than perished in the Hiroshima holocaust. On the other hand, the aerial bombardment of civilian localities in Vietnam, the use of herbicides and defoliants, napalm, and anti-personnel weapons have been all met with widespread controversy and protest. One should not deduce from this that the British public was more callous to the effects of human suffering than was the American.

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[19] Some interesting and recent theoretical work in the "issue area" literature is relevant to this discussion; see in particular Theodore J. Lowi, "Making Democracy Safe for the World: National Politics," in James Rosenau, ed., *Domestic Sources of Foreign Policy* (New York 1967); and William Zimmerman, "Issue Area and Foreign Policy Process," *American Political Science Review*, LXVII (December 1973). The literature on "bureaucratic politics" and "linkage politics" is also relevant.

Moral outrage is in large part a function of the interests perceived to be at stake in the conflict. Where survival is the issue, the propensity to question and protest the morality of the means used to defeat the enemy is markedly attenuated.

As the war drags on and the costs steadily escalate without the "light at the end of the tunnel" becoming more visible, the divisions generated within the metropolis become *in themselves* one of the political costs of the war. The government—or, more precisely, that faction of the government which is committed to the war—will continue to argue that prosecuting the war *is* in the national interest, that vital security interests *are* at stake, that the international credibility and prestige of the nation is at issue, and so forth. Whether or not these claims bear any relationship to reality—whether they are wholly true or wholly false— is quite immaterial. What counts in the long run is what the opponents of the war believe to be at stake and how much political capital they can muster.

Finally, another word about "contradiction." Mao and Giap have repeatedly emphasized that the principal contradiction which the imperialist army must confront on the ground derives from the fact that forces dispersed to control territory become spread so thinly that they are vulnerable to attack. If forces are concentrated to overcome this weakness, other areas are left unguarded. For the external power to overcome this contradiction requires a massive increase in metropolitan forces; but this immediately increases the domestic costs of the war. On the other hand, if the imperialists wish to pacify the opposition at home by withdrawing some of their forces, the contradiction on the battlefronts is sharpened. Any attempt to resolve one contradiction will magnify the other. The guerrilla strategists understand perfectly that the war they fight takes place on two fronts and the conflict must be perceived as an integrated whole. From this perspective, those who oppose the war in the metropolis act *objectively*—regardless of their subjective political philosophies—as a strategic resource for the insurgents. Governments are well aware of this, since it is they who have to confront the political constraints. Yet government accusations that those opposed to the war are "aiding the enemy" are contemptuously rejected. They are nevertheless objectively correct. From this perspective we can also see why the slogan "imperialism is a paper tiger" is by no means inaccurate. It is not that the material resources of the metropolitan power are in themselves underestimated by the revolutionaries; rather, there is an acute awareness that the political constraints on their

maximum deployment are as real as if those resources did not exist, and that these constraints become more rather than less powerful as the war escalates.

Few attempts have been made to analyze the outcome of asymmetric conflicts systematically. Among those few, even fewer have seen the asymmetries which characterize the conflict as being critical to an understanding of the outcome. However, some aspects have been touched on. Rosen considers the asymmetry in power and "willingness to suffer costs"; Katzenbach examines the asymmetry in "tangible" and "intangible resources"; Galtung distinguishes between "social" and "territorial defense" (asymmetry in goals); Kissinger, as already noted, mentions asymmetry in overall strategy (physical versus psychological attrition); and Kraemer distinguishes "colonial" versus "noncolonial" guerrilla wars.[20] An examination of the conflict in the light of any of *these* asymmetries provides certain insights into particular aspects of the war, but misses the overall picture. The asymmetries described in this paper—in the interests perceived to be at stake, in mobilization, in intervention capability, in "resource power," and so forth—are abstracted from their context for the sake of analytical clarity. But the whole remains greater than the sum of its parts, and it is the conflict *as a whole* which must be studied in order to understand its evolution and outcome.

