Maoist Insurgency Since Vietnam

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For a soldier –

Major Robert C. MacKenzie, SCR, BCR
Killed in action, 24 February 1995, Sierra Leone

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Introduction

Mao Tse-tung's campaign to capture state power in China has long served as the premier illustration of revolutionary warfare for scholars and would-be practitioners alike. Indeed, the vast scope and sheer numbers involved in the Chinese Civil War (1927–49) have served to all but dwarf possible rivals. Of these latter, though, the Vietnam War (1955–75) — also known as the Second Indochina War — certainly succeeded in capturing the world's attention and analysis in a way the Chinese episode could not. Not only was the leading global power, the United States, more directly involved in Vietnam (together with a host of more modest yet nonetheless still formidable players), but the conflict occurred in an era when mass communications were able to publicize its vicissitudes in a fashion simply not possible for the Chinese case. Thus it is Vietnam which has influenced the most recent scholarly generation concerned with revolution.

Still, it is Maoist 'people's war' that has remained the inspiration for would-be revolutionaries. For all the uniqueness of the Vietnamese approach, it is not possible to separate it from its Chinese predecessor — the debt owed in both strategic and tactical particulars is substantial. So, too, is this the case with follow-on episodes. The years since the 1975 end of the Vietnam War have seen four benchmark instances of revolutionary warfare consciously modelled after Mao. These have occurred in Thailand, the Philippines, Sri Lanka, and Peru. In all four, the insurgents have not only claimed to be 'making a revolution' but have held up Mao's approach as that providing guidance for their campaigns. Three of the battles, those of the Philippines, Sri Lanka, and Peru, continue at this writing; the fourth, Thailand, has all but disappeared. Regardless of precise status, none of these four has occasioned adequate scholarly attention.

This is a mistake. It may not, in a sense, be surprising. So much, after all, has been written concerning Maoist insurgency that there would seem little left to add. Such an attitude, however, is shortsighted, because *the form* remains with us still — and is likely to

for years to come. This alone should spark our interest.
Revolutionary wars which look to the Maoist model are not going
to disappear.

The reasons are both pragmatic and ideological. Pragmatically
speaking, the Maoist approach offers the most highly developed
construct available for 'making a revolution'. Hence there is little
need for would-be revolutionaries to look elsewhere for a tem-
plate. Ideologically speaking, the apparent Maoist appeal to a
communion with the masses is compatible with all political
philosophies which purport to find legitimacy in those same mass-
es. Hence it is seductive enough to capture adherents across the
spectrum. Only the content of 'democracy' need be adjusted to fit
the circumstances.

This, in fact, is precisely what has happened in the years since
Mao's triumphant 1949 entry into Peking. His approach has been
used by insurgents of all persuasions — predictably. For when all is
said and done, Maoist insurgency is a *technique* for purposive (i.e.,
deliberate) action. It is a means to an end, political power; politi-
cal power to be seized for the purpose of overthrowing the exist-
ing order. It is not, as so many of its misguided adherents have
claimed, an alternative form of democratic governance. To the
contrary, as will become clear in the course of this work, only
democracy offers a realistic counter to the Maoist approach.

Analytical Perspectives[1]

In Vietnam the West faced the first post-Chinese Civil War variant
of Maoist insurgency. The aftermath of that conflict remains with
us still. What were the lessons learned? How should they guide the
West in its foreign policy endeavors? Yet like the proverbial blind
men and the elephant, the responses seem to depend upon that
part of the conflict a particular scholar has examined. At times, to
paraphrase President John F. Kennedy, an observer is led to ask, in
exasperation, 'You all are talking about the same war, are you
not?'[2] United States involvement in Southeast Asia irrevocably
changed the face of America and a host of other countries, but how
little appears to have been learned from the painful episode.

Can any area be more illustrative of this than the study of rev-
olution, 'Maoist' or otherwise? Certainly, Vietnam has been the
most significant revolutionary episode since China, at least as far

as the West is concerned. And it has left a painful legacy of division. But in history and political science it is too often a shadowy legacy. Few scholars state explicitly the inspiration for theoretical constructs that are advanced as if sprung from a vacuum — even when they appear most obviously to be a reaction to one or another facet of the Vietnam experience. This we should expect, since the conflict fits neatly into no one's categories. Clearly, it was not the 'invasion' of the South by the North. Just as clearly, however, the Southern struggle was not a free-standing, indigenous peasant rebellion matched in David and Goliath fashion against the power of the United States. It was a revolution and all that is entailed in and implied by that term.

Here we come face to face with our shortcoming. What is the relationship between what went on during the war and what transpired after 'victory' for the Vietnamese communists? What can we learn that is valuable in attempting to understand revolution as a phenomenon? Too little work has been done to pursue such lines of inquiry. It would seem obvious that the most salient topic for examination would be the relationship between the would-be revolutionaries and the revolution that ultimately occurred. How much, for instance, was the former responsible for the latter? Did the communists *make* a revolution? Or did they simply step in at the right time and win virtually by default? Put in terms of that timeless query: do men make history, or does history make men?

Such questions are of more than passing importance. Around the globe, thousands continue to lose their lives as rebel groups struggle 'to make' revolutions, continue to lose their lives as those in power struggle to crush the strategies of those who would seize the state. Are the results ever really in question? Or is the deck stacked from the first draw by structural considerations of which most men are only dimly aware? Do 'victory' and 'defeat', in a hundred minor and major skirmishes and battles, make one whit of difference in the ultimate outcome of the struggle? Or are the contestants only prolonging or hastening that which is already written in the stars?

In the end, we return to the debate which, in the West, has not even begun to be settled: could the United States and its allies have won in Vietnam? Did their various strategic and tactical gambits matter at all in the ultimate outcome?[3] Clarification depends upon how the respondent answers the questions in the previous paragraph. To put my own biases on the table, I see nothing as 'writ-

ten'. Man is constrained by circumstances, but in the end nothing is real unless man makes it so. Of course history makes men; but just as certainly, men shape history.

