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MAO TSE-TUNG: HIS MILITARY WRITINGS AND PHILOSOPHY

A Research Paper written by
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Naval Command Course, 1964

INTRODUCTION

We must not belittle the saying in the book of Sun-tzu,¹ the great military expert of ancient China: 'Know yourself, know your enemy; a hundred battles, a hundred victories.' So Mao Tse-tung wrote in 1936, when he, himself, the great military expert of modern China, had already fought more than a hundred battles.

This man, Mao Tse-tung, is the leader of over one quarter of the world's population that live in an area about one and one-third times the size of the United States of America, and is the chairman and founder of the Chinese Communist Party who organized the peasants into a huge guerrilla army to take over China by force of arms. This is the 'man who may determine the course of world history in the second half of the twentieth century.'²

This paper sets out to examine in broad terms the background, upbringing and career of this man. It further sets out to examine some of his more pertinent military writings and deduce his military philosophy. Mao has written voluminously, not only on strategy, tactics, and military matters, but on political and economic subjects, and has even composed poetry. Not for nothing has he been described as the 'soldier scholar,' 'military genius,'³ and acknowledged by many as the greatest exponent of guerrilla warfare. In short, this paper endeavors to throw some light on the man, his philosophy and achievements, and gives a distillation of some of his more important military writings.

Due to the Bamboo Curtain there is not much material available on Mao, and as one writer puts it 'Lenin, Stalin and Khrushchev are open books'⁴ compared with the Chinese leader. What material there is in this country, particularly on Red China, is somewhat slanted.

Most of the research that follows in this paper is based on what Mao said, or wished to record for posterity as having said, in his five volumes of *Selected Works* in English, plus one

recently put out by the Foreign Languages Press, Peking. It is fully appreciated that no scholar would commence his work from this source, and would wish to see the original Chinese texts. The paper suffers from this limitation.

As Mao mainly wrote his thoughts and estimates of situations as short articles, widely separated in time, there is much repetition, and the inevitable Chinese love for speaking in riddles and similes often leaves one guessing as to what the author really means. No Chinese appears to be able to give a straight answer to a question. This possibly makes them good negotiators.

I. MAO—THE MAN

Mao was born in 1893 in Shao shan in Hunan province, the eldest of four children. He always got on well with his mother, but somehow found his father irksome—the boy and father often quarreled which sometimes led to difficulties and explosive situations. Mao's father, who was an ex-soldier, peasant farmer, wished his son to learn the classics and insisted that these be put to memory. The boy disliked this as he loathed the books of Confucius, but he loved fiction and even today often quotes from novels he read in his youth. In later years he learned to enjoy the works of Confucius.

Mao's relations with his father were never very happy, and on more than one occasion he ran away from home. Once, at the age of thirteen, he did so because his father cursed him in public; this time his father followed him, so when Mao reached a pond he threatened to jump in if his father came any nearer. The elder, being as stubborn as his junior, agreed to come no further if his son would kneel down and apologize. Mao refused, but offered to compromise by bowing on one knee and saying 'Sorry,' if his father promised never again to rebuke him in public. 'Thus,' Mao wrote later, 'the war ended and from it I learned that when I defended my rights by open rebellion, my father relented, but when I remained meek and submissive, he only cursed and beat me more.'¹

At sixteen Mao finally quit his house for the last and final time and went to the nearby town of Siangsiang where he commenced formal education—but not before he had paid his father 12 dollars to hire a laborer for a year in lieu of his services.² We can now already detect in Mao a rebellious and defiant spirit

and a hatred for authority. These factors combined with the impressions of his youth must have played some part in his mental makeup later.

At school Mao was financially the poorest in his class and was despised by some of his richer classmates. He nevertheless made many friends, both among the teachers who admired his ability, and among a few of the students. It was here that he met Emi Siao³ and his cousin Wen; the latter loaned Mao many books which he read avidly. Later, he referred to himself as being like an ox loose in a vegetable garden. He read the biographies of such leaders as Napoleon, Peter the Great, Gladstone, Wellington and Lincoln, as well as the works of such writers as Rousseau, and was impressed by what they had done for their countries.

In 1911 Mao joined the army in the revolutionary movement against the Manchu dynasty, which gave Sun Yat-sen control of the country. A year later Mao left the army and went back to his books and to a new school. For the next five years (1912-1917) he was at the First Normal School at Changsha where once again he made numerous friends, some of whom in later years were to assume high positions in both the KMT and in the Communist Revolution. One such student was Hsiao Yu, who in 1927 was Vice Minister for Mines and Agriculture in the KMT. He gives this description of Mao at school: 'These good white teeth helped to make his smile quite charming so that no one could imagine that he was not genuinely sincere . . . his movements in sitting or standing were very slow.'⁴

In 1917 Mao's mother died and shortly after, on completion of school, he went on to Peking. Many of his school friends at this time went to France under a scheme of working and studying, but Mao did not. 'I felt I did not know enough of my own country' he remarked.⁵ Mao now took up part-time employment at the University as assistant librarian. At that time a society for studying Marxism was established and Mao joined; by 1921 he considered himself a Marxist. That year the First Communist Party Conference was held at Shanghai and the specially sent Russian agent, Gregori Voitinsky, presided. At that time there were fifty party members.