Some writers interested in the *etiology* of conflict have argued that the nature of the state polity mediates the link between internal and external conflict.[21] The same question is of relevance with respect to the relatively neglected problem of understanding the *outcome* of international conflicts. *Is* the process of attrition of the political capability to wage war, which we observe so clearly in the Vietnam and Algerian conflicts, a function of the nature of the polity of the metropolitan powers involved? Some writers clearly believe that it is. With respect to Vietnam, Edmund Ions notes: "Whilst the freedom to demonstrate —even for defeatism in foreign policy—is clearly one of the strengths of a free society, *it is also one of its weaknesses so far as power politics is concerned.*"[22] The argument of Ions and other writers is roughly as follows. In contrast to "open" societies, where dissent is permitted, dissent is repressed in "closed" or "totalitarian" societies. Therefore

[20] Rosen (fn. 8); Katzenbach (fn. 2); Kissinger (fn. 10); Kraemer (fn. 2); see also Johan Galtung, "Mot et Nytt Forsvarsbegrep," *Pax*, No. 1 (Oslo 1965).

[21] E.g., Jonathan Wilkenfeld, "Models for the Analysis of Foreign Conflict Behavior of States," in Russett (fn. 8).

[22] Edmund Ions, "Dissent in America: The Constraints on Foreign Policy," *Conflict Studies*, No. 18 (London 1971); emphasis in original.

totalitarian societies will not be troubled by the domestic constraints which have bedeviled U.S. policy-makers on Vietnam, for instance. In some of the best-known examples of asymmetric conflict in which the insurgents gained their objectives—Indochina, Algeria, Cyprus, Aden, Palestine, and Indonesia—the metropolitan power which conceded defeat was a "democracy." Asymmetric conflicts in which the external power successfully crushed the opposition (or has yet to be beaten) include Hungary (1956), Czechoslovakia (1968), and Portugal's ongoing war in Africa. In these cases, the metropolitan regime may be described as "closed," "centrist," "totalitarian," or whatever; in any case, popular domestic opposition is not tolerated. In addition to the government proscribing opposition, it may be withholding information. The brutalities inflicted on civilians may go unreported, the costs of the war to the economy concealed, and the number of troops killed minimized. Ions in the paper quoted, and other supporters of the U.S. war in Indochina, have come close to recommending censorship for precisely these reasons. The French military strategist Trinquier, with greater concern for logic than for political reality, argues that in order to prevent the rot of "defeatism" or "lack of political will" from betraying the troops in the field, the entire structure of the metropolitan society must be altered.[23] The general point has some validity. In Laos, a greater number of civilian refugees was created by U.S. bombing missions than in Vietnam, yet the "secret war" in Laos attracted far less attention and controversy because the press was specifically excluded from the battle zones. Despite these obvious points, my main contention—that limited wars by their very nature will generate domestic constraints if the war continues—is not disproved. In terms of the argument put forward here, "politics" under *any* political system involves conflict over the allocation of resources. In closed or centrist polities, these conflicts will by and large be confined to the ruling elite—but not necessarily so. The argument may be exemplified by examining the case of Portugal.* Clearly, popular opposition to the war in Angola, Mozambique, and Guinea Bissau could not manifest itself in Portugal as did opposition to the Vietnam war in the United States. But there were nevertheless major controversies within the ruling Portuguese elite concerning the desirability —the costs and benefits—of continuing war in Africa: "[T]here seem

[23] P. Trinquier, *Modern Warfare* (New York 1964).
* This article was completed before the Spinola coup in Portugal in the spring of 1974. A brief discussion of the implications of the coup, and those of the recent developments in the Ulster crisis, has been added to the conclusion.

to be three main currents when it comes to the major direction of orientation for Portugal: the colonialist tradition in various versions which still believe in 'Portuguese Africa,' the old 'Lucitanian tradition' that would base Portuguese future on the Portugal/Brazil axis, and the 'Europeans' for whom the European Community must appear as a very attractive haven of escape."[24] The younger generation of "modernizing technocrats" clearly see Portugal's future as allied with the European Community and realize equally clearly that the price of a closer association with the EEC is the cessation of the war in Africa. Portugal is also an interesting case in the sense that, in addition to domestic constraints, there are also powerful *international* constraints, Portugal being critically dependent on the NATO countries for the arms needed to fight the war in Africa. This support is, needless to say, highly undependable, not only because it has already come under sustained attack from some of the north-European NATO powers, but more obviously because Portugal has a far greater dependence on NATO than NATO has on Portugal. Finally, popular domestic opposition has in the past manifested itself *indirectly*, as thousands of Portuguese "voted with the feet" by emigrating to the European Community.

