

# Toward a Revolutionary Strategy of the 90s

Wednesday 13 August 2008, by [QUIMPO Nathan Gilbert](#), [TOPAZ Omar](#) (Date first published: 10 August 1991).

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When the Communist Party of the Philippines was re-established in 1968, it adopted Mao Zedong's strategy of "protracted people's war", including the concept of "encircling the cities from the countryside". Since then, the Party has unswervingly adhered to this strategy. Over the years, adjustments and modifications have been made, notably the concept of "three strategic combinations" in 1981, but the fundamental strategic framework has remained the same.

After the election boycott fiasco of February 1986 which resulted in the marginalisation of the revolutionary forces in the EDSA uprising, various quarters outside and within the Party called for changes in certain formulations in strategy, particularly those pertaining to uprisings and insurrection, electoral struggle, peace negotiations and urban struggle (including urban partisan warfare). A few even challenged the very concepts of "protractedness" and "encircling the cities from the countryside".

Now, again, in the light of the economic drift and the severe crisis of governance in the Philippines and of major changes in the international scene such as the collapse of socialist regimes in Eastern Europe and the end of the Cold War, the issues raised in 1986-87 on strategy have re-surfaced, reinforced by new ones. The questions on strategy have grown louder and are now hitting at the very core.

With all the major domestic and global changes in the last five or six years, can Mao-style "protracted people's war" continue to be viable as revolutionary strategy in the Philippines? Can the long-held concept of "encircling the cities from the countryside" continue to be tenable as a strategic line for the Philippine revolutionary movement in the 1990s?

## Strategy as Originally Formulated

In its very first document, "*Rectify Errors and Rebuild the Party*", the Party declared its adherence to Mao's theory of people's war which it deemed was "universal and applies to Philippine conditions". [1] Hence, the strategy of the Philippine national democratic revolution, as explained in the major documents of the Party during the 60s and 70s, hews closely to the Maoist model. It runs as follows:

The essential task of the national democratic revolution is to liberate the Filipino people from foreign and feudal domination and establish an independent and democratic Philippines. Such a task can be accomplished only by waging armed struggle as the main form of revolutionary struggle and developing the broadest possible united front among the motive forces to isolate and destroy the target or enemy. [2]

The motive forces of the revolution are the workers (the leading force), the peasantry (the main force), the petty bourgeoisie and the national bourgeoisie. The basic alliance of the workers and peasants constitutes the solid foundation of the national united front. The targets of the revolution are US imperialism, the comprador big bourgeoisie and the landlord class.

The three main weapons of the Philippine revolution are the Communist Party, the armed struggle (or the New People's Army) and the national united front. In another manner of speaking, the Party, representing the proletariat, wields the two powerful weapons of armed struggle and united front. [3]

The strategic line of the people's war is to encircle the cities from the countryside. The people's democratic forces should build and develop the people's army and stable base areas in the countryside. From such revolutionary bases, they will be able ultimately to advance to the cities wave upon wave and seize political power. [4]

People's war is a protracted process because it will take the revolutionary forces a long period of time to accumulate armed strength - to build the people's army as well as revolutionary bases in the countryside. It will take a long time "to change the balance of forces between us and the enemy". [5] In this long process, the people's war will pass through certain stages and substages. The probable stages of the people's war are the strategic defensive, the strategic stalemate and the strategic offensive. [6] The forms of warfare include guerrilla warfare, regular mobile warfare, and, during the strategic offensive, positional warfare.