The history of China at the best of times is confused, but during the Sun Yat-sen era this was even more so as there was virtually no central authority, and local despots called War

Lords exercised power in their own regions. Sun Yat-sen had felt that he and his regime would be supported by the Western powers, but he was disappointed when the Washington Conference of 1921-22 refused to accept his delegates, and went even further by saying that in their opinion the Peking militarists (War Lords) were the only legitimate authority in the country. According to Sun the West now actively assisted the War Lords⁶ and he took the helping hand of Russia who sent him aid and military instructors.

In 1923 Sun Yat-sen despatched his Chief of Staff, Chiang Kai-shek to Russia to study Soviet conditions and negotiate military aid. The Communist Party of China was now admitted into the government with the KMT, under Sun's overall leadership.

Sun having died in 1925, Chiang Kai-shek in the following year carried out a coup d'etat and dissolved the KMT communist coalition government. Later Chiang gave the reason for this coup by saying that he had intercepted a cable from Stalin to the communists to overthrow the KMT.⁷ The Communist Party itself was in trouble at this time and split into two factions, the right wing members were later absorbed into Chiang's new KMT (Nationalist) government. The left wing communists, realizing that all hope of an alliance with the bourgeoisie was over, broke off completely and commenced to emphasize the 'class struggle.' On 15th July, 1926 Chiang outlawed the Communist Party and began open hostilities to exterminate them. Mao, and a few trusted left wing followers, fled to the Chingkanshan Mountains on the Hunan-Kiangsi border.

Mao now realized that whosoever could gain the control of China's teeming millions would eventually gain control of the country. He therefore set about to gain the confidence of the people, and under his leadership he forged out a guerrilla force from the peasantry. For Mao, now commenced ten lean years, when with infinite patience, cunning, and personal sacrifice he built up his 'guerrillas' and fought not only Chiang's armies that were sent against him, but also the Japanese. The story of these years is vividly told to Edgar Snow, and as he remarks the 'I' from Mao's narrative at this time becomes 'We'—it was always 'We' the 'Red Army.'

Chiang Kai-shek now stepped up his campaign against Mao and big rewards were offered for Red leaders. 'Big rewards⁸ were offered for my capture dead or alive as well as for . . .'

Then later Mao goes on to say 'my wife, my sister, the wives of my two brothers, and my own son were arrested. My wife and sister were executed.'⁹

Mao's strength and his peasant army grew slowly but surely. At first most of them were armed with only sticks and spears, and there was little discipline and the outward show of an army. Mao took great pains to avoid any reference to his forces as just a bunch of armed Robin Hoods, and for this reason very soon he formulated a code of behavior for his men. He insisted that these rules be implicitly obeyed and sung daily; Mao's whole intention was to have the villager, the peasant, the proletariat on his side. At a time when for years upon years the poor, the masses, had not been cared for, when governments had proved themselves corrupt, and nepotism among officials was the order of the day, is it really surprising that Mao's movement was successful? China was now ripe for a change, and the masses would have followed anyone who promised them a better deal, particularly when Mao undertook the same hardships as his men, and lived by their side.

From 1926, when Mao had fled to the mountains, until 1929, the Reds met with no great victories, but in that year came a significant success when his armies defeated a division of the Nationalist army and captured badly needed stores, weapons, ammunition and clothing. Dressed now in the 'borrowed' uniform of the KMT the Reds surprised and captured the sister division of the Nationalists.

From 1929 to 1934 Mao Tse-tung's power was something to be reckoned with, and Chiang Kai-shek had to divert his full energies and step up the effort against him. The Nationalist Fifth Anti-Communist Campaign was, however, successful and Mao was put to flight. In what Mao describes as a 'strategic retreat' he and his 300,000 men got out of the Nationalist encirclement and commenced the Long March of over 8,000 miles through deserts and mountains from southern China to Shensi in the northwest.¹⁰ The Nationalists were so elated with their success that they completely misjudged the situation and in 1935 even such an astute general as Chiang felt that the Reds posed no threat.¹¹ Events were shortly to prove him so very wrong.

In 1931 Japan had invaded China, and Chiang Kai-shek's forces were being obliged to fight literally three enemies at once, i.e., the War Lords, the Chinese Communists, and the Japanese. In 1936 Mao, who had once again become a power to be reckoned with, suggested to Chiang Kai-shek that they call a truce, unite

and fight against the intruders, the Japanese, on a common footing. This appeal fell on deaf ears; but as Dame Fortune would have it Chiang, at this time on an inspection tour of his armies, was captured at his temporary palace by the Reds. Mao sent Chou En-lai, his deputy, to confer with the captive, and promised freedom if Chiang would agree to a coalition government that would join together to fight the Japanese. Chiang agreed. Some writers feel that this release of Chiang was a precise long-term strategical move on the part of Mao who pulled off a great victory. They feel that this gave Mao and the communists a legal status and a wonderful opportunity to infiltrate into the government.

