# MAO'S PROTRACTED WAR: THEORY VS. PRACTICE

by

LIEUTENANT COLONEL JOHN W. WOODMANSEE. JR., USA

In the spring of 1938, Mao Tse-tung delivered a series of lectures at the "Yenan Association for the Study of the Anti-Japanese War." The Japanese War had been going on for almost a year. The Communists and the Nationalists had joined in a tenuous "United Front," and the Communists' Eighth Route Army, commanded by Chu Teh, was in the field. Japanese forces, driving out of Manchuria, had overrun the northern area of China down to the Shantung peninsula and in the south were well established on the Yangtze River. Chiang Kai-shek had borne the brunt of the Japanese attack and, despite heavy losses around Shanghai, had managed to preserve the fighting strength of his army. The Communists, in the meantime, had begun the political organization of the thinly-held Japanese territory in Shansi-Hopeh provinces. Their base area in northwest Shensi had not been reached by the Japanese.

Chairman Mao was being pressured to be more active in the military fight against the invading Japanese Army. Some were discouraged and felt there was little hope of defeating the relentless Japanese military machine. Mao used the theory of "protracted war" to encourage and unify his people and to turn the energies of his party to expanding political control over the peasants and establishing guerrilla bases. Mao's brilliant examination of the existing contradictions in the Sino-Japanese struggle and his three-stage portrayal of China's victory plan has become a modern military classic. It is taught in many service schools and widely used by scholars in explaining the Vietnamese Communist strategy, first against the French and later against the US/South Vietnamese forces in the unending Indochina War.[1]

The purpose of this paper is to look at the essentials of this strategy and to see if the historical evidence of the Sino-Japanese War supports the contemporary acclaim accorded to Mao's theoretical opus.

Lieutenant Colonel John W. Woodmansee, Jr., Armor, graduated from the United States Military Academy in 1956 and received a master of science degree in Public Administration from George Washington University in 1965. He has held command and staff positions with Armor, aviation, and air cavalry units and was a White House Fellow assigned to the Secretary of State from September 1968 to September 1969. He wrote this paper while he was an Army Research Associate at the Hoover Institution on War, Revolution and Peace, Stanford, California. He is now assigned to the Training and Doctrine Command at Fort Monroe, Virginia.

## ON THE PROTRACTED WAR

Mao left no doubt that his thesis of protracted war was not philosophical in nature, but was specifically related to the war at hand:

> The Sino-Japanese War is not just any war, it is specifically a war of life and death between semi-colonial and semi-feudal China and imperialist Japan fought in the nineteen thirties.[2]

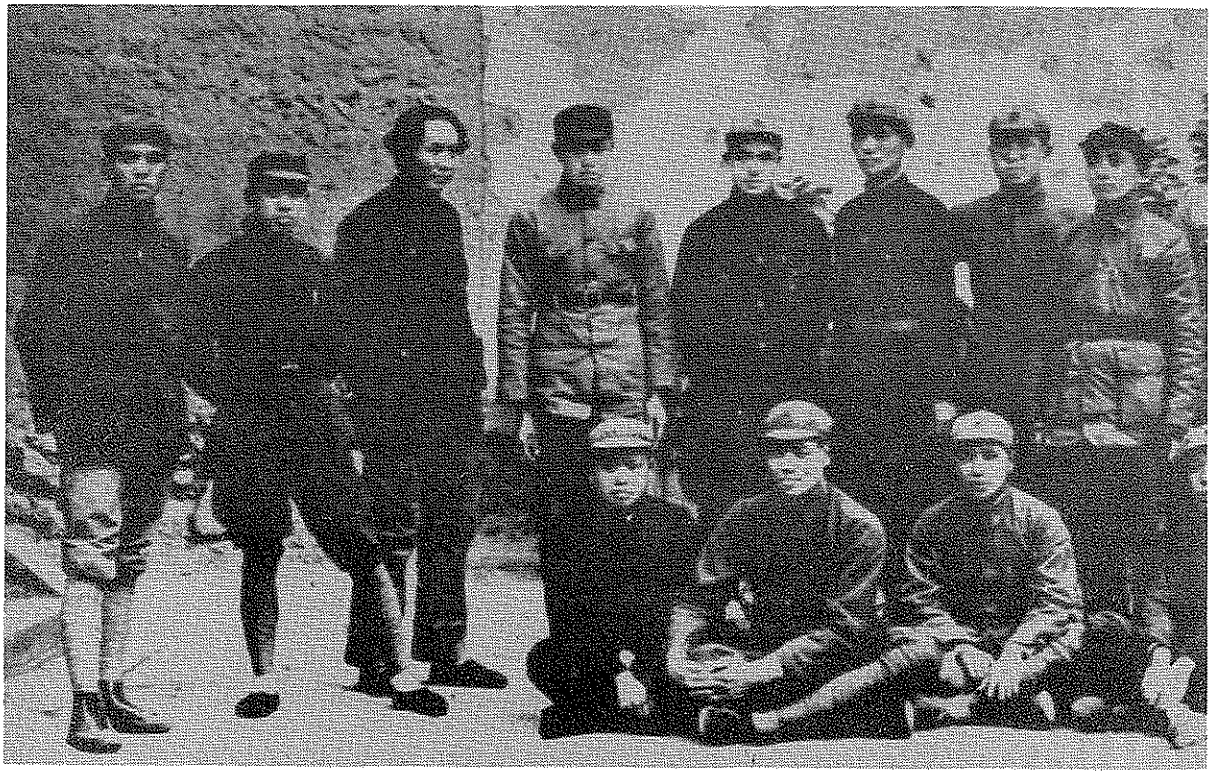
Mao's conclusion that the Chinese struggle against the Japanese could not be a quick victory, but that China would win in a protracted struggle stemmed directly from his assessment of the "contrasting features" of the two protagonists. "Japan's advantage," he reasoned, "lies in her great capacity to wage war, and her disadvantages lie in the reactionary and barbarous nature of her war,

in the inadequacy of her manpower and material resources, and in her meager international support."[3] In contrast, Mao explained: "China's disadvantage lies in her military weakness, and her advantages lie in the progressive and just character of her war, her great size and her abundant international support."[4]

Mao Tse-tung concluded that the initial disparity in military strength would allow the Japanese to advance deep into the countryside. At the point where her limited national resources of manpower and raw materials could not support a sustained attack and a significant occupational force as well, a stalemate would ensue. But with the passage of time, because of the "just" nature of the Chinese cause, the impact of international support, and "provided . . . we make no mistakes of principle and exert our best efforts,"[5] Mao predicted that the balance of forces would shift in China's favor, and permit her victorious counteroffensive.