Little is mentioned in early Party documents about uprising and insurrection. In *Specific Characteristics of Our People's War*, it is very generally stated that the revolutionary forces should "prepare the ground for popular uprisings in the future". [7] In *Our Urgent Tasks*, uprising is seen as a far-off phenomenon:

The people in the cities should realise that the long-term development of the underground there and the steady growth of political mass actions are a preparation for the final day of reckoning for the ruling system, when their general uprising will come into coordination with the general offensive of the people's army. The Party should promote this revolutionary thinking and dispel notions that the people's army should now send its small but growing forces to the cities for some spectacular actions. [8]

There is some discussion on urban partisan warfare. Armed city partisans are seen as performing special tasks of disrupting the enemy and punishing traitors in cities. They "specialise in city operations, in intelligence and reconnaissance, in disrupting the enemy rule, in raising the fighting

morale of workers and the urban petty bourgeoisie and in preparing in a long-term way for a general city uprising". [9]

In the early years of the Party, such arenas as the electoral struggle (specifically participation in bourgeois elections) and peace negotiations were not factored into overall strategy. In *Rectify Errors*, electoral struggle and negotiations were discussed in the context of the "right opportunist errors" of the old Partido Komunista sa Pilipinas (PKP) in the latter half of the 1940s, when it had forsaken armed struggle. In early documents, elections were seen as being "nothing more than a legal mechanism to facilitate the replacement of one ruling exploiter with another". [10] Hence, the Party boycotted the 1969 national elections and all the elections, plebiscites and referendums in the 70s and early 80s (up to 1986). *Rebolusyon, hindi eleksyon!* (Revolution, not election!) became the regular slogan come election time.

International work was likewise still discussed in general terms. In *Our Urgent Tasks*, Party forces were called upon to relate the Philippine revolution to the world revolution, to draw support and assistance from as many foreign friends as possible, and prepare overseas Filipinos to help and to join the revolutionary movement. [11]

In 1980-81, the results of a Party study revealed major demographic changes in Philippine society (a fast growing urban population compared to the rural population); changes in the class composition (a significantly higher percentage for workers and urban petty bourgeoisie and a lower percentage for the peasantry); and the existence of a strong legal tradition among middle forces.

Taking these developments into account, the Party leadership adopted the concept of "three strategic combinations", as a refinement of the "protracted people's war" strategy. While reiterating the protracted character of the people's war and the "encircling the cities from the countryside" concept, it called on the Party forces to be more conscious of combining and coordinating closely 1) the military struggle and the political struggle; 2) the struggles in the countryside and in the cities; and 3) the struggles in the domestic and international fronts. The military struggle was viewed as principal or predominant over the political; the struggle in the countryside, over the struggle in the cities; and the struggle in the domestic front, over the struggle in the international front. The gap between the two in each combination, however, was no longer seen as wide as before. Roughly speaking, if the ratio was perceived as 90-10 or 80-20 before, it would now be 60-40 or 70-30. Moreover, in certain situations and periods, the secondary could become principal and vice-versa. [12]

The concept of the "three strategic combinations" was a significant adjustment of the "protracted people's war" strategy. It paved the way for the various concepts of the "pol-mil" (politico-military) framework, such as that adopted by the Mindanao Party machinery in 1984, and a different version taken by the Manila-Rizal region in 1988-89.

Unfortunately, no official Party document elaborating on the "three strategic combinations" has been issued up to now. Thus, there is some confusion among Party members as to whether or not the "three strategic combinations" concept is still considered valid officially, or if in fact, it was officially adopted in the first place.

### **Adjustments after the EDSA Uprising**

As far as is known by this writer, no overall re-examination nor adjustment of strategy on the level or scale of the "three strategic combinations" has been made since 1981. Neither the EDSA uprising of 1986 nor major changes in the international scene such as the collapse of socialist regimes in

Eastern Europe in 1989 have brought about such a review, despite calls from various quarters.

Regarding the EDSA uprising, the Party leadership has gone only as far as concluding that the Party committed a major tactical blunder when it campaigned for a boycott of the 1986 snap presidential election which paved the way for the uprising. [13] No mention is made whatsoever about anything wrong in strategy. Nonetheless, the EDSA uprising has forced a rethinking in the Party of previously held concepts and paved the way for the emergence of new ideas whose implications and ramifications on overall strategy are only now starting to be fully recognised.

