



# MAO TSE-TUNG

STRATEGIC  
PROBLEMS IN THE  
ANTI-JAPANESE  
GUERRILLA WAR

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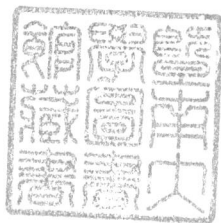
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## STRATEGIC PROBLEMS IN THE ANTI-JAPANESE GUERRILLA WAR



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毛 澤 東  
抗日游击战争的战略问题

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In the early days of the Anti-Japanese War, many people inside and outside the Party belittled the strategic role of guerrilla warfare and pinned their hopes on regular warfare, particularly on the operations of the Kuomintang troops. Comrade Mao Tse-tung refuted their view and wrote the following article in May 1938 to point out the correct course for the development of guerrilla warfare. As a result, the Eighth Route Army and the New Fourth Army, growing from a total strength of a little more than 40,000 men in 1937 to one million strong at the time of Japan's surrender in 1945, established many revolutionary base areas and played an important role in the Anti-Japanese War. It was because of this that Chiang Kai-shek was afraid to capitulate to Japan or launch a nation-wide civil war. When in 1946 he did launch the nation-wide civil war, the People's Liberation Army, formed out of the Eighth Route Army and the New Fourth Army, was already strong enough to deal with his attacks.

Commission on the Publication of  
the Selected Works of Mao Tse-  
tung, Central Committee of the  
Chinese Communist Party

## CONTENTS

### CHAPTER I

THE REASON FOR RAISING THE STRATEGIC PROBLEMS OF GUERRILLA WARFARE	1
--	---

### CHAPTER II

SELF-PRESERVATION AND ANNIHILATION OF THE ENEMY IS THE BASIC PRINCIPLE OF WAR	4
---	---

### CHAPTER III

SIX SPECIFIC STRATEGIC PROBLEMS OF THE ANTI-JAPANESE GUERRILLA WAR	6
--	---

### CHAPTER IV

INITIATIVE, FLEXIBILITY AND GOOD PLANNING IN CARRYING OUT OFFENSIVES IN A DEFENSIVE WAR, BATTLES OF QUICK DECISION IN A PROTRACTED WAR, AND EXTERIOR-LINE OPERATIONS WITHIN INTERIOR-LINE OPERATIONS	8
--	---

### CHAPTER V

CO-ORDINATION WITH REGULAR WARFARE	22
------------------------------------	----

### CHAPTER VI

ESTABLISHMENT OF BASE AREAS	26
1. Types of Base Areas	28
2. Guerrilla Zones and Base Areas	32
3. Conditions for Establishing Base Areas	35
4. Consolidation and Expansion of Base Areas	39
5. Forms of Encirclement by Enemy Forces and by Our Own Forces	40

*CHAPTER VII*

STRATEGIC DEFENSIVE AND STRATEGIC OFFENSIVE IN GUERRILLA WARFARE

43

1. Strategic Defensive in Guerrilla Warfare

43

2. Strategic Offensive in Guerrilla Warfare

48

*CHAPTER VIII*

DEVELOPMENT INTO MOBILE WARFARE

51

*CHAPTER IX*

RELATIONSHIP OF COMMANDS

56

## CHAPTER I

### THE REASON FOR RAISING THE STRATEGIC PROBLEMS OF GUERRILLA WARFARE

In the Anti-Japanese War regular warfare plays the principal and guerrilla warfare a supplementary role. This point has thus been correctly decided. Apparently, for guerrilla warfare, there remain only tactical problems; why then raise the strategic problems?

If our country were a small one, and guerrilla warfare were only to operate in direct co-ordination with, and within a short distance of the regular army in its campaigns, there would of course be only tactical and no strategic problems. Furthermore, if China were as strong as the Soviet Union and could quickly drive out the invaders, or if, though that could not be done very quickly, the enemy-occupied areas were not extensive, then guerrilla warfare would also play merely a co-ordinating role in the campaigns, and there would be only tactical and no strategic problems.

