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Mao Tsetung on Guerrilla Warfare

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interests, the conclusion that it would automatically be beneficial to the U.S.S.R. is not necessarily correct. The Soviet Union has shown a marked tendency to develop poor relations with Communist governments that come to power largely through their own efforts, as Soviet relations with Yugoslavia and China have shown. Eurocommunism is an extremely complex phenomenon, especially as its strength has been achieved through legal, democratic means. If the United States were simply to oppose it, these parties may well be driven closer to the U.S.S.R. Instead of a balance sheet attempting to show who will gain and lose from Eurocommunism based on speculation about the future behavior of European Communist Parties, an appraisal of the opportunities and the difficulties American foreign policy faces is necessary in order for the United States to understand and make sensible decisions about Eurocommunism.

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Griffith, Samuel B. II, trans. *Mao Tse-tung on Guerrilla Warfare*. Garden City, N.Y.: Anchor Press/Doubleday, 1978. 101pp.

Mao Tse-tung invented nothing new in the art of war. He borrowed almost entirely from the thoughts of Sun Tzu, Clausewitz, and Lenin. His greatest contribution, no doubt, was to synthesize those thoughts to embody in himself the main ideas of those earlier thinkers. Two of his interpretations stand out above all others. The first of these is that "politics is war without bloodshed; war is politics with bloodshed." This aphorism improves considerably on Clausewitz' own expression of the main idea in his book, *On War*. The second key interpretation is broader in its roots and concerns the whole matter of strategy for the physically weaker, but potentially morally stronger side in a struggle for political power.

As translated by Griffith, this essay is an important part of the corpus of Mao Tse-tung's writings. It treats guerrilla warfare not as an isolated military option and technique, but as one aspect of a political struggle. As the essay makes clear, an understanding of the political context of guerrilla warfare is crucial to an understanding of the strategy and tactics of it.

Although guerrilla warfare has been glamorized greatly and assigned much importance in recent decades, Mao considers it to be an indecisive expedient stage in a continuum of violent political struggle. It is worthwhile, he says, only when and while your opponent's orthodox forces enjoy superiority over your own. Guerrilla warfare is a way of protracting the struggle, building toward stronger orthodox forces of your own, wearing down the opponent both physically and mentally, and helping to gain moral (in the sense of psychological) ascendancy. The ultimate end is to achieve physical as well as moral superiority, and at that point to administer final victory with orthodox forces using orthodox methods. In a sense, the way of a Maoist follows the program of a bullfight, and for much the same reason. The matador is physically inferior and would be quickly gored and trampled by a fresh bull. So the matador is preceded by the banderilleros and picadors, who keep their distance and avoid direct encounters while inflicting small but muscle-weakening wounds on the bull and exhausting him in futile charges. By the time the matador enters the ring for a direct encounter, the bull is at least slightly inferior both morally and physically, and the outcome is seldom unpredictable.

Essentially, guerrilla warfare is one of the several forms of indirect approach used with frequent success by the physically weaker side against the morally vulnerable side. In this respect, it belongs in the same classification with civil

118 NAVAL WAR COLLEGE REVIEW

disobedience, terrorism, and even "peripheral strategy" such as that practiced by the United States and the United Kingdom during the "catch-up" years of 1942-1943 against the Germans. The point is that the physically weaker side needs *time* to succeed, so it must avoid the kind of decisive engagement that could put a quick end to the struggle. The underdog must initially seek a war of attrition, not of annihilation, and he must use this time not only gradually to build his own physical strength at the expense of his adversary's, but also to build political support and a sense of psychological superiority through the commission of acts of bravery, defiance, and sacrifice. Opportunities for small victories are sought and when such victories are achieved they represent success in a campaign of physical attrition. More important, they are prized for their cumulative symbolic and psychological effects, which add not only to the real strength of armed elements but to the political power of the movement being served. When the underdog's combined physical and moral strength reaches a point at which he can meet his adversary on physically equal (or better) terms, the moment for final decision has arrived. This is the moment for orthodox forces to come to the fore and, like the matador, complete the victory in a final orthodox campaign of annihilation.

Besides the translation, Brigadier General Griffith's book contains 31 pages of introduction and translator's notes. In these pages, he traces the development of Mao's thinking on revolutionary warfare and places Mao's version of guerrilla warfare in context with other prominent historical examples and writings on the subject. The author argues that our failings in Vietnam were a product of our failure to truly understand Mao's teachings and how aptly they were being applied by the North Vietnamese and Vietcong. He also outlines the challenge to the industrialized

West that lies ahead, pointing in particular to the discontent that is festering in many Third World countries, and to the fact that the West has become associated with maintenance of the sometimes oppressive status quo while the Soviet Union and its proxies have been posing as champions of liberating change. While the book makes clear the application of Mao's teachings to these circumstances, it does not try to tell us how to meet the challenge. For insights or prescriptions pertaining to our own strategy, the reader must look elsewhere.

Mao has said that political power grows out of the barrel of a gun. Standing alone, this oft-quoted passage is misleading. The total of Mao's writing makes clear his true belief that power grows out of the supportive sentiment of a land's inhabitants. Guerrilla warfare—part of the gun barrel, as it were—is but one among a number of complementary ways for an underdog to win that supportive sentiment.

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Hagan, Kenneth J., ed. *In Peace and War: Interpretations of American Naval History, 1775-1978*. Westport, Conn.: Greenwood Press, 1978. 368pp.

The seventeen chapters by seventeen authors that make up this book attempt, in the editor's words, "to assess the navy as an institutional expression of the American experience," and to avoid the "hagiographic and eulogistic tone" of the old school of naval history. So far, so good. Regarding further intentions, it may be observed that although the subtitle announces the contents as "Interpretations of American Naval History," the editor has made "no effort to impose interpretive themes upon the authors," and some of the essays are in fact almost purely expository. Nevertheless, the end product is a very welcome one.

The chapter on the Revolution will remind the reader of the early