This is a philosophy shared by those such as Mao who would 'make' a revolution. They can be termed rebels or revolutionaries or any of a dozen possible labels. Yet the one most appropriate is insurgents; namely, those who wage insurgency. Insurgency itself, as with revolution (to be considered in detail shortly), remains an ill-defined term. Desai and Eckstein have attempted to clarify matters somewhat by offering the following:

> ...insurgency is a syncretic phenomenon — one that joins diverse elements in an explosive mix. It combines three elements: first, the 'spirit' of traditional peasant 'rebellion'; second, the ideology and organization of modern 'revolution'; and third, the operational doctrines of guerrilla warfare.[4]

Useful though it may be, this effort still leaves the observer puzzled as to what precisely the goal of an insurgency is. Consequently, for our purposes here, let me coin the following definition: Insurgency is violence in support, *strategically*, of a political goal, *operationally*, of a political infrastructure, *tactically*, of local political domination. Such a definition recognises both the political nature of the insurgent campaign and its symbiotic relationship with force. Put in slightly different terms, an insurgency, then, is a political campaign backed by 'muscle'; that is, by threatened or actual violence. It has its most readily recognizable civil counterpart, at least in *form*, in the activities of criminal syndicates such as the Mafia or the triads. The goals of these two, however, are not political but economic.

An insurgency, in contrast, is about politics, about reshaping the process of who gets what. It is the conscious effort to supplant one political structure with another. Taken to its logical end, insurgency becomes that which Mao and the Vietnamese communists claimed to be waging, *revolutionary war*, the conscious effort 'to make' a revolution by seizing state power using politico-military means.

And what is a revolution? Even at this late date, sources seem unable to agree upon a basic definition.[5] The popular press, in particular, often equates revolution with successful rebellion. Nothing, of course, could be further from the meaning most

accepted by the social sciences (and insurgents), namely that 'by "revolution" we now understand, in addition to the political aspects, a fundamental challenge to the legitimacy of social structures, including patterns of hierarchy or stratification, and titles to economic ownership or control.'[6]

A revolution, in other words, is not simply the exchange of personnel or roles but rather a fundamental overturning of what was. Hagopian, in his basic political science text, *Regimes, Movements, and Ideologies*, draws extensively upon the work of Max Weber to elucidate this development. If all reality can be divided, as Weber does, into three 'systems of social stratification' — economic, political, and status — then a revolution, Hagopian observes, reorders those systems.[7] To achieve such a reordering is the goal of insurgents engaged in revolutionary warfare.

One goal in this book, then, in examining Maoist insurgency since Vietnam, is to understand the relationship between these insurgents, in their deliberate quest to make a revolution, and the larger process of revolution itself, the overturning of the world as it is. In particular, we wish to understand the relationship between insurgent strategic vision and revolutionary outcome. Do the choices made by insurgents matter? And, in particular, is their ideological template of moment? Does a communist ideology, for instance, to use Vietnam again as an illustration, add to the revolutionary conjuncture a crucial element without which events might play themselves out differently? Or is ideology irrelevant?

Given America's decades of involvement in Vietnam, particularly the battle with the guerrilla network of the Vietcong, it is frustrating to realize how little (if any) general theory there is upon which to draw. Indeed, insurgency as a phenomenon has been academically peripheral in recent years. Instead, scholarship concerning revolutions and would-be revolutions has emphasized the importance of structural factors over deliberate (purposive) action.[8] 'Revolutions are not made; they come', writes Theda Skocpol (quoting Wendell Phillips) in her seminal *States and Social Revolutions*.[9] Groups, in other words, do not *make* revolution. Rather, they contend within a revolutionary crisis characterized by state breakdown and widespread peasant rebellion. Such emphasis leads researchers to focus upon the 'deeper' causes of revolutionary conjunctures rather than upon the ideological designs of those who would be king.

If the structural perspective — the so-called 'Third Generation'

of revolutionary scholarship[10] — can be said to be the dominant paradigm at the moment, there is nevertheless an emerging groundswell of reaction, one which is dissatisfied with the relegation of deliberate action to the background.[11] Since it is certainly humans who must act within any structural matrix of factors, runs the argument, there must be a role for strategic action. Were this not so, how are we to explain, in acknowledged revolutions, the frequent capture of state power by those very groups who claim to be making revolution?

An example will clarify this point. The anti-French movement in Indochina was comprised of numerous contending groups. Only one, the Vietminh, emerged victorious. Structurally, the Vietminh were the beneficiaries of an alignment of forces which stacked the deck against the French. Nevertheless, this does not explain why the Vietminh were able to benefit from these forces to the extent that they emerged controlling the state, from which vantage point they could carry out their ideologically motivated revolution. Such an explanation can only be gained by examining various strategic and tactical features. This would reveal that the approach adopted, embracing as it did the all-encompassing mechanics of organization and terror, was a key factor.[12]

Scholarly work on Vietnam has not pursued this lead, focusing in the main on other aspects of the conflict.[13] Recent analysis of the Chinese revolution, however, has been helpful.[14] Studies of specific areas demonstrate that much of the Chinese Communist Party (CCP) approach was tactical response to local conditions and exploitation of existing societal institutions — an approach which was adopted as frequently by *Kuomintang* (KMT) forces as by those of the CCP. That the communists were able to emerge victorious stemmed from a superior strategic vision for harnessing operational and tactical gambits. Structure, then, did indeed set the parameters for action, but both of the main contenders for power were able to maneuver as chessmen are moved about the board, a play embracing myriad strategic variations.

The point, of course, is that it is men who comprise a revolution. Structural circumstances mean nothing save they are made real through human action. To venture into the specifics of the CCP campaign just mentioned, or of any similar endeavor, requires that we explore *insurgency*. External manifestations of the campaign, *terror* or *guerrilla war* or *mobile war*, are all only tools to accomplish the political end, the remaking of the political system.

The precise level of force required to achieve this depends upon the strength of the system under attack. Guerrilla warfare may suffice in one case; full-fledged conventional action may ultimately prove necessary in another. Likewise, the correct strategy to be followed will depend upon the particulars of the case at hand. Regardless, that which links strategy to the tactical use of force is the operational utilization of political infrastructure.

