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Author(s): Malcolm Caldwell

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MALCOLM CALDWELL

Revolutionary Violence in a People's War

THE VICTORY of the people's liberation armies in South Vietnam and Cambodia, which burst with shattering force upon the world in April 1975, predictably gave rise to an anguished chorus of accusations, and forecasts of "bloodbaths to come" in the newly liberated countries of Indochina. This at a time when no one is yet in a position to compile even roughly accurate statistics of the number of victims—killed, maimed, orphaned, bereaved and made homeless—of American and puppet actions in Indochina. The figure certainly runs into tens of millions, not to speak of either the havoc to property and ecological balance, or the devastation to the painstaking construction and productive achievements in North Vietnam by recurrent US bombing.¹ We may, with the utmost confidence, leave to the judgment of history the allocation of right and wrong in this bloodiest of wars. Here, for the record, I shall make some general points and observations.

The obvious starting-point must be the theory of revolutionary violence itself. Here we have evidence of a number of kinds in the writings of those who have conducted people's war and drawn theoretical conclusions—notably Mao-Tse-tung, General Giap, and other leaders of the great Asian revolutions of our era: the curious is first referred to these sources.² Next, we may examine the practice of people's war, using three

types of sources: first, the evidence of participants; second, the evidence of sympathetic observer-participants and observers; and third, the evidence of counter-insurgency “experts.” In the first category we have the testimony of such experienced revolutionaries as Kim San.³ In the second, we may turn to classic sources such as Jack Belden and Eqbal Ahmad.⁴ In the third, and specifically relating to the Vietnam war, we may cite Douglas Pike.⁵ And a final area to which we can turn is to accounts of what has historically been the immediate sequence of successful revolutions achieved by people’s war.

There is, I think, no need to paraphrase here the theoretical writings whose message is clear: guerrillas waging people’s war cannot survive without the support, willingly given, of the people. However, a particularly interesting commentary on a specific instance of theory being put into practice and of the subsequent modification and refinement of theory is to be found in Mark Selden’s *The Yen-an Way*⁶ which documents the extreme sensitivity of the guerrilla to the feelings and needs of the peasantry.

Strict Forbearance

All three kinds of sources on the practice of people’s war concur on the avoidance of violence against the people by the liberation forces. Indeed as Kim San points out, on many occasions the party, by restraining the mass movement, virtually pardoned their enemies who simply came back to annihilate them. Of the Canton Commune he records: “Had the workers not kept discipline they could easily have eliminated their enemies, but they stood by their orders not to kill private individuals. Contrast such generosity and discipline with the orgy of brutality indulged in by the Reaction three days later, when nearly seven thousand were killed!”⁷ Talking of fury of unrestrained peasant vengeance, he observes: “the Kuomintang killed the best and bravest of China’s people, the socially desirable, while the revolutionaries killed the degenerate and the parasites, the socially harmful.”⁸ The whole book testifies to the turmoil of emotions stirred up in a sensitive person dedicated to the advancement of the people’s cause and to human and humane values by participation in such a human upheaval as a revolution. The experience of the revolutionary movement in Indonesia illustrates very clearly the choices—and the consequences—when contrasted with that of the revolutionary movement in Indochina: in the first, merciless decimation and subsequent fascist repression and indefinite perpetuation of rural poverty; in the second, successful land reform and rising production with greater equality of distribution.⁹

Jack Belden was with the Chinese People’s Liberation Army (PLA) at the height of their struggle with the Kuomintang and had ample opportunity to observe the conduct of the liberation forces. His testimony is consistent and unambiguous: extreme care was taken to ensure that there was no unnecessary or indiscriminate violence. Indeed, the operative principle was evidently that no man was beyond redemption, that even the deepest-dyed reactionary might one day reform and become useful to

the community. He stresses the ethical content in Maoism, and this is a point which has been made many times since, and we should constantly bear in mind the nature of the enemy against whom the PLA fought: a rapacious fascism of the cruellest and most callous cast.¹⁰ Of Mao himself, Han Suyin writes that very early in his revolutionary career “he...formulated the distinction between the liquidation of a class by economic and social means and the physical liquidation of human beings, which he abhorred.”¹¹ Eqbal Ahmad’s statement of the basic principles and tactics of guerrilla warfare—by one who fought in the Algerian revolution—makes an irrefutable case in short compass.¹²