This unholy alliance lasted but a short time and in November 1938 both sides wrangled about areas of operations and the killing of one another's forces as opposed to the Japanese. It is of interest to note, however, that Mao's forces when fighting the Japanese actually expanded their area of control, whereas Chiang's armies had to withdraw from Nanking, Hankow and Canton. Chiang Kai-shek remarks that Mao actually spent at this time only ten percent of his effort in fighting the Japanese; the remainder was against his forces, but evidence is insufficient to accept or reject this.¹²

Throughout World War II this position of stalemate between Chiang and Mao's forces prevailed and both Great Britain and the U.S.A. recognized Chiang Kai-shek's government as corrupt and useless, but bolstered him up to help their own purpose. In 1945 another effort was made by the U.S.A. to get Chiang Kai-shek and Mao Tse-tung together. This achieved little and the truce under the Marshall mission expired in June 1946; by July a full-scale civil war was in progress. By 1943 communist victories began to pile up and the KMT forces lost many thousands of troops, certainly over one million. On 1st October 1949 Mao Tse-tung proclaimed the People's Republic of China, and Chiang Kai-shek, with his remaining demoralized forces, fled to Formosa.

For the first time 'since 1840 partially, since 1911 completely, China has been the victim of a civil war, invasion and revolution.'¹³ It is a sobering thought, however much one may dislike it, that for the first time in many hundreds of years, this huge country with a monster population, is effectively controlled and ruled by one central authority.

II. MAO—THE WRITER

Mao and Sun-tzu. Mao has more than once openly acknowledged that he was a great student of Sun-tzu, and has often chided his countrymen for not paying sufficient attention to this ancient Chinese writer. Mao has read and studied the works of Napoleon, Clausewitz and the military writers of ancient China, notably Li Chuan, but to him Sun-tzu remains the favorite, the master—the *Guru*.¹ In order to study Mao it now becomes mandatory to study his teacher. What indeed did this ancient write and say that Mao holds valid today?

Sun-tzu lived in about 400 B.C. and was a general in Ho Lu's army. He wrote his experiences in a book called *The Art of War* which consisted of thirteen chapters on the principles of war, and contained many notes on tactical doctrine and strategy as Sun-tzu saw them. *The Art of War* is not only required reading, but is prescribed as a textbook for all Chinese military academies—this alone should show how much stress Mao places on this work. The book is an outstanding piece of military literature, and the great British military writer B.H. Liddell Hart has this to say on the subject:

Among all the military thinkers of the past, only Clausewitz is comparable, and even he is more 'dated' than Sun-tzu, and in part antiquated, although he was writing more than 2000 years later. Sun-tzu has clearer vision, more profound insight and eternal freshness.²

General S.B. Griffith, USMC, who has translated Sun-tzu, points out that *The Art of War* has 'had a profound influence throughout Chinese history and on Japanese military thought; it is the source of Mao Tse-tung's strategic theories and the tactical doctrine of the Chinese armies.'³

There is amazing similarity in the detailed explanation of the principles as stated by Sun-tzu, and in Mao's writings. Take for example the four famous slogans coined by Mao to explain his most successful strategy and tactics against Chiang Kai-shek and the Japanese forces:

- (a) When the enemy advances we retreat.
- (b) When the enemy halts we harass.

(c) When the enemy seeks to avoid battle we attack.

(d) When the enemy retreats we pursue.

Sun-tzu has this to say on the same subject, 'When the enemy is at ease be able to weary him, when well fed to starve him; when at rest to make him move.'⁴ The similarity is too obvious to be accidental and many such examples can be quoted. In fact Griffith says that Mao has paraphrased much of Sun-tzu—this may not be intentional, but due to the fact that the pupil had imbibed so much of the master that unconsciously he was repeating the wisdom of the ancient.

Deception and surprise are two principles, two key principles, with both Mao and Sun-tzu. The former talks about creating 'illusions' and the latter about 'shapes.' Deception to both means more than the literal meaning of the word—confusion of the enemy leaders even to a point of insanity is required. To both an essential requirement before the clash is the destroying of the enemy's morale, the destruction of his will to resist. Both Sun-tzu and Mao, and in fact other Chinese military writers such as Tu Yu, Ts'ao Ts'ao, Chang Yu and Ho Yen-hsi, all stress deception and surprise to such an extent that it appears to be a fetish with that race. In fact one may safely conclude that the Chinese love 'deception'; and may even go out of their way to include some 'ruse de guerre' in their plans.