Thus the *raison d'être* of insurgent military power, in whatever form, lies in the projection and protection of this infrastructure, leading ultimately to victory.[15] How exactly to achieve this has been related by various revolutionaries whose names are familiar. Mao Tse-tung, for instance, whose doctrines so influenced the Vietnamese, set forth a three-step process (strategic defensive, stalemate, and offensive) and found it necessary, in the end, to transform his guerrilla armies into massive conventional forces to remove the last vestiges of KMT power.[16] Fidel Castro, in contrast, found a Cuba so decayed that minimal guerrilla action was all that was needed to bring the edifice crashing down.[17]

Regardless of the force level required to achieve the political aim in China or Cuba, the critical point is that it was — and is — dictated by the demands for protection of the alternate political system being constructed to carry out a revolution, not by military concerns *per se*. This, to be sure, is the ideal. Numerous other mundane factors, such as logistics or ecological realities, will impact upon insurgent capabilities for force maintenance and projection. Yet it is the inspiration that is important. Step by step, the revolutionaries in China and Cuba created an alternative political movement, then used it to seize power. Having done this, they implemented far-reaching changes — revolutionary changes.

This description has its implications. In particular, it imputes that insurgents, as they gathered strength, were forced to make specific strategic and tactical decisions that were crucial not only to their advancement but also to their very survival. It also implies that the only viable decisions were those that made use, subjectively, of objective revolutionary conditions. This much is true on any battlefield. And certainly 'to make revolution' is to wage war. Consequently, as on the battlefield, we face the reality that victory or defeat is never preordained, no matter how the scales may be weighted in favor of one outcome or the other. The course adopted by the insurgents, as contestants for power — their strategy for waging insurgency, in other words — is crucial.

Ideological Blueprint for a New Regime

Mao's strategy itself did not spring full-grown from his mind. To the contrary, only by fits and starts did it mature. As such, it really has several parts, and the relationship between them is not always appreciated. Specifically, during the Jiangxi (Kiangsi) Soviet period, 1930-34, techniques of small unit warfare and for dealing with the masses were developed. Yet these proved insufficient to prevent the Jiangxi Soviet from being crushed by Chiang Kai-shek's Five Encirclement Campaigns.[18] Subsequently, during the Yenan period, that which followed the Long March of 1934–35, but prior to full-scale war with Japan (7 July 1937), further 'mass line' techniques were developed. Only with the Japanese occupation, however, could a synthesis between guerrilla warfare and mass organization emerge which we would recognise today as 'Maoist insurgency'.

Despite the controversy over the role peasant nationalism played in the mobilization process, Chalmers Johnson is obviously correct in judging that without the Japanese occupation there would not have been Maoist insurgency.[19] One need not even enter into the debate as to whether it was nationalism or social action which activated the peasantry. Both were important and played varying roles depending upon the specific region in question; the real key was the destruction of the *Kuomintang* resource and manpower base by the Japanese, a reality which meant the state — incomplete and inefficient though it was, even after the Northern Expedition of 1926–28 — was no longer able to muster the power which had previously proved quite sufficient to crush the communists, most tellingly in the Fifth Encirclement Campaign (1933-34). Indeed, it is not an overstatement to observe that without the Japanese invasion of 1937 onwards, there might well have been no Mao. The collapse of the KMT in the 1945–49 civil war was an anticlimax. The Nationalist cause was mortally wounded before the battle was joined.[20]

Finally, from the struggle against the Japanese came Mao's actual 'people's war' framework. Here we see all of the diverse pieces fit together to form a picture. What was crucial was that in Mao's final product his earlier 'techniques' were subsumed by the larger strategic approach which rested upon a very particular worldview, that of the insurgent battling within the imperialist context. Absent that, the pieces did not necessarily hang together. This, too, was to

pose problems for those who would seek to use the model.

Let us look at this more carefully. It is generally agreed that while Marx outlined the communist critique of political economy, it was Lenin who understood the realities of making a revolution. By perfecting the notion of the clandestine party of revolutionaries, he removed the Marxian revolution from its position as a course of action open only to advanced capitalist societies and placed it within the realm of possibility for any state, provided a revolutionary situation existed and a revolutionary party could guide the population towards consciousness. Mao took this lesson and applied it to China, producing a movement far more grounded in the masses than had been envisaged by Lenin. Mao thus demonstrated the need for revolutionaries to bend Marxism to their particular situation, rather than attempting to fit the situation to Marxism.[21] It was a lesson, we shall see, that would-be revolutionaries frequently overlooked.

Mao's greatest contribution was to recognize that in a country where the working class was unavailable or unable to participate in the revolutionary movement, other classes — in a relationship with the dominant class similar in quality and nature to that between the proletariat and the bourgeoisie — might have class consciousness and, therefore, revolutionary potential. In China the class Mao specifically had in mind was the peasantry, the overwhelming majority of the Chinese population. The revolution, to be sure, would still have to be guided by the representatives of the working class, the party, but the relationship between the party and the masses was to be far more symbiotic than proposed by Lenin. Even as the party raised the consciousness of the peasants, it was to learn from the people and thus to modify its approaches. Only by pursuing such a process of interaction could a correct strategy be developed.

This 'going to the masses' is often mistaken as democratic action. It was anything but that. Rather it was a technique to maximize mobilization of manpower by using a carrot rather than a stick. The masses needed to be brought into decision-making, but their deliberations would be guided in the direction chosen by the party. Early efforts to build revolutionary power upon a proletarian base had foundered upon the most logical of explanations: there was insufficient human material in the urban centers of proletarian concentration to build a potent movement. The peasantry was where the bodies were.

Mao's recognition of the need to mold Marxism to fit the unique circumstances of China had a profound effect in another area, that of the analysis of the revolutionary situation. While agreeing with Lenin that there were major and minor contradictions in a society, Mao recognized that there might arise special circumstances so extreme in their character that there was the chance that the very society which gave rise to the contradictions — and therefore the opportunity for revolutionary action — might be eliminated. The special circumstances would thus have to take priority over the contradictions; that is, the special circumstance in itself became the major contradiction, and all other contradictions became minor.[22]

China, at the time Mao wrote this analysis, was caught up in two great contradictions, that of feudalism versus the masses of the people, and that of China versus imperialism, as represented by Japan. The contradiction between China and Japan had been principal, because the Japanese invasion threatened to wipe out Chinese society. Thus the nature of class relations was changed, since all classes were faced with the issue of survival. The need to resist the common threat made possible bonds which could not have existed previously. The struggle against imperialism had to take priority; and since this was a struggle of the Chinese people as a whole, the entire population could be viewed as a revolutionary class.

