

East *versus* West

By Major Dexter Davis

The events of 11 September 2001 set the stage for a U.S.-led military mission to force regime changes in Afghanistan and, later, in Iraq. In what was initially referred to as “the Global War on Terror,” U.S. forces defeated the Taliban and some al-Qaida in Afghanistan. This was considered a “victory;” and in 2003, war was waged against Iraq. The United States was successful in its ground and air campaign against the Western-style Iraqi military at the onset of the war; however, from 2004 to 2007, insurgent¹ attacks inundated the newly established interim government and smaller U.S. forces. This growth in the strength of insurgents created hostile relations between the Sunni and Shi’a (the two major Islamic denominations), and the potential for civil war began to brew. To combat this threat, U.S. forces employed the military principle and strategies of Antoine-Henri Jomini, which proved to be tactically effective against insurgency groups using Mao Tse-tung’s theory and principles.

Mao Tse-tung’s Theory of Revolutionary Warfare

Mao Tse-tung’s theory of revolutionary warfare includes the following principles of operation:

- Attack dispersed, isolated enemy forces first. Attack concentrated, strong enemy forces later.
- Take small and medium cities and extensive rural areas first. Take big cities later.
- Make wiping out the enemy’s effective strength our main objective. Do not make holding or seizing a city or place our main objective. Holding or seizing a city or place is the outcome of wiping out the enemy’s effective strength, and often a city or place can be held or seized for good only after it has changed hands a number of times.
- 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. In special circumstances, deal crushing blows to the enemy; that is, concentrate all our strength to make a frontal attack and an attack on one or both of his flanks, with the aim of wiping out one part and routing another so that our army can swiftly move its troops to smash other enemy forces. Strive to avoid battles of attrition in which we lose more than we gain—or only break even. In this way, although inferior as a whole (in terms of numbers), we shall be 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 the entire enemy.
- Fight no battle unprepared. Fight no battle you are not sure of winning. Make every effort to be well-prepared for each battle. Make every effort to ensure victory in the given set of conditions, as between the enemy and ourselves.
- Give full play to our style of fighting: courage in battle, no fear of sacrifice, no fear of fatigue, and continuous fighting (that is, fighting successive battles in a short time without rest).

Mao Tse-tung was the communist leader of the People’s Republic of China from the time the republic was established in 1949 until his death in 1976. He was also a Chinese revolutionary, military mastermind, political theorist, and philosopher. In his works, Mao Tse-tung states that “guerilla troops should have a precise conception of the political goal of the struggle and the political organization to be used in attaining that goal. This means that both organization and discipline of guerrilla troops must be at a high level so that they can carry out the political activities that are the life of both the guerilla armies and revolutionary warfare.”² According to Mao Tse-tung, the object of war is “to preserve oneself and destroy the enemy.”³ However, destruction of the enemy (attack) is the primary goal, while self-preservation (defense) is secondary. Only by destroying the enemy in large numbers can one effectively preserve oneself.⁴



- Strive to wipe out the enemy when he is on the move. At the same time, pay attention to the tactics of positional attack and capture enemy-fortified points and cities.
- Resolutely seize all enemy-fortified points and cities that are weakly defended. At opportune moments, seize all enemy-fortified points and cities defended with moderate strength, provided circumstances permit. For strongly defended, enemy-fortified points and cities, wait until conditions are ripe and then take them.
- Replenish our strength with all of the arms and most of the personnel captured from the enemy. Our army's main sources of manpower and materiel are at the front.
- Make good use of the intervals between campaigns to rest, train, and consolidate our troops. Periods of rest, training, and consolidation should not, in general, be very long. And the enemy should, so far as possible, be permitted no breathing space.⁵

These principles were employed by the People's Liberation Army⁶ to defeat Chiang Kai-shek in 1949.⁷ And, according to Mao Tse-tung, "They are the result of the tempering of the People's Liberation Army in long years of fighting against domestic and foreign enemies. . . . Our strategy and tactics are based on a people's war; no army opposed to the people can use our strategy and tactics."⁸

Iraqi Insurgents' Implementation of Mao Tse-tung's Theory

After the Iraqi army was defeated, it was dismantled by the newly formed provisional government. All former government employees were also released from their jobs. This angered the Iraqis and prompted them to use guerrilla tactics derived from Mao Tse-tung's theory of revolutionary warfare to try to defeat the provisional government and disrupt U.S. military operations from late 2004 to 2007.