The strategic problems of guerrilla warfare arise in these circumstances: China is neither a small country nor, like the Soviet Union, a strong country but a country large and weak. The whole problem arises



because this large weak country in its era of progress is attacked by a small strong country. It is in these circumstances that a very extensive area falls under enemy occupation and the war becomes a protracted one. As the enemy, on account of the smallness of his own country and the insufficiency of the armed forces at his command, has to leave a great many places ungarrisoned in the extensive areas he has seized in our vast country, our anti-Japanese guerrilla war will mainly consist in independent operations on the exterior line and not in interior line actions in co-ordination with the campaign of the regular troops; and as China is a progressive country in that she has strong armed forces and broad masses of people, both led by the Communist Party, this war will be fought not on a small but on a large scale: thus, it has to tackle a whole series of problems, such as strategic defensive and strategic offensive. The protracted nature of the war and the ruthlessness which it entails give rise to a number of unusual tasks which guerrilla warfare must undertake, hence the problems of the base areas, of the development of guerrilla warfare into mobile warfare, and so on. Thus, China's anti-Japanese guerrilla war passes beyond the field of tactics into that of strategy and it is from the point of view of strategy that its problems should be considered. The point which deserves our particular attention is that such an extensive and protracted guerrilla war is quite new in the history of war. The crux of the problem lies in the fact that the march of time has carried us

to the thirties and forties of the twentieth century, and that the Communist Party and the Red Army now exist. Our enemy is probably still dreaming happily of pulling off such coups as the Mongols' conquest of the Sung dynasty, the Manchus' conquest of the Ming dynasty, the British occupation of North America and India, the occupation of Central and South America by the Latin countries. But his dream can never come true because in China today there are certain factors not present on those historical occasions and guerrilla warfare, something quite new, is one of them. If our enemy overlooks this fact, he will certainly come to grief.

These are the reasons why though the anti-Japanese guerrilla war plays a supplementary role in the Anti-Japanese War as a whole, it must be examined from the viewpoint of strategy.

Then why don't we apply the general strategic principles of the Anti-Japanese War to guerrilla war?

The strategic problems of the anti-Japanese guerrilla war are, of course, closely connected with those of the Anti-Japanese War as a whole, because they have many things in common. On the other hand, since guerrilla warfare, as distinguished from regular warfare, has its own characteristics and therefore its own strategic problems, it is impossible to apply without modification the general strategy of the Anti-Japanese War in the particular sphere of guerrilla warfare.

## CHAPTER II

### **SELF-PRESERVATION AND ANNIHILATION OF THE ENEMY IS THE BASIC PRINCIPLE OF WAR**

Before discussing specifically the strategic problems of guerrilla warfare, it is necessary to say a few words on the basic problems of war.

All guiding principles for military operations proceed from one basic principle: to strive as far as possible to preserve one's own strength and to annihilate the enemy. In a revolutionary war, this principle is directly linked with the basic political principle. For instance, the basic political principle of China's Anti-Japanese War, its political objective, is to drive out the Japanese imperialists and build a new China, independent, free and happy. In terms of military operations this principle means the use of armed forces to defend our homeland and to drive out the Japanese invaders. To attain this end, the actions of the armed forces will assume two forms: on the one hand to strive as far as possible to preserve their own strength and on the other hand to destroy the enemy's strength. How then can we explain the fact that we encourage and commend heroic self-sacrifice in war? Since every war

exacts a price, sometimes a very heavy one, does this not contradict self-preservation? No, there is no contradiction at all; there is rather, to put it exactly, a unity of opposites. For such self-sacrifice is necessary not only for the annihilation of the enemy, but also for self-preservation; non-preservation, sacrifice or paying the price, in a partial and temporary sense is necessary for preservation in a complete and permanent sense. From this basic principle arises a series of recognized principles governing military operations as a whole, all imbued with the same spirit, from the principle of marksmanship, that is, taking cover and exploiting fire power, the former for preserving oneself and the latter for annihilating the enemy, to principles of strategy. All principles pertaining to military technique, tactics, campaigns and strategy provide the conditions for the application of this basic principle. The principle of self-preservation and annihilation of the enemy is the basis of all military principles.

### CHAPTER III

## SIX SPECIFIC STRATEGIC PROBLEMS OF THE ANTI-JAPANESE GUERRILLA WAR

Now let us see what directives or principles should be adopted in the military operations in the anti-Japanese guerrilla war in order to achieve our aim of self-preservation and annihilation of the enemy. Since the guerrilla units in the Anti-Japanese War (and in all revolutionary wars) generally grow out of nothing and expand from a small force to a large one, they must not only preserve but also enlarge their forces. Thus the question is: What directives or principles should be adopted to attain the end of preserving or enlarging our forces and of annihilating the enemy?