Mobilization of this class required a united front against the imperialists. This was also not a new concept,[23] yet in the Leninist context the united front had been a stratagem. For Mao it became much more. He obviously was influenced by the conception of 'democracy of a new type', or 'new democracy', articulated by the Bulgarian communist leader and Comintern general secretary Georgi Dimitrov (1882–1949), wherein a popular front government rested upon a broad anti-fascist popular movement, with all parties included in the popular front as participants.[24] Mao himself welcomed into his united front all except 'enemy classes'. To ensure harmony within the front, certain concessions not involving 'issues of principle' were made. Most significantly, the goal of a 'workers' and peasants' republic' was broadened to include all allied elements in a 'people's republic'.[25]

Hence, while Mao recognized that China, as a precapitalist country, would have to pass through the bourgeois-democratic and socialist stages of revolution to achieve communism, and while the first upheaval would take the form of 'new democracy' as outlined by Dimitrov, he was adding a new slant to the united front con-

cept. The leadership of the 'new democracy' by the 'joint revolutionary democratic dictatorship of several revolutionary classes' was an innovation which extended the limits of the 'dictatorship of the proletariat' concept. He even saw the possibility that the Chinese bourgeoisie might prove capable of assuming the responsibility for driving out Japanese imperialism and introducing democratic government. Here, 'Mao was already groping towards the "people's dictatorship" he was to proclaim in 1949'.[26]

The united front, therefore, had become for Mao an integral step in a process of societal transition, rather than a mere maneuver, to use Trotsky's term, to be utilized for advantage under certain circumstances. It was not a 'temporary makeshift'. Through it the revolution could be propelled to a new stage. In greatly expanding the scope of popular participation in the revolutionary process, Mao echoed the calls of the German female communist Rosa Luxemburg (1870–1919) for a similar strategy. Still, within the Chinese context, this necessarily meant work principally not among the urban proletariat but among the peasantry. Mao was under no preconceptions that actual power could be gained without the support of China's masses. Even while participating in a united front, the communist party was directed to proselyze, to win over to its way of thinking 'the middle forces'. It was within this context that Mao was able to create the mass organization that ultimately allowed him to defeat the *Kuomintang*.

This mass organization had three important aspects: (a) the 'mass line'; (b) emphasis on 'self-reliance'; and (c) a three-phase periodization of the 'protracted war'.[27] The 'mass line' was the formal enunciation of the attitude mentioned above, Mao's conviction that the relationship between the party and the masses had to be one of constant interaction. As Mao wrote:

> All correct leadership is necessarily from the masses, to the masses. This means: take the ideas of the masses (scattered and unsystematic ideas) and concentrate them (through study turn them into concentrated and systematic ideas), then go to the masses and propagate and explain these ideas until the masses embrace them as their own, hold fast to them and translate them into action, and test the correctness of these ideas in such action. Then once again go to the masses so that the ideas are preserved in an endless spiral, with the ideas becoming more correct, more vital and richer each time. Such is the Marxist-Leninist theory of knowledge, or methodology.[28]

Such a philosophy went a ways towards addressing the concerns voiced by Luxemburg that a communist party formulated along the lines proposed by Lenin would inevitably drift into the dictatorship of a few.[29] By insisting upon the mass line's implementation, Mao proposed to avoid ideological dogmatism. It is worth reiterating, though, that this was intended as a feedback mechanism, not as a form of democracy (though left-wing admirers, particularly in the West, were to interpret it as such).

Closely related to the mass line was Mao's emphasis on self-reliance. Not only were the masses the ultimate source of revolutionary rectitude, but upon them the revolutionaries in China depended for their sustenance. There were no foreign sanctuaries as had sheltered Lenin and his compatriots. Neither did the Chinese bourgeois state seem to be in straits as desperate as those into which Russia entered after three years of martial defeat in World War I. We now know this part of Mao's reasoning to be inaccurate in one sense: the Japanese intrusion, in fact, had shattered the KMT state. Nonetheless, in the immediate matter of military confrontation, the 'diehard forces' (i.e., the anti-communist forces) remained powerful *vis-à-vis* the communists. To counter them it was necessary for Mao to engage the third aspect of his approach, the 'protracted war'.

The strength of the national bourgeoisie, and later also the strength of the Japanese imperialists, was overwhelming initially compared to that of the communists. This meant that the party was faced with two tasks: (a) the construction of a viable military apparatus; and (b) with this apparatus to engage in a protracted war of 'three stages': the 'period of the enemy's strategical offensive, the period of the enemy's strategical defense and of our preparations for counter-offensive, and the period of our strategical counter-offensive'. It is not necessary here to examine in detail these phases. Suffice to say they became the more well-known portions of Mao's approach to 'revolutionary warfare', or 'people's war' (i.e., war among and by the people for the purposes of 'national liberation').

This aspect of Mao's contribution was to have enormous impact upon liberation movements throughout the Third World. As he struggled to continue the revolution and to create a new society in post-1949 China, Mao viewed the primary threat to the Chinese revolution no longer as the Japanese but as the Americans. His answer to the threat lay in people's war. Though not authored by

Mao himself, Marshal Lin Piao's 'Long Live the Victory of People's War',[30] published in 1965 to commemorate the twentieth anniversary of Japan's World War II defeat, certainly had his approval. With remarkable clarity, it documented the need for self-reliance and the organic as opposed to expedient role the united front was to occupy in the process. More to our point, a cardinal theme that ran through the work was that, just as the invasion of China by the Japanese imperialists had caused a transformation of the principal and secondary contradictions, so the situation in an Asia ripe for revolution had been transformed by America's assumption of the Japanese imperial role. During the national-democratic revolutionary phase, 'imperialism and its lackeys' were thus the principal enemy. American imperialist aggression presented the Asian communist parties with the opportunity 'to rally all anti-imperialist patriotic forces, including the national bourgeoisie and all patriotic persons', in an anti-imperialist united front. Those from the exploiting classes who joined the struggle against the imperialists thereby played a progressive historical role and transcended their own reactionary essence.