In order to be more precise in evaluating whether or not this process took place, one must look more closely into Mao's description of the three phases of the protracted war and see how he describes the tactics and characteristics of each stage.

In the first phase, Mao explained, Japan would be on the strategic offensive while China would remain on the strategic defensive. During this period the enemy spearhead after initial success would lose some of its sharpness, enemy troop morale would begin to deteriorate, the Japanese nation would start to grow war-weary and would feel the condemnation of the court of world opinion. The correct tactic for China to employ in this phase was "mobile warfare," executed by regular forces. Neither guerrilla activity nor positional warfare was to assume a major role in this phase. Mobile warfare, Mao carefully defined as "the form in which regular armies wage quick-decision, offensive campaigns and battles on exterior lines along



*Mao Tse-tung (third from left) with some survivors of the Long March in May 1937.*

extensive fronts and over big areas of operations."[6]

The second stage of war would be one of strategic stalemate. Japan would shift to the strategic defensive, while China was preparing for the counteroffensive. This would be the transitional and, Mao predicted, the most trying stage. The enemy's advance will have been stopped, but there will still be large-scale fighting. China could expect Japan to set up puppet governments and plunder the occupied zones. Since China would not yet be technically capable of launching a counter-offensive, the principal tactic of this phase would be guerrilla warfare rather than mobile warfare. Guerrilla warfare would result from large numbers of Chinese troops "basing themselves on all areas not actually occupied by the enemy, and coordinating with the people's local armed forces; they will launch extensive, fierce guerrilla warfare against enemy-occupied places."[7] Another purpose of guerrilla warfare in this phase was to evolve into mobile warfare in phase three. The second stage, Mao proposed, would be the pivotal one. Victory for China would be determined "not by the retention or loss of the big cities in the first stage, but by the extent to which the whole nation exerts itself in the second."[8]

China's counteroffensive would mark the beginning of the third stage of the struggle. This stage would demonstrate the increased capability of China's military forces and reflect considerable international support. Japan, having been worn down militarily, war-wearied through heavy losses and condemned internationally, would fall before the Chinese offensive. Mobile warfare would regain preeminence in this phase; "positional attack" (i.e., assault of defended positions) would also be important; guerrilla warfare would be less useful, but could contribute some strategic support.

Mao admitted that the road to victory was not an easy one and could be traveled only if the Chinese people became "tempered," the political parties became "steeled," and the United Front was "persevered in."[9]

This in brief is the theory of the protracted war against the Japanese which Mao laid before his colleagues in 1938. We must now address the historical evidence to see how this plan unfolded.

## DEVELOPMENT OF THE NORTHWEST BORDER REGION

An understanding of Mao's political and military strength at the beginning of the Sino-Japanese War is necessary to appreciate both what action was taken and what was possible.

The northern part of Shensi province offered an ideal sanctuary for Mao and the remnants of the Long March. The terrain is rugged. Hills were generally deforested, but adequate agricultural land existed in the valleys. After very successful diplomatic and military measures to expand and secure his base area, Mao turned to the internal problems of developing and administering his domain. Land was redistributed more equitably to the peasants; small industries began producing paper, soap, shoes, and textiles; sewing machines were brought in, and the Red Army soldiers appeared in uniform. An arsenal was begun; radio communications were established. There was coal in the area, giving Mao a vital source of fuel. Salt, a near-precious commodity, was also available; thus, the Reds had an item which could readily be exported in exchange for manufactured goods, particularly military supplies. The key element in the development of the base area however lay in Mao's emphasis on training and indoctrination. A

**AN UNDERSTANDING OF MAO'S POLITICAL AND MILITARY STRENGTH AT THE BEGINNING OF THE SINO-JAPANESE WAR IS NECESSARY TO APPRECIATE BOTH WHAT ACTION WAS TAKEN AND WHAT WAS POSSIBLE.**

*An artist's impression of the Long March titled "Comrade Mao Tse-tung at Wenchiashih."*

political-military school in Pao-An had, by 1936, gained an enrollment of some 2,000. The school offered a variety of courses to officers, noncommissioned officers, communications specialists, etc. A vast program to eliminate illiteracy in the army was also begun because it is very difficult to assimilate the "glorious thought of Comrad Mao Tse-tung" if one cannot read or write. Meanwhile, Chu Teh and the remainder of the Red forces on the Long March arrived in the base area, swelling the Red Army to about 94,000.[10]

### FORMATION OF THE UNITED FRONT

After the Sian incident in December 1936, and in return for Chiang's agreement to form a united front, the Communists reportedly promised to abolish their soviet form of government, stop propagandising the people, follow the goals of Sun Yat-sen, and allow the Red Army to be incorporated into the Nationalist forces.[11] Thus, the Eighth Route Army, under Chu Teh, was created. Mao was quick to dispel any misapprehension that his party members might harbor concerning the agreement. In a booklet entitled "Present Strategy and Tactics of the Chinese Communist Party—very confidential," Mao explained:

> . . . Our present compromise is designed to weaken the Kuomintang and to overthrow the National Government under the Kuomingtang dictatorship by utilizing the name of a democratic republic.
>
> . . . For the sake of strategy and during the initial stage of the United Front, the Red Army can change its insignia and accept a united command. However, in reality, the Red Army should maintain its independent entity so that it can act as a model army and become the center and reliable force of the Communist movement in China.

