

CUSA

Center for Unconventional Security Affairs
“Meeting the Security Challenges of the 21st Century”

Occasional Paper Series



How Not To Fight Terrorism

Martin van Creveld
Hebrew University of Jerusalem

Center for Unconventional Security Affairs
University of California, Irvine
309 MPAA Building
Irvine, CA 92697-7075
<http://www.cusa.uci.edu/>

CUSA Occasional Paper #1
Published September 2003
Copyright ©2003 by the author

How Not To Fight Terrorism¹

Martin van Creveld

CUSA's occasional paper series presents the often controversial views of the world's leading experts on the challenges of the new security landscape of the 21st century. In this essay, the well-known military historian Martin van Creveld draws a parallel between the American experience in Vietnam and its current war on global terrorism. During Vietnam, and again today, U.S. military leaders relied on strategies that are impressive for their sheer firepower, but which are not likely to be effective. Although U.S. soldiers are confident, dedicated, and hardworking, Van Creveld suggests that they are directed by leaders who have violated a fundamental maxim of warfare: know thine enemy. Large-scale conventional campaigns stiffen the enemy's resolve, upset third parties who regard them as indiscriminate and bullying, and inflict remarkably little damage on low-tech, highly mobile, irregular forces. Van Creveld worries that the unprecedented power of the U.S. will be wasted unless its military leaders revise strategy based on a better understanding of the character of the enemies we face.

As Shakespeare once wrote, they have their exits and their entries. Between about 1975 and 1990, following the U.S. defeat in Vietnam, military history was extremely popular. After 1991, largely as a result of what many people considered the “stellar” performance of the US Armed Forces against Saddam Hussein, it went out of fashion; after all, if we were able to do that well there was not much point in reading about the mistakes of our predecessors. In this paper, I wish to bring military history back by focusing on the war on terrorism as it was experienced by one man, Moshe Dayan. The time was July 1966, and the place—Vietnam.

As of 2003, Dayan is remembered—if he is remembered at all—principally as the symbol of Israeli military power on the one hand and as one of the architects of the Israeli-Egyptian Peace Agreement on the other. In 1966 he was fifty-one years old. Having resigned his position as chief of staff in January 1958, he spent two years studying at the Hebrew University in Jerusalem. Next he entered politics, was elected to Parliament, and spent five years (1959-1964) as minister of agriculture. In this position he served first under his old mentor, David Ben Gurion, and then under Levi Eshkol. In November 1964 he resigned and found himself a member of the opposition.

In 1965 he published his first book, *Sinai Diary*, which proved that he could write as well as fight. He was, however, developing an attitude of having seen it all, done it all; a feeling that his twin hobbies, archaeology and an endless string of mistresses, could only relieve up to a point. Hence, when the most important Israeli newspaper of the time, *Maariv*, proposed that he go to Vietnam as a war correspondent he jumped on the idea. The articles he wrote were published in *Maariv* as well as the British and French press. In 1977, by which time he was serving as foreign minister under Menahem Begin and engaged in peace-talks with Egypt, the Hebrew-language articles were collected in book form and published. In the preface he explains they were too long to be included in the memoirs he had published in the previous year; perhaps he wanted to warn his countrymen of the consequences that might ultimately follow if they did not rid themselves of what he called

¹ This paper was originally presented at Conference on "Global Change and Terrorism: New World, New Threats," held at the University of California, Irvine on April 5, 2002. CUSA would like to thank Bryan McDonald for his assistance in editing this paper.

“the blemish of conquest.”¹ If so, unfortunately he did not succeed. The present paper is based on the book in question.

Dayan knew nothing about Vietnam, and prepared himself thoroughly. His first visit was to France where he had many acquaintances left from the time of the Israeli-French alliance of the mid-nineteen fifties; some of these people had served in, and helped lose, the First Indo-China War. His very first contact was a retired Air Force General by the name of Loission. In Loission’s view American public opinion was to blame for not putting its full support behind the war—to which should be added, in parentheses, that at the beginning of the war that support had been overwhelming. He thought the war could easily be won if only American public opinion agreed to bomb North Vietnam back into the Stone Age. As it was, a combination of Viet Cong terrorism and propaganda prevented the world, as well as the South Vietnamese themselves, from seeing how righteous the American cause was; he even believed that, had free elections been held, the Vietnamese might have wanted the French back. He ended the conversation by asking for his ideas to be kept secret. Dayan, who did not think those ideas constituted “a ray of light to an embarrassed world,”² readily agreed.