In the matter of logistics Sun-tzu says, 'Hence the wise general sees to it that his troops feed on the enemy.'⁵ Mao puts it in more dramatic form: 'We have a claim on the output of the arsenals of London . . . and what is more, it is to be delivered to us by the enemy's own transport corps. This is the sober truth, not a joke.'⁶ 'By 1949 the Americans, who had spent several billion dollars equipping, training, supporting and transporting Chiang's armies, were fully aware that this was indeed no joke.'⁷

However, the pupil and master are not always in accord about everything. Sun-tzu talks about a controlled victory—his is more a philosophy of moderation and realism, whereas to Mao victory means annihilation. Here obviously he is influenced by Clausewitz. Sun-tzu states that no country ever benefited from a protracted war and appreciated its ill effect on the economy of a country. Mao, on the other hand, believes that protracted wars may be necessary and that one should not be afraid to 'trade space for time,'⁸ or as he concludes: 'We are for protracted war

and final victory; we are not gamblers who risk everything on a single throw.⁹

There is no doubt that Mao draws heavily on the principles and doctrine of Sun-tzu for his military writings, but it would be quite wrong to say that the pupil is in complete agreement with the master on everything. It would not be unsound, however, to refer to Sun-tzu for a lead on Mao when the latter is silent on some aspect of warfare, or to get at the full meaning of some statement.

Mao—On Guerrilla Warfare. YU CHI CHAN (Guerrilla Warfare). There is no doubt that Mao's most famous military work is that on guerrilla warfare. It was first published in 1937 and widely sold in China for about ten cents a copy. This document does not feature in the five volumes of the selected works of Mao as published by the International Publishers, New York. The original Chinese text is now presumed to be lost, but an English translation does exist, and the *Selected Military Writings* of Mao Tse-tung as published in 1963 contain a lengthy discourse on the problems of strategy in guerrilla war against Japan. This contains much of the material of the original text. We do, however, know from Edgar Snow that before 1936 Mao had written on guerrilla warfare and his experiences of the Long March. It is a pity that the original document is not traceable, as it would have been of interest to compare the one with the other, as it is well known that Mao keeps amending his writings and speeches. A digest of Mao's writings on this subject, taken from the English translation by Colonel (now General) Griffith follows:

Without a political goal guerrilla warfare must fail. It must coincide with the aspirations of the masses, and thus is always revolutionary in character. Military action is merely a method used to attain a political goal, and the military must realize the relationship between politics and military affairs.

Discipline is always necessary in any army. In the case of guerrilla forces, however, it should be self-imposed, and largely a matter of the individual conscience. Officers must live under the same conditions as the men to win their confidence. It is incorrect to expect equality in all things, but there must be equality in the hardships and dangers of war.

Guerrillas must be at pains not to antagonize the local population, and for this purpose a code of rules is here set out:

1. Prompt obedience to orders.
2. No confiscation from the poor peasants.
3. Prompt delivery of all goods confiscated from the landlords.

Later the following were added.

4. Replace all doors when you leave a house.¹⁰
5. Return and roll up straw matting on which you sleep.
6. Be courteous and polite to the people and help them when you can.
7. Return all borrowed articles.
8. Replace all damaged articles.
9. Be honest in all transactions with the peasants.
10. Pay for all articles purchased.
11. Be sanitary and establish latrines at a safe distance from houses.¹¹

[It is believed that the Red Army still sing these rules every morning.]

The above rules must be strictly adhered to as guerrillas can only exist in the enemy's rear with the fullest cooperation of the local inhabitants. The people are like the water and the guerrillas like the fish. If the temperature of the water is incorrect the fish can neither swim nor propagate.

Consideration and care shown to prisoners of war is of great propaganda value.

The three functions of guerrillas are to fight behind the enemy lines, to establish bases there, and to extend the war area. The last involves strategical considerations.

Guerrilla strategy is based on alertness, mobility and attack. Factors such as terrain, weather, and the situation of the local

people, must be taken into consideration. Always seek to confuse the enemy—harass him when he stops; strike him when he is weary; pursue him when he withdraws. Attack the enemy at his most vulnerable points such as his flank and his rear. If large-scale destruction of the enemy is not possible, small local losses can undermine his strength. A guerrilla leader must exploit to the full the enemy's weak points, and make use of every changing situation. We must continue to harass defeated enemy troops so that they have no time to re-form. We must always select an aim which we can be certain of achieving. Guerrilla troops can function without bases, but not indefinitely, so these must be established. Mountain bases have certain obvious advantages over those in the plains or on beaches. We must wipe out the enemy in small areas, then win over and train the inhabitants of that area to become guerrillas or auxiliaries, then move on.

The guerrilla unit is usually formed by a group of the most courageous men of an occupied area. They should be gathered together, equipped with some sort of gun, and exhorted to resist to the last drop of blood. Guerrilla units can also be formed from troops that come over from the enemy, or even from groups of bandits. All these types must be welded together to form a vast sea of guerrillas. All the able-bodied men and women of a village who have not joined as guerrillas should be organized to form auxiliaries. These should be responsible for local defense, and can render all possible assistance to the combatant guerrillas.

As guerrillas are lightly armed attack groups they do not need costly equipment. In each base an armory should be established for the manufacture and repair of small arms, but the principal source for obtaining arms is always the enemy. Sabotage units must be trained and equipped for demolition work, and one such unit attached to every guerrilla regiment.

Other necessary equipment is medicine, and if no other is available, then indigenous medicines must be used. Printing material and paper, for propaganda purposes, is also necessary, as well as field glasses, compasses and maps. An accomplished unit will very soon acquire all that it needs.