Generally speaking, the main directives are as follows: (1) initiative, flexibility and good planning in carrying out offensives in a defensive war, battles of quick decision in a protracted war, and exterior-line operations within interior-line operations; (2) co-ordination with regular warfare; (3) establishment of base areas; (4) strategic defensive and strategic offensive; (5) development into mobile warfare; and (6) correct relationship of commands. These six items constitute the whole strategic programme in the anti-

Japanese guerrilla war and serve as the necessary means for preserving and expanding our forces, annihilating or driving out the enemy, and co-ordinating with regular warfare to win the final victory.

## CHAPTER IV

# INITIATIVE, FLEXIBILITY AND GOOD PLANNING IN CARRYING OUT OFFENSIVES IN A DEFENSIVE WAR, BATTLES OF QUICK DECISION IN A PROTRACTED WAR, AND EXTERIOR-LINE OPERATIONS WITHIN INTERIOR-LINE OPERATIONS

We shall deal with this topic under four headings: (1) relationship between the defensive and the offensive, between protraction and quick decision, and between the interior line and the exterior line; (2) initiative in all operations; (3) flexible employment of forces; and (4) planning in all operations.

To start with the first point.

In the Anti-Japanese War as a whole, the fact that Japan is a strong country on the offensive while China is a weak country on the defensive, is the reason why strategically our war is a defensive and protracted one. As far as operational lines are concerned, the enemy operates on the exterior and we on the interior line. This is one aspect of the situation. But the other aspect is just the reverse. The enemy forces, though strong in certain qualities and conditions of arms and men, are numerically small, whereas our forces, though

weak in certain qualities and conditions of arms and men, are numerically very large; this, in addition to the fact that the enemy is a foreign invader while we are resisting him on our own soil, determines the following strategic principle: It is possible and necessary to take the offensive in campaigns and battles in a strategically defensive war, to wage campaigns and battles of quick decision in a strategically protracted war and to wage campaigns and battles on the exterior line within strategic interior-line operations. This is the strategic principle to be followed in the Anti-Japanese War as a whole. It holds true in both regular and guerrilla warfare. For guerrilla warfare is different from regular warfare only in degree and form. Offensives in guerrilla warfare generally take the form of surprise attacks. In regular warfare, although surprise attacks should and can be employed, the element of surprise is less pronounced. In guerrilla warfare there is a great demand for quick decision but a very short exterior line to encircle the enemy in campaigns and battles. All these distinguish it from regular warfare.

Evidently then, guerrilla operations require concentration of the biggest possible force, concealed and swift actions, surprise attacks on the enemy and quick decisions in battles; and must carefully avoid passive defence, delay and dispersal of forces immediately before combat. Of course there is in guerrilla warfare not only strategical defensive but tactical defensive which includes, among other things, containing



and outpost action during a battle; dispositions for resistance at narrow passes or strategic points, along rivers or in villages to inflict attrition on the enemy and to wear him down; and rear-guard dispositions during withdrawal. But in guerrilla warfare, even more definitely than in regular warfare, the basic principle must be one of offensive, furthermore, such offensives must take the form of surprise attacks and to expose ourselves by ostentatiously parading our forces is even less permissible in guerrilla warfare than in regular warfare. Since the enemy is strong and we are weak, in guerrilla operations in general a quick decision of the battle is more needed than in regular warfare, though on some occasions guerrilla battles may continue for several days, as in a battle against a small, isolated and helpless enemy force. Because of its dispersed character, guerrilla warfare can be spread over a wide area and the principle of dividing up the forces applies in many of its tasks, such as harassing, containing and disrupting the enemy and doing mass work, but when a guerrilla detachment or corps is attempting to annihilate the enemy and particularly when it is struggling to smash an enemy offensive, its main forces must be concentrated. "Gather a big force to strike at a small enemy sector" remains one of the principles for field operations in guerrilla warfare.

Thus it is also evident that, considering the Anti-Japanese War as a whole, we can attain the aim of a strategic defensive and ultimately defeat Japanese imperialism only through the cumulative effect of many