Aspects of the revolutionary struggle which were once lightly regarded have now gained some importance. Popular uprising and insurrection, electoral struggle (i.e., electoral participation, not boycott), peace negotiations, urban guerrilla warfare and political work among enemy soldiers - all these are now seen in a new light.

International developments over the last few years - the toppling of bureaucratic and authoritarian "socialist" regimes of Eastern Europe through gigantic mass actions and popular uprisings; the end of the Cold War; the shift to political pluralism (including multiparty elections) of many socialist, socialist-oriented and formerly socialist states; and the increased use of negotiations in the resolution of major regional and civil armed conflicts in the Third World - have only served to reinforce some of the new concepts.

**Popular uprisings and insurrections.** These are no longer viewed as forms of struggle being employed only or mainly in the very distant future as, for instance, the stage of the strategic offensive. Uprisings are now considered an important component of the strategic defensive. The concept of the strategic defensive itself has been modified - according to the Party theoretical and analytical journal *Rebolusyon* (January-March 1990), the strategic defensive no longer revolves around the creation and development of regular mobile forces and of base areas. In the new concept of the stage of the strategic defensive, "our general task is to strengthen the revolutionary forces and to further weaken the enemy to change the balance of forces between revolution and counterrevolution. . . [T]his strategic task can be carried out through a combination of three important components: the extensive and intensive guerrilla warfare throughout the land, some elements of regular mobile warfare, and widespread revolutionary mass movement and *people's uprisings*". [14] (Underscoring supplied.)

In a subsequent issue, however, *Rebolusyon* (April-June 1991) warned against "the idea of uprisings without regard for the state of revolutionary organisation" and stressed the need for widening and deepening the mass base. It urged revolutionary forces to persevere in waging the protracted people's war, to accomplish the tasks of the current stage before proceeding to the next stage, and not to "overreach by word or deed" at anytime. [15]

**Electoral struggle.** Elections held under the current ruling order are no longer dismissed as just noisy and empty political battles of reactionary forces. Breaking with its tradition of boycott, the revolutionary movement (i.e., its legal democratic forces) participated in the 1987 congressional elections, then again in the 1988 local elections, fielding and campaigning for progressive candidates on both occasions.

Just before the 1987 elections, the Party, apparently referring to the electoral struggle, called on the revolutionary forces "to widen the avenues of fighting for a struggle on all fronts, and to develop expertise in the science and art of combining these various arenas against reaction". [16]

While electoral participation is now regarded as a valid form of struggle, it is a secondary form. As Politburo member Julian Banaag explained it: "The Party viewed the [1987] elections as a major but

secondary arena of struggle. The tasks in the armed struggle and in the mass movements occupy a higher place in our order of priorities.” [17]

**Negotiations.** Peace negotiations, which were unthinkable under Marcos, were regarded as a new and valid arena of struggle soon after the EDSA uprising. The National Democratic Front, of which the Party is a component organisation, engaged in negotiations with the Aquino government in December 1986 - January 1987 to try to find a political solution to the armed conflict in the Philippines.

Prior to the talks, the Party newspaper *Ang Bayan* (August 1986) stated: “We are seriously entering into these talks and are open to the possibility of attaining enduring peace through a comprehensive political settlement.” [18]

Despite the collapse of the peace talks in early 1987, the NDF and the Party remain open to negotiations. “Short of winning total victory,” says *Rebolusyon* (January-March 1991), “peace talks are desirable and necessary under certain conditions such as when they are to facilitate the further advance or total victory of the revolution, when there is need to strike an alliance with the adversary in order to confront a bigger and worse foe, when there is a reasonable chance for major social reforms to be agreed upon and when the revolutionary movement wishes to demonstrate its just and reasonable position against the peace pretence of the enemy.” [19]

**Urban partisan warfare.** Prior to 1986, urban partisan warfare was employed on a significant scale only in a number of urban centres in Mindanao. In 1987, such a “new and delicate form of struggle” became a major component of the revolutionary struggle in the national capital region, Metro Manila, and the military actions of NPA “sparrow” (urban partisan) units constantly hit the headlines.