Insurgents used improvised explosive devices (IEDs) to ambush U.S. supply points, convoys, and checkpoints. Then, they used the media to show that the newly formed government and U.S. military were unable to provide for the safety and basic needs of Iraqis. Insurgent forces formed "shadow governments" to enforce the Islamic rule of law and provide jobs and basic needs. They stole water and electricity and provided them to the local populace. They paid young men and women to spy on government and U.S. forces and to use IEDs to disrupt their operations. The insurgents became so strong that internal conflicts began to arise. This led to a fight for control of the country, which in turn, led to another U.S. tactical operation in 2007.

Jomini's Principle and Strategies

Antoine-Henri Jomini's Fundamental Principle of War consists of the following maxims:

- To throw, by strategic movements, the mass of an army, successively, upon the decisive points of a theater of war and also upon the communications of the enemy, as much as possible, without compromising one's own.
- To maneuver to engage fractions of the hostile army with the bulk of one's forces.
- To throw the mass of the forces upon the decisive point or upon that portion of the hostile line which is the first importance to overthrow.
- To so arrange that these masses shall not only be thrown upon the decisive point, but that they shall engage at the proper times and with energy.¹⁰



The greatest military theorist of the 19th century was born from the success of the French Revolution. Antoine-Henri Jomini, a Swiss citizen, joined the French army and observed Napoleon Bonaparte's army transformation as well as his ability to make decisions on the battlefield. Jomini's observations led him to develop his Fundamental Principle of War.⁹

Because he realized that not all military leaders had the genius of Napoleon, Jomini used his own observations of Napoleon to develop strategies that government officials could use to select military leaders. Jomini believed that the most essential qualities of a military leader would always be "a high moral courage capable of great resolutions" and "a physical courage which takes no account of danger."¹¹ Successful leaders must also understand the Fundamental Principle of War. Commanders should agree with the head of the state upon the character of the war. They must carefully study the theater of war and select the most suitable base of operations, taking into consideration the frontiers of the state and those of its allies.¹²

Once commanders have been chosen, the Fundamental Principle of War should be applied using Grand Tactics,¹³ including—

- The choice of positions and defensive lines of battle.
- The offensive in a defensive battle.

- The different orders of battle or the grand maneuvers that are proper for the attack of the enemy's line.
- The collision of two armies on the march or unexpected battles.
- Surprises of armies in the open field.
- The arrangements for leading troops into battle.
- The attack of positions and entrenched camps.¹⁴

Jomini believed that commanders who followed the Fundamental Principle of War would be victorious. Even today, Jomini's principle lies at the heart of U.S. Army doctrinal operations.

General Petraeus' Implementation of Jomini's Principle

In 2006, General David Petraeus (who, as a lieutenant general, was the commander of the U.S. Army Combined Arms Center, Fort Leavenworth, Kansas) and General James N. Mattis (who, as a lieutenant general, was the commanding general of the Marine Corps Combat Development Command, Quantico, Virginia) incorporated Jomini's Fundamental Principle of War into field manuals (FMs) that prescribe how tactical units are to defeat an insurgency—specifically, the one that was raging in Iraq. In FM 3-24, they state that it is time to institutionalize Army and Marine Corps knowledge of this long-standing form of conflict. The purpose of the publication is to help prepare Army and Marine Corps leaders to conduct counterinsurgency operations anywhere in the world. It provides a foundation for study before deployment and serves as the basis for operations in theater. Perhaps more importantly, it outlines essential requirements for success against today's adaptive foes and presents techniques for generating and incorporating lessons learned during operations. The use of the prescribed techniques is meant to ensure that U.S. forces remain more agile and adaptive than their irregular enemies. These traits are essential for any military confronting an enemy who does not fight using conventional tactics and who adapts while waging irregular warfare. Unfortunately, it is particularly challenging for a military to adopt the techniques when they are engaged in conflict.



