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PARALLELS IN CONFLICT

THE AMERICAN REVOLUTION AND THE VIETNAM WAR

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by

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Lieutenant Colonel, USAF

A RESEARCH REPORT SUBMITTED TO THE FACULTY

IN

FULFILLMENT OF THE RESEARCH

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AIR WAR COLLEGE RESEARCH REPORT ABSTRACT

TITLE: Conflicts in Parallel--The American Revolution and the Vietnam War

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Research uses the Fabyanic Model to assess why British and United States military strategies were remarkably similar in the American Revolution and the Vietnam War respectively, and why each "superpower" was defeated by a numerically and qualtiatively inferior force. Comparative analysis shows that both British and American leaders failed to appreciate the true nature of the conflicts, did not establish clear or reasonable national objectives, and each nation pursued a flawed military strategy of limited force. Report concludes that when faced with revolutionary civil wars, military commanders should advocate military force only when the political situation will support a decisive military campaign early in the conflict.

BIOGRAPHICAL SKETCH

Lieutenant Colonel Robert P. Daly, II, (B.S., US Air Force Academy, M.S., Air Force Institute of Technology) has always had a strong interest in the Revolutionary War period and the origins of the American military. He has served with the Military Airlift Command, Air Force Systems Command, and is a graduate of the USAF Test Pilot School. His most recent assignment was at the Pentagon as an action officer in the Office of Legislative Liaison, Secretary of the Air Force. Lt Col Daly is a distinguished graduate of Squadron Officer's School and completed Air Command and Staff College by seminar. Lt Col Daly is a graduate of the Air War College, class of 1986.

CONFLICTS IN PARALLEL

THE VIETNAM WAR AND THE AMERICAN REVOLUTION

A recent speaker at the Air War College said: "Before you advise your President to go to war, make sure it's a good war." The reference was to the Vietnam War with the implication being that it was a "bad war" and that, in retrospect, the United States fought a war that was unwinnable. A similar sentiment was later echoed in the same forum by a former Chairman of the Joint Chiefs of Staff. The United States, clearly superior in every element of national power, could not prevent the Communist takeover of South Vietnam--why? What made Vietnam a "bad war?"

Contemporary views on the Vietnam War are by no means unified on this subject. But on one thought all writers and historians are in agreement--that the Vietnam War experience was a tragedy of epic proportion which changed the very fabric of American society including how Americans view the role of the United States in the world. American leadership was never able to come to grips with the realities of the war until it was too late--until a negotiated retreat was our only rational recourse.

Tragic as that war was to the American psyche, it was not a unique conflict in our history. Vietnam was not an aberration of modern times but, in a broad context, had a precedent in history--the American Revolution. During the American Revolution, an 18th century superpower was defeated by a numerically and qualitatively inferior force. Like the United States, Great Britain, too, had its own "bad war." But in that war, the revolutionaries were Americans, and the Americans won.

A comparative analysis of the American Revolution and the Vietnam War reveals that the two conflicts were remarkably similar. Both British and American leaders failed to appreciate the true nature of their respective conflicts; both failed to establish clear or reasonable national objectives; and, most importantly, in the absence of clear national objectives, each nation pursued a military strategy predicated on the use of limited force. These fatal flaws doomed each strategy to defeat. Rarely can the use of limited force achieve military solutions to social conflicts when the latter have matured into full scale revolutions. This brief review of history may dispel the popular notion that 25 years ago Vietnam was "something new, something that could not be foreseen." In the realm of armed conflict, the Vietnam War did ostensbily usher in some "new ideas." But these "new ideas" were merely new twists to some old themes which the United States, a nation and people spawned by revolution, should have understood.

The United States as a nation is still struggling to comprehend the role of military force in dealing with modern revolutions. Certainly no consensus exists. By contrast, at the Air War College, the role of military force in dealing with revolutions receives little attention. So little that, during the numerous presentations on military history and strategy, one speaker remarked that "revolutions are not a topic of much interest here." Indeed, our very own War of Independence is totally ignored. Perhaps had the United States remembered the reasons for Great Britain's defeat in the War of Independence, and the true social

nature of the conflict, then we might have better understood the realities of Vietnam.

The American Revolution should have taught us that conventional military strategies based on the use of limited military force will most likely prove unsuccessful when dealing with combatants whose commitment to the cause is so strong that, by sheer force of will, they are able to erode their enemy's will to perservere in a war of attrition. In the words of Carl von Clausewitz:

> . . . the strength of his will is much less easy to determine and can only be gauged approximately by the strength of the motive animating it. (1:77) Like the smoldering embers, it consumes the basic foundations of the enemy forces. Since it needs time to be effective, a state of tension will develop while the two elements interact. This tension will either gradually relax, if the insurgency is suppressed. . . or it will build up to a crisis: a general conflagration closes in on the enemy, driving him out of the country before he is faced with total destruction. (1:480)

Before comparing and contrasting the military strategies in the two conflicts, the fundamental nature of the two wars must be understood--what kind of wars were they?

The American Revolution was a social and political revolution and indeed a civil war, since Americans fought Americans. How do Americans think of the Vietnam War--as a social or political revolution, as a civil war, or as an "unconventional" or "conventional" war of aggression orchestrated and prosecuted by the government in Hanoi? The distinction worth noting is that the terms "revolution" and "civil war" connotate more "why" the war

was fought, whereas the terms "unconventional," "conventional," "guerilla," and "revolutionary," connotate "how" the war was fought. The manner of our prosecution of the Vietnam War leads one to believe that the United States approached the war primarily as a technical enterprise and gave insufficient credence to the social and political origins of the conflict. Too late came the realization that the conflict in Vietnam was and always had been a social and political revolution and a civil war, and not simply an unconventional or conventional war of aggression by North Vietnam. (2:15)

A revolution is a process, rather than a single event, and its goal is redistribution of political and economic power. For a revolution to be successful, three elements must be present: 1) widespread and high levels of discontent with the incumbent government and its political elites; 2) a strong organization with a cross section of support; and, 3) external support, whether it be direct or indirect. All these factors were present during the American Revolution and the Vietnam War. With this in mind we can now begin to examine the military strategies of Great Britain and the United States.

