

# **Mao Tse-tung's Contribution in the Development of Universal Theory of People's War**

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## **1. Introduction**

Following extensive investigation of the history, Marx and Engels put forward a scientific proposition based on the dialectical and historical materialist world outlook regarding the revolutionary role and necessity of violence in class society. Grasping the proposition on the necessity of armed struggle as the essence of entire teachings of Marx and Engels, Lenin further developed the Marxist concept on revolutionary violence in the course of applying it systematically in class struggle that led successfully to the Great Russian October Revolution. In the context of preparation, development and consolidation of the outcome of the Russian Revolution, Lenin and Stalin, providing imperialism as the source of war along with explanation of its particularities elucidated that revolutionary war is inevitable against it. In the course of applying these Marxist-Leninist principles in the concrete practice of class struggle in the Chinese society, Mao Tse-tung developed the proposition on revolutionary violence to a comprehensive theory of People's War, and proved it to have a universal character. In this way, Mao Tse-tung not only developed the Marxist-Leninist military science to a qualitatively new height but also clarified that waging of People's War in the imperialist era has become the focal point of philosophical and political understanding to change the world.

## **2. Historical Background of the Development of Maoist Conception on People's War**

While talking about Mao's contribution in the development of theory of People's War it is necessary to keep in mind the historical background of it. In November 1919, Lenin in the course of delivering "Speech in the Second Russian Congress of Communist Organizations of the Eastern Nations" had said that the question of revolution in the oppressed countries dominated by peasants was 'difficult', 'unique' but 'specially honorable'. In relation to the problems of these revolutions, Lenin, stated that these are such problems "of which you will find no solution in any communist books", and clarified that "it is such a task to which no communists of the world had met with before". Lenin had suggested that the communists in such countries of the east should accomplish this task by applying the "general theory of communism" in compliance with the specific situation of their own. Mao Tse-tung enriched qualitatively the theoretical treasure of Marxism-Leninism by successfully fulfilling the necessity of class struggle in the imperialist era. In relation to People's War, Mao's contributions should be understood in the context of the necessity of developing class struggle in the history.

The success of Russian revolution in 1917 disseminated Marxism-Leninism the world over. The process of extensive study of politics and military strategy and tactics of armed insurrection of that revolution also intensified. It also provided a general orientation of class struggle against reaction along with high morale from great strength prevailing within the world proletarian class and oppressed and working masses themselves. The historic significance of this revolution accomplished under the leadership of Lenin is self-evident the world over.

But, even though the experience of Russian revolution was very much significant in the task of advancing revolution in countries, under twofold oppression of imperialism and feudalism, it would be a serious mistake to pursue it mechanically. The tendency of mechanically following Russian revolution in the history of international communist movement including China has caused no less damage. Large number of modern industrial workers were centralized in the big cities in Russia, as her level of industrial development was high. General strike of workers in cities did have the strength that could challenge directly the whole state machinery and participation and assistance of peasants in it would create a situation that could enable to seize cities and the center first. On the other, Russia was not an oppressed country but was itself in an imperialist position of subjugating weak nations. In that situation, to follow the strategy and tactics adopted in the course of Russian revolution in the countries that were industrially backward and weak, peasant dominated and oppressed by imperialism and feudalism, would be against what Lenin stated, and is against Leninism itself. On the other, the tendency that would try to trail behind the bourgeois class in the pretext that there existed discrepancy of social development between Russia and other oppressed countries would be right opportunism and serious treason towards revolution and Marxism-Leninism. This type of tendency was prevalent in the international communist movement and also in the Chinese communist movement itself. This tendency was further damaging the communist movement.

In the course of carrying out forceful struggle against both kinds of aforesaid deviations, Mao, as the preparation of socialist revolution, developed a comprehensive strategy and tactics of New Democratic revolution, an inseparable part of the world proletarian revolution. In the semi-feudal and semi-colonial countries, he, along with the historical materialist analysis of alliance between imperialism and feudalism and power balance on the side of the people, developed a general theory of People's War in the form of a comprehensive chain of military strategy and tactics. Today, the theory of People's War Mao developed has become a universal theory that could and must be applied according to the respective situation of all types of countries.

### **3. Maoist Principle of People's War**

The entire theories of Mao on People's War are based upon the great and scientific proposition that "masses are the creators of the history". In general, those armies that have gone against the objective necessity and sentiment of the masses have been defeated in history. In whatever way they are equipped with weapons, trained and powerful in the beginning their fall is inevitable when they stand against the interest of the masses. Final victory is theirs that fight for defending the interest of broad masses however weak they seem militarily in the beginning. Extermination of the old and development of the new is an imperative law of objective world beyond any human wish. In fact, the scientific basis of Marxism-Leninism-Maoism exactly lies in finding objective laws and conducting accordingly. What has Mao through practice of Chinese

revolution proved perfectly is that however powerful they seem to be the reactionary imperialists are paper tigers and the real heroes are the working masses. In this context Mao says, “All reactionaries are paper tigers. In appearance, the reactionaries are terrifying, but in reality they are not so powerful. From a long-term point of view, it is not the reactionaries but the people who are really powerful.”