In short, as Marshal Chang Hsueh-Liang, one of Mao's ablest generals, told Edgar Snow in 1936—successful guerrilla warfare demanded these fundamentals: fearlessness, swiftness, intelligent planning, mobility, secrecy, and suddenness and determination in action.

Mao—On Protracted War. In May 1938, Mao Tse-tung delivered a series of lectures at the Yen-an Association for the study of the Resistance against Japan. The subject was *On Protracted War*, and the gist of this is set out below.

China's war with Japan will not end in a quick victory for us as some people imagine, nor will it end in subjugation for us as others do. The former viewpoint underestimates the enemy and the latter is unduly pessimistic; both these approaches are subjective to the problem, one-sided and unscientific.

In the early days of our war there were some who openly talked about Russia's intervention on our side and some who pinned their hopes on foreign aid. Both have come to nought. My viewpoint is that China will defeat Japan, but the war of resistance will be a protracted war. My reasons for stating this are:

- (a) Japan's advantage lies in her great capacity to wage war due to her military and economic power, but her disadvantages lie in her inadequacy of material and manpower resources.
- (b) China's advantages are her huge land mass and population, and the justness of her war against the invader. The immediate disadvantage is her military weakness.

These then, are the contradictory characteristics of the Sino-Japanese War. This war is a contest between these characteristics, and as the fight progresses the balance of the advantages on Japan's side will shift as world opinion is in our favor, but this will be a long-drawn-out process.

This protracted war will pass through three stages. These may be summed up as:

- (a) Period when Japan is on the strategic offensive and China on the defensive.
- (b) The second phase when Japan attempts consolidation and China prepares counteroffensive operations.
- (c) The third phase when we are on the offensive and the enemy on the retreat.

No-one can predict the exact turn of events, but broadly this war will follow the pattern stated above.

In the first phase the enemy will attempt to make deep inroads into China, and endeavor to link up Canton, Wuhan and Lanchow. This will mean long lines of communication and its consequent difficulties; for this alone the enemy needs fifty divisions. The KMT have failed to hold the enemy due to their mania for 'positional warfare.' Flexible mobile guerrilla warfare behind the enemy's lines, where he is weak, where it hurts him most, has already proved most successful. Already the enemy's morale is showing signs of strain.

The second phase will be one of strategic stalemate and the transitional phase of the whole war. It is during this phase that the people must be asked to give their all, as during this period the enemy, in order to safeguard his possessions, will lash out with venom both militarily and politically—the latter by recruiting traitors and establishing puppet governments. In this stage guerrilla warfare will excel itself behind his long lines, and we will commence to gain solid victories—if well conducted we may gain as much as two thirds of our territory back. During this period the enemy's morale will sink further, with their troops homesick and war weary; and even a feeling of antiwar may creep over the Japanese population. It is during this period that the international situation will become even more unfavorable to Japan and in turn *Japan's threat to Siberia and S.E. Asia greater, and there may even be another war.*¹²

The third stage will be the strategically offensive phase, when China will be on the offensive both on interior and exterior lines. China's strength alone will not achieve this, but certain changes will take place in Japan to facilitate this. On our side we must step up international propaganda and diplomacy. Positional warfare will now dominate and guerrilla warfare will take second place, and slowly the enemy will be pushed to beyond the Yalu river.¹³ There is no short cut to war; the duration may, however, be shortened by the whole country working towards one aim with one purpose.

In short, at present we must trade space for time.

Mao—On War and Strategy. Mao delivered this lecture on *War and Strategy* as part of his concluding speech at the Sixth Plenary Session of the Party in November 1938. It consists of fourteen pages, and a short summary is given below.

The elementary object of war is 'mutual slaughter by opposing armies' as 'man's politics with blood.' The specific object of war is to preserve oneself and to destroy the enemy. This is the essence of war and the basis of all warlike activities from the technical to the strategic.

In ancient days the spear was used to attack and the shield to defend; present-day weapons, whether the rifle, the bomber or the air-raid shelter, are all extensions of the old spear and shield principle.

The attack and defense of an army can be linked with the spear and the shield. In attack we desire to destroy the enemy; in defense we desire self-preservation. Pursuit and retreat are but extensions of attack and defense. But it must be stressed that the destruction of the enemy is the prime object of war, and therefore the enemy must be destroyed in great numbers for self-preservation.

Sacrifice and self-preservation are not contradictory, but are both opposite and complementary to each other. War is politics with bloodshed and exacts an extremely high price. Sacrifice has to be accepted for general and permanent preservation. Likewise attack, which basically means to destroy the enemy, is a function of self-preservation; so also, I say, that defense must be accompanied by attack and must never be defense, pure and simple.

Strategy is the study of the laws of a war situation as a whole. The commander of a tactical operation should understand some of the laws of strategy, as a knowledge of the whole facilitates the handling of the part. However, the overall commander of a theatre must devote his attention to the war as a whole; that is, both his own and the enemy's activities as a whole. He must on no account be misled by tactical victories unless these contribute to the main aim. As in chess so also in war, one careless move may affect the whole course of the war, and the commander must pay attention to the important links that affect the situation as a whole, and avoid entanglements with secondary problems.