THE FABYANIC MODEL

The military strategy employed by a nation in conflict is in essence a distillation of many variables. In the curriculum of the Air War College, the Fabyanic Model is offered as a framework to assess military strategy (see Appendix 1) by isolating eight discreet variables which shape a nation's military strategy: 1) force structure, 2) doctrine, 3) the perceived threat, 4) tech-

nology, 5) targetry, and 6) policy. (3) These six variables are then integrated into a military strategy by 7) society, and 8) its leadership. This research paper will use the Fabyanic Model to assess the military strategies of Great Britain and the United States during the American Revolution and the Vietnam War. Recognizing that a nation's society and leadership are the most pervasive of the eight variables and are the most influential in the formulation of military strategy, they will be discussed first.

SOCIETY AND LEADERSHIP

The American Revolution officially began in 1775 at Lexington, Massachusetts, although some historians contend that the Revolution really started in 1620 with the landing of the Pilgrims at Plymouth Rock. (4:11-12) The first colonists came to North America from Great Britain seeking to gain political, economic, and religious freedoms. Although the colonies remained loyal to Great Britain for 155 years, the seeds of social ferment had been sown at the time the colonies were founded.

American society was highly mobile and flexible by standards of the 18th century. The British, on the other hand, were a stable and rigid society. Americans looked for change while British interests were in maintaining the status-quo. The British were convinced of their social superiority and, after the defeat of the French in 1763 in the Seven Year's War, enjoyed wealth and power as no European power had since the Roman Empire. (4:1)

Much of Britain's wealth and prosperity came from the growth and economic success of the American colonies. Although many have attributed the reasons for the rebellion as being principa-

ly economic, the real reason was a demand for self-government. This subtle, but very important distinction, is the reason why the revolution appealed to all classes of colonial society:

> A rich ideology of republican self-government was sweeping the colonies, and the great concern was that continued British rule by an increasingly corrupt elite was beginning to pervert even the rich British democratic legacy. (4:14)

The American colonies were blessed with a gifted assemblage of civilian and military leaders throughout the conflict. Although American leadership rarely exhibited unanimity of thought throughout the war, thus mirroring the highly individualistic society of the colonies, it could, however, rely to some degree on the will of the people to defend their homes. British leaders, on the other hand, had to rely on mercenaries and the traditional methods of 18th century Europe to raise and equip an army for a war 3,000 miles away. British society never fully accepted the responsibility for the war and therefore never fielded a force dedicated to victory at any cost. (4:93-152)

The failure of British society to fully unite in support of the war was a predictable consequence of the disaffection expressed by many in Parliament over the use of force to enforce the legitimacy of Parliament's rule over the colonists. This opposition was articulated by one of the opposition leaders to Lord North's ministery, Sir Edmund Burke:

> To use it [force] alone could be no more than a temporary measure, for a 'nation is not to be governed which is perpetually to be conquered.' A government does not rule by the forces at its disposal but by the authority it commands. If Britain were

> to win by force of arms alone, the quiet of the Americans would be 'nothing but the meditation of revenge.' (5:400)

As the war progressed and escalated in intensity, the English Parliament increasingly found itself in heated debate over the ever growing need for men and material to fight the war. British and American societies of the 18th century were starkly different and it is clear that the British never understood or appreciated colonial aspirations.

The parallel between the British experience in the American Revolution and the American experience in Vietnam is vivid. Like the British failure to appreciate colonial aspirations, the United States never fully appreciated the history and culture of Vietnamese society. Vietnam has a long history of violence and conflict and some historians contend that the Vietnamese culture has been the most violent culture in Asia. Vietnam has been a nation in conflict since the early part of the 16th century. As in the American colonies, the seeds of social unrest had been nurtured for a long period of time--over 450 years--and conflict, personal sacrifice, and struggle had become an accepted way of life in Vietnamese society. The period of American involvement in Vietnam (1959 to 1975) was only a continuation of an armed struggle, revolution, and civil war which really began in the 16th century. American forces, interjected after the retreat of the French, were viewed by the Communist insurgents as merely the current enemy in a long history of occupation forces which stood in the way of establishing a new social order.

Social change was the prime ingredient in the mobilization

of indigenous Communist forces. Their primary goal was the redistribution of wealth and power and the removal of the ruling elite. Further, the Communist Vietnamese strongly attacked the cultures and political legacies of the European countries which formerly had dominated Indochina. This hatred for the western world was difficult for American leaders to fully appreciate. It is not "what" the Communist Vietnamese believed, but rather, "how strongly" they believed that translated into their commitment to the cause. The United States could not hope to instill in American troops a will to fight equal to the passion, nurtured by 450 years of violence, which was frequently displayed by the Communist Vietnamese forces. By contrast, American society was democratic, idustrialized, impatient, and was far removed from the Vietnam War.

The significance of the Vietnam war as it related to national objectives, society, and interests of the United States became less and less clear as the conflict continued. American political leadership, like their British counterparts nearly 200 years earlier, also wrestled with the legitimacy of the war. Much has been written on the roots of the American involvement in Vietnam, but one thought appears to be universal:

> No serious discussion or questioning appears to have taken place of the importance of Southeast Asia to American security interests, of the correctness of the dire predictions regarding the consequences of the loss of the area, of the probability of success in the military struggle, or of the costs of winning the war in Indochina. (6:695)

As in the American Revolution when British society failed to accept fully the responsibility for the war and demonstrated a

significant degree of opposition to the conflict, American society became less and less supportive of the war as political leaders increasingly failed to articulate clear national security interests in the region. As the war escalated, it began to demand too much personal sacrifice from the average American and eventually large segments of American society publically defied government authority.