His other French contact, a General Niceault, was more enlightening. For his role in the 1961 attempt to overthrow the Fifth Republic, Niceault had just spent five years in jail; as so often happens, jail proved an opportunity to think and to learn. Unlike Loission he had devoted a lot of thought to the matter and his mind was fresh and agile. To Dayan he explained that the Americans were using the wrong forces against the wrong targets. Their intelligence simply was not good enough, and most of their bombs hit nothing but empty stretches of jungle. He suggested solving the problem by using small groups of five to seven men; they would shadow the Viet Cong and act as guides, calling in air power or artillery when contact was formed. The American attempts to prevent the North Vietnamese from infiltrating into South Vietnam by way of the demilitarized zone were not working either, given that each time a path was blocked another one could be found to bypass it. Perhaps the War could be won by sending in a million-man army and killing all male Vietnamese, but the days in which such things were possible had gone. He ended by telling Dayan that there was no point in going to Vietnam, since he would see nothing anyhow. Typically of him, Dayan answered that, if he would be unable to see the enemy or the war, at any rate he would see that he could not see; and that, too, would be enlightening.³

From France he went to Britain in order to see Field Marshal Bernard Montgomery of Alamein. Montgomery at that time was in the midst of writing his *History of Warfare*; Dayan, who had met him before, noted how relaxed and alert the old man looked. They had a common acquaintance in the person of Wingate. Captain Orde Wingate was a British officer who had served in the Holy Land in 1937-39. He enlisted the young Dayan to act as a guide to his unit, acted as his mentor, launched him on his military career, and taught him how to fight the Palestinian terrorists who were then roaming the lower Galilee; Dayan on his part considered Wingate “a genius”. Montgomery, who at one point had been Wingate’s direct commander, took an entirely different view. To him, Wingate was merely an opinionated subaltern who was full of his own importance and who thought he had the solution to every problem. Montgomery’s last comment to Dayan was that the best thing Wingate ever did was to get himself killed in an aircraft-crash. The visitor from Israel was too polite to disagree.

The old man's ideas concerning Vietnam were very clear-cut. The Americans' most important problem in running the war was that they did not have a clear objective. He himself had tried to get an answer on that subject from no less a person than former vice president Richard Nixon; only to be treated to a twenty-minute lecture at the end of which he remained as much in the dark as he had been at the beginning. To Montgomery, an exceptionally systematic commander who always planned his moves very carefully, that was the essence of the problem. Not having a clear overall policy, the Americans were permitting the field commanders to call the shots. Calling the shots, they did what they knew best and bombed and shelled without giving a thought to what, if anything, they were achieving. At the end of their conversation Montgomery told Dayan to tell the Americans, in his name, that they were "insane."⁴ Once again Dayan did not disagree, though perhaps this time for different reasons.

From Britain he flew to the United States. Eighteen years had passed since his first visit to that country. Like many visitors, the dominant impression he received was that of towering power the like of which history had never seen; here was a society racing into the twenty-first century with the rest of the world only barely keeping pace. His first meeting was at the Pentagon where no fewer than three colonels had been appointed to brief the visitor from Israel. They pretended to be humble and called him "the glorious General Dayan"; at the same time, as he noted, they appeared ready to provide him not only with the answers but also with the questions he was supposed to ask. He left with the feeling that they, and those whom they represented, did not really have a handle on the War. In particular, he wondered why, given the four to one superiority that the Americans and their South Vietnamese Allies enjoyed over the Viet Cong, General Westmoreland would not give the latter a chance to consolidate and attack so that he himself could smash them to pieces. The answer he received, namely that Westmoreland thought doing so was too risky, he considered unconvincing.

