

# MAO TSE-TUNG

## STRATEGIC PROBLEMS OF CHINA'S REVOLUTIONARY WAR

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### *PUBLISHER'S NOTE*

The present English translation of Mao Tse-tung's *Strategic Problems of China's Revolutionary War*, together with the editor's note, has been made from the Chinese text given in the second edition of the *Selected Works of Mao Tse-tung*, Volume I, published by the People's Publishing House, Peking, in July 1952.

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## EDITOR'S NOTE

This is a summary of the experience of the Second Revolutionary Civil War (1927-1936). The result of a major inner-Party debate over military problems during the Second Revolutionary Civil War, it gives the views of one military line as opposed to those of another. The controversy was settled at the Tsunyi meeting of the Party Centre in January 1935, at which Comrade Mao Tse-tung's correct views were adopted and those of the erroneous line rejected.

The Party Centre was moved to northern Shensi in October 1935, and in December Comrade Mao made a report entitled *On the Tactics of Fighting Japanese Imperialism*, in which he solved systematically the problem of the political line in the Second Revolutionary Civil War. A year later he wrote this booklet to give a systematic explanation of the strategic problems of China's revolutionary war.

The five chapters here published were originally delivered as lectures at the Red Army College in northern Shensi. The Sian Incident and its sequel kept Comrade Mao too busy to round off the work with chapters on the strategic offensive, political work and other problems.

Commission on the Publication of  
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tung, Central Committee of the  
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## CHAPTER I

### HOW TO STUDY WAR

#### SECTION 1. THE LAWS OF WAR ARE DEVELOPMENTAL

The laws of war—this is a problem which anyone directing a war must study and solve.

The laws of a revolutionary war—this is a problem which anyone directing a revolutionary war must study and solve.

The laws of China's revolutionary war—this is a problem which anyone directing China's revolutionary war must study and solve.

We are now engaged in a war; our war is a revolutionary war; and our revolutionary war is being waged in this semi-feudal and semi-colonial country of China. Thus we must not only study the laws of war in general but also study the laws of a particular revolutionary war and, moreover, study the laws of the even more particular revolutionary war in China.

Everyone knows that, in doing a thing, if one



does not understand its circumstances, its characteristics, and its relations to other things, then one cannot know its laws, cannot know how to do it, and cannot do it well.

War—the highest form of struggle, in existence ever since the emergence of private property and social classes, for settling contradictions between classes, between nations, between states, or between political groups at given stages of their development. Without understanding the circumstances of war, its characteristics, and its relations to other things, we cannot know the laws of war, cannot know how to direct it, and cannot win victory.

Revolutionary war—a revolutionary class war or a revolutionary national war has its special circumstances and characteristics in addition to circumstances and characteristics of war in general. Thus besides the general laws of war, it has some special laws of its own. Without understanding these special circumstances and characteristics and without understanding its special laws, we cannot direct a revolutionary war and win victory in it.

China's revolutionary war—whether a civil war or a national war, it is waged in the special environment of China; and compared with war in general or the revolutionary war in general, it again has its special circumstances and special characteristics. Thus, besides the laws of war in general and of the revolutionary war in general, it has also some special

laws of its own. If we do not understand them, we cannot win victory in China's revolutionary war.

Therefore, we must study the laws of war in general, we must also study the laws of the revolutionary war, and, finally, we must study the laws of China's revolutionary war.

One group of people hold an incorrect view, and we refuted it long ago: They declare that it is enough to study merely the laws of war in general or, specifically, that it is enough to follow the military rules published by the reactionary Chinese government or the reactionary military academies in China. They do not see that these rules represent only the laws of war in general and, moreover, are entirely copied from abroad; if we copy them and apply them mechanically without the slightest change in form or content, it will be like whittling down our feet to fit the shoes, and we shall be defeated. Their argument is: such things were learnt at the cost of blood by people in the past, why are they of no use? They do not see that although we must cherish the experiences acquired by people in the past at the cost of their blood, we must also cherish experiences acquired at the cost of our own blood.