In retrospect, history suggests that the reasons for United States involvement in the Vietnam War were similar in principle to the gradual escalation of political misadventures (i.e. taxation, representation issues, etc) which culminated in the colonial rebellion against Great Britain. Over a span of four administrations beginning with President Truman, seemingly small "miscalculations imperceptibly pulled the US toward an entangling situation" from which it eventually could not withdraw. There did not appear to be any "master plan for intervention, nor any devious intrigue on the part of American presidents," but rather, an overreaction to involvement based on misunderstanding, misinformation, and in some cases, lack of information. (7:147)

The United States is often ignorant of fully studying another country's politics and culture and, in the case of Vietnam, almost a total failure to investigate and comprehend the feelings and aspirations of the majority of the Vietnamese population. This lack of understanding of the culture of the indigenous population was a critical mistake made by not only the United States, but also by Great Britain in the Revolution. (7:149)

It is a striking similarity that both Great Britain and the

United States expected that a large share of the burden of the wars would be borne by indigenous forces. Great Britain expected substantial effort and support in the conduct of the war from those colonists remaining loyal to the crown, and the United States certainly relied on the South Vietnamese not only to establish a government supported by the people, but also to field a credible fighting force capable of defending South Vietnam. However, the United States failed to appreciate the true character of the South Vietnamese people which resulted in disastrous consequences:

> . . . the non-Communist Vietnamese were never able to achieve ideological cohesion, organizational discipline, or political legitimacy. They were never able to overcome their differences so as to project one unified policy that would be able to win the support of the peasantry. Given this, America's hopes for success in Vietnam were probably doomed from the beginning. (7:149)

In a similar fashion, during the American Revolution, the British failed to understand the true character of American society. Like the French and Americans in Vietnam 200 years later, the British were unable to take advantage of their numerical and qualitative superiority in men and armaments, "it was like trying to hit a swarm of flies with a hammer." (4:97) While conquering territory was relatively easy, the difficulty came in holding it. This led to the desire to use Loyalist forces (or South Vietnamese troops) for occupation thus freeing regular forces for offensive duties. However, in both wars, regular forces were never able to rely on indigenous forces to provide adequate control of captured territory. This was due in large part to low morale.

Loyalist morale during the War of Independence was generally low for a variety of reasons. British forces were never able to sustain effective offensive operations and usually only temporarily occupied rebel territory after capture preferring the relative safety of the coastal seaports. During the course of the war, British defeats and retreats essentially announced to the Loyalist forces that British power was unable to support and protect those who remained loyal from patriot recriminations. With little confidence for their safety and in the ability of the British to inflict the ultimate defeat on the colonists, the Loyalists preferred to remain more "neutral" and never became a serious fighting force.

Like the British military during the Revolution, after capturing rebel held villages and territory, the American military often left loyal South Vietnamese to protect themselves against the Viet Cong guerillas. Although the South Vietnamese government was certainly not "neutral," numerous critics cite their apparent lack of initiative and commitment to fighting Communism as an essential ingredient in the American defeat. As early as 1954, the Joint Chiefs of Staff warned:

> . . . that without a stable civilian government in control and without a willingness by the Vietnamese themselves to resist communism, 'no amount of external pressure and assistance can long delay complete Communist victory in South Vietnam.' (6:698)

Another critic wrote:

> . . . the cardinal mistake made by the United States concerned not our assessment of our enemies, but of our allies, and specifically the nature of the various

> Indochinese regimes that the Congress and the American people were asked to support through the 1960s and early 1970s. (8:732)

The succession of South Vietnamese governments did little to strengthen and solidify the legitimacy of the South Vietnamese military. South Vietnamese forces, like the Loyalists in the American Revolution, were never considered a credible military force. It was not uncommon for "Cautious generals, fearful of casualties, [to conduct] operations in areas where the VC were known not to be." (6:702)

It is against this background of discord, lack of unity, and competing interests, that American and British society and leadership formulated military strategy. The next two variables in the Fabyanic Model to be discussed are force structure and doctrine.

FORCE STRUCTURE AND DOCTRINE

At the outbreak of the American Revolution, colonial forces consisted of an amalgam of provivincial militias and fleets composed of farmers, tradesmen, and sailors whose allegiences were to the individual colonies. The colonists had no need for a standing army since they had received the benefit of the British occupation forces for most of the century. At the outbreak of the Revolution, British forces numbered around 7,000 men, many having seen duty in the Seven Year's War. As the war progressed, in excess of 50,000 men were eventually sent to North America. Many a British officer derived comfort from this numerical and qualitative mismatch:

> . . . the native American is an effeminate thing, very unfit for and very im-

> patient of war. . . a set of upstart vagabonds, the dregs and scorn of the human species. (4:127)

During the course of the war, General Washington recognized the need for a regular army saying that "regular troops are alone equal to the exigencies of modern war, as well as for defense and offense, and whenever a substitute is attempted it must prove illusory and ruinous." (9:173) However, colonial forces were never a match for the regular British forces under the rules of 18th century warfare since they never exceeded 10,000 regulars. Why then were the British unable to defeat the numerically inferior colonial forces?

The British, per 18th century doctrine, looked to engage the colonial army in a decisive engagement. Although General Howe, Commander of the British forces in America, realized that the war could only be won by such an engagement, he was unable to see clearly how to make it happen "as the enemy moves with so much more celerity than we possibly can." (4:99) The British military was never able to adapt successfully to the conditions they experienced in North America:

> The British hidebound by their European background never improvised sufficiently. Howe, despite his reputation as a leading proponent of Light Infantry, followed exactly the art of war of Europe in the eighteenth century--the occupation of posts and cities, constant manoeuvering, fighting as few major battles, and losing as few men as possible. (4:99)

Blindly confident in traditional doctrine, British commanders disregarded the tactical and strategic realities of land warfare on the North American continent, and relied too heavily

on support from Loyalist forces which failed to materialize in appreciable numbers. Both of these deficiencies contributed to a major failure in British military operations--the failure to sustain offensive operations throughout the war. This failure can also be attributed to the reluctance of British commanders to expose their troops to hostile fire:

> Howe confessed that 'as my opinion has always been, that the defeat of the rebel regular army is the surest road to peace, I invariably pursued the most probable means of forcing its commander to action,' but with one proviso, 'under circumstances the least hazardous to the royal army; for even a victory, attended by a heavy loss of men on our part, would have given a fatal check to the progress of the war, and might have proved irreprable.' This explains another British disadvantage. Being predictable is a cardinal sin in war. (4:98)

Early in the war, the British never felt compelled to take the offensive in the belief that the American army would crumble from lack of commitment and supply. As an example, the British believed that the American army which routinely had the bulk of its membership up for reenlistment at one time, as in December 1776, could not endure. This lack of initiative on the part of British early in the war allowed the colonists to gain strength, confidence, and experience, and most likely was the result of the British underestimating the enemy's capabilities.