During the next few days his feeling that the Americans did not really know where they were going was reinforced. Everywhere he went he was received courteously enough. Everywhere he went he encountered people who were committed and extremely hard working. Intensely patriotic, they seemed proud of what they were doing and would not admit any errors. At one point he asked whether they had changed their methods since they first went to Vietnam. He was told that they did not have to do so since everything worked much better than expected; whereupon he noted that the US Military never made any mistakes but kept that comment to himself. He was subjected to a flood of statistics whose purport was to prove that the situation was well under control and that large parts of the territory of South Vietnam, as well as its population, were now safe against terrorist attack. As he noted, however, even a few elementary questions revealed that things were not simple. Later he was to discover how right he had been in this; in the whole of South Vietnam there was not a single road that was really safe.⁵ Nor was there anything to prevent the Viet Cong from returning even to those places that had been most thoroughly "cleansed" and "pacified".

The three most important figures he met were the deputy head of the National Security Council, Walt Rostow, General Maxwell Taylor who was then acting as special adviser to President Johnson, and Secretary of Defense Robert McNamara. Rostow, a

Harvard-based economist, had published a famous book in which he explained how the developing world would catch up with the developed one in four clear, well-defined, stages.⁶ Now he told Dayan that the desire for economic growth would drive the peoples of Asia closer to the U.S. Dayan, who had observed how eager Israel's Arab neighbors had been to get rid of their Western overlords even at heavy economic cost, doubted it; had he been alive today, no doubt he would have said the same thing about the Palestinian Uprising. Rostow also believed, or pretended to believe, that the forthcoming elections in South Vietnam would be free and democratic and thus strengthen the Government in waging the war. Still he was the first American to whom Dayan spoke who was prepared to admit that the US objective was not just to help South Vietnam but to set up a permanent military political presence in South East Asia so as to counterbalance the growing power of China. To that extent, the conversation with him was the most useful of those he had had so far.

Taylor, whom he met next, was the first American to present him with a comprehensive plan for winning the war. It consisted of four elements, namely: a. improving US Army operations on the ground; b. making full use of the Air Force to bomb the North; c. strengthening the economy of South Vietnam; and d. reaching an "honorable" peace with Ho Chi Minh. Asked whether he thought the US was making progress in those directions, however, he could not produce convincing indications that this was indeed the case. As the Americans themselves admitted, in spite of the heavy casualties being inflicted on the enemy—which Taylor estimated at 1,000 a week—the number of his troops in South Vietnam kept growing. Nor could Taylor point to any clear progress as a result of the air campaign. He did, however, believe that the bombing formed "a heavy burden" on the North; sooner or later, the enemy would break.

Dayan's last important contact, Robert McNamara, had a reputation for being hard to approach. This did not turn out to be true and Dayan was pleasantly surprised; at a small dinner party with Margot (McNamara's wife), Walt Rostow and several journalists, the Secretary of Defense did what he could to answer all the questions that were directed at him. He admitted that many of the figures being floated by the Pentagon—particularly those pertaining to the percentage of the country and population "secured"—were meaningless at best and bogus at worst. No more than anybody else could he explain to Dayan how the Americans intended to end the war. What set him apart was the fact that he was prepared to admit it, albeit only in a half-hearted way; as we now know, he already had his own doubts which led to his resignation in the next year. He consoled himself by saying that the War was not hurting the U.S. economy. In other words, it could go on and on until one side or the other gave way.

Flying to Vietnam by way of Honolulu and Tokyo, Dayan summed up his impressions so far.⁷ Almost all of the Americans he had met were pleasant enough. None, however, could tell him how they were going to win the War. Most could not even give him a convincing reason why the US had to be in Vietnam in the first place; at last one had said that, had President Johnson been presented with a way to get out, he would have jumped on it and withdrawn his troops.⁸ What really infuriated them was any attempt to question their motives. As far as they were concerned their cause was noble and just. The fact that the Communist States did what they could to support the Viet Cong and North Vietnam was bad but understandable. They were, however, puzzled by the attitude of their European allies. Those Europeans supposedly shared America's liberal-democratic values. Still many of

them were strongly critical. At a loss to explain the problem, the Americans attributed it to cowardice, envy, and the resentment that arose from Europe's own recent failure in waging "Imperialist" war. Dayan thought that, in ignoring the Europeans, the Americans were making a big mistake.

