

The Guerrilla Warfare: from Mao Tse Tung to the Algerian Revolution

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Abstract

Guerrilla is derived from the Spanish word “Guerra” and literally means a little war. Its usages started from 19th century when Napoleon fought the Spanish peasants during the Peninsular war (1808-1814), when the defeated Spanish forces broke up into small units to harass the Napoleonic armies and expel them from their territory and similar tactics were used by the Algerian resistance against the French colony since 1830 to 1962.

The main characteristic principles of guerrilla warfare are based upon armed struggle which involved the mass movement by political indoctrination and through a well-planned organization which maintains a highly disciplined force in order to win sympathy from native people and gain unconditional popular support.

Key words: Algerian revolt, guerrilla, asymmetric warfare, Mao Tse Tung, strategy.

Introduction

To win this support, the guerrilla leaders resort the following principles: the creation of a cause, the organization of people, self-maintenance, secure base, adequate weapons and supplies are needed. To defeat the enemy's will and strength, military operations must be coupled with mass struggle, supplemented by propaganda, violence, sabotage and an intelligence network.

According to guerrilla experts, a guerrilla fighter must be politically educated and disciplined before he does the role of fighter. Mao Tse Tung observed : “when the guerrilla fights, he fights not only for the sake of fighting, but to agitate the masses, to organize them, to arm them and help them to establish revolutionary political power. Political and military mobilization go hand in hand in guerrilla concept of warfare... because guerrilla warfare basically derives from the masses and is supported by them, it can neither exist nor flourish if it separates itself from their sympathies and co-operation”.

However, this paper tries to present the subject of guerrilla warfare in its both theoretical and operational significance. Part one briefly deals with the aspects and the fundamental principles of guerrilla warfare, part two explains the fundamental principles of guerrilla warfare; part three presents the analytical discussion of the Algerian model of guerrilla warfare.

Finally, it attempts to draw the assessment of the case study on the Algerian Revolutionary war in the light of the aspects and the fundamental principles of modern guerrilla warfare.

Part I : Guerrilla warfare aspects

The main theoretical aspect of guerrilla warfare is a war of totality based upon mass movement. Some writers on guerrilla warfare such as

Mao Tse Tung insist that guerrilla warfare is the outcome of an unsatisfactory political situation. Therefore, guerrilla warfare starts and ends with politics.

According to Mao Tse Tung, guerrilla warfare is always fought for political goal. After the 2nd World War, many nations were fighting for the liberation of their countries from foreign occupation, were fighting against colonialism in order to achieve national independence and the Algerian case serves as a good example.

The scholars of guerrilla warfare based the process of revolutionary wars on the three stages of Mao Tse Tung guerrilla strategy such as cause, leadership and organization to conduct the revolutionary wars to a successful victory. The development of guerrilla warfare may be divided into the following stages:

1- The stage of preparation

In this stage, a group of determined rebels join together to find a cause, and to form an organization. After the nucleus is formed, they start clandestine propaganda and organizational activities in order to explain their cause to the people to attract new members to the organization. When they feel strong enough, organizationally and ideologically, they take some actions and the second stage is reached.

2- The stage of initiation

In this stage, non-military destructive operations are initiated. Fronts are built, mass organizations are set up openly, propaganda, riots and other activities are wide-spread and intensified. Public attention is attracted by violence and sabotage and regular government functions are disturbed. An intelligence network is formed and regional offices are set to direct and co-ordinate those activities in various areas and people join the movement.

3- The stage of armed struggle

This stage is distinguished by its wide-spread violence. There will be strikes, demonstrations and riots in the cities, and guerrilla operations in county-sides. In this stage, organizational work and propaganda are still intensified, the cause is now universally spread, fronts and mass organizations are extremely active, sabotage and violence are carried out whenever and wherever they are deemed necessary and finally military campaigns are employed to defeat the enemy, bases, weapons and supplies are used for self-maintenance and expansion.

However, these three stages are reinforcing the success of a guerrilla warfare when proper strategies and tactics are skillfully applied, the guerrilla process will become extremely persistent and a new political order is thus in the making. In addition, all the people in guerrilla warfare are using their possessions and all available resources to destroy the enemy infra-structure and disturb its stability and also to crush its political institutions and social economy in order to achieve victory.

The fundamental principles of guerrilla warfare have three purposes: first, the psychological war is to weaken and, if possible, to destroy the morale of the enemy, and also to strengthen the will of the people to fight for the national cause. The importance of psychological war is to create a chaos which destroys its unity and disturbs its defense activities and cleverly provokes the enemies to fight among themselves.