In short, analyzed Lin Piao and Mao, the strategic setting was ripe for seizure of the initiative; and through the united front against the imperialists, the communists of Asia would be able to mobilize their countrymen in such a way as to advance the revolution itself, just as Mao had done in China. Thus the intervention of American imperialism was not a setback but a boon, for it created the historical conditions for the realization of the national united front. Just as importantly, this intervention was not a chance occurrence; rather it was a stage in the historical decline of capitalism, a permanent reality which was to be overcome and utilized to further the revolution.

What Mao had done, in essence, was to redefine revolution as revolutionary warfare and to provide a blueprint for its execution. As can be seen, though, the techniques, while conceivably viable when taken in isolation, were intended to function within a very special context. In particular, the mobilization of the oppressed depended upon two necessities: (a) carving out liberated areas (i.e., soviets) of such size that the alternative society could function to mobilize the masses; and (b) convincing these same masses that the feedback mechanisms of the Leninist structure were a sufficient form of democracy. Absent either of these, the only realistic alternative to effect mobilization was terror. This, in fact, became

increasingly prominent in movements which sought to utilize
Maoist insurgency. They were to be caught in a strategic misjudge-
ment, because Mao's assessment of the situation, grounded as it
was in the economic determinism of Marxism, failed to discern the
larger structural dynamic at work, the growth of popular demand
for democratic governance.

Small wonder that those adopting the Maoist model, rather
than recognizing this strategic reality, fell into an emphasis upon
the techniques. Most such students copied from afar, absorbing a
filtered view of the Maoist strategy.

Still not completely understood, though, and thus discussed but
little in this work, is the extent to which the Chinese sought to pass
on *directly* their understanding of what they were about in making
revolutionary war (as opposed to imparting technical training, par-
ticularly in cadre procedures and military tactics). In all of the
cases examined here — Thailand, the Philippines, Sri Lanka, and
Peru — it is now established that cadre either actually trained in
China or were in contact with Chinese personnel posted abroad.
We have long known of the instruction given to Thai communists
in China; but it is only more recently that information has surfaced
on numerous training trips made to China by Philippine and
Peruvian insurgents. The picture is incomplete as concerns the
Sinhalese component of the Sri Lankan uprising, though contact
did occur with overseas Chinese representatives. What remains yet
to be researched is the precise balance struck in this training
between technique and approach, which is to say, the relative
weight given to tactical, operational, and strategic components of
the Maoist vision.

Be this as it may, the model being used by these would-be revo-
lutionaries seemed sound. How then to account for the errors we
will see the insurgents commit in this book? Very simply, their
approach was flawed, inappropriate to the new circumstances of a
world embracing popular rule and rejecting, perhaps only tem-
porarily, dictatorial forms. The trend toward democracy meant
Maoist insurgency was still potent as a tactic but could succeed
strategically only if the state blundered or was critically weakened
by external assault. None of these occurred in the four cases at
hand, though certainly Sri Lanka and Peru remain in turmoil. Still,
even there, strategic initiative rests with Colombo and Lima after
well over a decade of armed struggle in both countries.

Regardless, we have not seen the last of revolutionary warfare.

My examination, it needs to be emphasized, is not intended to be a history of all Maoist insurgencies since Vietnam. An argument could certainly be made that other important post-1975 insurgencies (e.g., the Khmer Rouge in Cambodia since 1979 and the Kurdish PKK since 1984 in Turkey) than those analyzed in this book qualify for attention. Rather I seek to illuminate Maoist insurgency as a strategic approach by examining in detail what I judge to be four premier cases that have occurred in the past several decades. By so doing, we will gain greater insight not only into a strategy still used by virtually all insurgents but also into the only realistic counter to it, democratization.

NOTES

1. Versions of this introduction have been used in two of my previous works: 'Making Revolution: *Sendero Luminoso* in Peru', *Small Wars and Insurgencies* [London], 3/1 (Spring 1992), pp.22–46; and *Making Revolution: The Insurgency of the Communist Party of Thailand in Structural Perspective* (Bangkok: White Lotus Press, forthcoming).
2. President John F. Kennedy's exact comment was, 'You two did visit the same country, didn't you?' See Neil Sheehan, *A Bright Shining Lie: John Paul Vann and America in Vietnam* (NY: Random House, 1988), p.365. Kennedy was addressing the diametrically opposed reports delivered to him on the situation in South Vietnam by Victor 'Brute' Krulak and Joseph Mendenhall.
3. Useful counterpoint concerning this subject may be found by examining, for the affirmative, William Colby, *Lost Victory: A Firsthand Account of America's Sixteen-Year Involvement in Vietnam* (NY: Contemporary Books, 1989); and, for the negative, Gabriel Kolko, *Anatomy of a War: Vietnam, the United States, and the Modern Historical Experience* (NY: Pantheon Books, 1985).
4. Raj Desai and Harry Eckstein, 'Insurgency — The Transformation of Peasant Rebellion', *World Politics*, 42/4 (July 1990), pp.441–65. Elsewhere in their piece (p. 464), the authors observe that insurgency is 'the mix of millenarian zeal, revolutionary ideology and organization, and guerrilla warfare'.
5. A very short but useful discussion of the issue may be found in Thomas M. Magstadt and Peter M. Schotten, *Understanding Politics — Ideas, Institutions, and Issues* (NY: St. Martin's Press, 1988), pp.395–6; cf. Ch. 17, 'Revolution', pp.394–418.
6. J.C.D. Clark, *Revolution and Rebellion — State and Society in England in the Seventeenth and Eighteenth Centuries* (NY: Cambridge UP, 1986), p.4; cf. Ch.1, 'Introduction', pp.1–5.
7. Mark N. Hagopian, *Regimes, Movements, and Ideologies — A Comparative Introduction to Political Science* (NY: Longman, n.d.), esp. Ch. 6, 'Society and Polity', pp.223–58, and Ch.7, 'Social Movements and Revolution', pp.259–300. Cf. Mark N. Hagopian, *The Phenomenon of Revolution* (NY: Dodd, Mead, 1974).
8. Cf. Jack A. Goldstone, 'Theories of Revolution: The Third Generation', *World Politics*, 32/3 (April 1980), pp.425–53. The basic themes discussed in this article appear in expanded form, with readings, in Goldstone (ed.), *Revolutions: Theoretical, Comparative, and Historical Studies* (Chicago: Harcourt Brace Jovanovich, 1985). A benchmark work is Theda Skocpol, *States and Social Revolutions* (NY: Cambridge UP, 1979). Also useful is Walter L. Goldfrank, 'Theories of Revolution and Revolution Without Theory: The Case of Mexico', *Theory & Society*, 7 (1979), pp.135–65.