Sensitive Use of Force

It is interesting to turn to the reactionary ‘experts’ like Pike. Unlike the propagandists, politicians, and penpushers of the bourgeois press, these ‘experts’ have to make as realistic assessments as possible in order to be of any use to their paymasters in the Pentagon and the CIA. Pike, in his standard work, comes to the following conclusions :

Terror was used to immobilize these forces, including the GVN officials, standing between it (the NLF) and its domination of the rural areas. For this reason there was little terrorism in Saigon and virtually none directed at top-level government officials...We have no way of determining whether terror was employed by the NLF for internal morale-building purposes, but apparently it was not; the internal documents dealing with criticism and self-criticism of the violence program indicate a fairly widespread distaste for terror on the part of the NLF rank and file...Nor apparently was terror used by the NLF as provocation; at least no internal documents were ever uncovered that so instructed cadres; on the contrary, struggle movement cadres particularly were warned not to allow extremists in the crowd to commit any violence or terroristic act which would provoke the GVN or justify retaliation in force... Nor did the NLF pursue terror in a random or indiscriminate pattern. On the contrary, the killing of individuals was done with great specificity, as, for example pinning a note to the shirtfront of an assassinated government official, explaining what crime he had committed...The NLF made a concerted effort to ensure that there were no unexplained killings; sometimes it went so far as to issue leaflets denying the killing of individuals, asserting that they were killed by bandits masquerading as NLF army soldiers¹³. . . The NLF theoreticians considered terror to be the weapon of the weak, the desperate, of the ineffectual guerrilla leader.¹⁴

Precisely, and the NLF won!

There appears, therefore, to be an extraordinary convergence of testimony on the tactics of people’s war with respect to its pointed avoidance of committing “bloodbaths.” Before leaving this aspect of the topic, I should deal with two recurring staples of those concerned with propagating the “bloodbath” myth: casualties in the land reform of the

Democratic Republic of Vietnam in 1953-1956; and what is referred to as the Hue massacre. Both have recently been discussed in an extremely valuable consideration of the whole subject of "bloodbaths" by Noam Chomsky and Edward Herman.¹⁵ On the first, there is an extended examination of the allegation, and a crushing retort by Gareth Porter.¹⁶ On the second, the reader is referred to the extended analysis in the December-January, 1969-70, issue of *Vietnam International*. What emerges with stark clarity from sources such as these is that there has been systematic, deliberate, and calculated distortion of the facts in favour of manufacturing propaganda supposedly mitigatory or even explanatory of the incalculable war crimes committed by US leaders against the peoples of Indochina.

Moral Superiority

A crucial consideration which most observers and commentators overlook is that the Vietnamese strove throughout to establish and maintain a clear moral superiority over the imperialist aggressors. I stress this because in this the Vietnamese struggle presents a striking contrast with such other armed struggles as those waged by the Palestinians, and the Provisionals of the Irish Republican Army, to cite but two. From the outset, the liberation forces in Vietnam drew a distinction between the American people, including ordinary American servicemen, and the American government and ruling class. Obviously, such was their support both inside and outside Vietnam that the NLF could easily have waged, and called on their countless eager allies throughout the world to wage in their support, an all-out campaign of terror. How easy it would have been for Vietnamese cadres to have burst into US forces' recreation clubs and sprayed relaxing American servicemen with random machine-gun fire! What sitting targets tourists presented in Saigon! How simple for them, or for dedicated supporters in the worldwide solidarity movement, to plant bombs in Washington or Los Angeles and blast the limbs off American women and children!