Besides these actions, the political war must always try to decrease the opponent's allies and to increase his enemies. Economic war must also try to destroy the enemy's resources and tools of production. In Algeria, the French colonial army faced harassment by guerrillas. Rail road tracks were destroyed, vehicle convoys were put under fire, guard posts were attacked at night, telephone wires were cut, small troops were ambushed, such guerrilla's activities greatly exhausted and weakened the French army.

Part II: The fundamental principles of guerrilla warfare

1- The cause

The first element of strategic importance to guerrilla warfare is the “cause”, it spells out the ultimate objective of the struggle and inspires the guerrilla fighters, as well as rallying the people behind the movement. Militants of guerrilla warfare realize well the value of the cause. Mao Tse Tung’s statement “without political goal, guerrilla warfare must fail”, is a case in point. Illustrating the value of a political cause has been widely cited all over the world.

In other words, when feelings against colonialism in Asia, Latin America and Africa ran high after 2nd world war, the cause of national independence was strong enough to rally native people behind it. Mao Tse Tung’s explanation to the cause is the outcome of a political problem that means unsolved contradictions.

2- The leadership

Guerrilla warfare needs leadership more than anything else; the leaders should not only be good military commanders, but also experts in organization, agitation, and intelligence. The leaderships in guerrilla warfare must be a model of the people who gives his followers the will to fight and the determination to die, and leads the masses to the high spirit and devote to it. According to Mao Tse Tung, guerrilla leaders must be loyal, sincere and robust. They must be well-educated in revolutionary techniques, self-confident, able to establish severe discipline, and able to cope with counter-propaganda.

3- The organization

Scholars of guerrilla warfare have forcefully stressed the strategic value of organization in guerrilla struggle. As a matter of fact, orga-

nization is regarded as essential to the success of a guerrilla movement. Furthermore, cause and organization are inseparable objectives of any guerrilla warfare. Organization can last only with a cause, in return, a cause can be widely spread only with the help of an organization. These two strategic principles lay down a solid foundation for guerrilla warfare.

When the people are politically and militarily organized, everybody becomes under the control of the guerrilla mechanism and has a definite role to perform his militancy and are working toward a single goal which is to defeat the enemy. Thus, the masses create a solid front to support the fighting guerrillas, as Mao Tse Tung's theory "people are like water and guerrillas like fish who live in it", becomes reality.

4- The guerrilla strategy

Guerrilla strategy is well codified by Mao Tse Tung and relied on three guerrilla principles and has been followed by guerrillas everywhere:

- 1- yield any town or terrain you cannot hold safely;
- 2- limit yourself to guerrilla warfare as long as the enemy has numerical superiority and better or sophisticated weapons;
- 3- organize regular units and pass over the general counter offensive only when you are sure of the final victory;

In brief, Mao's teachings on guerrilla strategy are that guerrilla warfare is a war of mobility and fluidity, and the skillful shift between strategic offensive and tactical defensive and strategic defensive and tactical offensive. Speed and surprise attack are indispensable. The main principles of guerrilla strategy are:

4.1- The political unity and efficiency:

This element includes loyalty, honesty and efficiency of the political apparatus, the degree of organization and indoctrination of people, the co-operation among the groups or factions within the or-

ganization, and political legitimacy at the high level. Without a highly organized organization, guerrilla warfare can hardly be started, and without an honest and efficient leadership guerrilla warfare would be greatly handicapped.

4.2- The military strength:

This element includes the physical strength of armed forces under highly qualified command which must be seriously taken into account and the existence of the political sections of the armed forces and the level of their intelligence should set up in advance.

4.3- The morale and training:

The military structure is functional only when the morale of the troops is high, and morale is greatly dependent upon the training and discipline of the armed forces, because training determines the capacity of the fighting forces. Therefore, morale and training can be decisive factor in a guerrilla war and without them, guerrilla fighters cannot operate effectively.

4.4- The Base terrain

Terrain means the geographical features of the base area. Thus, in the course of guerrilla warfare, one of the basic considerations of guerrilla leaders is how to establish and maintain a base. In other words, the base serves mainly to regroup, rest and hospitalize the wounded guerrilla forces, it is also the location for supply depots, and without doubt, a base is a physical, psychological, political and military necessity of guerrilla warfare.