The value of armed city partisans was seen in that they broke the reactionary monopoly on class violence in the urban centres, enhanced the masses’ room for maneuver in their political and economic struggles, provided a higher dimension to the coordination and mutual support between the revolutionary forces in the countryside and urban centre, and hastened the preparation of the urban masses for armed insurrections. [20] Urban partisan units are now regarded as “the backbone of insurrectionary forces of the future”. [21]

The Party leadership, however, cautioned that “the armed city partisans should allow the gigantic mass actions to develop and avoid giving the enemy a chance to attack the legal democratic forces either by means of brutality or propaganda”. [22]

**Political work among enemy troops.** Ever since the EDSA uprising, which had been immediately preceded by a mutiny of soldiers of the Armed Forces of the Philippines led by Defence Secretary Juan Ponce Enrile and AFP Deputy Chief Fidel Ramos, the Party has become more conscious of the potentials of exacerbating, and taking advantage of, conflicts within the reactionary military. Such consciousness has grown in the light of the continuing fractiousness of the AFP as reflected in the spate of military coup attempts and mutinies staged over the last few years.

On the 20<sup>th</sup> anniversary of the NPA, *Ang Bayan* (March 1989) stated: “The NPA must seek not only to annihilate enemy forces but also to disintegrate them. . . The NPA must use every possible means to persuade enemy personnel, especially those recruited from the working people, to abandon the counterrevolutionary side.” [23]

A few months after the December 1989 failed coup attempt, NPA chief of staff Romulo Kintanar, in a well-publicised message, announced that the revolutionary movement considered “patriotic officers

and men” of the AFP as potential allies and comrades. He called on them to organise secret patriotic cells and committees, carry out study sessions and establish underground links with the revolutionary forces. He also welcomed with open arms those who wished to join the NPA. [24]

### **On the “Universal” Character of Mao’s Strategy**

Before proceeding to the review of the substance of “protracted people’s war” strategy, it is important to first tackle one of the earliest concepts regarding strategy that the Party has adopted - that of the supposedly “universal” character of Mao’s strategy.

The doctrine that Mao’s theory of “protracted people’s war” and of “encircling the cities from the countryside” is a “universal truth” - i.e., universal for all semicolonial or colonial, semifeudal countries - is proclaimed in the earliest Party documents. Furthermore, the theory of using the countryside to encircle the cities is considered “invincible”. The Party even adopted Lin Piao’s thesis of extending Mao’s theory of people’s war on a world scale - that “the world’s countryside, that is, Asia, Africa and Latin America, encircle the cities of the world [the imperialist countries]”. [25]

The above assertions reflect the ultra-left language and the mood of triumphalism of the Chinese Cultural Revolution, which fortunately are no longer much in vogue. However, the declarations and the doctrine on the universality of Mao’s theory on strategy have never been withdrawn officially.

The achievements of Mao Zedong in leading the Chinese revolution and developing the theory of “people’s war”, and the inspiration he gave to revolutionary forces the world over are tremendous. Conferring on him god-like qualities, however, is a great disservice and insult to this outstanding revolutionary leader and thinker. Dogmatically or mechanically applying Mao’s concepts in the Philippine revolutionary struggle harms the Philippine revolutionary cause.

There is a long list of successful revolutionary movements in the Third World which did not resort to the three-stage “protracted people’s war” and “encircling the cities from the countryside” strategy: Vietnam (1945) and Nicaragua, popular insurrection together with guerrilla warfare; Cuba, mass struggle culminating in general strike, coupled with guerrilla warfare; Algeria and the former Portuguese colonies (Mozambique, Angola, Guinea-Bissau and Cape Verde), protracted guerrilla warfare (without having to go to regular warfare as main form of warfare); Zimbabwe and Namibia, protracted guerrilla warfare culminating in political settlement and elections; Grenada (1979), popular uprising; Afghanistan and Burkina Faso, left-wing military coup; Haiti (1990), combination of mass struggle and electoral struggle; Vanuatu, extended parliamentary struggle and elections; and so on.