What the Japanese Red Army did at Lodz international airport, or what the Palestinians did at the Munich Olympics, could have been fashioned and perpetrated a thousand-fold by the Vietnamese comrades and their international friends had they so wished. The point is that they did *not* so wish, and in this I believe they were absolutely right—in both senses. It was imperative that, the more the Americans resorted in their desperation to indiscriminate slaughter of the 'gooks' and the 'slant-eyes', the more scrupulously should the liberation movement cleave to its policy of incarnating a transparently superior ethical stance. The grievances of the Vietnamese were, to put it mildly, no less deep-seated and justified than those of the Palestinians or the Ulster Catholics, but never did they use this as a justification for maiming, blinding and slaughtering US civilians, far less those of other nationalities going about their day-to-day lives totally unconnected with the war. Revolutionaries everywhere ought to commend and hail the Vietnamese and equally condemn other struggles which stoop to the moral squalor of their oppressors; for not only is

cowardly terror wrong it is also politically suicidal. No liberation struggle has faced the odds that faced the Vietnamese; their triumph is also a triumph for what we would not have hesitated not so long ago to have termed virtue—moral excellence, uprightness, and goodness.

The DRV land reform falls properly into what follows successful revolutionary seizures of power. Here the outstanding work for the post-war Asian revolutions is unquestionably William Hinton's *Fanshen*.¹⁷ This is an authentic record of the tensions and forces released by liberation, and read in conjunction with Belden's masterpiece gives the lie to the claim made in the otherwise impeccably researched and reliable *Guinness Book of Records* that Mao presided over the greatest organized slaughter in human history. On the contrary, cadres sought to restrain the quite natural fury and thirst for revenge of peasants who had suffered so much at the hands of village notables and local bureaucrats. Mao's record in consistently exhorting the use of reason, not violence, and in sturdily rehabilitating those demoted and discredited by others more powerful for the time being, is beyond query.

Justice in Reconstruction

But here it may be interjected that China was one thing, but surely what is happening in Cambodia is another? Mock horror and abundant crocodile tears were expended freely by those who complacently accepted the unparalleled savagery of the US aerial assault on Cambodia when the triumphant guerrilla, on taking the capital city, proceeded to evacuate all its inhabitants. But as Charles Meyer has pointed out, Phnom Penh had become, for the rural poor, the hated symbol of all that had gone rotten, corrupt and pro-Western in their society, and they were determined to wipe it out as an effective national centre:

In other times, the peasant army would undoubtedly have razed it, after having exterminated part of the population. In 1975, they were content to empty it of its citizens, who will be purified and re-educated by hard work in the rice fields. Foreigners judge this measure inhuman, absurd, uneconomical. In reality, it is political, decided with clear cognizance of the facts, in order to reconstitute a Khmer community that has been profoundly altered by Westernization of part of the society. The peasant revolutionaries' ambition is to reconstruct their country on the foundations they have freely chosen. They think they will only be able to do so if they totally destroy all the material symbols of foreign domination and create a 'new man' within a peasant socialist society that is authentically Cambodian. This is a political, economic, and cultural revolution that certainly recalls the Chinese experience.¹⁸

No doubt it will be hard for some urban dwellers accustomed to pushing pens or turning ledgers to adjust to labour in the rice-fields, but such hardship as may arise cannot be construed as a 'bloodbath', unless many commit suicide rather than submit to it.

Desperately though the Western media and Western political leaders have strained and squinted for a sign or a sighting of a credible "bloodbath" in Indochina since April 1975 they have signally failed to produce anything better than mirages—projections of their depraved cravings for exoneration. Somewhat embarrassingly, Western reporters staying on after liberation have been unable to come up with any firm stories of massacres by the liberation forces, so President Ford and Secretary of State Kissinger have been reduced to grasping at straws, which in any case have turned out in every instance to have been figments of their heated imaginations. The named traitors who ignored warnings to leave before liberation have no doubt suffered the fate promised them, but even so we can only marvel that guilty as they were of the most heinous crimes, they were virtually given the option of fleeing a retribution that, by any standards, would have been amply justified.