4.5- The weapons and supplies:

Guerrilla warfare like other forms of war needs weapons and supplies to carry on the struggle. Weapons are urgently needed in guer-

rilla warfare, especially in its early stage, such as, light arms which are easy to carry and have considerable fire power. Supply is another problem to guerrilla leaders such as food, clothing, medicines and means of transportation and communication must be provided.

4.6- The intelligence and sabotage:

Intelligence and sabotage are two effective weapons of guerrilla warfare. Intelligence is aimed at the collection of information, and sabotage is used to destroy enemy installations and resources. Both are strategically and tactically used, and can accomplish political as well as military purposes. They have been widely employed by guerrilla leaders. In fact, some experts of guerrilla warfare say that, without these two weapons, guerrilla warfare cannot be conducted effectively.

The words of Sun Tzu: “know yourself and your enemy and you will be able to win a hundred battles”, spoken in 600 B.C., are still valid today. Intelligence is extremely important to guerrilla warfare. The guerrillas who cannot fight except on their own terms, must know enough about their enemy’s plans and movements to avoid being trapped into battles which they cannot win. They must have sufficient knowledge of the enemy’s weaknesses to make their own strikes as safe as effective as possible.

4.7- The surprise and shock action:

The operational strategy of guerrilla warfare must be understood, practiced and applied. The first principle is speed of movement and shock action. The guerrilla must move with speed and resort to shock action by hit and run tactics. Surprise is a major factor in their success and the enemy must never know from which direction is the attack is coming.

The success of guerrilla operations will depend on full information about the enemy and the main aim of guerrilla war is to cause

chaos and confusion and then withdraw before heavy reinforcement of the enemy. But guerrillas must know the complete details of the enemy forces before launching their attack and misleading the enemy about intentions and attack them from unexpected directions. Whatever be the form of surprise, it depends on good intelligence, speed, concentration of force, imagination, initiative and effective leadership.

4.8- The propaganda, mass struggle and popular support:

Before the guerrilla leaders can win over the people and make them take sides with the guerrillas, they must be persuaded and convinced. This is why propaganda becomes important. Mao Tse Tung emphasized propaganda in guerrilla warfare has essentially three dimensional operations:

- A- To win over the masses with propaganda;
- B- To attack the enemy with psychological warfare;
- C- To maintain self-confidence with political indoctrination.

Psychologically, people confronted with the guerrilla's cause may be divided into three groups: a) the sympathizers or supporters, b) the opponents, c) the neutrals. Propaganda must be to encourage the supporters, to discourage the opponents, and to persuade the neutrals.

Mass struggle is the manipulation of the masses to harass the government in power, to disturb peace and order, to stop industrial production in order to create chaos in the community so that existing government loses its control. Guerrillas can survive only with the support of the people, and guerrilla war can be won only when it is actively participated by the majority of people. Without popular support, the guerrillas can be easily destroyed by government forces. Therefore, popular support remains the most essential condition for the survival, protection, and eventual victory of any guerrilla movement.

Part III: The guerilla warfare within the Algerian Revolution

The methods and the goals of French colonialism in Algeria partially explain the desperation of the group of nationalists who began the revolution in 1954. The character and the interests of the European settlers in Algeria were important determinants of the Algerian Revolution causes and of consequences.

The history of French colonialism was governed for the benefit of the French settlers, lands were seized for European cultivation and famines were followed by serious epidemics of disease among the native populations in 1883, 1897 and in 1920. After the 1st world war, the situation slowly began to change, one investigating factor was the rapid population growth of the Algerian people and this created even more rural misery, causing migrations from the countryside to the cities of Algeria and of France. It was among the workers in France that the first sentiments of Algerian nationalism began, and the contacts with French life, and urbanization were implied and contributed to the realization of the Algerians of their inferior position.

During the 2nd world war, the development of Algerian nationalism rose, especially through the participation of many Algerians in the war, and at the end of the war, the event of may 8th, 1945, in the towns of Setif, Guelma and Kherrata seemed to fulfill the promised independence, but it was answered by a great massacre and a severe repression, which included aerial and off-shore bombings on Algerian towns and villages which killed more than 45000 of Algerian population.

From this bitter event, the Algerian masses realized that they had no hope of attaining equality or freedom within the French political system as long as European population maintained its dominant position. The Algerian population was doomed to a permanent inferiority, which gave them the faith and the strength to unify all their efforts in

a new one nationalist organization, the “National Front of Liberation”, FLN, which determined to take armed struggle to achieve national independence.

