

subversion in their state. Soviet policies such as “peaceful coexistence” resulted, but all the while, Soviet intelligence agents and Comintern Communist Party members still quietly went about their subversive work (Walt 1997).

While the Comintern strategy would spark revolutionary action in Hungary and Germany, both revolutions would ultimately collapse. In fact, the overarching strategy was so ineffective that the formation of other communist states wouldn’t occur until after WW II.

### **Mao Tse Tung and Protracted Popular War**

Political power comes out of the barrel of a gun.

Mao Tse Tung, 1938

Mao Tse Tung was born into a peasant family in the rural region of the Hunan province in 1893 (Chang and Halliday 2005, 4). Notwithstanding, Mao would receive a good education by the standards of the day. He had a voracious reading appetite that he maintained throughout his life and was self-schooled in the writings of the masters of war, to include Sun Tzu and Clausewitz, both of whom he quoted often.<sup>30</sup> He was also a student of military history, analyzing military operations in past wars for what made them successful and what did not. Mao wrote *On Guerrilla Warfare* (also known as *Yu Chi Chan*) in 1937, followed by *Problems of Strategy in Guerrilla War Against Japan* and *On Protracted War* in 1938, in which he articulated the strategy the Chinese should employ against the Japanese in the Second Sino-Japanese War. The three-stage strategy he developed would apply equally well to his war against the Kuomintang, fought later, and other communist revolutionary struggles with similar conditions around the world.

---

<sup>30</sup> For example, in *On Guerilla Warfare*, Mao quoted Sun Tzu, Clausewitz and Lenin.

Early on, before the war with Japan, Mao realized that the communist revolutionary strategy as laid out by Moscow would not work in China. The industrial workers weren't the oppressed class; rather, it was the 400 million peasants, many of who were landless and barely able to eke out an existence (Tse Tung, *On Guerilla Warfare* [1937] 2000). In his 1927 *Report on an Investigation of the Peasant Movement in Hunan*, Mao championed the peasant, rather than the worker, as the engine of communist revolution in China (Tse Tung, *Report on an Investigation of the Peasant Movement in Hunan* 1975):

All talk directed against the peasant movement must be speedily set right. All the wrong measures taken by the revolutionary authorities concerning the peasant movement must be speedily changed. Only thus can the future of the revolution be benefited. For the present upsurge of the peasant movement is a colossal event. In a very short time, in China's central, southern and northern provinces, several hundred million peasants will rise like a mighty storm, like a hurricane, a force so swift and violent that no power, however great, will be able to hold it back. They will smash all the trammels' that bind them and rush forward along the road to liberation. They will sweep all the imperialists, warlords, corrupt officials, local tyrants and evil gentry into their graves. Every revolutionary party and every revolutionary comrade will be put to the test, to be accepted or rejected as they decide. There are three alternatives. To march at their head and lead them? To trail behind them, gesticulating and criticizing? Or to stand in their way and oppose them? Every Chinese is free to choose, but events will force you to make the choice quickly.

While intentionally overstated for political reasons, Mao's faith in the peasantry would ultimately prove well-founded. Mao realized that this enormous, disenfranchised body was ripe for political exploitation. After some initial, sporadic successes and failures with guerrilla warfare, however, the Communist revolution in China was put on hold when the Japanese invaded in July 1937.

Mao's appraisal of China's war-making capacity against the Japanese was more circumspect. His overall assessment was as unflattering as it was accurate. While the

peasants would again play an important role in his strategy, he was well aware of the asymmetric disadvantage China faced in fighting the more advanced Japanese. He assessed China's prospects relative to their Japanese aggressor thusly (Tse Tung [1937] 2000, 68):

China is a country half colonial and half feudal; it is a country that is politically, militarily, and economically backward. This is an inescapable conclusion. It is a vast country with great resources and tremendous population, a country in which the terrain is complicated and the facilities for communication are poor. All these factors favor a protracted war; they all favor the application of mobile warfare and guerilla operations.

Opinions of Chinese leaders on how to fight the Japanese invaders were divided, with many opting for a regular war of army vs. army. Based on his strategic assessment of the situation, Mao, however, advocated a hybrid strategy that included guerilla warfare. In an effort to convince others to adopt this strategy, Mao wrote extensively and convincingly on the mechanics and merits of his strategy. Well versed in the teachings of previous masters of war, Mao began with the political objective, which he described as “the basic political principle of China's War of Resistance Against Japan, i.e., its political aim, is to drive out Japanese imperialism and build an independent, free and happy new China” (Tse Tung 1938a). In order to achieve this aim, he noted that there was but one basic, guiding principle, from which all others derived, that was paramount in the war against the Japanese: “to strive to the utmost to preserve one's own strength and destroy that of the enemy” (Tse Tung 1938a).

Six supplemental principles supported his basic principle: (1) the use of initiative, flexibility and planning in conducting offensives within the defensive, battles of quick decision within protracted war, and exterior-line operations within interior-line

operations; (2) co-ordination with regular warfare; (3) establishment of base areas; (4) the strategic defensive and the strategic offensive; (5) the development of guerrilla warfare into mobile warfare; and (6) correct relationship of command. (Tse Tung 1938a)

Mao not only explained his six principles, but did so in “Yin and Yang” terms that, arguably, even Sun Tzu would have appreciated. In describing “the relationship between the defensive and the offensive, between protractedness and quick decision, and between the interior and exterior lines”, Mao explained the virtues of his hybrid strategy (Tse Tung 1938a):

The enemy forces, though strong (in arms, in certain qualities of their men, and certain other factors), are numerically small, whereas our forces, though weak ... are numerically very large. Added to the fact that the enemy is an alien nation invading our country while we are resisting his invasion on our own soil, this determines the following strategy. It is possible and necessary to use tactical offensives within the strategic defensive, to fight campaigns and battles of quick decision within a strategically protracted war and to fight campaigns and battles on exterior lines within strategically interior lines. Such is the strategy to be adopted in the War of Resistance as a whole. It holds true both for regular and for guerrilla warfare. Guerrilla warfare is different only in degree and form. Offensives in guerrilla warfare generally take the form of surprise attacks. Although surprise attacks can and should be employed in regular warfare too, the degree of surprise is less. In guerrilla warfare, the need to bring operations to a quick decision is very great, and our exterior-line ring of encirclement of the enemy in campaigns and battles is very small. All these distinguish it from regular warfare.

Mao divided his overarching strategy of protracted war against the Japanese and Kuomintang into three overlapping stages, the strategic defensive, strategic stalemate (preparation for the counter-offensive) and the counter-offensive. These stages were specifically designed to counter the enemy stages of strategic offensive, consolidation and strategic retreat, respectively (Tse Tung 1938b).