It remains to be explained why Portugal, the oldest and weakest of imperial powers, should have clung to her colonies long after her more powerful rivals surrendered by granting independence to their colonial dependencies. The usual explanation is that it is a matter of an ideological—and essentially irrational—obsession with "manifest destiny." However, without denying that there may be a powerful contingent of genuine ideologues within the Portuguese polity who support the war for these reasons, this does not provide the whole answer. Those most loyal to the "Portuguese connection" are the Portuguese settlers in the territories themselves—loyal in the sense of total opposition to black rule. But this loyalty—like the loyalty of Ulster Protestants, white Rhodesians or white *colons* in Algeria—is highly unreliable.[25] The settler class will bitterly resist any attempt to hand over control to the

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[24] Johan Galtung, *The European Community: A Superpower in the Making* (London 1973), 166.

[25] As Emmanuel notes of the "settler class" in "colonial" situations: "They benefitted from colonialism and therefore promoted it, without reserve or contradiction—and for that very reason they were basically anti-imperialist, however paradoxical that may seem. From the very beginning they were in conflict with their parent countries . . . objectively so at all times, subjectively so at times of crisis, going so far as to take up arms against it." Argirihi Emmanuel, "White Settler Colonialism and the Myth of Investment Imperialism," *New Left Review*, No. 73 (May/June 1972), 38-39.

indigenous population; it thereby provides a powerful brake on any move towards independence.

For the settler class, *qua* settler class, the granting of independence to the indigenous population poses a direct threat to local European hegemony in both the political and economic spheres. If pressures in the metropolis are such that withdrawal from the colonies appears likely —as seems highly possible following the Spinola coup of the spring of 1974—there may well be moves by the settlers to attempt a type of go-it-alone, Unilateral Declaration of Independence strategy along Rhodesian lines. The *colons* in Algeria tried this strategy when it became obvious that De Gaulle was going to give in to Moslem demands for independence. They failed, but the white Rhodesians succeeded. In the current Ulster crisis there is little doubt that such a strategy would be attempted—and would most likely succeed if it became clear to the Protestant majority that the British were going to withdraw—as seems increasingly possible. The "settlers" exhibit "ultra-loyalism" towards the "mother country" up to the moment at which they appear to have been deserted. If the break *does* succeed, the structure of the conflict changes completely. If the metropolitan power does not intervene against the settlers' rebellion (Algeria) but instead simply makes nonmilitary protests (Britain against Rhodesia) then the conflict becomes symmetric: a zero-sum struggle for ascendancy, essentially a civil war in which the settler class has a survival stake in the outcome. The settlers will in many ways prove to be a more formidable enemy than was the vastly more powerful metropolitan power, because the constraints against the use of force will be almost completely absent in their case. Thus the task of nationalist movements trying to bring down the settler regimes in Israel, Rhodesia, and South Africa is extremely onerous. The question for these regimes is not *whether* to fight the insurgents but *how*. In other words, despite superficial similarities in tactics and in descriptive language—"Palestinian guerrillas," "national liberation struggle,"—the "settler-regime" conflicts are fundamentally different from asymmetric conflicts.

There is another, perhaps equally powerful reason why the Portuguese resisted independence so bitterly. It is extremely difficult to calculate the economic costs and benefits which Portugal derives from her overseas territories, in part because exchange controls are artificially manipulated. However, even if it could be unequivocally demonstrated that the costs of the war exceed by a wide margin the *present* economic benefits which Portugal derives from her colonies—most particularly

Angola—it would not invalidate the hypothesis that a major Portu-
guese interest in maintaining the colonial possessions is economic. Oil
in large quantities has already been discovered in the overseas terri-
tories, and there are also extensive and as yet barely exploited mineral
reserves. Portugal therefore has a considerable economic interest in
trying to maintain control in these areas.[26] When France and Britain
relinquished their African colonies, they relinquished also the economic
costs of administration while retaining whatever benefits they derived
from their investments and from special trade relationships. Portugal is
in a very different position. Since Portugal is relatively underdeveloped
economically, the benefits she derives from her overseas territories are
based on political rather than economic control. The key economic en-
terprises in the overseas territories are increasingly dominated by non-
Portuguese capital (in contrast to the situation in French and British
African colonies before independence). If Portugal were to relinquish
political control in Africa, she would lose not only the present economic
benefits but also the more important future benefits. The so-called neo-
colonial solution is not a possibility for the Portuguese.