The British experience in doctrinal deficiency was repeated by the American military nearly two centuries later. The American army was a large standing army principally trained and equipped to defend Western Europe and, essentially, was predisposed to the tactics of 20th century conventional war as fought in World War

II. American forces were psychologically ill-prepared to fight a jungle war against highly motivated, indigenous Communist forces trained in the art of revolutionary warfare. Like their British counterparts, United States military doctrine did not support the realities of the war:

> Rather than planning to fight small wars, the defense establishment from the Secretary of Defense on down hopes to initmidate potential opponents and therefore obviate the need for fighting. . . The failure to grapple with with the difficult task of providing a doctrine for the employment of force in a small war is an old one. (10:22)

Colonel Harry G. Summers, in his book On Strategy: The Vietnam War in Context, summarizes the doctrinal dilemma faced by the United States military in Vietnam. Colonel Summers' premise is that prior to World War II, military doctrine had focused on the ultimate objective of destruction of the enemy's forces so as to force him to sue for peace. World War II changed this ultimate doctrinal objective to simply forcing the enemy's unconditional surrender. This perhaps subtle difference could not accommodate the political restraints and problems we faced in Korea after the Chinese intervention. In 1962, the military introduced two fundamental changes to its doctrine which in concert would eventually prove diastrous in Vietnam: first, that war can be considered in a "spectrum of war," and two, limited war was redefined to limit the means rather than the objective. According to the 1962 doctrinal change, the spectrum of war ranged from cold war, through limited war, to general war. The former being a peacetime power struggle between nations with the dividng line between cold war and limited war "neither distinct or absolute."

> Erasing the line between war and peace was to prove a serious flaw. It contributed to our failure to declare war over Vietnam, as well as the credibility gap that developed between the government and the American people. (11:42)

The similarity in force structures and doctrines of the British and American forces in the two wars is quite apparent. In both conflicts each superpower had a regular army trained in the art of the traditional wars of the period and each nation's military doctrine, influenced by contemporary national policy, necessitated prosecution of the war with "limited means." It is this concept of limited force that needs to be explored in greater detail. The degree of military force a nation chooses to employ in a conflict is a direct consequence of national policy--another Fabyanic Model variable. National policy and national strategy when coupled together form the basis for "how" a nation achieves its national objectives. It is from this combination of national policy and national strategy that military doctrine results. From what policies did the doctrine of limited use of force evolve?

POLICY

National policies and national objectives are intertwined since policies support the attainment of objectives. Before discussing policy, however, a review of the national objectives of the combatants is in order.

The American colonists clearly wanted to establish an independent confederation of the colonies although the exact form and conduct of the government was yet to be determined. In retrospect, the policies of the Americans in 1775 were rather

fragile and certainly not a unified concept in the minds of the separatists. However, the colonies did collectively subscribe to a policy of self-determination and independence with expulsion of British forces from North America as their primary objective. Clearly then, Great Britian's objective was to preserve the status quo and the Empire such as it was following the Seven Year's War in 1763:

> As late as June 11, 1779, the King remarked to Lord North that he should think it the greatest instance among the many he had met with of ingratitude and injustice if it could be supposed that any man in his dominions 'more ardently desired the restoration of peace and solid happiness in every part of this Empire' than he did. 'There is no personal sacrifice I could not readily yield for so desirable an object.' But, at the same time, no desire to get out of the present difficulties would incline him to enter 'into what I look upon as the destruction of the Empire.' (4:24)

However, while the British objective was relatively clear, the policy on how to deal with the American situation was very much in dispute.

> Whereas the government and its supporters found the issue in supremacy of Parliament--or rather, the colonial rejection of parliamentary supremacy--the opposition found the issue in colonial resistance to discrete measures taken by the metropolis since 1763 and, above all, to measures of taxation. . . . Throughout the almost continuous dispute on American policy that raged in the Commons and Lords from the beginning of 1774 to the spring of 1775, it is this difference in understanding that overshadows all other points at controversy. . . . This affinity of historians for the political opposition in Parliament rests, of course, upon far more than simply the latter's insistence that the dispute might have been settled with-

out war. (5:384-385)

Unable to agree,

> . . . the record of the North ministery was clearly open to the charge that its American policy was marked by inconsistency and sheer inadvertence . . . and was one not only of compromise, but of compromise that had been neither well conceived nor consistently pursued. (5:391)

British policies were alternately firm and appeasing and stemmed in part from the paradox that the colonists were indeed British citizens under the protection of the British constitution, and that every effort to bring them back into the Empire should be made. However, the overuse of killing force would only alienate them further, thus making long term pacification that more difficult to achieve. (4:51) This inconsistency plagued the execution of military operations and contributed to indecisive action on the part of British commanders.

What, then, were the objectives of the United States during the Vietnam War? This question is by no means a dead issue. Today, ten years following the withdrawal of American troops from South Vietnam, historians and analysts are still debating why the United States chose to enter into a land war in Asia. As Arthur Schlesinger, Jr. said in 1967:

> Vietnam is a triumph of the politics of inadvertence. We have achieved our present entanglement, not after due and deliberate consideration, but through a series of smal. decisions. . . . Each step in the deepening of the American commitment was reasonably regarded as the last that would be necessary. Yet, in retrospect, each step led only to the next, until we find ourselves entrapped today in that nightmare of American strategists, a land war in Asia--a war which no President. . . . .

> desired or intended. The Vietnam story is a tragedy without villains. (7:147)

Approximately a decade ago, a poll taken of US Army Generals showed that 70 percent of them considered American objectives in Vietnam to be unclear and uncertain, and 91 percent of them felt that America should decide what it wanted to accomplish before it chose to commit military forces in future conflicts:

> In fact, the United States did pursue defined objectives in Indochina; the trouble was that it kept changing its mind as to what they were. From first to last there was consistent agreement only about what our objective was not: we were not fighting to make South Vietnam into an American colony. Unfortunately, that is exactly what a great many people thought we were doing. (8:737)

While agreement on specific objectives may be difficult to achieve, perhaps the broad objective of "containment of Communism" is sufficiently accurate to begin a discussion on American policy during the war.