General David Petraeus

Based on Jomini's principle and strategies, Petraeus was considered the best-educated and best-trained U.S. general in 2007; therefore, he was selected as the commander of the Multinational Forces–Iraq. Following his confirmation, he put Jomini's principle—along with his own principles—to work. He surmised that political support and additional troops were necessary to separate the Iraqi people from insurgent forces.

Clash of Mao Tse-tung's Theory and Jomini's Principle

President George W. Bush ordered additional U.S. Soldiers and Marines to be sent to Iraq to wage a counterattack against the insurgents who were bidding for control of the government. Most additional troops were sent to large urban areas, since General Petraeus believed that these were the decisive points at which to defeat the insurgency. The presence of the additional troops allowed the newly elected government the opportunity to gain citizen support. U.S. forces began assisting with the hiring of local citizens, which increased the size of the Iraqi army and police forces. The tactical principles of mass and surprise, which were focused on decisive and objective points of insurgent strongholds and middle-class neighborhoods, proved to be successful. The surge of U.S. troops also allowed Iraqi security forces to provide more equipment and increase training, resulting in a more self-reliant force that was capable of conducting independent operations against insurgent forces. The populace began to lose faith in the insurgents and started working with local governments and U.S. forces to rid the country of insurgents and shadow governments. By the end of 2009, the Iraqi government was able to provide security and basic needs for its citizens.

Conclusion

The success of the Jomini approach over that of Mao Tse-tung can be attributed to the people of Iraq. Originally, the small U.S. force was not able to assemble a mass or to surprise insurgent forces; therefore, they were unable to gain the support of the local populace. Following the increase in size of the U.S. and Iraqi forces, the forces carried out more decisive actions against the insurgents, separating the insurgents from the citizens and allowing the country to return to a sense of normalcy. The decisive point against the insurgency came when, with minimal U.S. assistance, Iraqi security forces were able to defeat insurgent forces in urban areas in 2008. This resulted in government legitimacy in the public eye. ●●●

Endnotes:

¹An "insurgent" refers to "a person who revolts against civil authority or an established government; especially: a rebel not recognized as a belligerent." *Merriam-Webster's Collegiate Dictionary*, Eleventh Edition, Merriam-Webster, Incorporated, Springfield, Massachusetts, 2003.

²Mao Tse-tung, *On Guerrilla Warfare*, 1937.

³Mao Tse-tung, "Problems of Strategy in Guerrilla War Against Japan," from *Selected Works of Mao Tse-tung*, Vol. II, Foreign Language Press, Peking, 1967, <<http://www.marx2mao.com/Mao/PSGW38.html#c2>>, accessed on 29 July 2010.

⁴“People’s War,” *Quotations From Mao Tse Tung*,” Peking Foreign Language Press, 1966, <<http://www.marxists.org/reference/archive/mao/works/red-book/ch08.htm>>, accessed on 29 July 2010.

⁵Ibid.

⁶The People’s Liberation Army, which was established as the military arm of the Communist Party of China in 1927, is the unified military organization of the People’s Republic of China.

⁷Chiang Kai-shek was the leader of the Nationalist Party in China, 1928–1948, and in 1948, became the President of the Republic of China.

⁸“People’s War,” 1966.

⁹*Napoleon.org*, “History of the Two Empires,” Foundation Napoleon, 2008, <http://www.napoleon.org/en/reading_room/biographies/files/jomini.asp>, accessed on 19 August 2010.

¹⁰Baron Henri de Jomini, Captain C.H. Mendell, and Lieutenant W.P. Craighill, *The Art of War*, 1862.

¹¹Ibid.

¹²Ibid.

¹³Ibid. “Grand Tactics” refers to the art of posting troops on the battlefield according to the accidents of the ground, bringing them into action, and fighting on the ground—in contradistinction to planning upon a map.

¹⁴Ibid.

Reference:

FM 3-24, *Counterinsurgency*, 15 December 2006.

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