While it may be true that there have been no recent pronouncements on the “universality” concept appear in Party publications, there is still a strong tendency in the Party to look at the experiences of other Third World liberation movements through the prism of Maoist strategy rather than to examine them from the point of view of the movements themselves. The experiences of such liberation movements as those of the Vietnamese, Cubans, Nicaraguans, Namibians, Eritreans, Salvadorans and Guatemalans are held up as examples, and proofs of the validity, if not universality, of Mao’s strategy of “protracted people’s war” and “encircling the cities from the countryside”, simply because all the said movements engaged in armed struggle, in army-building and base-building in the countryside for a considerable period of time prior to victory or to their current level.

None of the liberation movements mentioned (or at least none of the main tendencies or currents within them) actually adopted Mao’s strategy even if all of them did study and learn from the Chinese revolutionary experience. The Cuban and Nicaraguan revolutions were insurrectional in



character, as the leaders themselves assert. The Salvadorans speak about their “people’s war” - without the adjective “protracted” - and their “politico-military strategy”. Even the Vietnamese, who were initially influenced by Mao’s strategy, developed their own version of “protracted people’s war”. They rejected the notion of “using the rural areas to encircle the urban centres and then moving forward to use military force to liberate the whole country as China had done”. Instead, they believed, it must be done “*in the Vietnamese way*”, which involved attacking the enemy “with both political and military forces so as to move towards a general insurrection and offensive and liberate the South”. [26] (Underscoring Le Duan’s.)

Given the wide variety of experiences and strategies employed by different national liberation movements, it is difficult to imagine how Mao’s theory on people’s war can be considered universal. It may even be that the combination of elements in China’s experience - protracted guerrilla and regular warfare, fully encircling the cities from the countryside and passing through the three stages - was unique.

The doctrine of the “universality” of Mao’s theory of “protracted people’s war” needs to be discarded once and for all. Dropping it has to be done on an official basis. Even as the “universality” of Mao’s strategy is no longer being actively propagated, there are still a good number of Party cadres and members, particularly in remote countryside areas where access to fairly recent revolutionary reading materials in the local dialect is very limited, who take it as official Party position, or worse, as gospel truth.

### **Primacy of Military Struggle over Political Struggle?**

The first major problem with Maoist “protracted people’s war” strategy, when applied to the Philippine context, is that it is much too weighed in favour of the military struggle and military forces (the people’s army) and underestimates the capacities of the political struggle and political forces (the mass movement). To a lot of Party cadres and members, this may not be immediately apparent. A closer look at some basic formulations and past experience will illustrate this.

Armed struggle is the principal form of struggle and legal struggle, secondary - so has it been repeatedly said. The latter serves the former. It may be said that armed struggle consists of two main types: military struggle (such as guerrilla warfare, regular mobile warfare and positional warfare), and armed uprising or insurrection. As for legal struggle, the most important specific forms are mass actions such as demonstrations, strikes, pickets and marches.

In reality, prior to 1986, the only type of armed struggle that the movement was engaged in and that was seriously being encouraged was military struggle. Uprisings and insurrections were seen as something to be employed only in the distant future. Party members were constantly told of the putschist mistakes of Chinese revolutionaries in the 1920s when they tried to launch urban insurrections without first building base areas in the countryside. Hence, armed struggle in practice turned out to be military struggle.