American political leadership was definitely wedded to the "dominoe theory" first espoused under the Eisenhower administration. And if one accepts the "containment" objective, then one must also acknowledge that the use of limited military force is by necessity a realistic consequence of that objective. The "containment" objective spawned a political policy which created a dilemma for the American military like the dilemma faced by the British military in the American Revolution. United States policy in Vietnam was to contain the expansion of Communist power in the region, but the United States was not willing to risk a world war by using military means to destroy the source of the aggression. (11:75) The "containment" objective, therefore, led to

the policy of flexible response and this policy resulted in the American military doctrine (subsequent to 1962) of limited use of force, or limited means.

The United States was confident that American forces could, through a policy of flexible response, demonstrate American resolve to keep South Vietnam free of Communist domination by gradually escalating the level of conflict as necessary to counter the threat. Not only did the military have to adapt to an unpopular policy of flexible response and "gradualism," but also was expected to support and carryout such nontraditional missions as coalition warfare, nationbuilding activities, and Vietnamization.

During the course of the war, the United States attempted to change the social fabric of South Vietnam while simultaneously trying to prosecute the war. For the first time in history, the military's ultimate objective was not the "destruction of the enemy's armed forces in battle," but rather,

> 'The fundamental purpose of US military forces is to preserve, restore, or create an environment of order or stability within which the instrumentalities of government can function effectively under a code of laws.' We had come a long way from the pre-Vietnam war doctrine that called for the 'defeat of an enemy by application of military power directly or indirectly against the armed forces which support his political structure.' (11:49)

The similarities between the American Revolution and the Vietnam War are remarkable. Both British and American forces were clearly shackled by governmental policies and military doctrines which precluded the effective initiation of offensive operations. The British faced the dilemma that general war would

never lead to an amiable settlement and leniency would only serve to encourage the rebels. The dilemma facing the United States in Vietnam was perhaps more complicated, but a dilemma originating from the perceived realities of world politics nonetheless. In both cases, military commanders were effectively prevented from using "sufficient" force against the enemy's center of gravity EARLY IN THE WAR. Flawed government policies produced flawed doctrine which effectively precluded the use of such force. This brings us to the last two variables in the Fabyanic Model to be addressed: the threat and targetry.

THREAT AND TARGETRY

The immediate threat of the colonial rebellion to Great Britain was twofold. First, if the revolution was successful, it would signal to other members of the Empire that Great Britain was fallible, and second, the departure of the colonies from the Empire would have a severe adverse impact on trade. Foremost, Great Britain's prestige in the world was at stake:

> there not being. . . a single instance in all history of any nation surrendering a distant province voluntarily and of free choice, notwithstanding it was greatly to their interest to have done it. (4:24)

If the British failed to contain this citizen rebellion, then other colonies might be inclined to follow suit. Like the United States during the the 1950s and 1960s, the British had their own version of "containment," containment of colonial opposition to Parliament's power and preservation of the Empire.

What threat did the potential fall of South Vietnam pose for the United States? Like Great Britain, was loss of face and

prestige in the world perhaps the main reason that the United States chose to make a stand in South Vietnam or did the United States, as leader of the free world, have a duty to intervene? Did Washington undertake defense of South Vietnam on behalf of the free world and did American leadership make a conscious choice that intervention was necessary to ensure international security and world order? The answer probably lies somewhere in between the extremes of "saving face" and champion of the free world. It is probably fair to conclude that in a broad context, the United States felt threatened by the perceived expansion of monolithic Communism and, like the British 200 years earlier, was unable to comprehend a world which was contrary to its own making and control.

In June 1956, then Senator John F. Kennedy outlined "America's stake in Vietnam" in a speech which expressed the sentiments of a broad spectrum of political opinion. Kennedy declared that Vietnam represented the cornerstone of the free world in Southeast Asia and represented a proving ground for democracy in the region. Most important, however, is that Kennedy said Vietnam represents a test of American responsibility, determination, and prestige in Asia:

> if it falls victim to any one of the perils that threaten its existence... then the United States, with some justification will be held responsible; and our prestige in Asia will sink to a new low. (6:699)

Both Great Britain and the United States considered the insurgencies to be a threat to their dominance in the world arena

and that their national interests would be served if the insurgencies were defeated. The question, however, must be asked, "was the threat real, or was it contrived?" As noted previously, in the case of the American Revolution, history would indicate that Great Britain could have prevented the war--that the threat was more contrived than real. By the same token, although only eleven years ago, post-war events would indicate that in fact Asia has not become a bastion of anti-West Communism and that perhaps the United States was guilty of gross national paranoia. Again, we see a vivid parallel between the two conflicts in that both Great Britain and the United States perceived threats that history might indicate were illusory to the national security interests of the nation.

The last variable in the Fabyanic Model to be discussed will be targetry. What were the targets, or centers of gravity, upon which the success or failure of the rebellions depended?

In the early stages of the Revolution, the American army resorted to harrassment tactics aimed at keeping the British off balance since, as previuously mentioned, General Washington and the colonial leaders recognized that the colonial militias were no match for British regulars. This may have been the first time "modern" guerilla forces were used in a major conflict. The aims of the colonial forces were to avoid the climactic battle, withdraw when outnumbered, and stall for time while the British will to fight declined and France would enter the war on the side of the colonies. Contrary to one of the myths of the American Revolution, the citizen soldier did not win the war.

Americans have long believed the "standard patriotic mythology of a determined provinicial free-holding populace marching arm-in-arm in the struggle to overcome tyranny." (12:211) While this notion certainly has strong sentimental appeal, unfortunately it is not true. As previously mentioned, the regular army under the command of General Washington was the center of gravity in the colonial cause and remained the real British military objective during the war. However, given the severe limitations on offensive operations imposed on the British forces, they were never able to engage the colonial army in the decisive battle that British commanders desired.