> . . . For the present, the organization of the Communist Party should still be kept secret while the members of the party should openly participate in all patriotic organizations, forming a nucleus in them.[12]

## PHASE ONE

The Marco Polo Bridge incident of 7 July 1937 rapidly expanded into a full-scale invasion of North and Central China, and a bitter 8-year struggle had begun.

The Japanese in 1937 had a regular army in China, plus an indigenous Manchukuoan Army of 100,000 to 150,000 officered by Japanese. To support this force, Japan had the third largest navy in the world—some 200 warships—plus an air force of 2,000 first-rate airplanes manned by a pool of surprisingly effective pilots.[13] Although Japan lacked the natural resources to feed her war machine, her industries had great capacity and were capable of rapid wartime mobilization. Japan could easily supply the required munitions, provided the raw materials were made available.

Chinese Nationalist forces in 1937 totaled around 2 million men. The quality of these soldiers ranged from miserably-armed, ill-trained men of questionable loyalty, to 100,000 well-armed, German-trained and advised elite troops. China had some German 75mm and 88mm guns, but in general lacked artillery, tanks, and air support. The Chinese navy was, of course, no match for the Japanese. It consisted of a few old destroyers, gunboats, and 12 light cruisers. While China was well endowed with natural resources, she had no war industrial capability beyond the few mills and factories that the Germans had constructed as part of their advisory effort. China could not even satisfy her own ammunition requirements.

The Communist Eighth Route Army, commanded by Chu Teh, was supposedly, 45,000 strong, but some estimates put it between 80,000 and 90,000.[14] The Eighth

*A sentry on the Marco Polo Bridge.*

Route Army was organized with three hand-picked divisions: the 115th, commanded by Lin Piao; the 120th, commanded by Ho Lung; and the 129th, commanded by Liu Po-cheng.

Japanese operations in 1937 aimed for a rapid victory over the disjointed Chinese forces. An early dash across the Kalgan-Paotow railway cut the main Chinese supply routes to Russia and protected the right flank of the attack. The main attack then plunged south towards Taiyuan. The plan was to drive the Chinese forces back to the North China Sea, cut off all lines of communications and administer a swift *coup de grâce.*[15] To assist the main attack, a secondary attack was launched into the Shanghai area on 13 August. This would fix Chinese forces in the defense of Shanghai, obtain an excellent port from which to supply further operations, gain control of the Yangtze and so cut off the Chinese lines of communications from the south, and, finally, deal an economic blow to China by capturing the financial center and cutting off revenue from customs duties.

Meanwhile, the Eighth Route Army crossed the Yellow River from Shensi to Shansi province in September 1937. Its orders were probably to produce a significant victory in order to cement the "United Front" and then to organize and sovietize the peasants. Certain conditions led to the successful execution of these missions. The Japanese commander of the 5th Division, General Itagaki, was known as an arrogant, over-confident leader, and he was marching blindly into the rugged Pinghsing Pass.[16] The great lesson of providing front and flank security for marching columns was to be relearned. Nieh Jung-chen, the deputy commander of Lin Piao's 115th Division, conducted the ambush.[17] As described by Chu Teh: ". . . two regiments struck the enemy's flank and two battalions enveloped his rear. The Japanese were caught in a trap."[18] A large portion of the Japanese division was defeated, the remainder dispersed. The 115th captured five tanks, five armored cars, 50 field guns, and another 100 assorted vehicles. However, all this material had to be destroyed except some of the artillery.[19] The victory provided a tremendous boost to Communist morale and gave the Reds a "show-piece" battle on which Chairman Mao could claim the correctness of the concept of mobile warfare.

It was, however, as one authority noted, "the first, last, and only occasion during the Anti-Japanese War when the Communists committed a unit as large as a division to formal battle—despite the fact that there were many opportunities to have done so."[20]

Despite this setback to the Japanese Fifth Division, the remainder of the Japanese forces poured around the Communist 115th Division and seized Taiyuan on 8 November 1937. This left the Red division completely isolated in Japanese-held territory. There, in the Wutai mountains of the Shansi-Hopeh-Chahar border region, Mao's forces began the second part of their mission, the conversion of the masses and the organization of a Communist base area. Meanwhile, the 129th Division was in southeast Shansi facing the Japanese on three sides. The other division of the Eighth Route Army, the 120th, remained out of contact in northwest Shansi. All of the areas picked by the divisions were mountainous, were not occupied by large Japanese garrisons, and thus were quite suitable for the development of guerrilla base areas.[21]

One must recall that Mao's discussion of the protracted war assumed a united front. Although it is facetious to suggest that Chiang Kai-shek's strategy conformed to Mao's, it is worthwhile to see what type of military activity the Generalissimo was adopting.

In Hopeh province, Chiang Kai-shek refused decisive battle and withdrew his forces to the south. Chiang's strategy for the war was surprisingly similar to Mao's concept of a protracted struggle. Recognizing the Japanese need for a battle of annihilation, Chiang proposed instead a war of attrition. It was to be a trading of space for time, a strategy of "accumulating minor successes into major victory."[22] By late October the Japanese had crossed the Yellow River and captured Tsinian. Then winter fell, and operations ground to a halt. In November, Chiang moved the capital inland to Hankow.

