

Pax Americana I: The Pentagon Way

By SEYMOUR MELMAN

Twenty-five years after the start of the nuclear age in 1945, policy-formulating ideologists of the American establishment continue to advocate an American world mission: Pax Americana based upon U.S. military power. In the name of goals like a sustained U.S. armed presence in Asia, thinkers like W. W. Rostow and Henry Kissinger rationalize the priority use of this country's treasure and brains for building and operating ever more powerful nuclear and conventional forces.

The wonder is that these systems of rationalization are taken seriously by large publics and by policy-makers and the Congress. For the reasoning behind a military-based Pax Americana, apart from its moral ruthlessness and arrogance, suffers from two basic flaws: first, obsolete assumptions on the nature of military power; second, false estimates of the economic consequences of military priorities.

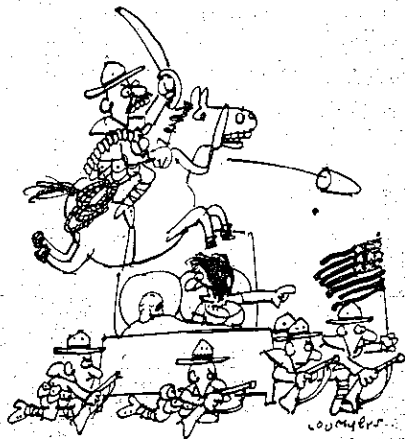
Since 1945, nuclear weapons and guerrilla warfare have transformed military power and its uses. A wealthier society could once achieve military superiority against opponents with lesser industrial wealth. However, once many nuclear weapons could be delivered by all opponents, then the effect of relative wealth was checkmated. As nuclear power exceeded one kill and entered the overkill range, it ceased to matter that one opponent had more weapons: all became equally vulnerable.

The U.S. can now deliver, with its biggest missiles and planes alone, more than forty nuclear warheads for each Soviet city with populations of 100,000 or more. (Allowing for the excess of explosive force in modern weapons, compared with those of Hiroshima, the U.S. could overkill the Soviets more than 1,000 times.) The Soviets can destroy America's major cities at least sixteen times over. But having more overkill is no advantage; having less no disadvantage. (If the U.S. and Soviet armaments were exchanged, would it make any difference?)

In place of traditional military competence, the ideologues of Pax Americana now offer deterrence: an opponent is to be frozen into immobility in rational response to a credible threat. However, many people—including leaders—respond to threats with enlarged hostility and aggression. But this precarious psychological inference is put forth by the ideologues of Pax Americana as though it was a self-evident truth.

an industrial state could translate its production capacity into military superiority against a less productive population. Guerrilla warfare can frustrate the previous advantage of industrialized states when the guerrilla effort satisfies three conditions: (a) The men involved are prepared to sacrifice their lives; (b) They are supported in their operations by a surrounding population; (c) The opponent cannot differentiate the guerrillas from the ordinary population. Under these conditions, even elaborately equipped opponents cannot overcome guerrilla forces short

Even thoughtful men seem to have great difficulty in adjusting to the new limits of military power. A distinguished Senator once wrote to me that "our defense philosophy is indeed outmoded" if the mutual overkill has become the strategic condition. However, he added, "it would require exceptional courage for the average member of Congress to acquiesce to a situation in which the United States was at a quantitative nuclear disadvantage vis-à-vis the Soviet Union. I confess that I would feel uneasy about it myself, even if I were intellectually con-



of changing (b) by population destruction.

The effects of nuclear weapons and guerrilla warfare compel reassessment of familiar categories like military superiority. What does being ahead mean when possessing more or less overkill cannot be translated into anything that is militarily or humanly meaningful? And what remains of traditional military superiority when shoeless peasants lacking armor, heavy weapons, a navy or an air force can frustrate a military win by the armed force with the most firepower and most elaborate equipment in the world?

vinced that a factor of greater than 100 times overkill was inconsequential to the national security."

These new conditions challenge the world view and the self-identity of many men. Else how to explain that men can look at the military transformation and not see it?

The outmoded, failure-prone strategies of Pax Americana must be replaced with just Pax.

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