The British were clearly a long way from "home" and understood that the North American and Canadian seaports were essential to the survival of their forces on the continent. Consequently, they seized and occupied the seaports in New England and the South. The British successfully occupied these seaports for most of the war although, as they soon discovered, once they left the sanctity of their garrisons, the American army and militia units proved very elusive to engage. In addition, the general population proved recalcitrant and frequently transformed itself into bands of guerillas thereby increasing British frustration. In 1777, unable to close with the colonial army for a decisive engagement, the British under the command of Gneral Burgoyne decided to embark on a bold offensive essentially deviating from their earlier indirect strategy. This will be discussed in greater detail later.

Similar to the British in 1777, the United States military

experienced many of the same frustrations during the Vietnam War in that they were unable to strike at the enemy's center of gravity. (11:80) Like the British before them, the Americans faced two types of military forces: the Viet Cong guerillas and the North Vietnamese regular army. Early in the war, the American military undertook a classic counter insurgency campaign against the Viet Cong using special forces units. As the war progressed, and in response to Viet Cong successes, the United States escalated its combat operations in an effort to defeat the Viet Cong directly and, by 1963, had inserted 16,000 men into South Vietnam. In the next two years, the United States increased its troop strength in-country to 23,000 men and began to direct its focus to the North. It was not unitl 1964, five years after the first direct involvement of American forces, that the United States began seriously to consider the conflict as being more than just a guerilla war.

Like the British in the American Revolution, the United States was faced with a guerilla war in the early stages of the conflict. However, unlike the British who recognized after the initial stages of the war that the American regular army was the key to defeating the rebellion, the United States never really accepted the conclusion that more than limited offensive operations against the Hanoi regime were needed in order to bring the war to a successful conclusion. To do so was deemed politically unacceptable due to the risk of provoking ever greater levels of conflict in the region. Once again, we see a parallel between the two conflicts. Both Great Britain and the United States failed to

engage the rebel centers of gravity--the regular armies--and during the early years, were preoccupied with a guerilla war which, in reality, proved to be secondary in nature.

This concludes the assessment of the Fabyanic Model. In light of this assessment, the military strategies of Great Britain and the United States in the respective conflicts will be discussed next.

STRATEGIES

THE AMERICAN REVOLUTION

As Richard Preston and Sydney Wise wrote in Men in Arms:

> The American Revolution marks, indeed, an important transitional step in the history of warfare. The professional military methods of the eighteenth century, which had come to be predominant in the Anglo-French struggle in America by the time of the Seven Year's War, were more important in the Revolution than popular legend admits. At the same time, the war was a portent for the future, pointing toward conflicts quite different from those of the dynastic quarrels of eighteenth century Europe. (9:172)

The British forces in North America were faced with what may have been an impossible situation. As a consequence of the variable relationships illustrated by the Fabyanic Model which existed at the start of the Revolution, the British initially adopted a deterrent and indirect strategy. It was believed that the cumulative effects of such a strategy would demonstrate to the rebels that a war with Great Britain was unwinnable. But, as the war escalated, it became increasingly clear to the British military that direct offensive operations aimed at destroying the colonial army were necessary if a military victory was to be achieved. It was this dichotemy in strategies which characterized British con-

duct of the war. The indirect strategy could not win the war, and the offensive strategy was a strategy that, given the state of British military capabilities, was foreordained to defeat.

In view of British doctrine, terrain, hostile civilian populace, long lines of supply, lack of support at home, etc., the British military were unable to sustain effective offensive operations. In addition, the extreme caution exhibited by British commanders hindered aggressive operations necessary to seek and destroy the enemy. This latter condition, and the prevailing sentiment of the British military, was expressed by General Howe:

> if I could by any manoeuvre remove an enemy from a very advantageous position, without hazarding consequences of an attack, where the point to be carried was not adequate to the loss of men to be expected from the enterprise, I should certainly adopt that cautionary conduct, in the hopes of meeting my adversary upon more equal terms. (4:110)

Given this penchant for caution on the part of the British military, it is not surprising that the turning point of the war resulted from a bold offensive campaign which was a marked deviation from their deterrent and indirect strategy. This departure from their initial strategy illustrates the dual strategy dilemma that plagued British military forces in the colonies. Known as the Saratoga campaign, this operation was a classic example of the inability of the British to mount and sustain offensive thrusts into rebel territory.

The idea for the campaign was the brainchild of Major General John Burgoyne and, in theory, was basically a sound plan. However, as the analysis of the Fabyanic Model has shown, given

British doctrine, force structure, policy, society, etc.. several insurmountable obstacles existed which prevented the British military from conducting and sustaining bold offensive operations against an indigenous rebel army.

The plan called for Burgoyne to lead a strong Anglo-German force (approximately 6,500 men) from Montreal and, by striking from the North along the Richilieu and Hudson Rivers, take Albany, New York. At Albany, Burgoyne was to be met by Lieutenant Colonel St. Leger in command of a mixed force of British, Hessians, Tories, and Indians, from Oswego on Lake Ontario. These two forces would then crush all colonial opposition in their path as they met a British force led by General Howe driving north up the Hudson from New York. This campaign would then sever New England from the rest of the colonies. On the drive south to Albany, General Burgoyne was to capture weakly held Ticonderoga. However, history shows that the campaign was doomed from the beginning. (13:234-255)

A key part of the plan was for thousands of Tories, Canadians, and Indians to supplement the regular British force. This provision of the plan, however, fell far short of expectations and in at least one aspect unexpectdly worked against the British: 1) only approximately 100 Tories and 400 Indians were actually recruited, and 2) the idea of using Indians to fight against transplanted Englishman was considered immoral by English society and was one of the reasons that English society eventually lost favor with the war. In addition, Burgoyne was determined to travel with heavy artillery (some 138 artillery pieces in

all), and all the traditional trappings of an eighteenth century army. One final item would prove equally disastrous. Information that Howe's forces were in Pennsylvania, and would not be available for the drive north to Albany, was casually disregarded by Burgoyne believing that London would surely make General Howe's forces available for the most important campaign of the war. Undermanned, overburdened and in the face of declining support from home, in July 1777, General Burgoyne left Montreal and began the Saratoga campaign--a campaign upon which the hopes of Lord North's administration rested.