While the advance in the north had been

making rapid progress, the invasion of Shanghai had met determined resistance. Japan had been forced to reinforce this effort with troops from the north. After several costly frontal assaults, the Japanese enveloped the Chinese on the peninsula by the imaginative employment of amphibious landings on the north shore of Hangchow Bay and the south shore of the Yangtze River. Shanghai fell in early November. On 13 December, Nanking was evacuated and Japanese troops began the infamous "Rape of Nanking." Chiang again withdrew his armies before they were destroyed. While the Battle for Suchow was raging, Chiang counterattacked at Tai-erh-chuang trapping 60,000 Japanese troops and inflicting 30,000 casualties. It was the first time in modern history that a Japanese army had suffered such a military disaster. After the fall of Suchow in early June, the Japanese turned southwest and drove to Wuhan, occupying this area by the middle of November. Chiang defended stubbornly and, in a last resort, destroyed the dikes of the swollen Yellow River. Water inundated the countryside spoiling the offensive and miring down large quantities of trucks, tanks, and artillery, all of which the Japanese had to abandon. Hankow fell in October, and Chiang was forced to move the capital further inland to Chunking, also on the Yangtze River. While the attack on Hankow was in progress, an amphibious landing struck Canton and secured it in 9 days. By the end of 1938 the Japanese advance had stalled, with the Japanese generally controlling the major cities and communications routes in the eastern third of China. With 1 million total troops in China and Manchuria, almost one-half of them (450,000) were required as support troops to maintain the lines of communication. In retrospect, the strategies of both Mao and Chiang seemed to have properly estimated that the Japanese advance would extend itself until the problem of defending and organizing its conquered territory out-weighed the capability to continue advancing. Though Mao's prescription for mobile warfare in Phase One may be judged to have been somewhat euphoric, it should be noted that adaption of basic strategy to the circumstances of time and place is a fundamental tenet of Mao's doctrine. With the exception of the Red ambush at Pinghsing Pass and Chiang's counterattack at Tai-erh-chuang, the main activity of the Communists was political agitation, while the Nationalists were paying rigid adherence to the first part of Mao's basic principle of warfare: preserve your forces and destroy the enemy.[23]

### PHASE TWO

The Japanese plan for consolidation of the overrun territory followed Mao's prediction.

> The next important step for the Japanese army is to create conditions favorable to the sound development of the new central regime in China, in process of being set up. It is not considered necessary to conduct a large-scale, prolonged war against the Chiang Kai-shek regime but rather to establish a new regime which will cooperate with Japan, at the same time maintaining sufficient Japanese strength in China to secure peace and order.[24]

In a country which had traditionally been under the oppressive rule of landlords, an enlightened occupying power, working through a liberal indigenous puppet government, should have been able to create stable conditions. In fact, Japan did establish a puppet regime. In December 1937 the first provisional government was established at Peking. It was moved to Nanking in 1938 and bolstered in March 1939 by the defection of the Nationalist Prime Minister, Wang Ching-wei, who was immediately installed as the head of the Chinese Government. Over the next 3 years Wang was to build an indigenous force of over 800,000—many of whom defected from Chiang Kai-shek's forces.[25] However, the Japanese Army generally outdid the previous warlord regimes in cruelty and plundering. As a result, the Communist cadres found that all areas occupied by the Japanese Army were ready targets for their ideology and organization. One authority has significantly observed that in north China, in areas where the Japanese had not penetrated, there was little

*The inauguration of the Japanese Ambassador to the puppet Manchukuo.*

enthusiasm for communism from the peasants.[26]

Despite Chiang's many demoralizing battles and continual retrograde movement, his army was growing, exceeding 3 million by late 1939. When compared to the Japanese 1 million, it seems that more could have been expected of the Nationalists. But Chiang, instead of directing his power at the Japanese, was more concerned with the progress of Red political activities. Chiang still refused to give them arms, discounted any of their claims of large-scale military operations, and ordered them to adhere to their earlier agreement to refrain from political organization. In December 1939, the Generalissimo even directed one of his major forces in the north to attack the Red Northwest Border Region. General Hu Tsung-nan responded with a driving assault, to include air strikes, against the southwest corner of the base. The Japanese, obviously pleased about the situation, attacked simultaneously. Mao struggled against both his "friends" and "enemies" and after shifting troops down from the north, managed to stabilize his positions.[27] General Hu then dug in and was satisfied to contain the Reds in their reduced base area. The "United Front," shaken by this assault, still held together, but hardly in accord with Mao's protracted war scenario.

When the Chinese Nationalists had been driven out of the northern zone, most of the public administrators pulled back with them. The combination of the oppressive occupation by the Japanese and the administrative vacuum provided fertile ground for Communist indoctrination. Much of the Communist progress was similar to the success in the Shansi-Chahar-Hopeh region where the 115th Division had established its base.[28] In this region, administrative committees and even local officials were elected among the peasants. Land reforms based on the National Government's plan of 1930 were also put into effect. As one author noted, "Although most

landlords escaped with their lives, they paid for them."[29]

Tax reform was also instituted. In well-organized soviets there were regular income and property taxes. Michael Lindsay states that the rates for 1941 would have assessed a peasant about 5 percent of his income, while a well-to-do landlord could expect to pay around 45 percent.[30] This was quite a change over the old system which was both "inequitable and inefficient."[31] Local security police kept the community purged of "suspected collaborators, overt Nationalist sympathizers, local bullies, evil landlords, and rich peasants"[32] whose social attitudes were unacceptable. The women and children of a village were particularly encouraged to volunteer for one of the numerous auxiliary groups. In this way all members of a village developed a feeling of loyalty for a party-sponsored organization and a sense of participation in community affairs.

The peasants could also expect equally well-organized military programs. At village meetings the people would be asked to form local self-defense units and eventually regional militia units. Thus, cadres were developed which would ultimately swell the ranks of the Red Army.[33] Weapons were easily obtained for these local forces. Wars had been waged in and around these villages literally since the advent of gunpowder. And, although many types of weapons had been used, the Chinese armies had apparently used the same cartridges since the 1890's; therefore, ammunition was limited but obtainable.[34]

The political indoctrination of the Communist military forces was perhaps the key factor in its success. Emphasis had been placed on relationships between the soldier and the peasant. One eyewitness account told of seeing insurgent forces who "were prepared to do without a meal rather than override a cantankerous old peasant woman who refused the loan of a cooking vessel."[35] Each member of the Eighth Route Army was required to memorize a code called "Three Rules and Eight Remarks."