9. Skocpol (note 8), p.17. The author attributes the precise phrase to Wendell Phillips
   but notes (fn.43, p.298) that she extracted it from an unreferenced use by Stephen F.
   Cohen in his *Bukharin and the Bolshevik Revolution* (NY: Knopf, 1973), p.336.
10. Cf. Goldstone, 'Theories of Revolution: The Third Generation', cited in note 8. The
   emphasis upon structure is a fundamental shift from the 'Second Generation' and its
   focus upon revolutionary process. The detailed analysis of structural relationships is
   also considerably removed from the descriptive but largely atheoretical perspective of
   the 'First Generation'. Among the key works considered representative of the 'Second
   Generation' approach are: James C. Davies, 'Toward a Theory of Revolution',
   American Sociological Review, 27/1 (Feb. 1962), pp.5–19; Ted Robert Gurr, *Why Men
   Rebel* (Princeton, NJ: Princeton UP, 1970); Chalmers Johnson, *Revolutionary Change*
   (NY: Free Press, 1963); and Charles Tilly, *From Mobilization to Revolution* (Reading,
   MA: Addison-Wesley, 1978). Illustrative 'First Generation' books are: Crane Brinton,
   The Anatomy of Revolution (Englewood Cliffs, NJ: Prentice-Hall, 1938); Lyford P.
   Edwards, *The Natural History of Revolution* (Chicago, IL: Univ. of Chicago Press,
   1927); and Pitrim A. Sorokin, *The Sociology of Revolution* (Philadelphia, PA:
   Lippincott, 1925).
11. Early works in reaction to Skocpol's structural perspective are representative: Cf. Bruce
   Cumings, 'Interest and Ideology in the Study of Agrarian Politics', *Politics & Society*,
   10/4 (1981), pp.467–95; Jerome L. Himmelstein and Michael S. Kimmel, 'Review
   Essay: *States and Social Revolutions*: The Implications and Limits of Skocpol's
   Structural Model', *American Journal of Sociology*, 86/5 (March 1981), pp.1145–54;
   Elizabeth J. Perry, 'Book Review: *States and Social Revolutions*', *Journal of Asian
   Studies*, 39/3 (May 1980), pp.533–5; and Elizabeth Nichols, 'Skocpol on Revolution:
   Comparative Analysis vs. Historical Conjuncture', draft for *Comparative Social
   Research*, Vol.9 (1986).
12. This issue is discussed explicitly in Truong Buu Lam, *Resistance, Rebellion, Revolution:
   Popular Movements in Vietnamese History* (Singapore: Inst. of SE Asian Studies, 1984).
   See esp. Ch.5, 'The Viet Minh Movement', pp.37–48.
13. A useful exception is Greg Lockhart, *Nation in Arms: The Origins of the People's Army
   of Vietnam* (Boston, MA: Allen and Unwin, 1989).
14. Illustrative works are Elizabeth J. Perry, *Rebels and Revolutionaries in North China,
   1845-1945* (Stanford, CA: Stanford UP, 1980); Yung-fa Chen, *Making Revolution: The
   Communist Movement in Eastern and Central China, 1937–1945* (Berkeley, CA: Univ.
   of California Press, 1986); Kathleen Hartford and Steven M. Goldstein (eds.), *Single
   Sparks: China's Rural Revolutions* (Armonk, NY: M.E. Sharpe, 1989).
15. Clarification of this point with respect to Vietnam may be found by consulting what
   remain the most outstanding works on the subject, those of Douglas Pike: *Viet Cong:
   The Organization and Techniques of the National Liberation Front of South Vietnam*
   (Cambridge, MA: MIT Press, 1966); and *PAVN: People's Army of Vietnam* (Novato,
   CA: Presidio Press, 1986), esp. Chs.9 and 10 of Sect. IV, 'Strategy'. These works are
   relevant for an understanding of insurgencies in general.
16. For the theory of Mao Tse-tung, see his *Selected Military Writings of Mao Tse-tung*
   (Peking: Foreign Languages Press, 1968). To compare with Vietnamese thinking on the
   subject, see Vo Nguyen Giap, *People's War, People's Army* (NY: Bantam Books, 1968).
17. Che Guevara is generally credited with origination of Castro's strategy for seizing
   power. For his thought, see Che Guevara, *Guerrilla Warfare* (Lincoln, NE: Univ. of
   Nebraska Press, 1985). Perhaps better known is Guevara (*et al.?*) as synthesised by
   Regis Debray. Debray's own analysis of revolutionary theory and praxis makes for fas-
   cinating reading; see his *A Critique of Arms* (Middlesex, UK: Penguin Books, 1977);
   additional analysis in Hartmut Ramm, *The Marxism of Regis Debray* (Lawrence, KS:
   Regents Press of Kansas, 1978). For the Cuban Revolution in general, see Ramon
   Eduardo Ruiz, *Cuba: The Making of a Revolution* (NY: Norton, 1968).
18. Numerous works are available on this early period. Among the most useful, in dis-

cussing soviet formation, are Linda Grove, 'Creating a Northern Soviet', *Modern China,* 1/3 (July 1975), pp.243–70; and Shinkichi Eto, 'Hai-lu-feng — The First Chinese Soviet Government', Parts I & II, *China Quarterly,* No. 8 (Oct.–Dec. 1961), I: pp.161–83; 9 (Jan.–March 1962), II: pp.149–81.