To believe in the masses and to serve them, for that, to adapt with the masses, make every policy, decision and activity based upon well-being of them is the basis of Mao’s theory of People’s War. Mao says, “Our point of departure is to serve the masses whole-heartedly and never for a moment divorce ourselves from the masses, to proceed in all cases from the interests of the people and not from the interests of individuals or groups, and to understand the identity of our responsibility to the people and our responsibility to the leading organs of the Party.” Mao used to firmly oppose irresponsible things opposed to people’s interest and he had a firm belief that correcting such mistakes immediately is to become responsible to the people. He says, “Our duty is to hold ourselves responsible to the people. Every word, every act and every policy must conform to the people’s interests, and if mistakes occur, they must be corrected -- that is what being responsible to the people means.” The key factor for the success of People’s War is, of course, to believe in the people and be devoted to them. This task is impossible to fulfill by reactionaries, revisionists and opportunists of the world because their point of departure is inspired by the individual interest.

“The seizure of power by armed force, the settlement of the issue by war, is the central task and the highest form of revolution. This Marxist-Leninist principle of revolution holds good universally, for China and for all other countries.” Mao on this basis proceeds – what is a revolutionary war? Mao says: “The revolutionary war is a war of the masses; it can be waged only by mobilizing the masses and relying on them”. Mao says people are “real iron bastions” and says that no force in the world can strike out the masses. In this context Mao says, “What is a true bastion of iron? It is the masses, the millions upon millions of people who genuinely and sincerely support the revolution. That is the real iron bastion which no force can smash, no force whatsoever. The counter-revolution cannot smash us; on the contrary, we shall smash it.” This Marxist-Leninist determination and belief enabled Mao to crush to dust the imperialist and reactionary armies in millions that were equipped with sophisticated weapons and trained well. Mao says, “Weapons are an important factor in war, but not the decisive factor; it is people, not things, that are decisive.” This belief enabled to stamp out Japan including the American imperialists through the hurricane of People’s War. The belief based on this scientific insight enabled Mao to develop the entire theories of People’s War. Therefore, those who want to lead People’s War must firmly grasp this Maoist understanding towards people. It, along with giving rise to never failing self-confidence for the revolutionaries fighting for people’s favor, did ascertain a scientific methodology to demolish reactionaries. He says, “Make trouble, fail, make trouble again, fail again . . . till their doom; that is the logic of the imperialists and all reactionaries the world over in dealing with the people’s cause, and they will never go against this logic. This is a Marxist law.” Mao further says in it, “Fight, fail, fight again, fail again, fight again . . . till their victory; that is the logic of the people, and they too will never go against this logic. This is another Marxist law.” In this way, Mao has put forward a correct and the Marxist proposition on the nature of reaction and the people. The army is the principal instrument of the state power. One, who wants to seize the state power must have army with him. Revolutionary

war is inevitable in the class society. Such type of war brings forth a qualitative advance in the social development. Based upon the scientific essence of the historical experience that revolutionary war is necessary to do away with the reactionary war, Mao, plainly and clearly proclaimed, "Political power grows out of the barrel of a gun". Accepting that the revolutionary war is all-powerful, Mao takes up it as a Marxist ideology. He says, "Experience in the class struggle in the era of imperialism teaches us that it is only by the power of the gun that the working class and the laboring masses can defeat the armed bourgeoisie and landlords; in this sense we may say that only with guns can the whole world be transformed. We are advocates of the abolition of war, we do not want war; but war can only be abolished through war, and in order to get rid of the gun it is necessary to take up the gun." In this way, it is clear that Mao's conceptions on war have been built upon the basis of dialectical historical materialism.

Mao does not take up the revolutionary war only as a means of defeating enemy but emphasizes that it has an inherent role of cleansing several evils that have rooted into the revolutionaries themselves and the masses. He says, "Revolutionary war is an antitoxin which not only eliminates the enemy's poison but also purges us of our own filth. Every just, revolutionary war is endowed with tremendous power, which can transform many things or clear the way for their transformation." In course of the First World War, Lenin has not only emphasized on the negative aspect of the war but also the positive role it plays in the history like, "War has activated the broad masses. War has provided motion to the history and now the history is propelling forward in the rapid motion of a rail engine." (Quote not original). Mao also clarifies this fact further through his aforesaid statement.