Now this leads to another important dimension of the question. Western expressions of apprehension about "bloodbaths" seem to me an obvious psychological reflection of guilt, of self-knowledge of what Westerners would do in the circumstances. I shall therefore turn to consideration of this psycho-historical dimension.

Colonial Psycho-history

Typical of the guilt aspect is the frequently reiterated image of the "bloodthirsty" African "savage" or Arab "fanatic" or Asian "native". Yet no serious student of history would deny that Western expansionists and imperialists, revered in the self-same texts which thus slander our fellowmen, far outdid—and outdo—them in barbarity and callous indifference to human life (other than their own, of course). Whether we look at the record of the slave trade in Africa, to the crusades of later campaigns in the Middle East, or to such manifestations as the suppression of the Indian "Mutiny",¹⁹ the record is clear. The Muslims conducted their resistance to the European crusaders with a markedly greater degree of humanity and restraint, respecting the rights of prisoners where often their own captured were summarily despatched by their Christian captors. The European conquest of Latin America is a horrifying showcase of man's inhumanity to man, with the extermination or decimation of the peoples of North America, the Pacific Islands and Australasia as confirmation that this was no aberration.²⁰

Western conduct in China simply underlines the lesson and the message: as Jack Beeching has reminded us,²¹ European campaigns in China were conducted with a ruthlessness and utter disregard for the Chinese which at times impelled expressions of shame on the part of some of the leaders of these "punitive" and exemplary expeditions. Moreover, opium smuggling, drugs again linking Western imperialism and Asia, was not the only staple of trade: there was the parallel "pig trade" in Chinese "coolies" required to perform what amounted to slave ("indentured") labour in plantations all the way across the Pacific as far as the United

States and the Caribbean. “Merchandise” who became “defective” en route (kidnapped Chinese in the holds of the pig trade ships who, not surprisingly in view of conditions, fell ill) were simply taken out, shot, and thrown overboard.

Politics of Hysteria

We must be careful in making this kind of point not to place a racist interpretation upon it, tempting though this may be. Among others, Stillman and Pfaff have attempted a sociological-historical explanation which is persuasive, and which we should consider now.²² Basically, they argue that Western development of concepts and mental approaches founded upon the pursuit of “mastery of nature” and the application of reason to the solution of human problems and needs not only pushed dramatically forward man’s potential for good, but also—and unavoidably, in harness—enhanced his capacity for the infliction of evil. The very idea of “mastery” is itself pregnant with the promise of moral degeneration; when combined with an exponential increase in the physical capacity to enforce it, it becomes rabidly dangerous. The evidence is to be found in the religious and ideological wars, as well as the imperialist ones, which have torn asunder whole nations and continents. Where else in human history can we find equivalents of the horrors of the First World War,²³ the Nazi extermination camps²⁴ the saturation-bombing of German and Japanese cities like Dresden and Tokyo by the Allies during the Second World War,²⁵ followed by Hiroshima and Nagasaki?²⁶ Here we are confronted with an appalling carnage of which Stillman and Pfaff comment:

The crimes are ours, arising from our culture, our West, the same society which today is essentially unchanged from what it was those few years ago when it originated these convulsions, these self-mutilation ... There is a tradition of excess—of violence for transcendental and essentially unattainable goals— that is as much part of the West as is our tradition of regard for individual destiny and worth.²⁷

The pursuit of ends by a “logical” pushing of the means to the extremes contrasts strongly with traditional Asian concepts of warfare and conflict, whereby ways out are left open to the outnumbered and defeated, so that some face may be saved for them while further casualties are spared on both sides.²⁸