Another group of people hold a second incorrect view, and we also refuted it long ago: They declare that it is enough to study Russia's experiences of the revolutionary war or, specifically, that it is enough to follow the guiding laws in the civil war in the Soviet Union and the military directives published by the

military leadership there. They do not see that these laws of war and military directives in the Soviet Union embody the special characteristics of the civil war and the Red Army of the Soviet Union; if we copy them and apply them mechanically and allow no change whatsoever, it will also be like whittling down our feet to fit the shoes, and we shall be defeated. Their argument is: ours, like the war in the Soviet Union, is a revolutionary war; since the Soviet Union has won victory, how can there be any alternative but to follow its example? They do not see that although we must particularly cherish the Soviet experiences of war because they are the most recent experiences of revolutionary war and have been acquired under the guidance of Lenin and Stalin, we must also cherish the experiences of China's revolutionary war because there are a great number of conditions special to the Chinese revolution and the Chinese Red Army.

Another group of people hold a third incorrect view, and we also refuted it long ago: They declare that the experiences of the Northern Expedition of 1926-27 are the most valuable and that we must learn from them; or, specifically, that we must learn therefrom to drive straightforward to seize the big cities. They do not see that while the precedents in the Northern Expedition must be studied, they should not be copied mechanically because the circumstances of our present war are different. We should adopt only those measures in the Northern Expedition that are still suitable in the present circumstances, and we

should work out our own measures according to our present circumstances.

Thus the difference in the circumstances of wars determines the difference in the guiding laws of wars: the differences of time, place and character. Considering the condition of time, war and the guiding laws of war are both developmental; as each historical stage has its characteristics, the laws of war in each historical stage have their characteristics and cannot be mechanically applied in a different stage. Considering the character of war, as the revolutionary or the counter-revolutionary war each has its characteristics, the laws of each also have their characteristics, and the laws governing one cannot be mechanically applied to the other. Considering the condition of place, as each state or nation, especially a big state or a big nation, has its peculiarities, the laws of war in each state or nation have their peculiarities and cannot be copied mechanically either. In studying the guiding laws of war of different historical stages, of different characters, of different places, and of different nations, we must keep our eyes on their respective characteristics and their development, and must oppose a mechanical approach to the problem of war.

That is not all. It marks a progress and development on the part of a commander capable at first of commanding only a small unit to become capable of commanding a big one. There is also a difference between operating in one and same place and operating in many different places. It marks also a progress

and development on the part of a commander capable at first of operating only in a place he knows well, to become capable of operating in many other places. Owing to the technological, tactical and strategic developments on the enemy side and on our own, the conditions at each stage of a war are also different. It marks even further progress and development on the part of a commander capable of directing a war in its elementary stage, to become capable of directing it in its advanced stage. To be competent only in commanding a certain military unit, at a certain place, or at a certain stage in the development of a war, means making no progress or showing no development. There are some people who, contented with a single talent or a peep-hole view, never make any progress; they may play some part in the revolution at a given place and time, but not a significant part. We need commanders in war who can play a significant part. All guiding laws of war develop as history develops and as war develops; nothing remains changeless.

## SECTION 2. THE AIM OF WAR LIES IN ELIMINATING WAR

War, this monster of mutual slaughter among mankind, will be finally eliminated through the progress of human society, and in no distant future too. But there is only one way of eliminating it, namely,