> *Rules* - All actions are subject to command; do not steal from the people; be neither selfish nor unjust.
>
> *Remarks* - Replace the door when you leave the house; roll up the bedding in which you have slept; be courteous; be honest in your transactions; return what you borrow; replace what you break; do not bathe in the presence of women; do not without authority search the pocketbooks of those you arrest.

The administration and supply of the guerrilla forces were also well handled. Troops on the move were issued "grain-tickets" which they could use to pay the peasants for any food required. The peasant could, in turn, use these tickets to pay his taxes to the Communist government. Supply procedures reached impressive standards. In one instance in the main base area of the 115th Division, the Japanese in 1943 had launched a long-term sweep that dragged on into the winter. The supply agencies were reputedly able to distribute winter uniforms to the men "although Japanese columns were moving about all over the area."[36]

Neither was the psychological weapon neglected. In each soviet the propaganda section arranged for schools to eliminate illiteracy, "staged theatrical and other entertainments," and saw to the posting of large anti-Japanese slogans on wall newspapers.[37] Local newspapers tried to maintain publication even during Japanese "mopping-up" operations.[38] Japanese prisoners were usually treated with kindness and after a short period of indoctrination, might be released to rejoin their units.[39] This, of course, discredited the official Japanese policy that prisoners of the Chinese would be tortured. It also must have had some influence on the Japanese soldier's will to resist the next time he found himself in a tight position. Some of the more cooperative prisoners were used in combat against their own forces, while others were organized into a Japanese Communist-front, called the People's Emancipation League and were used for propaganda work against the Japanese Army.[40]

As the Communist military organization developed, there were some efforts directed at harassing Japanese troops and employing the guerrilla warfare which Mao had predicted

would characterize phase two of his protracted war. These actions did, to a degree, fix Japanese troops and maintain the image of Red participation in the "United Front," but they did not accomplish the attrition which Mao had predicted in his earlier thesis. Mao later admitted that their overall efforts were generally divided into "seventy percent self-development, twenty percent compromise and ten percent fight the Japanese."[41]

Michael Lindsay analyzed the Communist success in North China as being due primarily to superior administration.

> The Communists came to dominate the resistance movement in North China largely because they were able to provide the essential elements of effective organization, while, in most cases, forces under National Government leadership failed to do so.[42]

Or, as similarly analyzed by the cryptic humor of one local saying in a peasant area in southeast Shansi province: "Japanese—too many killed; Kuomintang—too many meetings."[43]

### THE HUNDRED REGIMENTS CAMPAIGN

By late 1939 the Communists were progressing quite well. The areas infiltrated by the troops of the Eighth Route Army were developing from a condition of temporary influence through guerrilla presence to a condition of solid political support for and sustenance of the revolutionary forces. (Mao described this process as the transitioning of a "guerrilla zone" into a "base area.") In the meantime, Red forces made small attacks to antagonize and harass the Japanese. But there was no major attack or increasing intensity of military activities to coincide with Mao's proposed phase two of this protracted war. If, as Mao stated, the purpose of guerrilla warfare was to support and evolve into mobile warfare, it was obvious that the Red operations in North China were dragging their feet.

*Chiang Kai-shek.*

As Mao's organization grew, he also became more dependent on outside support. Despite the fact that the United States was showing increasing support for Chiang, very few supplies were filtering down the Nationalist channels to the Reds. Neither could the Reds expect to get aid directly from the Nationalist Americans because the newsmen and diplomatic representatives of foreign countries were only accredited to and received news releases from the headquarters in Chunking.[44] Needless to say, Chiang was not extolling the virtues of the Eighth Route Army. In fact, Chiang constantly complained about both the Red political activity and their military inactivity.

Besides the Nationalist neglect, a new Japanese officer, Lieutenant General Tada Hayao, had taken over command of the North China Area Army and was determined to eliminate the Red guerrilla bands and pacify the countryside. His plan was similar to Chiang's "Fifth Encirclement and Suppression" plan of 1934, in which the German advisers proposed a massive network of barriers, ditches, and blockhouses surrounding and dissecting the infested area. Although it was a slow, costly plan, Tada built hundreds of miles of new roads with protecting ditches and blockhouses. These roads began to divide and seal the area into manageable compartments. The compartments could then be dealt with one at a time.[45] Not only would Tada's "cage policy" threaten the guerrilla movement, but it would bring the Japanese administration down to a closer working level with the people, and thus destroy or endanger the crucial factor of party influence in the area.

Thus, in order to prove his theories of protracted warfare, to defend his growing bases against the new Japanese plan, to repudiate the Nationalists' claims of inactivity, and to try to gain some international recognition for his movement, Mao was forced to attempt the "Hundred Regiments Campaign."

The campaign, a well-coordinated series of surprise attacks executed by most of the elements of the growing Eighth Route Army, began on the night of 20 August 1940. The initial objectives were rail lines, road networks, and industrial areas (principally mines). After these attacks, the Reds turned to the reduction of isolated blockhouses and small garrisons. For several weeks the Red guerrillas seemed to be everywhere, taking prisoners, seizing arms and ammunition, and avoiding engagement by any of the Japanese brigades that were beginning to respond to the crisis.[46] Then with their momentum spent, the guerrillas resought anonymity and refuge from the reprisals which they knew would be forthcoming.