The march south through the mountains of New York was excruciatingly slow due to the excessive hardware carried by the British and the inhospitable terrain. Although Burgoyne was successful in driving the Americans from Ticonderoga, his lines of supply were unable to support his army and the Americans ensured that all supply along his route of march was destroyed.

> This supply problem was never satisfactorily solved by the British: hence their relative immobility, 'tethered by their supply lines to the coast,' and the continuing stress placed on the Loyalists--to keep the country open behind the fighting troops in a terrain where all were opposed or equivocally neutral until proof of ability to retain advantages was shown. (4:106)

The detailed account of General Burgoyne's march south is well worth reading. It is an epic story of the Revolution which clearly illustrates the shortcomings of the British military posture in America and the strength of will of the citizen soldier. The slow pace of the British allowed the colonial forces to amass a citizen army which overwhelmed the British force. The colonial

forces were able to swell from 4,000 to 17,000 men. On October 14, 1777, totally outnumbered and with no reasonable hope of supply, General Burgoyne surrendered near the New York village of Saratoga.

The defeat at Saratoga was critical to the British cause for two primary reasons: it gave the colonies time to train and and equip a regular army of sufficient capability to engage the British for the decisive battle which, by this time, both sides knew would have to occur, and it brought France into the war on the side of the Americans. Although the colonial forces were able to score numerous victories against the British in the first years of the war, they knew full well that a trained regular army and an alliance with France were crucial to final victory of the war. Both these objectives were achieved after the colonial victory at Saratoga.

With the resources, men, and renewed confidence brought to the colonial cause by the French, a combined force of colonial and French regulars defeated the British at the Battle of Yorktown in 1781 and essentially concluded the American Revolution. Cut off by French seapower from their lines of supply, faced with increasing casualties and declining support back in England, General Cornwallis surrendered to General Washington.

THE VIETNAM WAR

The analysis of the Fabyanic Model shows that the United States faced much the same situation in Vietnam that the British faced in the American Revolution. Consequently, American leadership initially adopted very much the same military strategy as

the British. Early in the war (prior to 1964), the United States attempted to halt Communist expansionism in South Vietnam through a cumulative deterrent and indirect strategy. When it became clear that this strategy was failing, and the Communists were escalating the level of conflict, the United States adopted a more direct strategy (although limited) designed to bring North Vietnam to the negotiating table.

To be sure, the Vietnam War was politically more complex than the American Revolution. However, like the British 200 years earlier, the United States hoped to deal initially with the insurgency with as little use of force as possible. For the first two years, the United States limited its military role to that of advisors and special forces units. As the Viet Cong became increasingly more aggressive and successful, the United States began to focus its efforts on defeating the Viet Cong and gradually increased its military commitment. By the end of 1963, 16,000 troops had been deployed to South Vietnam. In 1964, in response to ever increasing Communist aggression, the United States chose to begin bombing the North and, like the British in the Revolution, dramatically changed their strategy. Incumbent in this change of strategy was an increased requirement for men and material to meet the demands of intensified air and ground operations. By the end of 1964, the American military had 23,000 troops in-country.

The change to a more direct offensive strategy, principally the bombing of targets in the North, was undertaken neither to achieve an unconditional surrender, nor the total destruction of

the enemy's war fighting capability, but rather was designed to bring the Communists to the negotiating table. Four years later, this gradual escalation of military force by both sides culminated in the dramatic battle of Tet. Unlike the British, however, the American military never tasted significant defeat in the field. But, nonetheless, Tet 1968 was a significant victory for the North Vietnamese against the American center of gravity:

> Rather than commending the military victory, Americans were instead horrified by the brutality of war, and Tet marked the beginning of a radically intensified antiwar protest. (14:756)

American society and segments of its leadership chose the reality they wished to see. In the face of increasing casualties, public support for the war declined, and pressure to negotiate increased. Three years later, the United States pulled out of South Vietnam.

The United States had won the battles, but lost the war. The reasons for the defeat are found in the analysis of the Fabyanic Model and closely parallel the conditions encountered by the British during the Revolution. Essentially, the United States had failed to adapt to the tactical, strategic, and political realities of the war they found in Southeast Asia while completely underestimating their enemy's capabilities. By adopting a flexible response policy and a strategy of "gradualism," the United States disdained the strategic offensive early in the war and, as a result, any hope of preventing the Communist takeover of South Vietnam. Had the United States not felt politically compelled to limit the use of force early in the war then, like the British

experience in the American Revolution, the outcome of the war might have been very different.

CONCLUSION

The analysis of the Fabyanic Model variables clearly shows that both the British and United States failed to appreciate the true nature of the American Revolution and Vietnam War respectively. Both wars were revolutionary civil wars which gradually escalated into conflicts approaching the conventional conflicts which were representative of the time. Both wars were true revolutions and each nation, failing to fully comprehend the enemy's commitment, was forced to respond gradually to an escalating level of intensity of conflict dictated by the rebel armies.

The military commanders in both wars were clearly saddled by national policies which resulted in military doctrines incapable of bringing the conflicts to a successful military conclusion. While military commanders can understand the concept of limited objectives, the use of limited means to achieve these objectives was contrary to the principles of war. The use of limited means in these wars resulted from the fact that national objectives were unclear. And, in the absence of clear objectives, the national command authorities inhibited military operations for fear of reducing negotiating flexibility. The following thoughts, while written about the British in the American Revolution, are also applicable to the Vietnam War:

> It is a sound maxim in war to be clear about one's objective--all the rest will follow, given sufficient resources and activity. Until 1778, this was ignored by the British who were uncertain about their main motive. Was it to con-

