Worksheet 1.2

Guerrilla Warfare

Although the techniques of guerrilla warfare have been practised in one form or another since the beginnings of warfare, the founder of modern guerrilla warfare is arguably the Chinese communist leader Mao Zedong. Here is a passage from his work On Guerrilla Warfare. Note that it was written in 1937, when China was under invasion and occupation by the Japanese:

What is the relationship of guerrilla warfare to the people? Without a political goal, guerrilla warfare must fail, as it must, if its political objectives do not coincide with the aspirations of the people and their sympathy, co-operation, and assistance cannot be gained. The essence of guerrilla warfare is thus revolutionary in character. On the other hand, in a war of counter-revolutionary nature, there is no place for guerrilla hostilities. Because guerrilla warfare basically derives from the masses and is supported by them, it can neither exist nor flourish if it separates itself from their sympathies and co-operation. There are those who do not comprehend guerrilla action, and who therefore do not understand the distinguishing qualities of a people’s guerrilla war, who say: ‘Only regular troops can carry on guerrilla operations.’ There are others who, because they do not believe in the ultimate success of guerrilla action, mistakenly say: ‘Guerrilla warfare is an insignificant and highly specialized type of operation in which there is no place for the masses of the people’ (Jen Ch’i Shan). Then there are those who ridicule the masses and undermine resistance by wildly asserting that the people have no understanding of the war of resistance (Yeh Ch’ing, for one). The moment that this war of resistance dissociates itself from the masses of the people is the precise moment that it dissociates itself from hope of ultimate victory over the Japanese.

What is the organization for guerrilla warfare? Though all guerrilla bands that spring from the masses of the people suffer from lack of organization at the time of their formation, they all have in common a basic quality that makes organization possible. All guerrilla units must have political and military leadership. This is true regardless of the source or size of such units. Such units may originate locally, in the masses of the people; they may be formed from an admixture of regular troops with groups of the people, or they may consist of regular army units intact. And mere quantity does not affect this matter. Such units may consist of a squad of a few men, a battalion of several hundred men, or a regiment of several thousand men.

All these must have leaders who are unyielding in their policies—resolute, loyal, sincere, and robust. These men must be well-educated in revolutionary technique, self-confident, able to establish severe discipline, and able to cope with counter-propaganda. In short, these leaders must be models for the people. As the war progresses, such leaders [...] establish discipline in their forces, strengthening them and increasing their combat efficiency. Thus eventual victory will be attained.

Note: The full text of this book can be read here.
Questions

a) According to Mao, what is the relationship between politics and guerrilla warfare? How, do you think, would politicized, civilian combatants be different from soldiers fighting within a regular army?

b) What was Mao’s purpose in writing this book? Why, do you think, does Mao focus on the principle of leadership? What reasons does he give for the importance of leadership?

c) How does Mao link guerrilla warfare to revolution? Why does he consider it to be impossible for a ‘counter-revolution’ to use guerrilla warfare effectively? From your own knowledge of how guerrilla warfare was used in the 20th century, how far would you agree with this assertion?