The only way to learn the laws of strategy is by hard thinking. 'For what pertains to the situation as a whole is not visible to the eye, and we can understand it only by hard thinking.'

The problems of strategy are to give proper consideration to a host of things, some of which are given below:

Enemy and ourselves
Losses and replacements
Time and space
Fighting and resting
Advance and retreat
Victory and defeat
Attack and defense
Concentration and dispersion
Fixed fronts and fluid fronts, etc., etc., etc.

'None of the above problems of strategy are visible to the eye and yet if we think hard we can comprehend, grasp, and master them all. . . . Our task in studying the problems of strategy is to attain this goal.'

Mao—On the Study of War. Mao Tse-tung wrote this work in December 1936, and later used it as a basis for his lectures to the Red Army College in Northern Shensi.

A study of the laws of war is necessary as we require to apply them to war. To learn this is no easy matter and to apply them in practice is even harder; some officers are excellent at paper exercises and theoretical discussions in the War Colleges, but when it comes to battle there are those that win and those that lose.

The ever-victorious General is rare and there have been very few of these in history, but what is necessary is that our generals should have studied the art of war and paid attention to its rules; it is then that, with this wisdom tempered by courage, our military leaders will have better chances of success.

We should familiarize ourselves with all aspects of war and read and study the military manuals of all the great foreign powers, but one word of caution is necessary here—namely, we should not blindly follow the other nations, but accept what is suitable for our needs and combine that with our own experience—the experience that we have attained with blood. There is no finer teacher of war than war.

One particular aspect of the principles of war as propounded by the West is fascinating; this is *flexibility*. Flexibility means the ability to switch plans after subjective mistakes have been made, or after unexpected or irresistible changes have occurred in objective circumstances. Subjective mistakes will be made only when all the objective factors have not been fully ascertained.

Commanders must realize that before plans are made for a campaign, a full and complete appreciation must be made and all factors studied and carefully considered—wishful thinking is not good enough. Conversely a rash commander relies solely upon enthusiasm and he is bound to be tricked by the enemy, or lured away by some superficial aspect of a situation, or swayed by his subordinates eagerness, based on insufficient knowledge, and then he goes hurtling away on a wrong tack.

Reading is learning and applying this is also learning; the latter method is the more important. War is the highest form of struggle between nations, and thus the study of military matters brooks not a moments delay, and must be learned not only by our commanders, but also by members of the Party.

III. MAO—THE MILITARY PHILOSOPHER

Writing in 1956,¹ Dr. Edward L. Katzenbach, then Director of the Defense Studies Program at Harvard University said:

Among the Communist Vietminh in Indochina among the Huks in the Philippines, and the insurgents in Malaya, Mao's writings are gospel. What Lenin did on the subject of imperialism and Marx on capitalism, Mao has done for antiindustrial warfare. That is why an understanding of Mao's military philosophy may be of rather more than casual interest.

At Fontainebleau Napoleon was one day standing in front of the globe of the world and playfully gave it a twist, and as it came to rest his eyes focused on China; he is then reported to have said, 'There lies a sleeping giant. Let him sleep for when he wakes he will rock the world.' Well the giant is now awake and we have already seen some of his rockings, yet it amazes

one to see so little serious military thought being given to this country.

Mao's military philosophy stems not only from his reading and writing, but from long, hard, actual experience of battle, defeats and victories. From childhood Mao has had to face challenge after challenge that have tested him at every step on the ladder to power, and he has surmounted them all. He has proved that he is tremendously tough and resilient. He does not favor rashness, but advocates cold, hard, objective reasoning with an eye always on the main aim. He feels strongly that military salvation comes but from political conversion and that the people must be allied to any struggle. It is thus that he says that a counterrevolutionary war will never succeed as it is 'rootless'; in other words a few interested people trying to force their will on the masses.

Mao believes that China's problems cannot be settled without armed force. He believes that whoever '. . . has an army, has power, and that war decides everything,'² and advocates that those who want to seize power must have a strong army. He exhorts his party workers to understand that 'political power grows out of a gun barrel,'³ but that the Party must hold the weapon, and not the weapon be the master of the Party.

Mao constantly emphasizes a patient, careful, and deliberate examination of all the circumstances before bringing superior force to fight the enemy at his weakest point. He lays stress on surprise, flexibility, and feints. The unconventional and a thorough use of intelligence stand high in his principles of war.

Unlike most Chinese generals of old, Mao does not feel that it is any loss of face to retreat or to fight a defensive battle, but warns that defense purely for the sake of defense is wrong. He pleads for offensive defense. Retreat is permissible but *defeat no*, as he feels that defeat can invariably be avoided by choosing one's own time and place for battle.

The three intangibles of war are Time, Space and Will. To most Western strategists wars must be won as speedily as possible—to Mao it is just the opposite. He is prepared to trade space to yield time, and he is prepared to trade time to yield will. Time and space he is prepared to give up so that his ultimate goal is achieved.

