

## CHINESE

## REVOLUTIONARY

## WARFARE

When the Chinese Communist leader Mao Tse-tung established the People's Republic in Peking in October 1949, it represented the culmination of a remarkable revolution. Only 22 years earlier, Mao had been confined to a small area in Kiangsi province, fighting for survival against seemingly overwhelming odds.

The key to Mao's success lay in his unique approach to the process of evolution. Central to his ideas was a firm belief that political change in China could only come through the peasants in the countryside, so his first priority had to be to find some way of persuading them to support the communist cause. Here Mao used his own experience to good effect. Having been born into the peasant class, he understood the realities of poverty and harsh rule, yet had escaped from them through education. Being a trained teacher, he could offer to the peasants and their children all the promises of education, gaining their support for something which they valued.

### **Setting up base areas**

In the process, he would not only xxx to organize the people but also spread the communist word through reading or writing exercises. Once that occurred, the people could be persuaded to accept new forms of taxation and justice, based on the communist

model but infinitely preferable to those which then existed. Gradually, an "alternative society would be created, under communist control and in defiance of the Kuomintang or local warlords (the so-called "reactionary forces").

Obviously, this was not something that could be done openly, so Mao chose "base area" which were remote and inaccessible. He hoped that the "reactionaries" would be unaware of what was going on.

### **The organization phase**

Moreover, once a single base had been set up, selected leaders from within it would be sent into neighboring areas to repeat the process. Mao likened it to ink on blotting paper: just as a single spot of ink spreads until it is absorbed, so the revolutionary bases would spread over the countryside, isolating the cities and preparing the way for a takeover of political power by the communists.

This became known as the "organization phase" of the revolution and was vital to eventual success. Once the base areas were firmly established then the communists were in a powerful position and could defend themselves against opponents.

However, it was unlikely that "reactionary forces" would remain ignorant indefinitely, particularly if communist attempts to introduce new tax systems denied them money or they suddenly found that local people were defying existing laws. Faced with this danger, Mao's next stage was to search for ways to defend his

bases as they developed.

### **Defending the bases**

Quite clearly, he could not expect the peasants to form military units capable of fighting Kuomintang or warlord armies in open battle, but this did not mean that they were unable to take military action.

The peasants enjoyed two priceless advantages which their enemies could not match – an intimate knowledge of local terrain and support from the local population. Thus, if their base should be threatened, they could be formed into guerrilla groups and used to mount hit-and-run attacks on enemy units which had no local knowledge and no local support.

Any attempt to pursue the guerrillas would draw the enemy into inhospitable areas in which further attacks could take place, while the guerrillas themselves would melt into the local population and be impossible to find. After a time, the enemy would become frustrated and demoralized, leaving the communists free to continue their political organization.

### **Guerrilla warfare**

Admittedly, the enemy might respond by lashing out with massive force, killing the population and burning villages in a desperate attempt to root out the guerrilla groups.

But even this could be used to advantage by the communists, who could claim that it was another example of harsh rule by the Kuomintang or warlords.

At the same time, the guerrillas could survive by

withdrawing from the area – a policy put into effect by Mao during the “Long March” of 1934-35. The enemy would concentrate on one location so that bases could be established elsewhere. As these new bases would also produce guerrilla groups of their own, the enemy would be faced with an epidemic of communist activity. For obvious reasons, this became known as the “guerrilla warfare phase.”

#### **Protracted war**

All this was likely to take time to effect – indeed, one of the central features of Mao’s theory was the concept of “protracted war.” Sacrificing territory whenever necessary in order to gain time, and using that time to persuade the people to support the revolution. However, the final stages could be quite rapid. As the guerrilla groups gained in strength and prestige, their attacks would become more frequent and widespread. The enemy would then be forced to thin out his units in an attempt to cope. This would increase the demoralization of the enemy units as the soldiers within them were subjected to surprise assaults.

The advantage would eventually tilt in favor of the revolutionaries – although weak to begin with, their new-found effectiveness, combined with the diminishing strength of the enemy, would gradually give them the edge. Once that happened, the guerrilla groups could join forces to create a large conventional army, fully capable of defeating the remnants of the enemy force in open battle. Known as the “open,

or mobile, phase” of the revolution, this is exactly what happened in China during the Civil War (1945-49).

#### **Seizing power**

But this was only a means to an end, for the defeat of the enemy in battle would open the way to the realization of Mao’s ultimate aim – the seizure of political power. A period of consolidation would then occur, during which the last vestiges of the old regime were rooted out and a communist system imposed. Through a careful process of organization, guerrilla attacks and open warfare, the will of the people, expressed through the ideals of communism, would be satisfied. It was a remarkable pattern of events and one which enjoyed success in China, and although it may be tempting to see Mao’s “theory” as nothing more than a retrospective description of that success, there can be no doubt that it acted as a model for similar revolutions in areas as far afield as Vietnam (1945-75) and Cuba (1956-59).