Open, legal struggle has primarily meant legal mass struggle. By subordinating the legal struggle to the armed (military) struggle, what has happened in practice is that *mass struggle in general* has also been subordinated to armed (military) struggle in a fixed way. At a time when the mass movement is in a relative ebb, it may not be too difficult to accept such legal forms of mass struggle as rallies and strikes as being subordinate to military struggle. But in a revolutionary situation (as in 1983-86), when mass mobilisations run to hundreds of thousands or more than a million, when they adopt more and more militant forms (long marches, civil disobedience, coordinated workers’ strikes, general strikes or people’s strikes, etc.), when they threaten to break out of legal parameters and

move in the direction of a mass uprising or insurrection, should mass struggle continue to be viewed as always playing second fiddle to the military struggle?

The primacy of the military forces over the political forces - in fact, the preponderant role of the people's army - is more apparent. Paraphrasing Mao, Party documents have frequently stated that "without a people's army, the people have nothing". "Specific Characteristics" declares: "The Filipino people are helpless without their own army. They cannot take a single step towards smashing the military-bureaucratic machine of the enemy without a people's army." Not only is the people's army supposed to be "the main form of organisation"; it is also regarded as "the most effective concrete form" of the basic alliance of the proletariat and the peasantry and as "the mainstay of the people's democratic state system". It is also the "organisation where the Party membership is most concentrated". [27] Most importantly, the people's army is regarded as the instrument "for carrying out the Party's central task of seizing political power and consolidating it . . . for overthrowing the present bourgeois reactionary puppet government and for winning the people's democratic revolution". [28]

The stages of the people's war are determined by the development of the people's army: "[W]e can tentatively define three strategic stages that our people's army will have to undergo. It is now undergoing the first stage, the strategic defensive. Consequently, it shall undergo the second stage, the strategic stalemate, when our strength shall be more or less on an equal footing with the enemy's. . . Finally, it shall undergo the third stage, the strategic offensive, when the enemy shall have been profoundly weakened and completely isolated and shall have been forced to go on the strategic defensive... [29]

The decisive role in the revolutionary struggle has been reserved for the people's army. The development of the political forces follows the logic of that of the military forces: The importance of the mass movement in the countryside lies in building base areas for the people's army; the role of the mass movement in the cities is to weaken the enemy right in his stronghold in preparation for the final advance of the people's army.

In effect, what the "armed struggle-legal struggle" framework has meant in reality is that military struggle is principal and political struggle is secondary, that the military forces (the people's army) take primacy over the political forces (the mass movement), and that the latter merely serves the former.

As early as 1987, a proposal had already been presented to the Party leadership to shift from the Maoist "armed struggle-legal struggle" framework to the Vietnamese "politico-military" framework ("For a Politico-Military Framework", by Marty Villalobos). Under the latter, the military and political struggles are viewed and treated not in terms of one being principal and the other secondary, but as *both* being *fundamental* and *decisive*, with one or the other playing the predominant role in different particular situations or periods. Instead of setting fixed principal-secondary roles, the Vietnamese framework stressed the combination of military and political struggles and coordination between the military and the political forces. [30] It goes further than the concept of "three strategic combinations" since the latter basically sticks to the primacy of military over political struggle, while allowing for shifts in certain situations.

For a Third World country like the Philippines, where capitalism and bourgeois democracy have made great inroads, and especially at a time when international conditions are not as favourable as before for armed national liberation movements, the Vietnamese framework is much more suited than the Maoist framework. The "politico-military" framework allows for greater flexibility. The military struggle and military forces will not have a fixed principal role nor the political struggle and political forces a fixed subordinate role. There can be more and better combinations and shifting of



stresses between military and political struggles.

The “politico-military” framework opens the possibility for the political forces playing the more decisive role in the revolutionary struggle. In the Vietnamese Revolution of 1945, it was the uprising of the masses that proved the decisive factor, not the military struggle, as the guerrilla units at that time were still small and weak. Again, in the Nicaraguan revolution of 1979, the *insurrectional* movement of the masses became the focal point of the struggle and the Sandinista guerrilla army provided support - a reversal of the Maoist paradigm. [31]

Should another revolutionary situation such as that of 1983-86 or another insurrectionary situation such as that of 1986 emerge, the “politico-military” framework can easily effect the necessary shift in stress from military struggle and military forces to the political struggle and the political forces; prepare the revolutionary forces for the possibility that the political struggle develops into its highest form - armed insurrection; and insure that the revolutionary forces are not left out again in an insurrectionary explosion as in the EDSA uprising of 1986.