To make things stranger still, the determination of American decision-makers to ignore world public opinion was counterbalanced by their extreme sensitivity to the views of their own electorate. At that moment, he noted, 75 percent of those polled were in favor of bombing North Vietnam. But permitting public opinion to decide on such issues was a strange way to run a war, and one he thought was likely to have grave consequences for the future.

He arrived in Vietnam on 25 July. His first stop was Saigon where there was paperwork to be done and where he spent two days being "processed". He was issued with an American uniform, rucksack, water bottles, and helmet; as he wrote, had it depended on the soldiers in charge they would also have given him a weapon and hand-grenades. Like most visitors, he was much impressed by the incomparable beauty of the Vietnamese women in their ao-dais. Between one thing and another he met a Vietnamese professor of nuclear physics to whom he had been referred by an Israeli friend. The professor told him--in strict confidence, since saying anything contrary to the official line was dangerous--that the Viet Cong were much stronger than the Americans knew or wanted to know. Later during his visit he also had occasion to meet with the South Vietnamese Deputy Prime Minister and minister of defense, General Nguyen Van Thieu, as well the chief of the general staff of the Army of the Republic of Vietnam. Both, he thought, were highly intelligent men. Both, interestingly enough, reserved their greatest admiration not for some American commander but for the North Vietnamese General Giap. Giap had been the hero of the struggle against the French. Now they fondly hoped he might force Hanoi to make peace.

On 27 July he joined a river patrol. The patrol consisted of three fast boats, each one manned by four "nice kids" and commanded by an officer. They were armed with heavy machine guns and light automatic cannon; as he noted, it was the first time since the Civil War that the U.S. Navy had embarked on river operations. They raced along at 25 knots an hour, using visual navigation to find their way by day and infra red at night. From time to time they would stop to search one of the thousands of South Vietnamese boats that were carrying provisions from the delta to Saigon. The searches reminded him of the ones that the British used to conduct during the Mandate, which had been largely useless; the U.S. sailors checked papers, took a perfunctory look at the load of each boat, and proceeded on their mission. He did not think the boats they examined actually carried weapons, but had they wanted to do so it would have been easy enough. As to thoroughly checking all boats, it was clearly impossible.

On 28 July a helicopter took him aboard the largest aircraft carrier then cruising off the Vietnamese coast, USS Constellation. He was a professional military man and had often read and heard about such ships; yet what he now saw made a "breath-taking impression" on him. The vessel constituted five acres of sovereign American territory that could go anywhere without having to worry about troublesome allies. Isolated at sea, the crew did not constitute a security problem and the lack of anything else to do made them work all the harder at their jobs. The ship was protected "from the air, the sea, the ground, outer space,

and under water;” if Dayan was being ironic—after all, the enemy consisted of little men wearing straw hats—he did not say so.

The product of this floating factory was firepower. Every ninety minutes, amidst a numbing outburst of fire and noise, flights of combat aircraft took off to strike at targets in Vietnam. When it came to specifying the precise nature of those targets his hosts refused to answer his questions; one might think they were attacking Afghanistan in 2001-2. As always, Dayan was impressed by the Americans’ pride in themselves, their nation, and their mission. He ended the day by noting that they were “not fighting against infiltration to south [Vietnam], or against guerrillas, or against North Vietnamese leader Ho Chi Minh, but against the entire world. Their real aim was to show everybody—including Britain, France, and the USSR--their power and determination so as to pass this message: wherever Americans go, they are irresistible.”⁹

The next month—he stayed until 27 August--was spent visiting various units throughout South Vietnam. First he went to see the Marines, joining a company that was patrolling only about a mile south of the Demilitarized Zone in order to prevent infiltration from the North. The company commander was a first lieutenant by the name of Charles Krulak. For two nights and three days they humped up and down amidst the vegetation that covered the hills. They waded through streams and sometimes almost drowned in them; at one point Dayan himself lost his foothold and had to be pulled out. Yet throughout all that time the only target at which they opened fire was some kind of unidentified animal. Apparently it had been wounded, and the noise that it made kept an entire unit awake for an entire night. Thirty-five years later General (ret.) Krulak, ex-commandant of the Marine Corps, told me that, as they set up camp one evening, Dayan had asked them what they were doing there. He gave it as his opinion that the American strategy was wrong. They should be “where the people are”, not vainly trying to chase the Viet Cong in the mountains where they were not.¹⁰