The Communists claimed to have killed more than 20,000 Japanese and 5,000 puppet troops. In addition, they reportedly cut several hundred miles of railroads, and destroyed almost 3,000 forts. The Japanese admitted that "these totally unexpected attacks caused serious damage, and it was necessary to expend much time and money in restoration work."[47] Communist losses must have been quite serious. After the Japanese retaliation and "mopping-up" operations, Japanese records indicate that the "heavy blow suffered by the Communist forces and their bases . . . forced them to resort to guerrilla warfare, and thereafter they offered very little resistance in this area."[48]

**THE JAPANESE REPRISALS PROBABLY EXCEEDED IN FEROCITY AND BRUTALITY THE WORST RED EXPECTATIONS.**

The Japanese reprisals probably exceeded in ferocity and brutality the worst Red expectations. In July 1941, General Okamura Yasuji instituted the "Three-All" policy—kill all! burn all! destroy all! His wrath was directed toward the guerrilla bases in the hills and the nearby towns and villages that had apparently supported the Reds. Villages were burned to the ground, inhabitants shot, and livestock slaughtered. This policy remained in effect throughout 1942,[49] and unquestionably hurt the Communists. Strength figures of the Eighth Route Army

showed that from the end of 1940 to the end of 1941, Red forces decreased from 400,000 to 350,000. Also, the population base which the Reds controlled was almost halved, from 80 million to 50 million. The "Three All" retaliation had been successful in the short run. In the long run, the troop shortage rendered it ineffective and the peasants, if they had been uncommitted before, were now flocking into the communist camp.

### FRACTURE OF THE UNITED FRONT

The Communist New Fourth Army, which had been created in the lower Yangtze in September 1937, never reached the size and influence of its sister unit, the Eighth Route Army. For one reason, the terrain did not permit the Fourth to develop secure base areas. Most of the valley was open plain, criss-crossed with waterways and irrigation canals.[50] But, if a permanent camp could not be built and defended, the Reds could still avoid major engagements with the Japanese and continue an active program of political indoctrination of the countryside. In the rainy season, the technological superiority of the Japanese Army was especially nullified, and the Reds could move about much more freely and openly. Certainly the major threat to the Fourth Army was the Nationalist troops to their south and west. Clashes had occurred as early as 1938, and they grew in size and frequency as the months passed. By late 1940 Chiang was upset with the political machinations of the Fourth, and since this was taking place in an area felt to be a Nationalist stronghold, Chiang Kai-shek ordered the Fourth to move north across the river. On 7 January 1941, most of the Red Army had crossed over; its headquarters and perhaps 8,000 - 10,000 troops remained behind. Chiang, claiming that the army was refusing his orders, attacked the forces on the south bank, capturing the commander, Yeh Ting, and inflicting 9,000 casualties on the surprised Reds.[51] The Fourth reorganized after this incident and consolidated its position in North Kiangsu. The facade of a "United Front" between the Nationalists and the Communists had finally been shattered. With the Japanese forces in a static position, the Reds and the Nationalists stared each other down in what might best be called an armed truce.

The "Three All" policy had been effective in reducing the size and influence of the Red movement. But other international designs crippled the Japanese occupational efforts and these designs were not (as Mao had predicted) associated with condemnation of the court of world opinion. In 1941 Japan made the fatal mistake of bombing Pearl Harbor. By 1943 the tide of the war had changed, and the Japanese were forced to draw seven experienced divisions from occupational duty in China to more necessary battlefronts in the central and southwest Pacific. The few replacements received in China were inferior in quality and lacked any experience in counterinsurgency warfare.[52] General Okamura, Japanese Commander in North China, stated to an American officer:

> If you people had not come into the Pacific when you did, there would be no Communists in Peking. My operations in 1942 and 1943 reduced their strength by more than 100,000. But the troops that replaced my good divisions were worthless. For one thing, the average age of the men was ten to fifteen years older. These older men could not campaign as the youngsters could, and they had no heart in it all.[53]

This decrease in priority gave the Reds another chance to develop and expand their organization and to prepare for the real test after the war. There were several main facets of this Communist expansion that should be stressed: the continual improvements in the Northwest Base Area, the development and refinement of the "militia," and the division of the regular forces into regional and main forces.

In 1942 Mao brought Liu Shao-chi in from the New Fourth Army to organize and train the political cadres. It became Liu's responsibility to see that all the developing base areas had trained party officials who were loyal to Mao and who "thought" and

could be expected to "perform" along the party line. Each of the base areas was also directed to strive toward self-sufficiency. In the Northwest Base Area, the number of "industrial" workers rose to 12,000 and limited quantities of radios, grenades, rifles, and mines were produced.[54]

As previously stated, Mao relied primarily on his "regular" army to go forth and organize the people. The army was to educate, mobilize, assist and protect the masses. To do this task Mao divided his regular army into two distinct groups—the main forces and the regional forces. The regional forces were to be permanently associated with a geographic area. The troops were encouraged to marry into the settlements and develop the area into a self-sufficient "base area."[55] The "main" forces were to act as the military reserve. They were not to be tied down to one area but were to remain "mobile" and to be able to rush to the defense of a base area or to be used in mobile warfare to attack the Japanese.

To assist the regular army, the Reds developed the concept of a Ming Ping or Militia. The idea originally grew out of the need for village "Home Guard" or "Self-defense Corps." By 1944 the militia had reached the staggering size of 2 million and contributed significantly to the capabilities of the regional and main forces. Most importantly, the militia furnished the sound intelligence on which military plans could be based. They would act as guides to the Chinese forces and provide the guerrilla forces with vital knowledge of the terrain. The other main contribution was the militia's development of mine warfare. Realizing that the Chinese guerrillas fought with almost no external assistance, it is easy to appreciate that as the size of the Eighth Route Army and its militia forces expanded, there were increasing demands placed on the

*Chinese guerrillas.*

conservation and local fabrication of ammunition. "Frequently the first shots a (militia) recruit ever fired were at a real, live enemy."[56] Since land mines and hand grenades were types of weapons which could be locally produced, they naturally became the prime weapons of village self-defense. One author described the various tactics which the militia employed to increase the effectiveness of its mines.