    For the Jiangxi period in general, cf. Philip C.C. Huang, Lynda Schaefer Bell, and Kathy Lemons Walker, *Chinese Communists and Rural Society, 1927–1934,* Chinese Res. Monograph No.13 (Berkeley, CA: Center for Chinese Studies, 1978). Particularly good for Jiangxi specifics are two works by Stephen C. Averill, 'Party, Society, and Local Elite in the Jiangxi Communist Movement', *Journal of Asian Studies,* 46/2 (May 1987), pp.279–303; and 'Local Elites and Communist Revolution in the Jiangxi Hill Country', Ch.11 in Joseph W. Esherick and Mary Backus Rankin (eds.), *Chinese Local Elites and Patterns of Dominance* (Berkeley, CA: Univ. of California Press, 1990), pp.282–304. One may also profitably consult Mao Tse-tung's own *Report From Xunwu,* released in a new edition, Roger Thompson, ed. and trans. (Stanford, CA: Stanford UP, 1990); his introduction is useful.

    In dealing with the KMT counterinsurgency, no work approaches that of William Wei, *Counterrevolution in China: The Nationalists in Jiangxi During the Soviet Period* (Ann Arbor, MI: Univ. of Michigan Press, 1985). Though he incorporates his previous research into his text, his individual articles which led up to the book are worth reviewing on their merits, particularly for the insight they give into the state's response to Maoist insurgency: 'The Role of the German Advisors in the Suppression of the Central Soviet: Myth and Reality', in Bernd Martin (ed.), *The German Advisory Group in China: Military, Economic, and Political Issues in Sino-German Relations, 1927–1938* [or *Die deutsche Beraterschaft in China 1927–1938]* (Düsseldorf: Droste, 1981); 'The Guomindang's Three Parts Military and Seven Parts Politics Policy', *Asian Profile* [Hong Kong], 10/2 (April 1982), pp.111–27; 'Warlordism and Factionalism in the Guomindang's Encirclement Campaigns in Jiangxi', in *Illinois Papers in Asian Studies 1983, Pt. II: Kuomintang Development Efforts During the Nanking Decade* (Urbana, IL: Center for Asian Studies, Univ. of Illinois, 1983), pp.87–120; 'Law and Order: The Role of Guomindang Security Forces in the Suppression of the Communist Bases During the Soviet Period', Ch. 2 in Hartford and Goldstein (note 14), pp.34–61; 'Five Encirclement and Suppression Campaigns (1930–1934)', in Edwin Pak-wah Leung (ed.), *Historical Dictionary of Revolutionary China, 1839–1976* (NY: Greenwood Press, 1992), pp.121–3; and 'Insurgency by the Numbers: A Reconsideration of the Ecology of Communist Success in Jiangxi', *Small Wars and Insurgencies* [London], 5/2 (Autumn 1994), pp.201–17.

19. The debate was started by the publication of Chalmers Johnson, *Peasant Nationalism and Communist Power in China* (Berkeley, CA: Univ. of California Press, 1962). For a critique of his approach, see Donald G. Gillin, 'Review Article: "Peasant Nationalism" in the History of Chinese Communism', *Journal of Asian Studies,* 23/2 (Feb. 1964), pp.269–87. Johnson himself considers the controversy and discusses his point further in 'Peasant Nationalism Revisited: The Biography of a Book', *China Quarterly,* No. 72 (Dec. 1977), pp.766–85.

    For presentation of the Yenan approach, cf. another Johnson critic, Mark Selden, *The Yenan Way in Revolutionary China* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard UP, 1971). Also useful is his earlier 'The Guerrilla Movement in Northwest China: The Origins of the Shensi-Kansu-Ninghsia Border Region', Parts I & II, *The China Quarterly,* No.28 (Oct.-Dec. 1966), I: pp.63–81; No.29 (Jan.-March 1967), II: pp.61–81. Carl E. Dorris suggests modification of the 'Yenan thesis' in his interesting 'Peasant Mobilization in North China and the Origins of Yenan Communism', *China Quarterly,* No.68 (Dec. 1976), pp.697-719.

20. An excellent work on the damage inflicted upon the KMT by the Japanese invasion is Hsi-sheng Ch'i, *Nationalist China at War* (Ann Arbor, MI: Univ. of Michigan Press, 1982). For the civil war period cf. Suzanne Pepper, *Civil War in China* (Berkeley, CA:

Univ. of California Press, 1978). Fine consideration of the KMT regime, its strengths and weaknesses, is in two works by Lloyd E. Eastman: *The Abortive Revolution: China Under Nationalist Rule, 1927–1937* (Cambridge: Harvard UP, 1974); and *Seeds of Destruction: Nationalist China in War and Revolution, 1937–1949* (Stanford, CA: Stanford UP, 1984).

21. This discussion is based principally upon *The Selected Works of Mao Tse-tung* [hereafter, SWM], 5 vols. (Peking: Foreign Languages Press, various publication dates); Stuart Schram, *Mao Tse-tung* (Middlesex, UK: Penguin Books, 1966); and Schram, *The Political Thought of Mao Tse-tung*, rev. ed. (NY: Praeger, 1976).

22. Mao: '...two contradictory things can be united and can transform themselves into each other, but in the absence of these conditions, they cannot constitute a contradiction, cannot coexist in the same entity and cannot transform themselves into each other'. See 'On Contradiction' (Aug. 1937), SWM I, pp.311–47.

23. For background see my 'The Maoist Conception of the United Front, With Particular Application to the United Front in Thailand Since October 1976', *Issues & Studies*, 16/3 (March 1980), pp.46–69.

24. Cf. Georgi Dimitroff [*sic*], *The United Front — The Struggle Against Fascism and War* (San Francisco, CA: Proletarian Publishers, 1975).

25. Cf. Lyman P. Van Slyke, *Enemies and Friends — The United Front in Chinese Communist History* (Stanford: Stanford UP, 1967).