Finally, however, we must move from the Stillman and Pfaff liberalism, instructive though it is, to the more solid ground of Marxism. It is woefully inadequate to analyze the phenomena in socio-cultural terms without taking account of class aspects. Decisions have, in the era of imperialism, been taken by one class while it has been another which has had to pay in blood and cash, intensified labour and personal sacrifices of all kinds. The First and Second World Wars were imperialist wars, as were those in Korea and Vietnam.²⁹ As Kolko notes of the Second World War, the outcome of the war was also a decisive worldwide rupture between leaders and led, one which accelerated the transformation of

world politics in ever-growing areas from conflicts between states to conflicts between strata and classes aligned with states . . . Asia was aflame with revolution which transformed World War II in the Far East almost immediately . . . into a civil war releasing a vast liberation movement that would eventually eclipse European affairs and define the larger destiny of world politics for the next generation.^{9 0}

It is in this kind of context that we must see the significance of the outcome of the Indochina war and the accompanying bleats of "bloodbaths" from the vanquished. For who can doubt that the events of April 1975 signal a historically significant watershed, and that the bell tolls ever more clearly for that class which has for so long unleashed such stupefying slaughter in defence of its economic interests? Unable to envisage any alternative to brute and naked force they impute to the victors the actions which they themselves would have had no hesitation in taking were circumstances reversed, a fact only too well and bloodily testified to by that tract of history littered with corpses which they dominated. Their dominance successfully challenged, they bluster and accuse. But the main trend in the world today is revolution and nothing at all that they can do can now reverse this inexorable and accelerating trend. As the revolution proceeds, so too does mankind proceed slowly but steadily towards a world where "bloodbaths" themselves will be, like the class which has launched so many, a horrible nightmare of the past.

- ¹ See the edited record of testimony to the Bertrand Russell War Crimes Tribunal Hearings published by Penguin Books, London, *Against the Crime of Silence*, 1971.
- ² There are abundant editions available of the work of Chairman Mao, Premier Kim Il Sung, General Giap, and other outstanding leaders of Asian revolutions, and I would like to draw attention to an excellent exposition by Phoumi Vongvichit, a prominent leader of the Laotian people: *Laos and the Victorious Struggle of the Lao People against U S Neo-Colonialism*, Neo Lao Haksat Publications.
- ³ Nym Wales and Kim San, *Song of Ariran*, Ramparts Press, San Francisco 1973; this extraordinary book is required reading for those seriously interested in the subject.
- ⁴ J Belden, *China Shakes the World*, Monthly Review Press, New York 1970; Eqbal Ahmed, "Revolutionary Warfare", M Gettleman (Ed.), *Vietnam*, London 1966.
- ⁵ D Pike, *Viet Cong*, The M I T Press, Cambridge, Mass., 1966.
- ⁶ Harvard University Press, Cambridge, Mass., 1971,
- ⁷ Nym Wales and Kim San, *op. cit.*, p 171.
- ⁸ *Ibid.*, p 187.
- ⁹ For a piquant interview of Ho Chi-minh by Ernst Utrecht see document section, *Journal of Contemporary Asia*, Vol 3, No 2, 1973; for a refutation of the wild Western estimate of the numbers killed in the North Vietnamese land reform see D Gareth Porter, "The Myth of the Bloodbath: North Vietnam's Land Reform Reconsidered", *Bulletin of Concerned Asian Scholars*, Vol 5, No 2, 1973.
- ¹⁰ See the recent book by L E Eastman, *The Abortive Revolution*, Harvard University Press, Cambridge, Mass., 1974, on KMT fascism. Some of the best accounts of the corruption and greed of the Chiang Kai-shek clique is to be found in the writings of Americans who represented their country in China during the period, of which I shall refer only to a handful: J S Service, *Lost Chance in China*, Random House, New York 1974; J T Davies, *Dragon by the Tail*, Robson Books, London 1974; (on Stilwell) Barbara W Tuchman: *Sand Against the Wind*, Macmillan, London 1970; K E Shewmaker,