1. FLN Leadership

The origins of the revolutionaries were relatively modest; most of them came from small towns or villages. Their education was also equally modest, although most of them had attended secondary school. The Politicians or moderate nationalists were better educated and had come from more privileged backgrounds. Many of them had served in the French army since they were in the age group that had been drafted in the 2nd world war, and several from them had been officers.

Therefore, the French army was a useful source of military expertise for many FLN Leaders, including the President Ahmed Ben Bella, Amar Ouamrane and Krim Belkacem. Nine members constituted the FLN Leadership, Ben Bella, Hocine Ait Ahmed, Mohamed Khider, Mohamed Boudiaf, Krim Belkacem, Rabah Bitat, Larbi Ben M'hidi, Didouche Mourad and Mustapha Ben Boulaid. These nine leaders are later known as the historic chiefs of the Algerian Revolution.

These leaders represented a group unwilling to compromise on the necessity of violence for gaining national independence. The FLN Leaders conducted a series of clandestine meetings at home and abroad to set a date for the revolt. They also published an appeal to the Algerian people outlining their political objective which is political independence, required the restoration of the sovereign democratic Algerian state within the framework of the principles of Islam.

2. The FLN Organization

The direction of the Algerian Revolution was originally organized under the United Revolutionary Committee and Action, CRUA, which had been created in the spring of 1954 composed with 22 members

but headed by six revolutionary leaders : Didouche Mourad, Larbi Ben M'hidi , Mustapha Ben Boulaid, Krim Belkacem, Mohamed Boudiaf and Rabah Bitat. Ahmed Ben Bella, Hocine Aït Ahmed and Mohamed Khider composed an “exterior delegation“ in Cairo that was charged with soliciting support for the revolutionary forces. The CRUA, divided Algeria into five zones or wilayas, plus Sahara which was organized later in the war. Ben Boulaid headed the Aures , Didouche Mourad the north of Constantine, Krim Belkacem the Kabylia, Rabah Bitat Algiers and Larbi Ben M'hidi Oran.

After the death of Ben Boulaid, on August 20, 1956, a Congress was held in Soumam Valley to reorganize insurrection. The platform of the Soumam Congress established a coordinate and execution committee , CCE, composed of Ben M'hidi, Abane Ramdhane, Krim Belkacem, Saad Dahlab and Ben Youcef Ben Khadda. It also established the National Council of Algerian Revolution, CNRA, with 34 members.

In September, after the establishment of the 5th French Republic, and the removal of the leadership of the revolution from Algeria to Tunisia and Morocco, the CCE, was replaced by the provisional Government of the Algerian republic, GPRA, whose first President was Farhat Abbas, and later on succeeded by Ben Khadda. However, the real power lay with shifting of the CNRA, particularly the military wing. The leader of each wilaya was a colonel in the Army of the National Liberation , ALN, which was the military tool of the FLN.

3. The FLN Strategy

The FLN Strategy was based on revolutionary conditions which existed, because, the French colonial regime had denied peaceful means of political protest. This strategy of guerrilla warfare is described as the weapon of the weak and is taken as a method of expression by a crushed people. It requires only a small number of militants who need effective training, and who do not even need to possess special sophisticated

weapons. The same weapon could be used for many operations, like a knife is often as efficient as a gun. The basic requirements for this revolutionary strategy are secrecy, discipline, and strict organization.

The two fundamental aims of the FLN were to obtain the absolute and uncompromised independence of Algeria from France and to establish the FLN's position as the unique representative of the nationalists and the only organization entitled to negotiate with the French organization on behalf of the Algerian people. The Algerian Revolution was influenced by Islamic principles and Pan-Arab nationalism and adopted socialist principles only in 1962 after its independence.

The FLN ideology was responding to the needs of the people's struggle, who seek to recover their dignity and freedom. The ideology of FLN armed struggle was to defend the just cause and this can be achieved only by arming the Algerian people and by achieving unity on the planning, actions and leadership levels by forging the unity of the revolution and assuring the support of the masses to the national cause.

4. The Algerian Revolution and popular support

The primary objective of the Algerian Revolution was to provoke ideological awareness and sympathy from the Algerian masses and to enlist their activities in the struggle against French colonialism in Algeria. The formation of the FLN was to seek national independence in a democratic and Islamic state, with the parallel objective of purifying the Algerian national movement. Liquidating colonialism, internationalizing the Algerian question, emphasizing North African solidarity and obtaining support from sympathetic nations.