to oppose war by means of war, to oppose counter-revolutionary war by means of revolutionary war, to oppose national counter-revolutionary war by means of national revolutionary war, and to oppose counter-revolutionary class war by means of revolutionary class war. There are only two kinds of wars in history, just and unjust. We support just wars and oppose unjust wars. All counter-revolutionary wars are unjust, all revolutionary wars are just. We will wind up man's warring era with our hands, and the war we are waging is undoubtedly part of the final war. But the war we are confronted with is also undoubtedly part of the greatest and most ruthless of all wars. The greatest and most ruthless of all unjust counter-revolutionary wars is pressing on us; and if we did not raise the banner of a just war, the majority of mankind would suffer destruction. The banner of a just war of mankind is the banner for the salvation of mankind; the banner of China's just war is the banner for the salvation of China. A war which will be waged by the overwhelming majority of mankind and of the Chinese people will undoubtedly be a just war—it will be incomparably the most honourable undertaking for saving mankind and China, and will form a bridge leading world history into a new era. When human society advances to the point where classes and states are eliminated, there will no longer be any wars, whether revolutionary or counter-revolutionary, just or unjust, and that will be an era of lasting peace for mankind. Our study of the laws of

revolutionary war starts from our will to eliminate all wars—this is the dividing line between us Communists and all exploiting classes.

### SECTION 3. STRATEGY STUDIES THE LAWS OF A WHOLE MILITARY SITUATION

Wherever there are military operations, there is a whole military situation. A whole military situation may cover the entire world, it may cover an entire country, or it may cover an independent guerilla area or a major independent operational front. Whenever there are various phases and stages to be taken into consideration there is a whole military situation.

The task of strategy is to study the laws for directing operations that may affect a whole military situation. The task of operational or tactical direction is to study the laws for directing military operations which are of a partial character.

Why should a campaign or battle commander have some understanding of the laws of strategy? Because a comprehension of the whole makes it easier for one to handle the part and because the part belongs to the whole. The view that strategic victory is achieved by tactical successes alone is erroneous because it overlooks the fact that the first and foremost problem in deciding the outcome of a war is whether or not the whole situation and its various stages are properly taken into consideration. If there are serious

shortcomings or mistakes in the appraisal of the whole situation and the various stages of a war, the war will certainly be lost. "Make a single careless move and the entire game is lost" refers to a move which is linked with the whole, *i.e.*, a move decisive for the whole situation, not to a move of a partial nature, *i.e.*, a move which is not decisive for the whole situation. This is as true of war as of a chess game.

But the whole situation cannot detach itself from its parts and become independent of them; the whole situation is made up of all its parts. Sometimes certain parts suffer destruction or defeat, yet the whole situation is not vitally affected, because those parts are not decisive for the whole situation. In a war, some defeats or failures in battles or campaigns do not lead to a change for the worse in the whole military situation because they are not defeats of decisive significance. But if most of the campaigns making up a whole military situation are lost or one or two decisive campaigns are lost, the whole situation will change immediately. In that case, "most of the campaigns" and "the one or two campaigns" are decisive. In the history of war, there are instances where, after a succession of battles won, defeat in a single battle nullifies all the previous achievements and there are also instances where, after many defeats, victory in a single battle opens up a new situation. In such instances "a succession of battles won" and "many defeats" are of a partial nature and are not decisive for the whole situation. Meanwhile the "defeat in a



single battle" and "victory in a single battle" are both decisive. All these explain the importance of taking the whole situation into consideration. For the person in command of the whole situation the most important thing is to devote his attention to appraising the whole military situation. The main thing is that, on the basis of existing circumstances, he should consider the problems of the grouping of his military units and formations, of the relations between campaigns, of the relations between various operational stages, and of the relations between the sum total of the enemy's activities and that of his own—all these require the maximum effort; if he overlooks them and is pre-occupied with secondary considerations, he can hardly avoid setbacks.

As to the relationship between the whole and the parts, it holds not only between war strategy and operational direction but also between operational direction and tactics. The relation between the action of a division and that of a regiment or battalion, and the relation between the action of a company and that of a platoon or squad, are concrete illustrations. The commanding officer at any level should centre his attention on the most important and most decisively significant problem or action in the whole situation he is handling, and not on other problems or actions.

The importance or decisive significance of a thing is not determined according to circumstances in general or in the abstract, but according to the concrete circumstances. In a military operation the selection