In discussing Portugal by way of exemplification of my argument,
I have raised three possible hypotheses, which might be formulated as
follows:

(1) The political attrition of the metropolitan power's war-making ca-
    pability appears to be positively correlated with the degree of "open-
    ness" of the political system and negatively correlated with the
    degree of "closeness" of the political system. Democratic poly-
    archies are apparently most susceptible to internal opposition to
    external wars, while totalitarian "centrist" states are less susceptible
    to such opposition. This argument is subject to severe qualification
    (see below).
(2) Where a metropolitan settler class exists in the insurgents' home-
    land, it will have a survival interest in the conflict and will thus
    act as a powerful countervailing "brake" to forces in the metropolis
    which favor a pull-out. If the latter forces prevail, there will be a
    strong push from the settler class for a U.D.I.-type break with the
    metropolis along Rhodesian lines. If this succeeds, the conflict ceases
    to be asymmetric as defined here.
(3) In a limited war, despite the fact that there is no direct threat to
    physical survival of the metropolis, there may well be other power-

[26] For a detailed argument of this point see Eduardo de Sousa Ferreira, *Portuguese
Colonialism from South Africa to Europe* (Freiburg 1972).

ful interests to be protected. The greater the salience of these in-
terests, the greater the resistance to withdrawal will be in the
metropolis.

The last point brings us to the two other examples noted above—
the Russian interventions in Hungary (1956) and Czechoslovakia
(1968). It is obvious that one of the necessary conditions noted earlier
for the process of political attrition to manifest itself was absent. In both
cases the local resistance was effectively and rapidly crushed.[27]

From the Soviet point of view, the security interest, while not one
of a direct threat of invasion, was nevertheless highly salient. For ex-
ample, Russian interests in maintaining Czechoslovakia under Soviet
control were two-fold. As Zeman notes, Czechoslovakia had a key
position in the Soviet system: "It is a workshop where a lot of Russian
and East-European raw material is processed; the country's territory
forms a tunnel leading from western Europe directly to the Soviet
Union."[28] Second, for the U.S.S.R., twice invaded this century from
the West at a cost of millions of lives, a certain fixation on security in-
terests was understandable. But the strategic costs of relinquishing con-
trol over Czechoslovakia were not simply the direct costs of creating a
physical gap in the chain of satellite buffer states. The real risk from
the Soviet point of view was that the subversive ideology of national
determination, of "socialism with a human—i.e., non-Russian—face"
might spread first to the other satellite states of Eastern Europe and
ultimately to the Soviet Union itself. The Soviet intervention in Hun-
gary in 1956 is a similar case in point.

These examples show that it is virtually impossible to produce a model
of asymmetric conflict which would be sufficiently flexible to account
for the outcome of the cases of conflict that might be included under
that rubric. Neither is it evident that this would be desirable. The prob-
lem with using models to explain conflicts is that there is a natural
tendency to attempt to force the data to fit the requirements of the
theory. The risks lie in ignoring other factors which might fall within
the category sometimes labeled "accidents of history," but which may
nevertheless be of critical importance in determining the outcome of
a particular conflict.

Most of the discussion thus far has dealt with the *domestic* constraints
which will be generated in the metropolis as a consequence of asym-
metries in the structure of the conflict. We can quite easily point to the

[27] For an analysis of the breakdown of the resistance in the Czech case see Boserup
and Mack (fn. 7), chap. VI.
[28] Z. A. B. Zeman, *Prague Spring* (London 1969).

mechanisms that generate such constraints—though the *form* they will
take in practice will vary according to the interests perceived to be at
stake and according to the nature of the polity of the external power.
But little or nothing can be said with respect to *external* constraints.
For example, there were few external constraints bearing down on
British policy in the Mau Mau rebellion in Kenya, yet in the case of the
nationalist struggle in Indonesia against the Dutch the situation was
very different. The critical factor here was the U.S. threat to cut off
Marshall Plan aid to the Dutch if they failed to make a settlement
with the Indonesian nationalists. A completely different set of potential
external pressures could be brought to bear against Portugal vis-à-vis
the Portuguese wars in Africa, and so on.

In an asymmetric conflict, the *potential* for the generation of internal
divisions in the metropolitan power exists *regardless* of the historical
epoch, the nature of the polity of the external power, the interests per-
ceived to be at stake, and the international context in which the con-
flict takes place. Though these factors may influence the form and
intensity taken by these internal divisions in any particular conflict,
the *cause* of these divisions is independent from all of them. It arises
from the nature of the asymmetric relationships which exist between
the belligerents. On the other hand, nothing can be said in the abstract
about any *external* constraints which may be brought to bear on the
external power. These are dependent on the conditions of a particular
historical epoch.