A few days later his wish to see the war “where the people are” was granted. Near Da Nang, he visited another Marine unit that was engaged in pacification. The Marines were responsible for security—he noted their excellent discipline--whereas most of the actual work was done by civilians. Once again, he found the Americans on the spot committed and immensely proud of what they were doing to bring a ray of light into a troubled world. Once again, he left the district clear in his own mind that much remained to be done; so much so that it was doubtful whether the Americans were making any progress at all. Nor was he impressed with the attempts to help the South Vietnamese peasants improve their standard of living by introducing new methods, better livestock, and so on. Back in Paris Niceault had told him it would not work, given that that the Vietnamese had their own cultural traditions—as well as “immensely beautiful women”—and that “Californization” was the last thing they wanted.¹¹ This, moreover, was a field where he had some experience. With U.S. financial backing, during his term as minister of agriculture he had sent out Israeli experts to carry out agrarian reforms in various Asian and African countries. Some of those countries he had visited in person, only to find out how hard it was to make an established culture change its ways. Clearly doing so in the midst of a war, when every achievement was under constant threat from Viet Cong terrorists, was much harder still.

Another extremely interesting visit was the one he paid to 1st Air Cavalry Division. Organized only a few years previously, it was the most up-to-date fighting force in the entire world. Not to mention the incredible economic, industrial, and logistic power that made such a unit possible in the first place; and, having done so, supported it in battle thousands of miles away from the American homeland. Operating under conditions of absolute air superiority--in all South Vietnam, there was not a single enemy aircraft--the division was capable of doing as it pleased; requiring no more than four hours' warning to land an entire battalion at any location within its helicopters' range. As it turned out, though, often four hours were four hours too many. Arriving at the selected spot, the troops would find that the enemy had gone.

It must have been during his stay with 1st Cavalry that the following incident took place. As was his custom Dayan wanted to visit the front, which in the case of Vietnam meant going on patrol. His hosts reluctantly agreed, but fearing lest something might happen to the celebrity for whom they were responsible selected a route that was supposedly free of the Viet Cong. As often happened, their information proved wrong. They came under fire and were "pinned down", as the phrase went. Looking around from where he was lying, the American captain in charge discovered that Dayan had disappeared. In the end he located him; the middle-aged visitor from Israel was sitting comfortably on top of a grassy knoll. With great effort, the captain crawled to him and asked what he was doing. "What are you doing?" was the answer he got: "get your --- up here, and see what this battle is all about."¹²

The way he saw it, the problem was intelligence. "According to Norton's (commanding officer, 1st Air Cavalry) information, there was a Viet Cong division in this highland area. It was not concentrated in a single base but split into several battalions, each of about 350 men. It was Norton's plan to land a battalion... in the Vietcong divisional area and then, in accordance with the developments of the battle, to rush in additional 'reaction troops' to reinforce, seal off, and carry out flank attacks. All this was fine, except for one small item missing in the plan: the exact location of the Viet Cong battalions was not known. Air photos and air reconnaissance had failed to pick out their encampments, entrenched, bunkered and camouflaged with the jungle vegetation. The U.S. intelligence sources were largely technical--air photos and decoded radio intercepts, for Viet Cong units from battalion strength and up used transmitters. Only scanty information could be gleaned from POWs. Many of the latter spat in the Americans' face and swore to die rather than talk.

Contrary to what had been written about the enormous logistical requirements of the U.S. troops—from iced beer to go-go girls—he was impressed by the Spartan nature of the arrangements. The Americans were prepared to improvise at a moment's notice; throw a flak jacket into the helicopter, hop in, and off you go hunting VC. The entire Division was "a huge force, fast and efficient. It used its weapons—including artillery support and tactical and strategic air support—very effectively indeed"; in Dayan's view, it was as superior to other forces as the German tanks had been to their enemies at the beginning of World War II.¹³ "[Its] battle procedures operated like an assembly belt. First came the shelling of the landing zones by ground artillery. Then came aerial bombardment. And the landings themselves were covered by 'gunships,' the accompanying, close-support, heli-borne units firing their rockets and machine guns almost at our feet." It was an amazing operation, "but where was the war? It was like watching military maneuvers--with only one side." "Where were the Viet Cong? And where was the battle? The Viet Cong were there, a few hundred

yards away. And the battle came half an hour later when the company which had landed 300 yards to our south ran into an ambush after it had started moving off.”¹⁴ Within minutes the company was shot to pieces, suffering 25 dead and some 50 wounded including its commander. Calling in their firepower, 1st Cavalry gave pursuit. When they met resistance they would radio for the same heavy B-52s bombers which, as these words are being written, are among the aircraft deployed to pulverize the remaining opposition forces in Afghanistan; to what effect, was not clear.