> ciliate, or to subdue, the Americans; negotiated peace or war? This lack of determination meant immediate loss of initiative. Too vigorous a policy would ruin the chance of a settlement whilst too lenient handling of the rebels could only encourage them. IT SEEMS CLEAR THAT HAD AN ENERGETIC POLICY BEEN FOLLOWED FROM THE START BY POURING TROOPS AND SUPPLIES TO THE DECISIVE POINTS, BY ISOLATING THE MAIN AREAS OF DISSAFFECTION, AND BY DEALING DECISIVELY WITH EACH ONE, THE REBELLION COULD HAVE BEEN CRUSHED BEFORE FRANCE ENTERED THE WAR. THERE WAS NOT IN THESE YEARS ONE OVERRIDING PLAN TO WHICH ALL ELSE WAS SUBORDIINATED. THE BRITISH WERE HOPING TO HEAL AND SETTLE, AS WELL AS TO CONQUER, AND IMAGINED THAT BY THEIR VERY APPEARANCE THE REBELLION COULD BE PUT DOWN AS SUDDENLY AS IT HAD BROKEN OUT --HENCE THEIR NEGLECT OF WHAT SHOULD ALWAYS ACCOMPANY THE MAINTENANCE OF THE OBJECTIVE, SUFFICIENT RESOURCES READILY AVAILABLE FOR ITS ATTAINMENT. (4:113)

One last parallel between the two wars is significant--if only to show that the use of military force was merely a facade for a national leadership bereft of clear political vision. In both wars, each nation attempted to negotiate peace while engaged in offensive operations against the enemy. Again, the following passage was written about the American Revolution, but is remarkable in its applicability to the Vietnam War:

> To pursue approaches for peace while using to their utmost extent the soldiers and ships which were provided were in reality two incompatible aims - AND IT WAS THIS MISCONCEPTION WHICH FRUSTRATED THE UNDOUBTED ADVANTAGES WHICH THE BRITISH OPENED OPERATIONS AGAINST THE COLONIES, AND HINDERED THEM IN ACTION AGAINST THEIR SMALL, UNORGANISED ENEMY. (4:113)

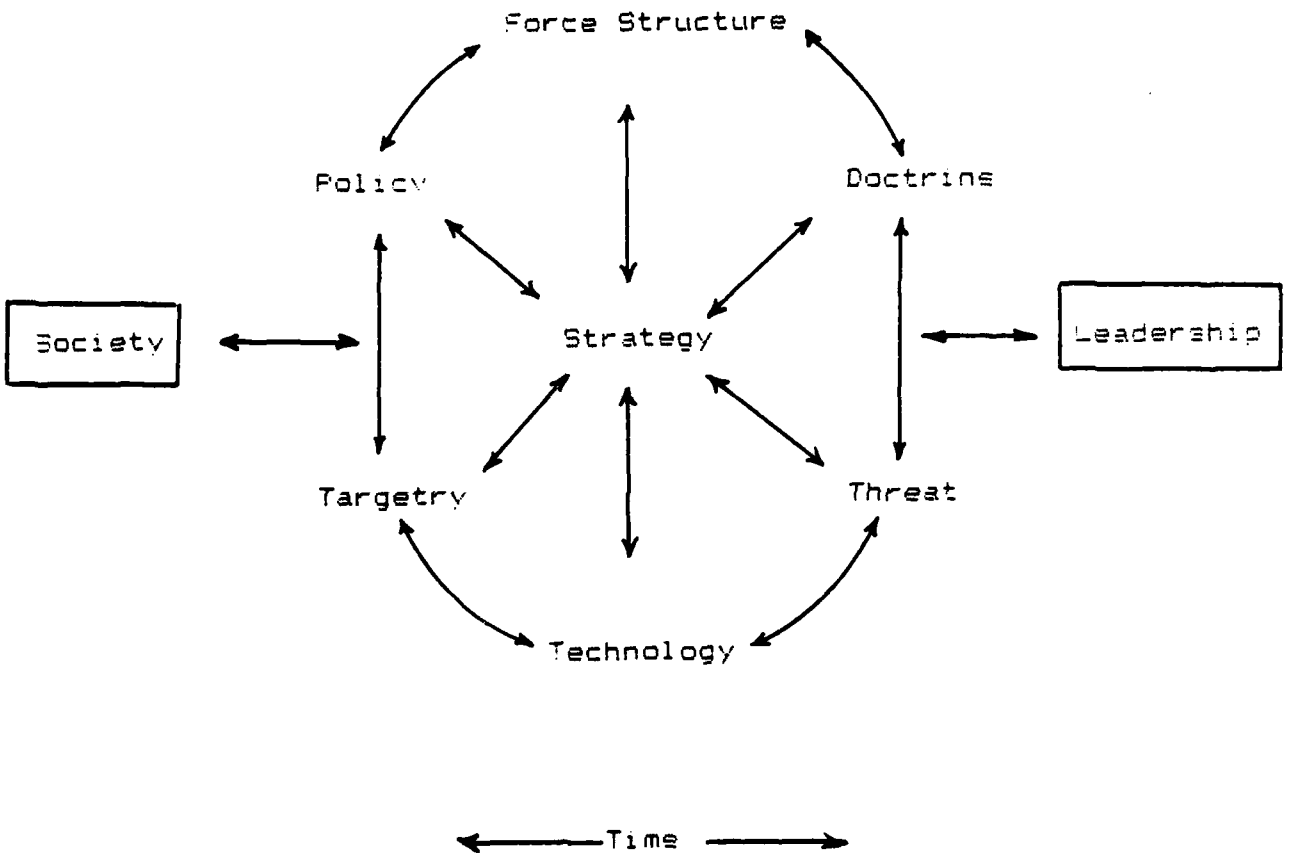
The principal lesson to be learned from both wars is that when military force is to be used as an instrument of policy in deal-

ing with revolutionary civil wars, the force must be decisive and swift. If this action is politically untenable, then alternative means to the application of military force must be used to achieve national objectives.

In summary, the American Revolution and the Vietnam War were remarkably similar in many ways. In both cases, the primary cause of each nation's political failure can be traced to a lack of understanding of the true character of the conflicts, unclear national objectives, and military strategies initially predicated on the limited use of force. In the future, when faced with revolutionary civil wars, military commanders should advocate military force only when the political situation will support a decisive military campaign early in the conflict.

MILITARY STRATEGY

VARIABLE RELATIONSHIPS



Appendix 1

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