War to Mao is a serious business to be tackled seriously with deep study; there is no room in his mind for benevolence or decency in war. He believes, as does Clausewitz, that it would be an absurdity to introduce moderation into the philosophy of war. Mao is a firm believer that it is the man behind the rifle that is the greatest single factor in war. Weapons and material are of secondary importance. Mao has openly scoffed at the atom bomb and called it the 'paper tiger.'⁴

Mao has shown great flexibility of mind in his approach to military operations; he has used guerrillas when these were most useful, mobile warfare when that made sense, and even positional warfare when that proved fruitful. In Korea and India he used the Human Sea tactics; his strategy now stems from the fact that population is his greatest asset.

IV. CONCLUSIONS

Mao is a tough,¹ hard headed, shrewd, and intensely nationalistic man. He has shown courage, the ability to give as hard blows as he gets, and a tremendous martial spirit. He has made a thorough study of strategy and military tactics and believes in the 'omnipotence of war.'² His knowledge stems not only from reading and writing, but from hard, bitter combat experience. Like most politicians he is apt to say one thing and do another.³ He is noted for his accuracy to detail, and without any shadow of doubt dreams of restoring to China the lands that were here in the past. In his own words:

After inflicting military defeats on China, the imperialist countries forcibly took from her a large number of states tributary to China, as well as a part of her own territory. Japan appropriated Korea, Taiwan, the Ryukyu Islands, the Pescadores and Port Arthur; England took Burma, Bhutan, Nepal and Hong Kong; France seized Annam; even a miserable little country like Portugal took Macao from us.⁴

Independence to Mao means but one thing—communist domination. On the 19th of November 1949, he sent a telegram to Mr. Ranadive of India saying 'I firmly believe that India, relying on the brave Communist Party of India and the unity and struggle of all Indian patriots, will certainly not remain long under the yoke of imperialism and its collaborators.'⁵ This after India had been independent of British rule for two and a half years!

Opinions of Mao are varied, and depend so much on the nationality of the observer. Three descriptions of him in recent years, and their sources, are given below—two by Americans and one by an Englishman. From *Who Are They*, prepared at the request of the Committee on Un-American Affairs, comes the following:

Mao does not have the appearance of a dictator ruling millions. His garb is modest, his manner unpretentious. The impression is that of a roly-poly gardener philosopher rather than a butcher of human beings.

On the 16th of April 1961, Bernard Ullman writing for *The New York Times* says: 'A chain smoker . . . his face wore an expression of total peace, almost of surprise,' while Field Marshal Montgomery of Alamein, after his visit to China in May 1960 had this to say about Mao:

A very delightful person to meet and to talk with. He may be a communist. That is his business. But he did not give me an indication that he is planning to force his ideology down the throats of any other nation or that he plans to communize the world . . . like all sons of the soil he is a genuine democrat.

Thus two Americans see Mao as a poker-faced butcher, and an Englishman calls him a democrat!

The United States of America to Mao is like a red rag to a bull—perhaps the antipathy is mutual. Examples to prove this are legion and would fill a book.

Mao Tse-tung is the acknowledged master of guerrilla warfare. To him guerrilla warfare is essentially a war of, by, and for the people; its political objectives must always coincide with their aspirations and sympathies. He feels that guerrilla tactics can only be used successfully by the masses against an oppressor or intruder, and never by an invading or conquering minority. His maxims are alertness, mobility, and attack.

Defense rates low in Mao's vocabulary, and although he does not discredit it completely he is, however, vehemently against passive defense—'only the greatest idiot or megalomaniac would cherish passive defense as a trump card.'⁶

Surprise, ruse de guerre and the unconventional approach, rate high in his principles of war.

To Mao, war is a serious business which requires deep study, a thorough appreciation of the situation, careful planning, and correct intelligence, before the armies are locked in battle. Rashness and wishful thinking have no place in his makeup. He believes that there is no place for chivalry or mercy in war, and that the aim is annihilation of the enemy. He recognizes that weapons play an important part in war, but advises that they are not the decisive factor—to him it is the man behind the gun that counts.

To date Mao has shown great flexibility and has used the type of warfare most suited to his needs at the time. When he was on the defensive-offensive it was guerrilla warfare, then mobile warfare when circumstances warranted it, and even positional warfare. Now he seems to have settled for the 'Human Sea' type of warfare which we witnessed in Korea and India.

He believes that state power can only be retained by a strong army, that war can only be abolished by war, and that to get rid of the gun it is necessary to take up the gun. These are strong words and Mao has shown that he usually means what he says.

China, with her unlimited population, can certainly swallow her Southeast Asian neighbors. In Mao's own words China has dormant claims to Korea, Indochina, Formosa, Malaya, Thailand, and Burma. All these are weak and small countries and live in fear of the Red monster. They all have large Chinese minority populations, are contiguous, and historically were her satellites. When the time is ripe and Mao so desires it, there is no doubt that he will have sufficient excuse to regain control of these areas. The timing of this event will be all important and we have already seen that *time* is one thing that Mao is prepared to trade to achieve his aim.