To recount each and every detail of Dayan’s visit would be tedious. Everywhere he was met with the greatest courtesy and was given a fairly free hand to see and ask what he wanted. As he noted, American officers were committed, very hard working, and as frank as circumstances permitted; many of them enjoyed the war which, at this time, was still in its “forward” phase. General Westmoreland he found pleasant and informal. It was true he seemed to lack the “astute expression” that Dayan had discerned with a few other senior generals. Still there could be no question of American officers being incompetent oafs who delighted in setting alight Vietnamese huts and were fragged by their own men; that image only rose after the war and as a direct result of it.

One of their problems was the need to get their names mentioned by the media so as to advance their careers. This, Dayan thought, did not turn them into better persons or, what was more important, better commanders.¹⁵ He admired the American rank and file, particularly the Marines and the Green Berets. They were physically fit, well trained, and, in 1966, still did their job willingly. They were, to use his own Hebrew phrase, “golden guys;” they on their part found him easy to communicate with, charming, and possessed of a sneaky sense of humor. He was even more impressed by the tremendous military-industrial muscle that enabled 1,700 helicopters to be deployed in a single theater of war. It also enabled a single operation by a single South Korean infantry company to be supported by 21,000 artillery rounds. As he noted, this was more than had been expended by all Israeli forces in the wars of 1948 and 1956 combined.

Still, nothing could make up for the lack of accurate and timely tactical intelligence. Its absence was due partly to cultural obstacles, partly to the physical conditions of the country, and partly to the nature of the war itself; in Dayan’s own words, the information available to the Americans was limited to: “1. What they could photograph; 2. What they could intercept (SIGINT); and 3. What they could glean from low-ranking prisoners.”¹⁶ As a result, they were using sledgehammers to knock holes in empty air. So far they had not succeeded in inflicting unacceptable losses on the enemy who kept reinforcing. Even if they did succeed, it was hard to see how the South Vietnamese would be able to set up a viable government in the shadow of the gigantic machine that “protected” them; whether that machine would ever be withdrawn was anybody’s guess. As to what he was told of the war’s objectives, such as defending democracy and helping the South Vietnamese people, he considered it “childish” propaganda; if many of the Americans he met believed in them, clearly nobody else did. Over a year before the Tet Offensive proved that something was very, very wrong, he left Vietnam with the definite impression that things were not going at all well. In his own words, “the Americans are winning everything--except the war.”¹⁷ Perhaps this was one reason why, instead of flying home by way of the United States as both Taylor and McNamara had asked him to do, he chose the other route. When he wanted to he could be very tactful and rubbing salt into the Americans’ wounds was the last thing he

wanted to do. The trip did, however, provide a welcome opportunity to keep his military knowledge up to date.

Some people say that the U.S. won the war in Vietnam, to which I can only answer that I strongly disagree with them. Others say was Vietnam had little to do with terrorism, claiming that it was essentially a conventional war that was lost because the American civilian leadership failed to provide its Armed Forces with proper strategic direction.¹⁸ It is of course true that there are important differences; not every terrorist has a superpower to provide him with weapons or ends up by waging war with the aid of armored divisions. Still I think there are two reasons why the similarities are greater still.