- Americans and Chinese Communists*, Cornell University Press, Ithaca 1971; J F Melby, *The Mandate of Heaven*, London 1968. Han Suyin's three-volume autobiography-history (*The Crippled Tree*, *A Mortal Flower*, and *Birdless Summer*) is invaluable account of the degeneracy of the Kuomintang.
- ¹¹ Han Suyin, *The Morning Deluge*, Jonathan Cape, London 1972, p 217.
- ¹² I have made two attempts to survey and summarize some of the relevant literature and considerations in *The Chainless Mind*, Hamish Hamilton, London 1968, pp 16-20 and 97-223; and "Subversion or Social Revolution in South East Asia?" in M Leifer (Ed.) *Nationalism, Revolution and Evolution in South-East Asia*, University of Hull, 1970.
- ¹³ The bandits were most commonly CIA-trained assassination squads who went round killing, raping and committing other atrocities disguised as "Vietcong guerrillas" (See, for example, report in *Daily Telegraph*, 21 October 1965).
- ¹⁴ The excerpts quoted are drawn from pp 250 and 251 of his book, cited in footnote 5 above.
- ¹⁵ *Counter-revolutionary Violence: Bloodbaths in Fact and Propaganda*, Warner-Moduler Publications, Inc., Module 57, 1973, pp 1-46.
- ¹⁶ D Gareth Porter *op. cit.*
- ¹⁷ Pelican, London 1966; J Myrdal's *Report from a Chinese Village*, Penguin Books, London 1953, has interviews with those who participated in the liberation period.
- ¹⁸ "Rebuilding Cambodia: A Daring Gamble", *New York Times*, 16 May 1975.
- ¹⁹ For those unfamiliar with the abominable atrocities committed by the British in putting down the "Mutiny" (First National War of Independence) see the pretty re-trained account by M Edwardes: *Red Year*, Hamish Hamilton, London 1973; an interesting commentary on European attitudes in the imperial age is that by V G Kiernan, *The Lords of Human Kind*, Weidenfeld & Nicolson, London 1969. H Golwitzer, *Europe in the Age of Imperialism*, Thames & Hudson, London 1970, discusses the necessity of inculcating racist attitudes in the peoples of the Western imperialist countries in order to be able to effect overseas conquest and the subjugation of "inferior" societies without the normal scruples about methods.
- ²⁰ The literature in this area is depressingly vast, but it would be remiss not to draw attention to two recent and readily available works which arouse the profoundest feelings of abhorrence at the events they record: V D Bonilla, *Servants of God or Masters of Men?* Penguin Books, London 1972; and Dee Brown, *Bury My Heart at Wounded Knee*, Pan Books, London 1972.
- ²¹ *The Chinese Opium Wars*, Hutchinson, London 1975.
- ²² E Stillman and W Pfaff, *The Politics of Hysteria*, Gollancz, London 1964.
- ²³ Few conflicts have been better served by sensitive, literate, and talented observers; it would be invidious to single out contributions to the record, but works such as Siegfried Sassoon's *Memoirs of an Infantry Officer*, Robert Graves' *Coodbye to All That*, Edmund Blunden's *Undertones of War*, Frederic Manning's *Her Privates We*, Charles Carrington's *Soldier from the Wars Returning*, and the 1914-18 war novels of Ford Madox Ford (*Some Do not*, *No More Parades*, *A Man Could Stand Up*, and *Last Post*) may serve as an introduction; nor should we overlook the classic *All Quiet on the Western Front* by Erich Remarque, later made into a memorable film.
- ²⁴ In addition to the liquidation of nearly six million Jews, the Nazis subjected the hundreds of millions of people in the territory they occupied — and more particularly in Eastern Europe and in Russia to the extremes of fascist terror and bestiality.
- ²⁵ See D Irving, *The Destruction of Dresden*; according to his estimate 135,000 civilians were killed in the course of one night as a result of decisions taken with chilling deliberation by Britain's then civilian and military leaders. The first raid on Tokyo on 9 March 1945 incinerated 125,000 Japanese civilians, again by deliberate policy. Gabriel Kolko accurately captures the moral atmosphere of the then leaders of the class which today brays hypocritically about "bloodbaths": "The basic moral decision that the Americans had to make during the war was whether or not they would violate inter-

