

RIOT CONTROL DOCTRINE

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IN RECENT years, the frequency of civil disturbances in which military forces have been committed has been on the increase. The surge of civil rights activity within the United States has brought about several instances when US Army personnel have been called upon to take action to protect life and property.



Overseas, since 1958, unruly crowds have not only demonstrated against both the President and the Vice President of the United States, they have also played major roles in effecting



several changes of government. In many of those countries, indigenous forces—trained and equipped according to US doctrine—have been employed to quell the disturbances.

The rise in riot control activity brings to the fore the question as to whether or not the current US Army riot control doctrine is adequate in today's turbulent world. Is there a better system that we might employ? Are there changes we should make to ensure that our doctrine will be more effective?

Before the turn of the century, US military authors characterized riots

as the "sporadic issue of local disturbances." Riots were spontaneous and practically leaderless. They were not the offspring of sobering thought or calculating mind, but were the sudden outbursts of passion. The leaders of these mobs were characterized as the most angry and the least discreet members of the mob.

During the latter part of the 19th century, though, a change in the nature of the mob took place, related directly to the tremendous influx of immigrants into the United States. A military author of this period observed that professional agitators were part and parcel of this influx. These professional agitators were generally men who had been educated in the military profession, but had soiled its code in one way or another and had been dismissed from the service of their countries. Having been turned out, their interests were taken up by the masses of people who were trying

to find a new way of life in a new society.

Doctrinal Changes

The appearance of these professional agitators brought about two noticeable changes in US Army doctrine for dealing with mobs:

- Troops were enjoined to refrain from any physical contact with the rioters. Previously, the mere appearance of trained troops and a few well-placed musket butts or bayonet pricks had been force enough. The professional agitator changed this, because he added the tools of professional anarchy—weapons and explosives. Thus, mixing with the mob caused the troops to lose the power advantage their musket offered. One military author of the day observed that the rioter had changed "from the hurler of brickbats to the thrower of dynamite bombs." To be effective against this opposition, troops had to meet the anarchist with his own weapon—firepower.

- Greater use of firepower led to a second change in doctrine. Less and less reliance was placed on local militia units to quell disturbances and more and more was placed on the use of Federal troops. The reason was simple—local militia were not as pre-

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pared psychologically to fire on neighbors and friends.

By 1900, then, US Army riot control doctrine envisioned the use of Federal troops and a reliance on unit firepower to quell civil disturbances. The change from more peaceful and local means had been caused by a change in the characteristics of the mob—more professional leadership and an increased ability to affect life and property through the use of explosives and weapons.

Next Step

World War I ushered in the next evolutionary step. Although there were no major changes in the nature of riots in this country after 1900, the frequency of disturbances did take a leap forward. The use of military force increased commensurately.

In seeking ways to increase the effectiveness of the riot control force, efforts were made to incorporate combat developments which came out of World War I. Two of those developments, in particular, were noted—the machinegun and chemical agents.

In effect, the machinegun did nothing more than to increase the existing base of fire available to the commander, and this development was viewed accordingly. With chemical agents, however, a new dimension was added. Doctrinal sources of the period reflect that gas was the newest, most humane, and most effective weapon available for quelling domestic disturbances. And these same sources went so far as to say that this new weapon system should be relied upon before resorting to the more deadly rifle or machinegun fire.

Certain major changes in riot control doctrine resulted from the incorporation of the new weapon systems. With the use of chemicals, there came

the concept of priority of force--use gas first; if that doesn't work, then use firepower. Prior to this, the failure to respond to an order to disperse was met with fire. Now, the troop commander had some discretion in his choice of means.

The introduction of these new weapons also helped to foster a greater reliance on variable troop formations in confronting rioters. A 1934 article on this subject noted that:

... troop formations should be such that force can be applied in ever-increasing amounts, and that only that amount of force should be used which is absolutely necessary to quell the disturbance and disperse the mob.