First, as Dayan never stopped emphasizing, the most important problem the U.S. Forces were facing was intelligence, in other words the inability to distinguish the enemy from either the physical surroundings or the civilian population. Had intelligence been available then their enormous superiority in everything from fighter-bombers to artillery ammunition would have enabled them to win the war easily enough. In its absence, most of the mighty blows they delivered—including, besides the 21,000 rounds of artillery he himself saw being fired, no fewer than six million tons of bombs--hit empty air. Those blows that did hit their mark caused the enemy to disperse, thus making it even more difficult to gain intelligence about him. Worst of all, lack of intelligence meant that the Americans often hit noncombatants by mistake, thus driving the population into the arms of the Viet Cong. If only because there is nothing more conducive to hatred than death; and if only because people whose property has been destroyed by bombing or shelling are easily recruited by the other side.

The other and even more important reason why I think the story of Vietnam is relevant to the War on Terrorism is because the Americans found themselves in the unfortunate position where they were the strong beating down on the weak. In Dayan's own words, "any comparison between the two armies... was astonishing. On the one hand there was the American Army, complete with helicopters, an air force, armor, electronic communications, artillery, and mind-boggling riches; to say nothing of ammunition, fuel, spare parts, and equipment of all kinds. On the other there were the [North Vietnamese troops] who had been walking on foot for four months, carrying some artillery rounds on their backs and using a tin spoon to eat a little ground rice from a tin plate."¹⁹

That, of course, was precisely the problem. In private life, an adult person who keeps beating down on a five year old—even such a one as originally attacked him with a knife—will be perceived as committing a crime; therefore he will lose the support of bystanders and end up by being arrested, tried and convicted. In international life, an armed force that keeps beating down on a weaker opponent will be seen as committing a series of crimes; therefore it will end up by losing the support of its allies, its own people, and its own troops. Depending on the quality of the forces, the effectiveness of the propaganda machine, and nature of the political process, and so on things may happen quickly or take a long time to mature; however, the outcome is always the same. He (or she) who does not understand this does not understand anything about war or, indeed, human nature. Let those with ears to listen, listen!

In other words, he who fights against the weak—and terrorists are weak by definition—and loses, loses. He who fights against the weak and wins also loses. To kill an opponent who is much weaker than yourself is unnecessary and therefore cruel; to let that opponent kill you is unnecessary and therefore stupid, as is also evident from the commissions of inquiry that inevitably follow whenever such a thing happens. As experience—that of Vietnam as well as countless other cases—proves, no armed force however rich, however powerful, however advanced, and however well motivated its troops is immune to this dilemma. The end result is always disintegration and defeat. In the face of current operations in Afghanistan and Iraq I can only repeat: let those with ears to listen, listen!

About the Author: Martin van Creveld, an internationally acclaimed military historian, teaches history at the Hebrew University in Jerusalem. He is the author of *The Transformation of War*, *Technology and War*, *Command and War*, and *Supply and War*.

Endnotes

- ¹ Speech of 6.3.1981, in M. Dayan, *On the Peace Process and the Future of Israel* [Hebrew], N. Yanai, ed., Tel Aviv, Ministry of Defense, p. 254.
- ² M. Dayan, *Vietnam Diary* [Hebrew], Tel Aviv, Dvir, 1977, p. 8.
- ³ Dayan, *Vietnam Diary*, p. 9.
- ⁴ Dayan, *Vietnam Diary*, p. 18.
- ⁵ Dayan, *Vietnam Diary*, p. 98.
- ⁶ W. Rostow, *The Stages of Economic Growth*.
- ⁷ Dayan, *Vietnam Diary*, p. 45.
- ⁸ Dayan, *Vietnam Diary*, p. 43.
- ⁹ Dayan, *Vietnam Diary*, p. 59.
- ¹⁰ Gen. (ret.) C. Krulak, telephone interview, 5.11.2001.
- ¹¹ Dayan, *Vietnam Diary*, p. 9.
- ¹² See for this story R. Slater.
- ¹³ Dayan, *Vietnam Diary*, p. 83.
- ¹⁴ For these quotes see M. Dayan, *Story of My Life*, London, Weidenfeld & Nicolson, 1976, pp. 293-96.
- ¹⁵ Dayan, *Vietnam Diary*, p. 108.
- ¹⁶ Dayan, *Vietnam Diary*, p. 125.
- ¹⁷ Dayan, *Vietnam Diary*, p. 111.
- ¹⁸ See above all H. Summers, *On Strategy*, Novato, CA., Presidio, 1982.
- ¹⁹ Dayan, *Vietnam Diary*, p. 87.