> When the Japanese compelled civilians to walk ahead of them, the Chinese developed mines with the firing device some 15 to 20 yards behind the mine, so that the mine would explode among the Japanese. When the Japanese sent out detector squads who marked the places where mines were buried, the militia observed their marks and duplicated them to show almost impenetrable mine fields.[57]

To increase the effectiveness of local units and base areas to defend themselves, insurgents in some areas developed an elaborate underground tunnel system. At first air raid shelters were built to protect the villagers from Japanese bombers. Then these shelters were later expanded to connect houses within a village or to provide an escape route out of the village. In central Hopeh, where the sub-soil was particularly easy to tunnel and required few supports, tunnel networks were constructed which even connected villages.[58]

One additional measure that aided the Reds was the ability of local militia and regional units to reach an "understanding" with Chinese puppet troops employed by the Japanese. In some cases guerrilla units were ordered not to attack puppet garrisons without specific permission. In another case, puppet troops later sent word to guerrillas that they apologized for firing on them and hoped that no one had been hit, but that Japanese had been in the garrison, and they were forced to shoot at them.[59]

The development of the Red base areas continued in this manner until 1945. In April 1945 Mao ordered the expansion of the militia units to regular army units. The size of the Red forces then immediately jumped from 507,000 to 1,029,000. In June as the Japanese began to pull back the Communists could boast of controlling a "population of 95 million, [that] held over 300,000 square miles of territory, and had over 500 miles of coast line."[60]

The situation of the Nationalist army during the period of stalemate had been very difficult. The China theater was at the complete end of the allies' lines of communication. Supplies were scarce; inflation weakened the economy; graft, hoarding, and speculation were unwelcome offspring. Despite the determination of Chiang Kai-shek, his administration was unable to make good use of the remaining industrial capacity of the nation and unable to mobilize and train the manpower resources available to him.

### JAPANESE OCCUPATIONAL TECHNIQUES

In occupied areas that were relatively secure, Japanese measures for controlling the population were basically sound and have been used successfully in other counter-revolutionary experiences. First, there was complete registration of the population and the issuance of identification cards. (In the Peiping area these cards even included photographs.[61]) An additional control measure was a block warden system whereby the residential population was organized into cells of ten families (called a *pao*). Five of these groups constituted a *tai-pao*. The Japanese then appointed a responsible, respected Chinese in charge of the *tai-pao*. He in turn appointed subordinates and was responsible to the Japanese authorities for the actions of the families under him.[62]

In areas where control was marginal or non-existent, such as the Red base areas, the methods generally centered around the fort and barrier plan and, in North China, the "Three All" plan.

In the spring of 1944 there was one massive Japanese offensive that interrupted the stalemate condition. The Japanese code name was Operation Ichi-gō. This operation involved 620,000 first-line troops and was undertaken because the reverses in the Pacific

had endangered the Japanese positions on the mainland and exposed them to possible B-29 raids from airfields under Chiang's control. Objectives of the plan were basically to "destroy the backbone of the Chinese Army and force increased pressure on the political regime in Chingking" and "to forestall the bombing of the Japanese homeland by American B-29's from (the Chinese) base of Kweilin and Liu-chow" (in Kwangsi Chuang Autonomous Region). Despite a gallant defense of Hengyang wherein 16,000 Chinese troops fought off six Japanese divisions for 47 days, Ichi-gō was successful in seizing the air bases and in severely punishing Chiang's armies.[63] In Honan province Japanese troops overran 30 Chinese divisions led by the able General Tank En-po. The local peasants, racked by famine and burdened with taxes, refused to assist the government troops and in some cases rose to help the invading Japanese.[64]

Phase Two of the theoretical "Protracted War" thesis can hardly be equated to that corresponding portion of the Sino-Japanese War. The "United Front" was a myth. Communist political activities were excellent, but the "fierce guerrilla warfare" that was to keep the enemy on the move so he could be attacked and destroyed in mobile warfare only materialized in rare instances. On these occasions the Japanese reprisals dealt a severe punishment that must have driven the Communist leaders back to their theoretical roots to see what had gone wrong. Chiang, of course, never accepted Mao's protracted war game plan; he seemed to be as much concerned with the Red Eighth and Fourth Armies as with the whole Japanese force. The decay in Japanese strength did occur, as Mao had predicted, but for other reasons—the United States advance through the western Pacific.

## END OF THE WAR

Perhaps the Third Phase of the protracted war began in the summer of 1945, as the Japanese forces were withdrawing from China. But they had not been defeated by a people's war; they had been defeated by the overwhelming power of the Allies, spearheaded by the attack aircraft carrier forces of the US Navy and the land power of the US Marines and Army. In August, Russia declared war on Japan and marched into Manchuria. On 14 August 1945, 9 days after the first atomic bomb was dropped on Hiroshima, the 8-year Sino-Japanese war came to an end.

**AS FOR MAO'S THEORY OF THE PROTRACTED WAR, IT REMAINS A CLASSIC OF THE MILITARY ART.**

Both Chiang Kai-shek and Mao Tse-tung had been farsighted in planning their "joint" struggle against the Japanese. Each had realized that the Japanese would ultimately be defeated by the Allies and that the crucial struggle for control of China would be between themselves.

As for Mao's theory of the protracted war, it remains a classic of the military art. Mao was wrong when he stated that the thesis specifically applied to the Sino-Japanese war in the nineteen thirties. There is enough of the literary value of universality for that theory to be applied to many similar conditions both in the past and the future. His essays "On the Protracted War" will be read, digested, and admired by many to whom it will be completely irrelevant that the war never worked out that way.