SUMMARY

The initial problem was one of explaining how the militarily pow-
erful could be defeated in armed confrontation with the militarily
weak. This was not just idle speculation; in a number of critically im-
portant conflicts in the post-World War II epoch, industrial powers
have failed to gain their objectives in wars fought on foreign soil against
local nationalist forces. In all of these cases the superiority in conven-
tional military capability of the external power was overwhelming.
In a sense, these wars may be seen as a replay of the mini-wars of
colonial conquest which took place in the late nineteenth and early
twentieth centuries, but with a critical difference. In the earlier era, the
industrial powers used minimal force to achieve rapid success, whereas
in the post-World War II conflicts, the same industrial powers con-
fronted the same Third-World countries with massive forces and lost.

In explaining the successes of the "weaker" party, I pointed out that

an obvious minimal requirement for victory was that the insurgents should not lose. They achieved this by refusing to confront the industrial powers on their own terms and by resorting instead to "unconventional" forms of warfare—guerrilla war, urban terrorism, or even nonviolent action. However, I did not examine this aspect of the problem in any detail. I took the fact that the insurgents did not lose as a "given" when I inquired into the more interesting problem—namely, how did they *win*? I noted that one of the key asymmetries which characterized the relationships of the belligerents was that, as a consequence of the asymmetry in wealth and economic and technological development, the insurgents lacked the physical capability to attack the metropolitan power. It thus followed *logically* that the metropolitan power could not be defeated militarily. In turn, victory for the insurgents could only come about as a consequence of the destruction of the external power's *political* capability to wage war. The historical evidence of the outcome of the post-World War II conflicts confirms the logic of the argument.

As a next step, I examined the dynamics of the process of political attrition, arguing that the asymmetries which characterized the conflict provided the basis, not only for the initial restraints on mobilization of military forces, but also for the emergence of internal divisions as the war dragged on and costs accumulated. The fact that the war was by definition "limited" also provided the basis for a sustained moral critique of the military means employed—from torture to napalm— while reducing the willingness of troops to risk their lives in combat and of the domestic population to make economic sacrifices. However, the process of attrition was not seen as arising primarily from a steady across-the-board increment of "war weariness," as some writers have suggested; still less was it seen as a process of conversion at the top whereby the political leadership was gradually persuaded of the immorality or undesirability of its policies. The controversies *themselves* became one of the costs of the war. Time is a resource in politics, and the bitter hostilities such wars generate may come to dominate political debate to the detriment of the pursuit of other objectives. Provided the insurgents can maintain a steady imposition of "costs" on their metropolitan opponent, the balance of political forces in the external power will *inevitably* shift in favor of the anti-war factions.

Although the main discussion dealt essentially with domestic constraints, I also recognized that *international* constraints were often of great importance in asymmetric conflicts. However, whereas the mech-

anisms giving rise to internal constraints could be identified, it was impossible to say anything in the abstract about external constraints.

Having outlined in fairly general terms the conditions under which the process of political attrition might be expected to manifest itself in practice, I then briefly examined the countervailing forces. I noted that the nature of the polity of the external power might either inhibit or facilitate the generation of domestic conflict. But I also argued that internal divisions were primarily a function of the conflict *relationship* and not of differences in the political structure of the metropolis. Finally, I noted that the salience of the interest which the external power —or rather factions within it—had in pursuing the war would also affect the process of political attrition.

NOTE ON METHODOLOGY

Examples of the types of hypotheses which this analysis might suggest were given earlier in the paper. It would be easy to think of others, for instance:

> The greater the interest a particular metropolitan faction has in the prosecution of the war and the wider the basis of its domestic support, the greater will be the support for continuing the war.

Another example would be:

> The weaker and more dependent the external power is on external support in order to prosecute the war, the more important external constraints will be in determining the outcome.