Propaganda to Mao is an important weapon, and even for guerrillas he recommends that they carry their own leaflets and little printing presses, and constantly bring to the notice of the peasantry the virtues of communism. He advocates that prisoners of war be brainwashed, and that soldiers be constantly reminded of the political objectives. "The political worker literally hammers out soldiers who will always *volunteer* to take the most dangerous enemy position. These are the raw materials for the Human Sea offensive."⁷

Mao has learned the art of fishing in troubled waters and lately has made pronouncements that African, Asian and Latin-American nations will get full help and support from China to overthrow the 'running dogs of imperialism.'

Mao today leads the largest race of humans in the world and he has proved himself to his people. He has fought beside his countrymen for over 20 years and suffered hardship and disappointments with them. He knows China and China knows him. With simplicity, like some sage of old, he pronounces his verdict that the East wind now prevails over the West wind.

Mao knows how far he can go and respects only toughness and firmness. To deal with China one must go to the conference table backed by strength, by power, and by resoluteness. One cannot end this paper better than by quoting the now immortal words of the late John Fitzgerald Kennedy: 'Let us not fear to negotiate, but let us not negotiate through fear.'

FOOTNOTES

INTRODUCTION

¹Chinese warrior who propounded the first principles of war in about 450 B.C.

²Anne Fremantle, *Mao Tse-tung: an Anthology of His Writings*, (New York: New American Library, 1962), p. 1.

³Francis F. Fuller, 'Mao Tse-tung: Military Thinker,' *Military Affairs*, Fall 1958, p. 139.

⁴Ernest Pisco, 'Review of 'Mao Tse-tung: Emperor of the Blue Ants,'" *The Christian Science Monitor*, 22 August 1963, p. 11.

CHAPTER I

¹*Ibid.*, p. 125.

²It is not unusual in the East, even today, for parents to regard children as so much free labor for the field and house.

³Emi Siao later wrote about Mao's early years in the book *Mao Tse-tung: His Childhood and Youth*.

⁴Hsiao Yu, *Mao Tse-tung and I Were Beggars*, (Syracuse, N.Y.: Syracuse University Press, 1959), p. 31.

⁵Edgar Snow, *Red Star over China*, (New York: Random House, 1938), p. 146.

⁶Shao Chuan Leng and Norman Palmer, *Sun Yat-sen and Communism*, (New York: Praeger, 1961), p. 46.

⁷Chiang Kai-shek, *Soviet Russia in China*, (New York: Farrar, Strauss and Cudahy, 1957), p. 55.

⁸The actual price on Mao's head was \$250,000—a staggering figure for 1934.

⁹Snow, p. 160.

10The journey was covered on foot, across some of the world's most impassable trails, most of them unfit for wheeled traffic, across some of the highest mountains and greatest rivers of Asia.' Snow, p. 196.

11Chiang Kai-shek, p. 64.

12*Ibid.*, p. 91.

13Anne Fremantle, *Mao Tse-tung: an Anthology*, p. XLIV.

CHAPTER II

1A *Guru* in Hindustani means a religious teacher.

2Sun-tzu, *The Art of War*, (Oxford, Eng.: Clarendon Press, 1963), p. v.

3*Ibid.*, p. xi.

4*Ibid.*, p. 96.

5*Ibid.*, p. 74.

6Mao Tse-tung, *Selected Military Writings*, (Peking: Foreign Languages Press, 1963), p. 253.

7Sun-tzu, p. 49.

8Mao Tse-tung, *Selected Works*, (New York: International Publishers, 1954), v. I, p. 255.

9*Ibid.*, I, p. 257.

10Not as stupid as it may sound as the peasants at that time used to remove their doors and use them as boards to sleep on at night and replace by day for their normal function.

11This rule in some books is translated as 'Do not bath naked in the presence of women.'

12How right Mao was in 1938.

13Regarded by China as her boundary.

CHAPTER III

¹Edward L. Katzenbach, 'Time, Space and Will: the Politico-Military Views of Mao Tse-tung,' *Marine Corps Gazette*, October 1956, p. 36.

²Mao Tse-tung, *Selected Military Writings*, p. 273.

³*Ibid.*, p. 272.

⁴Anne Fremantle, *Mao Tse-tung: an Anthology*, p. 178.

CHAPTER IV

¹Seven years ago Mao was reported to be able to swim the Yangtse River—six miles broad.

²Mao Tse-tung, *Selected Military Works*, p. 273.

³Snow, p. 89, where Mao stated that Tibet would be allowed autonomous government.

⁴Stuart R. Schram, *The Political Thought of Mao Tse-tung*, (New York: Praeger, 1963), p. 257.

⁵*Ibid.*, p. 260.

⁶Mao Tse-tung, quoted in *The New York Times Magazine*, 4th June 1961, p. 18.

⁷Hsu Kai-yu, 'Behind Red China's Human Sea Tactics,' *Combat Forces*, June 1952, p. 14.

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