national law by indiscriminately attacking and destroying civilians, and they resolved their dilemma within the context of conventional weapons. Neither fanfare nor hesitation accompanied their choice, and in fact the atomic bomb used against Hiroshima was less lethal than massive fire bombing. The war had so brutalized American leaders that burning vast numbers of civilians no longer posed a real predicament by the spring of 1945. Given the anticipated power of the atomic bomb, which was far less than that of fire bombing, no one expected small quantities of it to end the war. Only its technique was novel, nothing more. By June 1945 the mass destruction of civilians via strategic bombing did impress Stimson as something of a moral problem, but the thought no sooner arose than he forgot it, and in no appreciable manner did it shape American use of conventional or atomic bombs. "I did not want to have the United States get the reputation of outdoing Hitler in atrocities", he noted telling the President on June 6. There was another difficulty posed by mass conventional bombing, that was its very success, a success that made the two modes of human destruction qualitatively identical in fact and in the minds of the American military. "I was a little fearful," Stimson told Truman, "that before we could get ready the Air Force might have Japan so thoroughly bombed out that the new weapon would not have a fair background to show its strength." To this the President "laughed (sic) and said he understood." (G Kolko, *The Politics of War*, pp 539-540.)

- ²⁶ For discussions of the reasons behind the American decision to drop the two atomic bombs which took 140,000 lives instantly, wounded countless others in a peculiarly horrifying way, drove thousands to permanent madness, and takes a toll to this day, see G Kolko, *op. cit.*, pp 539-43, 561, 567 and 595-597; and J Toland, *The Rising Sun*, Cassell & Co., London 1970, pp 761 *et seqq*; D Bergamini, *Japan's Imperial Conspiracy*, William Morrow, New York 1970, discusses the impact of the Hiroshima bomb on Emperor Hirohito's timing of a surrender he had already planned.
- ²⁷ Stillman and Pfaff: *op. cit.*, pp 8, 13.
- ²⁸ This was one factor entering into the American decision to escalate from "special war" in which their personnel acted merely as advisers to ARVN units, to direct intervention; as Halberstam, among others, reports (*The Making of a Quagmire*, Bodley Head, London 1965, pp 181-182 *et passim*) it drove US military advisers frantic with exasperation when ARVN units would "surround" the enemy on only three sides, so to speak, thus leaving a loophole for enemy withdrawal (something logical, of course on two scores: one, it saved lives; and two, it kept open the prospect that with tables turned, the compliment might be returned. It lies, too, behind the manner in which Saigon was finally liberated—the "beautiful vase" was preserved and the "rats" inside driven out, without sledgehammer being taken to both, which would have been the American way (destroying a city to "save" it).
- ²⁹ The First World War cost some 30 million lives; the second an estimated 50 million; and the Korean war an estimated 2 million (5 million casualties), of which four-fifths came *after* the US had resubjugated South Korea (resulted directly or indirectly from US invasion of the North). As indicated earlier in the text, estimates of the carnage in Indochina are as yet incomplete. But of course these are but spectacular incidents in a history of imperialism continuously characterized by bloodshed, brutality and the impoverishment, degradation and starvation of people. Contemplate for a moment compiling a catalogue in which the itemized entries run all the way through from the earliest violent encounters between the pioneers of an expanding West and the peoples of Asia, Africa, and Latin America to the present—the Portuguese and Spaniards in South America, the British in India and throughout their Empire, the Americans against the indigenous peoples of the subcontinent and against the Filipinos, and so on endlessly until the technological horror of the Vietnam war.
- ³⁰ G Kolko, *op. cit.*, pp 594, 595.