The objections to these alternative approaches—other than for the purpose of illustrating points in the argument—are several. First, they would slice the conflict up into parts (either temporally or spatially) which are then examined in relative isolation. I have argued that a full understanding can only come from an analysis of the conflict as a whole. Second, there is the technical problem of operationalizing such vague concepts as "interest" or "faction." Third, even if operationalization were possible, the hypotheses would remain untestable by the traditional statistical significance tests. That is a problem which has been largely ignored in most of the quantitative studies in conflict research where conflicts tend to get lumped together—symmetric and asymmetric and across periods of up to a hundred years or more—in order to obtain a sufficiently large sample for statistical manipulation. Thus the quantitative studies undertaken by Rummel and Tanter with the object of testing the relationship between external and internal conflicts arrive

at the conclusion that no such relationship exists.[29] However, the relationships may well exist but be hidden by precisely the methodological methods intended to reveal them. Contrary to writers like Stohl and Wilkenfeld, there is no "paradox" in the *apparently* contradictory assertions that, on the one hand, external conflicts cause internal conflict and, on the other, that they create internal solidarity.[30] Whether or not this *is* the case is a function of the nature of the conflict. But since the *type* of conflict is not identified, the relationships are lost in the aggregation of data. It is not possible to consider asymmetric conflicts (as defined here) on their own, since the size of the sample is far too small. The only way out of this dilemma is to attempt a "time series" analysis.[31] Here, instead of many conflicts being examined once, the data matrix is filled by examining one conflict (or a few) over many time intervals. The methodological and epistemological problems with this type of analysis are enormous, however, and the results produced thus far are extremely modest.

If we move away from the quantitative literature to examine other attempts at explaining the outcome of asymmetric conflicts, different problems arise. The literature on counter-insurgency, for example, concentrates almost exclusively on the development of the war on the ground and ignores its impact on the metropolis. Iklé notes: "When it comes to actual fighting, the scores that count are, for instance, the number of enemy units destroyed, square miles of territory gained, and other successes or failures in battle. Where such an attitude prevails, professional military men would consider it unusual, if not somewhat improper, to ask whether these 'mid-game' successes will improve the ending."[32] Counter-insurgency theorists can thus provide a partial explanation of why insurgents may *lose*, but they cannot, almost by definition, grasp how it is that they may *win*. Awareness that insurgent successes are a consequence of "lack of political will" or "defeatism" on the part of the metropolitan governments is of course there, but this is seen as a contingent phenomenon almost wholly unrelated to the con-

[29] R. J. Rummel, "Dimensions of Conflict Behavior Within and Between Nations," *General Systems Yearbook*, VIII (1963), 1-50; and Raymond Tanter, "Dimensions of Conflict Behavior Within and Between Nations, 1958-60," *Journal of Conflict Resolution*, x (March 1966), 41-64.

[30] Michael Stohl, "Linkages between War and Domestic Political Violence in the United States, 1890-1923" in J. Caporaso and L. Roos, eds., *Quasi-Experimental Approaches* (Evanston 1973); and Jonathan Wilkenfeld, "Introduction" to Wilkenfeld, ed., *Conflict Behavior and Linkage Politics* (New York 1973).

[31] See Robert Burrowes and Bertram Spector, "The Strength and Direction of Relationships Between Domestic and External Conflict and Cooperation: Syria, 1961-67" in Wilkenfeld, *ibid.*; also Stohl (fn. 30).

[32] Iklé (fn. 11).

duct of the war. More sophisticated works in the counter-insurgency field *do* consider political factors in the *insurgents'* homeland—namely, the payoffs of social and economic reform as a means of reducing popular support for the insurgents. But only Trinquier provides a sustained analysis of the political and social changes necessary in the *metropolis* if such wars are to succeed—and in this case the demands of logic are followed with no regard for political reality.

Although much of the research literature on conflict deals with events leading up to the outbreak of war, there has been a recent renewal of interest in "war-termination studies."[33] However, these concentrate on the final phases of the war, in particular those leading to negotiations or offering possibilities for third-party mediation. The *evolution* of the war and its wider sociopolitical dimensions are largely ignored.

A number of excellent historical case studies of the various asymmetric conflicts have been mentioned in this paper. Many of them have a virtue manifestly lacking in other works, namely that of treating the conflict as a whole rather than examining particular "technical" dimensions or temporal slices. However, individual case studies can provide no conceptual basis for distinguishing between what might in this context be called "structural necessity" from historically unique factors. Since narrative history is unable to discriminate between the universal and the particular when analyzing conflicts, it is a most unreliable guide to the future. Military history is replete with "Maginot lines," illustrating the dangers of relying on historical precedents.