Priority of Force

Current doctrine is based on the fundamental principle that only that amount of force should be employed which is necessary to accomplish the given mission. In the implementation of this principle, the concept of priority of force has been expanded until it now includes six elements:

- A show of force.
- The use of troops in varying riot control formations to drive a mob and to split it into small manageable groups.
- Employment of high-pressure water to disperse the mob.
- Employment of riot control agents to disperse the mob.
- Fire by selected marksmen to render the mob's leadership ineffective.
- The use of full unit firepower when all else has failed.

The above priority is normally followed. In a rapidly developing or extremely violent situation, however, one or more of the elements of force may have to be bypassed. The commander at the scene has the authority

to determine such action if, in his judgment, it is necessary to the accomplishment of his mission.

How does this doctrine fit the contemporary world? In general, there are two types of situations into which US forces may be introduced or US doctrine employed--civil unrest within the continental United States and disturbances with political overtones in countries allied with the United States.

Civil Rights

In the first circumstance, mob motivation generates from deep-seated moral convictions which have been brought to the surface in response to apparent violations of certain rights. Although political issues may be associated with these situations, the fundamental issue is not one of overthrow of government. The principal type situation which fits this mold is the civil rights disturbance.

In contrast is the politically motivated display of outright hostility to government which has been generated so many times by subversive elements in other nations. The issue at hand is stability of government. From the point of view of the indigenous military force committed to quell the disturbances, it can be said without too much exaggeration that they are fighting for their very existence.

The role of the Communist Party in many of these events has been clearly established--the program of the 1928 Comintern World Congress called for organization of mass action utilizing strikes and demonstrations and, finally, the general strike coupled with armed insurrection.

In the case of domestic disturbances, there appears to be no need to change our current riot control doctrine. If the violence of a domestic

riot should become so great as to override the less severe elements of force, the commander has at his disposal the selective use of firepower upon which he can rely, and he can tailor his reaction to the situation at hand. This type of flexible response is perfectly suited to the requirements of a military force in reacting to domestic civil disturbances.

The development of the new riot control agent CS lends further credence to this policy. The incisive effectiveness of this agent, coupled with its rate of action, has added a new dimension to the effective use of riot control agents in quelling civil disturbances. In effect, an increased element of force has been incorporated in the arsenal without echeloning upward the use of firepower.

Current doctrine, then, appears adequate to deal with domestic disturbances. The development of a new weapon system fits easily into the existing doctrine, while at the same time it gives the current doctrine increased effectiveness.

The same generally holds true in foreign countries where considerable US effort is expended in training indigenous forces in riot control. Certainly, the mob leadership fits the professional mold—highly motivated, well trained, politically controlled. Even if not politically controlled in the initial instance, the domestic disturbances are fertile fields for agitation and subversion by Communist-inspired groups.

It is this particular characteristic of civil disturbances in foreign countries which suggests that military reaction must be swift and immediately effective. The 1960 Tokyo riots provide a vivid example. For months the cry of the agitated citizenry was

“down with the Mutual Defense Treaty.” After the mobs had been whipped into a bloody assault on the Diet, the treaty had dropped to third place on the poll, and the trained leftist agitators had shifted mob emphasis to “down with Kishi” and “dissolve the Diet.” Military intervention, therefore, must prevent the trained agitator from turning the mob toward his own political goals.

The US doctrine of priority of force is applicable under these conditions. Certainly, each occurrence will vary in some detail. In one, the mob may consist of armed men; in another, the mob may include a front rank of women and children, as in Buenos Aires in 1959.

The reaction to each of these circumstances must be different, and flexible response is inherent in our current doctrine. It is not necessary that the six elements be followed in any predetermined order. Rather, it is the job of the force commander to make an accurate estimate of the situation to determine the appropriate amount of force with which to initiate his actions. It is precisely this inherent flexibility which makes our current doctrine equally effective in all extremes of civil disturbances.

There is no need for changing our current riot control doctrine. Some will undoubtedly ask “Has the doctrine been effective each time it has been applied?” The answer is not so much a function of the doctrine itself as it is the state of training of the force employing the doctrine.

The conclusion I reach makes one assumption—that troops employed under this doctrine will be thoroughly trained in its application. The validity of this assumption can only be determined with the passage of time.