## NOTES

1. For example, see George K. Tanham's highly regarded study *Communist Revolutionary Warfare* (New York: Praeger, 1961), p. 23.
2. Mao Tse-tung, "On Protracted War," *Selected Military Writings* (Peking: Foreign Language Press, 1963), p. 195.
3. *Ibid.*, p. 197.
4. *Ibid.*
5. *Ibid.*, p. 211.
6. *Ibid.*, p. 245.
7. *Ibid.*, p. 214.
8. *Ibid.*
9. *Ibid.*, p. 215.
10. Information on the development within the base area was taken from O'Ballance, *The Red Army in China* (New York: Frederick A. Praeger, 1963), pp. 107-109.

11. "Communism in China," Committee on Foreign Affairs, Subcommittee, No. 5, pp. 23 as quoted in Oron P. South, *The Rise of Communism in China, 1919-1949* (Maxwell AFB: Air University Documentary Research Study, May 1952), p. 47.

12. Congressional Record, 79th Congress, 2d Session, Vol. 92, Part 12, pp. A 4495-96, as quoted in South, *op. cit.*, p. 48.

13. Most of the discussion of the strengths of the opposing forces was taken from T. Dodson Stamps and Vincent J. Esposito, editors, *A Military History of World War II* (West Point: United States Military Academy, 1956), Appendix 5, pp. 525-528. For the strengths of the Red forces I have used Griffith, *The Chinese People's Liberation Army*, p. 61, and O'Ballance, *The Red Army of China*, p. 123.

14. See Samuel B. Griffith II, *The Chinese People's Liberation Army* (New York: McGraw-Hill Book Company., 1967), p. 61, and Robert C. North, *Chinese Communism* (New York: McGraw-Hill Book Company, 1966), p. 147.

15. General discussion concerning main attack and secondary attack is based on Stamps and Esposito, *op. cit.*, pp. 529-534.

16. Griffith, *op. cit.*, p. 62.

17. *Ibid.*

18. Evans Fordyce Carlson, *Twin Stars of China* (New York: Dodd, Mead, and Company, 1940), pp. 70-71.

19. O'Ballance, *op. cit.*, p. 125.

20. Griffith, *op. cit.*, p. 63.

21. This discussion is based on Michael Lindsay, "China (1937-1945)" (an unpublished paper written for the Center of Research in Social Systems under contract to the Department of Army), p. 7; and Griffith, *op. cit.*, pp. 65-68.

22. F.F. Liu, *A Military History of Modern China* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1956), pp. 104-5.

23. Mao, *Ibid.*, p. 153.

24. US Armed Forces in the Far East, *Chinese Area Operations Record, July 1937 - November 1941* (Tokyo: Military History Section: Headquarters, Army Forces Far East, 1957), "Japanese Monograph 70," p. 29.

25. O'Ballance, *op. cit.*, p. 130.

26. Lindsay, *op. cit.*, p. 14.

27. O'Ballance, *op. cit.*, p. 133.

28. Discussion of this example is based almost entirely on Lindsay, *op. cit.*, pp. 21-27.

29. Griffith, *op. cit.*, p. 68.

30. Lindsay, *op. cit.*, p. 23.

31. *Ibid.*, p. 22.

32. Griffith, *op. cit.*, p. 68.

33. *Ibid.*

34. Lindsay, *op. cit.*, p. 15.

35. *Ibid.*, p. 25.

36. *Ibid.*

37. Griffith, *op. cit.*, p. 68.

38. Lindsay, *op. cit.*, p. 25.

39. *Ibid.*, p. 26.

40. *Ibid.*

41. Taken from O'Ballance, *op. cit.*, in a footnote at the bottom of p. 131, referring to an interview with Mao, quoted in *Time* magazine, 1 December 1958.

42. Lindsay, *op. cit.*, p. 17.

43. *Ibid.*, p. 25.

44. Griffith, *op. cit.*, p. 69.

45. Taken from U.S. Senate, Committee on the Judiciary, *Institute of Pacific Relations*, Hearings before the Subcommittee to Investigate the Administration of the Internal Security Act and Other Internal Security Laws, 82d Congress, 1st Session (Washington, D.C.: GPO, 1951-52), Part 7A, Appendix h, "The Chinese Communist Movement," p. 2366. Quoted in Griffith, *The Chinese People's Liberation Army*, p. 70.

46. O'Ballance, *The Red Army of China*, pp. 134-5; Griffith, *The Chinese People's Liberation Army*, pp. 70-71; and US Army, Forces in the Far East, *North China Area Operations Record, July 1937-May 1941* (Tokyo: Military History Section; Headquarters, Army Forces Far East, 1955), "Japanese Monograph 178," pp. 316-20.

47. "Japanese Monograph 178," pp. 316-17.

48. *Ibid.*, p. 320.

49. Griffith, *op. cit.*, pp. 70-71.

50. Lindsay, *op. cit.*, pp. 30-31.

51. *Ibid.*, p. 32; O'Ballance, *op. cit.*, p. 135.

52. Griffith, *op. cit.*, p. 75.

53. Conversation between General Okamura Yasuji and B.G. Samuel R. Griffith II, Office of War History, Tokyo, November 1963, as quoted in Griffith, *op. cit.*, p. 75.

54. O'Ballance, *op. cit.*, p. 139.

55. *Ibid.*, p. 140.

56. *Ibid.*, p. 141.

57. Lindsay, *op. cit.*, p. 36.

58. *Ibid.*, p. 51.

59. *Ibid.*, p. 40.

60. O'Ballance, *op. cit.*, p. 145.

61. Lindsay, *op. cit.*, p. 51.

62. *Ibid.*, p. 53.

63. For a more complete discussion of Ichi-gō, refer to F.F. Liu, *A Military History of Modern China*, pp. 219-20; also US Army, Forces in the Far East, *China Area Operations Record, Command of the China Expeditionary Army* (Tokyo: Military History Section, Headquarters, Army Forces Far East, 1952), "Japanese Monograph 129," pp. 22-40.

64. Liu, *op. cit.*, p. 220. ■