26. Schram, *Mao Tse-tung* (n.21), 216.

27. Cf. Chalmers Johnson (n.19), as well as Johnson, 'The Third Generation of Guerrilla Warfare', *Asian Survey*, 8/6 (June 1978), pp.435–47.

28. 'Some Questions Concerning Methods of Leadership' (1 June 1942), SWM III, pp.117–22.

29. Cf. Rosa Luxemburg, 'Leninism or Marxism?', in William Lutz and Harry Brent (eds.), *On Revolution* (Cambridge, MA: Winthrop,1971), pp.263–75.

30. For a complete text see Lin Piao, 'Long Live the Victory of People's War', *Peking Review*, No.32 (4 Aug. 1967), pp.14–35.

1 Maoist Miscue I: The Demise of the Communist Party of Thailand, 1965–1983

In one of the final scenes of the 1983 film 'Under Fire', Nick Nolte, as journalist Russell Price, joins in the celebration as the Sandinistas march triumphantly into Managua. To his disgust, he finds beside him a mercenary acquaintance who, throughout the film, has kept popping into his life, alternately amusing and shocking him. Price wants nothing to do with the man and makes his exit. As he does, though, the mercenary calls out after him, 'See you in Thailand'.

It is a sentiment that was shared by more than a few over the years. Early on in the Vietnam War, books began to appear with titles such as *Thailand: Another Vietnam?* and *Thailand: The War That Is, The War That Will Be* ('A first-hand report of another Vietnam in the making', read the subtitle). It was only a matter of time, such analyses predicted, before the next domino found itself wobbling. The scriptwriters for 'Under Fire' obviously agreed with them.

Still, the film barely had time to hit the theaters before Thailand had won its war with communist insurgents and was on the verge of an economic boom. Today, Bangkok is being heralded as the next 'Asian miracle'. The Communist Party of Thailand (CPT) is still around and still dreaming of the day its 'people's war' will culminate in a Marxist victory. Yet it has become a shrill voice with no audience — and a minimal number of followers willing to remain in the field.

The reasons for this stunning development have not yet been studied in detail. This is a mistake, because the Thai insurgency provides an exceptionally useful window for examining one of the more recent episodes of 'political war' to play itself out. Furthermore, since the efforts by the insurgents to 'make a revolution' were ultimately unsuccessful, there are practical as well as theoretical lessons to be learned. Ironically, in the end, it was

government-led 'people's war' that ended the Maoist-inspired effort by the communists to seize state power.

Growth of the Communist Opposition to the Old-Regime

One of the few states to avoid the loss of its independence in the nineteenth/early twentieth century imperial scramble that divided up the globe, Thailand nonetheless emerged from the episode a greatly changed society. Not only was its economy integrated into the world market, but its political system, following the 1932 over-throw of the absolute monarchy, institutionalized rule by the bureaucratic elite — dominated by the military — a form of gov-ernance which has been termed a bureaucratic polity. (That is, political interplay took place within the bureaucracy itself.) In its geographic boundaries, this polity had shrunk considerably, as both the French and British had lopped off outlying areas. This lat-ter circumstance, though, was a plus, because it made the kingdom more ethnically and culturally homogenous. Thus its basic socio-cultural orientation remained traditionally Buddhist and Thai, both formally and in reality. In the kingdom there was a common thread of belief in Buddhist conceptions of life and correct con-duct, as well as agreement on the legitimacy of the established order, the old-regime, to use the phraseology of political science.

At the apex of that order was the king, who, despite having lost his position as an absolute monarch in 1932, regained, in the decades that followed, prominence in both social life and politics through his role as one who could stand above the fray and serve the interests of Thailand alone. Similarly, the notion that the Thai government ruled with the blessing of the king — even at his plea-sure — increasingly became a political fact which no coup group could ignore, the coup having become, in the post-1932 world of Bangkok, the accepted method for a change of government. To be perceived as having failed to obtain royal assent was to ensure fail-ure.

In addition to his resurgent political position, the king was for-mally the chief patron and protector of the Buddhist religion, which was represented by a vibrant order of monks (*Sangha*). The *Sangha* impacted upon all levels of Thai society, and there was scarcely a major village in the kingdom which did not have within its boundaries a *wat*, or temple, with a small group of monks in

residence. The monks were an important element in the continual renewal of culture, because they comprised a transient group, moving in and out of the population. It was considered every young man's duty to spend at least a three-month period in the saffron robe.[1] Members of the *Sangha* were present at all major government functions, and the king himself engaged in activities dictated by the religion as giving strength and unity to the kingdom.

The result was to intertwine integrally religion and polity. This was not merely a formal relationship. Numerous anthropological studies found a community of belief and practice which linked all classes and groups.[2] The value structure was shared by both elites and the populace at large. Among the more central elements were a shared perception that position was a function of *merit* accumulated in past lives; that it was the duty of those more well off to share with and care for those not as well endowed (this was a major tenet of ubiquitous patron-client relationships); and that all members of the polity were at the most basic level members of a unique community linked by that which was 'Thai'.

Beliefs such as these served qualitatively to shape the impact of 'modernization' even while, structurally, conditions grew during the twentieth century which were fraught with conflict. Increasingly, as the bureaucratic polity stifled the constitutive system,[3] forces of the left offered radical solutions to issues of policy, of which there were many, ranging from increasing poverty and landlessness to lack of avenues for political participation. Ultimately, after World War II, the Communist Party of Thailand (CPT) emerged as the primary opposition to the Royal Thai Government's (RTG) socio-economic-political policies. As such it challenged the legitimacy of the Buddhist-sanctioned order.

Communism had long been viewed by the Thai government as a threat. The Russian Revolution had served as an early example of the menace of the philosophy, involving as it did regicide, attacks on religion, and assaults upon the existing order. What damned Marxism still more was its association with the Chinese immigrant problem: the earliest communist proselytism was carried out amongst the Chinese community by agents sent from China. Similarly, other communist activities involved resident foreign communities. Vietnamese communist cadre, for instance, worked amongst the Vietnamese refugee groups in the Thai northeast; and Ho Chi Minh made a secret visit to the kingdom in 1928 as the Comintern's Southeast Asia representative. For a time, in