### **Bias for Military Struggle Persists Even After EDSA Uprising**

Adjustments made by the Party after the EDSA uprising - especially those pertaining to uprising and insurrection, electoral struggle, peace negotiations and political work among enemy soldiers - point to a definitively increased role for the political struggle in the overall revolutionary struggle.

But even if uprisings have been integrated as a component of the strategic defensive, even if the revolutionary forces have entered the new arenas of bourgeois elections and negotiations, the bias in favour of military struggle and military forces remains. Virtually none of the old basic formulations has been revised; they have in fact been reaffirmed and reinforced. The openings made by the “three strategic combinations” have virtually disappeared. The Party’s statement on the occasion of the 20<sup>th</sup> anniversary of the NPA (March 29, 1989) says the following:

*"Without the New People’s Army, there is no light of hope for the Filipino people. . .*

The New People’s Army is the main instrument of the Communist Party of the Philippines, the National Democratic Front and the entire Filipino people for carrying out the central task of **smashing the military-bureaucratic machinery of the reactionary state, seizing political power and bringing about the total victory of the national democratic revolution. . .**

The New People’s Army is engaged in a protracted people’s war. This involves the strategic line of encircling the cities from the countryside, accumulating strength in the countryside until **the people’s army becomes capable of seizing political power in the cities...**

The people’s army is **the principal weapon for destroying the enemy’s apparatuses of coercion.**" [32] (Underscoring supplied.)

From the above pronouncements, it is clear that the decisive role in the revolutionary struggle continues to be reserved exclusively for the military forces, the people’s army. There is no possibility for the political forces - not even an insurrectional mass movement - to become the main instrument or the main weapon in defeating enemy forces and seizing power.

The stages of the people’s war are still anchored on, and defined mainly by, the role and the development of the military struggle and the people’s army. Note how the stages are defined in *The Philippine Revolution: The Leader’s View* (published 1989):

**"Strategic defensive** - *The stage at which the inferior forces of the people's army must strategically take a defensive posture against the strategically superior forces of its enemy but take full initiative through specific offensives at the tactical level in guerrilla warfare by pitting superior forces of the people's army against inferior forces of the enemy.*

**Strategic stalemate** - The stage in people's war at which the forces of the people's army are more or less strategically at par with the forces of the enemy, with the people's army using both guerrilla and regular mobile warfare to pit its superior forces against inferior forces of the enemy at the tactical level.

**Strategic offensive** - The stage at which the people's army has strategically gained the upper hand against the enemy forces and launches regular mobile warfare as well as some positional warfare in order to destroy the strategic forces of the enemy and seize political power on a nationwide scale." [33]

In the above conceptualisation of the stages, there is no mention at all of the political forces, of the mass movement. The mindset on military predominance is transparent.

The predominance of the military factor continues to be propagated even when the formulations that the NPA is "the main form of organisation" and that it is "the most effective concrete form of the basic alliance" have long been invalidated by actual practice. The main organisational centres of the peasantry, workers, urban poor, women and youth have far outstripped the people's army in membership and may have as much political clout and impact. The joining of peasant and worker forces in the main multisectoral alliances of the mass movement are just as good an example of the concretisation of the basic alliance as the people's army, if not better.