The Algerian Revolution used violence as a tool to effect the internal and external environment that meant to create insecurity among the European population of Algeria, satisfy Algerian demands to take armed struggle for the national cause.

Another unique aspect of the Algerian Revolution is to bring guerrilla operations to enemy's territory - to France- . The FLN paid a specific attention to this aspect to put intensive pressure on the French government. During the period of Ben M'hidi and Abane Ramdhane within the CCE, the CCE, favored to organize Algerian workers in FLN organization and sent Mohamed Labjaoui to head this organization in France and described his instructions: "on my departure from Algiers, the recommendations were relatively precise. I was charged with bringing the war to France, that is, to carry out operations of reprisals in the French cities and country-sides each time an important colonialist exaction was committed in Algeria. For each Algerian killed, a French citizen would be. This idea was simple, and evidently signified a certain state of mind.

It concerned sensitizing French opinion to the reality of the war, making understood that they were responsible for what was done in their name in Algeria and that in continuing to close their eyes; they would wind up by suffering the consequences. "We must have blood in the headlines of all newspapers", told Abane as a goodbye.

After the battle of Algiers, the execution of Ben M'hidi and the assassination of Abane Ramdhane, the formation of GPRA under Farhat Abbas apparently led to new rules of guerrilla operations. The FLN which was under the general direction of Lakhdar Ben Tobbal as GPRA minister of interior from 1958- 1961, demanded to bring the war along to France.

In September 1958, El-Moudjahid, the FLN newspaper announced that for the first time since 1954, the FLN had decided to carry out the armed struggle to France. The FLN had previously been contented with organizational activity and efforts to combat MNA influence among the Algerian workers in France as a well as execution of traitors. This campaign opened in 1958 to create a psychological shock and to provoke repression which would demonstrate its active guerrilla operations such as the assassination of Jacques Soustelle who was Minister of information.

On strategic or tactical level, revolutionary operations had forced France to mobilize more than 80.000 men to guard the French cities. Moreover, the explosions at the Gas and Oil depots had deprived France of a day's consumption of fuel and damaged the installations for several months.

5. The Algerian Revolution and world opinion

The Algerian Revolution and revolutionary operations was directed to affect the external environment that meant to create insecurity along the European population of Algeria, satisfy Algerian demands and raise internal and external morale to the national cause. Another indication to influence world opinion was the timing of guerrilla operations to coincide with action in the United Nations. The massacre of August 20, 1955 and the battle of Algiers, influenced the international scene by making the national cause a veritable issue undermining the French position and persuading sympathetic states that FLN was a strong enough to deserve aid and assistance from outside.

However, the Algerian Revolution was effective in gaining international recognition for the FLN. The formation of the Provisional Government of the Republic of Algeria , GPRA, in 1958 , and the FLN's delegation to the United Nations was extremely active by means of corridor diplomacy. The FLN had also representatives in the capitals of most Arab states and in the Communist bloc, such as Moscow, Peking, East Germany, North Korea and Vietnam.

Conclusion

The Algerian Revolution against the French began towards the end of 1954, it was the last upwards of seven and half years. It contained many facets of classic-modern struggle. It was produced by Algerian religious and nationalist leaders and also benefited from the hard school of guerrilla warfare founded by Mao Tse Tung and General Giap.

The Revolution began with the traditional guerrilla survival in its early stage. Small groups of insurgency were establishing themselves in the mountains. The insurgents trained in Egypt and Tunisia and were ready for ultimate strength against the French. In many respects, Algerian independence achieved by political pressure, armed struggle and international diplomacy under the leadership of the FLN.

The armed struggle of the Algerian people has also certain characteristics that have been common in the national liberation struggle of China and Vietnam. The Moudjahidine are guerrillas of the national cause, of patriotic conscious, who want to carry out the struggle further with the people.

The Algerian Revolution is quite different from Mao Tse Tung theory on protracted war in its content and its methods. Because the Algerian Revolution started in the Algerian country-side as parallel to the cities by violent means and then the revolution expanded to France in order to harass the enemy and destroy its economic tools of production and create insecurity within its society and instability to its regime.

The fall down of the 4th republic in 1958 was a consequence and characteristic example of the Algerian Revolution. In addition, the first revolution which brought the war to the enemy's territory was the Algerian Revolution. In short, the Algerian Revolution applied all the revolutionary theories and methods but it has its own character of conducting the war against the French which was based on violence and guerrilla armed struggle.

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