As a guarantee that nobody could protect imperialism and domestic reaction from being defeated, Mao says, "The reason is that our strategy and tactics are based on the people's war; no army opposed to the people can use our strategy and tactics". This is the main foundation of Maoist theory.

#### **4. Maoist Strategy and Tactics of People's War**

Mao developed a series of strategies and tactics of People's War on the basis of intense wars of many years. Under the leadership of Mao, the Communist Party of China presented to the world a brilliant example of how a militarily small and a weak force can defeat the powerful enemy by adopting those strategies and tactics. Today they have become invaluable property for the revolutionary masses fighting imperialism and reaction the world over. Mao has developed the whole strategies and tactics on the basis of understanding that the basic principle of the entire military actions is to 'defend oneself and defeat the enemy'. To despise enemy strategically and take it seriously tactically is an undeniable condition for the success of People's War. On the basis of study of the past class struggles, of course from the military viewpoint, Mao teaches to neglect and mistrust enemy from the initial stage of People's War to its success basing on the historical materialist understanding that enemy's downfall is indispensable and people's victory is inevitable, and through this creates self-confidence towards victory. But, in the context of immediate tactics, he emphasizes to the necessity of taking the enemy seriously, collecting information of each of their activities and centralizing more strength compared to them in each confrontation. Mao has put forward the theory of dividing enemy into pieces, fighting their small and weakest part by only consolidating comparatively own strength to guarantee a victory in it

and, in this way, achieving strategic victory through the process of tactical ones. Accordingly, Mao says – “Although we are inferior as a whole (in terms of numbers), we are absolutely superior in every part and every specific campaign, and this ensures victory in the campaign. As time goes on, we shall become superior as a whole and eventually wipe out all the enemy.” In order to ensure victory of own side in the campaign, Mao instructs, “In every battle, concentrate an absolutely superior force (two, three, four and sometimes even five or six times the enemy's strength), encircle the enemy forces completely, strive to wipe them out thoroughly and do not let any escape from the net.” Mao always emphasizes on the fact that dispersion of a big section of the enemy is not of that importance whereas complete annihilation of even a small part of them deserves special significance.

In order to fight powerful army built up in alliance of feudalism and imperialism in the stage of New Democratic revolution, and to achieve victory in it, Mao has presented as inevitable factors a whole theoretical and practical solution that suggests to centralize in rural areas, conduct guerrilla warfare with a strategic plan under the leadership of the Party so as to transform peasants into an imperishable source of revolution and invincible army. Mao has developed strategy and tactics of protracted People's War as a solution on how to transform guerrilla war into the mobile and positional wars and capture cities through encirclement by establishing base areas in the countryside. The theory of protracted People's War that concludes in three stages of strategic defensive, strategic equilibrium and strategic offensive has become today a theoretical guideline to the entire oppressed nations of the world.

In relation to guerrilla war, the world famous tactics of developing people's strength step by step and annihilating enemy by dividing into pieces that Mao developed are:

"The enemy advances, we retreat; the enemy camps, we harass; the enemy tires, we attack; the enemy retreats, we pursue."

"In order to arouse the masses we decentralize our armed force among them and centralize the same to confront with the enemy." (Quote not original)

"To extend stable base areas, employ the policy of advancing in waves; when pursued by a powerful enemy, employ the policy of circling around."

"Through a best method, arouse maximum number of people in the least time". (Quote not original)

The scientific nature of aforesaid tactics is self-evident.

While talking about guerilla war, Mao has brought up seriously the question of base area on the basis of experience of several past failures regarding war. On the crux of base area under guerrilla war, Mao says, “They are the strategic bases on which the guerrilla forces rely in performing their strategic tasks and achieving the object of preserving and expanding themselves and destroying and driving out the enemy.” Mao has emphasized very seriously on the fact that guerrilla war cannot go for long without a base area and cannot develop either. Mao regards it as wrong to think of a war without base area in today's situation of development of science and technology by mentioning that the main reason behind failures of past peasant wars conducted by the roving rebels was the absence of it. What makes clear from this is that those who talk of protracted People's War but negate or ignore the necessity and significance of the base area do not either understand about protracted People's War or their outlook resembles that of the 'roving rebels'. It is clear that there can be no People's War in both the circumstances.

In order to build up such type of base area, Mao has emphasized a good mass base, a militant Party organization, adequate and powerful red army, appropriate geography for actions and adequate financial capacity for food grains as the necessary conditions.