Specific problems raised by these different methodological approaches to asymmetric conflicts and the different foci of interest which have been employed will be dealt with in depth in a forthcoming study.[34] In particular, that study will examine the writings of the leading revolutionary strategists. In the present paper, I have dealt essentially with the *process* of attrition as a function of the asymmetries which characterize the conflict. An asymmetric *strategy* would be one which sought to amplify this process of attrition *indirectly*. An outline of the basic requirements of such an "asymmetric strategy" (derived from the strategic writings of Clausewitz, Glucksman, and Mao Tse-tung) is provided in the final chapter of *War Without Weapons*.[35]

Finally, it should be obvious that my aim in this paper has not been to provide a "model" which may then be "tested" by applying it

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[33] Carroll (fn. 1); Fox (fn. 1); Iklé (fn. 11); and R. F. Randle, *The Origins of Peace* (New York 1973).

[34] Andrew Mack, "Working Papers on Asymmetric Conflict," Nos. 1-vi, Richardson Institute (London 1974).

[35] Boserup and Mack (fn. 7).

mechanically and ahistorically to a wide range of conflicts. Rather, it has been to construct a conceptual framework which will provide a focus for empirical studies. Like the "paradigm" of the physical sciences which Thomas Kuhn has described, this conceptual framework functions essentially to direct the researcher's attention toward particular aspects of the real world—to distinctions and relationships which "common sense" often does not take into account. The framework defines the necessary questions which must be asked; it does not seek to provide automatic answers.

CONCLUSION

Recent developments in two ongoing asymmetric conflicts have tended to bear out the main thrust of my argument. The most dramatic development has been the Spinola coup in Portugal which clearly has far-reaching implications for the wars of national liberation in Angola, Mozambique, and Guinea Bissau.* The second is the conflict in Ulster. The spring of 1974 saw the emergence, in England, of significant domestic opposition to the war, with several campaigns for troop withdrawal attracting growing support from very different political constituencies. Since the British Government has exhausted all the obvious "initiatives" (juggling the local Ulster leadership, direct rule, the Northern Ireland Assembly, and the Council of Ireland) to no avail, and since the I.R.A. remains not only undefeated but capable of escalating its offensive where necessary, it seems certain that the campaign for withdrawal will gather strength. One of the most significant aspects of current I.R.A. activity is its role in maintaining and solidifying Protestant "extremism." The bombing functions essentially to prevent the "moderate" political solution, favored by the Westminster government and the Catholic and Protestant center groups which dominate the Assembly, from coming to fruition. The Spinola government in Portugal faces a similar problem. Having explicitly abandoned the belief that the war is winnable, the regime's current strategy is to seek a "political" solution. General Spinola advocates greatly increased autonomy, but "the overseas territories must be an integral part of the Portuguese nation." It is already obvious that such a solution is ac-

* Since this conclusion was written, the new Portuguese Government has abandoned the earlier insistence that the "overseas territories must be an integral part of the Portuguese nation." The threat of a possible settler bid for a unilateral declaration of independence was briefly raised in Mozambique, but evaporated with the considerable exodus of whites to Portugal and South Africa. In Angola, with a larger settler population, far greater mineral resources, and deep divisions between competing liberation movements, the situation remains unclear.

ceptable neither to the European settlers nor to the liberation move-
ments. Withdrawal is now clearly a serious political option for both
metropolitan powers. In admitting that the colonial wars are un-
winnable, General Spinola has in fact admitted defeat: "the conven-
tional army loses if it does not win." In both countries the key ques-
tion is no longer whether to withdraw but rather when and how.

To conclude, it hardly needs pointing out that—if correct—the
implications of the foregoing analysis for industrial powers which
become embroiled in long drawn-out wars in the Third World are far-
reaching. Governments which become committed to such wars for
whatever reason should realize that, over time, the costs of the war
will inevitably generate widespread opposition at home. The causes
of dissent lie beyond the control of the political elite; they lie in the
structure of the conflict itself—in the type of war being pursued and in
the asymmetries which form its distinctive character. Anti-war move-
ments, on the other hand, have tended to underestimate their political
effectiveness. They have failed to realize that in every asymmetric con-
flict where the external power has been forced to withdraw, it has
been as a consequence of internal dissent. Thus, any analysis of the
outcome of asymmetric conflicts must of necessity take into account and
explain not only the tenacity and endurance of the nationalist forces,
but also the generation of internal divisions in the homeland of their
metropolitan enemy. In this type of conflict, anti-war movements—
and this includes all the social forces that oppose the war—have, despite
their short-term failures and frustrations, proven to be remarkably
successful in the long run.