It has been clear that in essence, ‘you fight your way and we will fight ours’; ‘you depend upon modern weapons, we depend upon conscious people’; ‘we will not fight if we cannot win; we will not miss chance, if we can’; ‘we will not give you any chance to fight if you want us to do; we will not let you survive when we fight you; we are prepared for any mobility if the war needs’; ‘we will not at any rate let loose our initiative’; etc are the key points of strategy and tactics of Maoist People's War.

## **5. Maoist Concept on the Relation Among Party, Army and the People.**

Mao has said that a new type of militant Communist Party, a powerful people’s army under its leadership and a united front of broad masses are the three important weapons of revolution. On Party Mao says, “If there is to be revolution, there must be a revolutionary Party. Without a revolutionary Party, without a Party built on the Marxist-Leninist revolutionary theory and in the Marxist-Leninist revolutionary style, it is impossible to lead the working class and the broad masses of the people to defeat imperialism and its running dogs.” As a very important principle on the relation between Party and army Mao says, “Our principle is that the Party commands the gun, and the gun must never be allowed to command the Party.” Therefore, Mao has always taught army to work under Party instruction and to be proud of it -- “All our officers and fighters must always bear in mind that we are the great People's Liberation Army, we are the troops led by the great Communist Party of China. Provided we constantly observe the directives of the Party, we are sure to win.”

Mao established three basic guiding theories on the style of work of the people’s army. These theories brought forward the people’s army in the form of a new army as opposed to the entire reactionary mercenary soldiers. They are, “First, the principle of unity between officers and men, which means eradicating feudal practices in the army, prohibiting beating and abuse, building up a conscious discipline, and sharing weal and woe--as a result of which the entire army is closely united. Second, the principle of unity between the army and the people, which means maintaining a discipline that forbids the slightest violation of the people's interests, conducting propaganda among the masses, organizing and arming them, lightening their financial burdens and suppressing the traitors and collaborators who do harm to the army and the people--as a result of which the army is closely united with the people and welcomed everywhere. Third, the principle of disintegrating the enemy troops and giving lenient treatment to prisoners of war. Our victory depends not only upon our military operations but also upon the disintegration of the enemy troops.” In this way, Mao has explained the basis of working style of the people’s army in an organized manner. Mao has emphasized on the facts that officers must maintain close relation with soldiers, one should learn from another and soldiers must not be punished physically. He has provided sufficient lessons to the army that along with treating the masses closely and always defending their interests and “without claiming to be independent”, never and at any cost, they should constantly respect the Party. In this context Mao time and again emphasizes on the facts, “The Red Army fights not merely for the sake of fighting but in order to conduct propaganda among the masses, organize them, arm them, and help them to establish revolutionary political power. Without these objectives, fighting loses its meaning and the Red

Army loses the reason for its existence.” It is evident that the success of People's War depends upon the aforesaid type of close relation among Party, army and the masses. Therefore, every Party that needs to lead People's War must build up a clear outlook on the relation between three important weapons and the working style.

## **6. Conclusion**

In the course of leading Chinese revolution, Mao Tse-tung, studying and analyzing the experiences of wars of human being on the basis of the historical materialist viewpoint since thousands of years, developed the military science qualitatively to a new height. On the basis of Marxist-Leninist world outlook, clarifying the fact that there exists no other way to resolve the contradictions of today's imperialist era than to fight with arm, Mao invented a theory of People's War by which even a very tiny force can defeat the “terrifying” enemy. The theory of People's War that has been developed by Mao is in fact the military expression of Marxist-Leninist principle and politics.

Mao investigated the whole series of principle, strategy and tactics necessary for the success of People's War. Today, these theories, strategies and tactics have been invincible ideological weapons for the communist parties and the masses the world over in the fight against imperialism and all sorts of reactions. Mao emphasized, “ We must stamp out all the powerless ideologies from our ranks. All such ideologies that exaggerate enemy's strength and minimize that of the people are quite wrong.” (Quote is not original). In this way, on the basis of intense internal and external wars for decades, Mao put forward a clarion call, “... people of the world, be enthusiastic, fight courageously, face hardships boldly and advance like waves. Then the whole of the world will be of yours. All kinds of devils and monsters will be annihilated selectively.” Quote is not original). Foreseeing that the coming 50 to 100 years in the world will be the years of intense turmoil, Mao has taught us to remain prepared for that.

Finally, what can be said is that, the theory of People's War developed by Mao is universal. In order to proceed forward in the struggles against imperialism and all sorts of reactions, it is quite necessary to study and to be active in applying this theory in their own particular situation. Anyone, that negates to understand its significance, tries to devalue it, is impossible to be a communist revolutionary. Whether to grasp or not the line of People's War has today become a demarcating line between Marxism and revisionism.

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