In the theories of people's war of the Vietnamese and the Salvadorans (who, like the Vietnamese, adopted the politico-military framework), the outcome of the war is determined not by military forces solely nor mainly, but by both political and military forces. Vietnamese Communist Party leader Le Duan stated: "In the final analysis, the revolution is decided by the balance of force in which our forces are composed of political and armed forces." [34] Salvadoran revolutionary leader Joaquin Villalobos said: "In a people's war, the role of the military is not absolute. What is decisive for a revolutionary movement is knowing whether or not it has attained a level of military development which, combined with political factors, is enough to change the correlation of forces. In 1983, despite the fact that the FMLN's military strikes pushed the army to the edge of military collapse, the lack of decisive activity in the sphere of popular struggle prevented these military victories from leading to more significant changes in the correlation of forces." [35]

There are many indications of just how much of a fundamental and decisive role the Vietnamese and the Salvadorans gave to political struggle. Not only were uprising and insurrection - as a form of struggle not reserved only for the final scenario - given prominence in many of their plans and actions. They also extended the struggle from the battlefield and the streets to the negotiating table, engaging in protracted negotiations with their adversaries. The Salvadorans have even entered the electoral arena, perhaps becoming the one armed revolutionary movement in the Third World that has made the farthest gains in this field without abandoning the armed struggle.

In Vietnam and El Salvador, the revolutionary forces viewed the disintegration of the reactionary armed forces itself as the result not just of military offensives but also of intense political work among them. The Vietnamese in fact regarded political work among enemy troops as "a strategic prong of attack" and implemented the slogan "Workers, peasants and soldiers, unite!" to overthrow neocolonialist rule and defeat the US war of aggression. [36] Filipino revolutionaries can certainly emulate their Vietnamese and Salvadoran counterparts, especially given the conditions of a faction-

ridden and coup-happy Philippine military.

## **Primacy of Rural Struggle over Urban Struggle?**

The second major problem with Maoist “protracted people’s war” strategy, particularly its “encircling the cities from the countryside” concept, when applied in the Philippines, is that it overstates the requirements for the rural component of revolutionary work and underrates the urban struggle, subordinating it too much to the struggle in the countryside.

In the Maoist “protracted people’s war” framework, developing the war in the countryside “entails three inseparable components, namely, armed struggle, agrarian revolution and rural bases”. [37] The correctness and necessity of engaging in these three components of rural work are not at all being denied by this writer. Many Third World revolutionary movements other than the Chinese, like the Cuban, Vietnamese and Salvadoran movements did implement all three. The “encircle the cities from the countryside” concept, however, sets the overly high target of “stable base areas”. Under this concept, stable base areas where local people’s governments can operate fully are supposed to be developed from guerrilla zones and guerrilla bases, to serve as a stable rear of the revolutionary forces. “From such stable revolutionary bases,” declares “Specific Characteristics”, “we shall be able ultimately to seize the cities and advance to nationwide victory.” [38] Up to now, the idea of “stable base areas” has not been abandoned, even as the concept of “guerrilla bases” has been developed and further elaborated. [39]

Building guerrilla zones and bases is fine. But the notion of “stable base areas” seems too much of a requisite for victory for the revolutionary forces in an archipelagic country like the Philippines at a time when imperialism can resort to and has in fact employed high-tech warfare in “middle-intensity” and even “low-intensity” conflicts to crush revolutionary movements and anti-US regimes. At present, and for a long time to come, there can be no base area that the reactionary armed forces cannot reach by land, sea or air within hours. If fairly stable liberated areas should emerge in the future, they would only be the result of the substantial disintegration or collapse of the enemy’s armed forces, and not really a major causative factor of this, as in China.

When the Vietnamese established their base areas and the Salvadorans their “zones of control”, they did not see these as “stable base areas” in the Maoist sense of fully liberated, virtually impregnable bases. Nor did they believe in the notion that the cities absolutely have to be encircled from the countryside first before a final bid for seizure of power can be launched. And they did not come up with formulations like: “The counterrevolutionary army must first be defeated in the countryside” [40] and “Only on the basis of solid democratic gains in the countryside can the revolution advance.” [41]

In the 30s and 40s, the Vietnamese did not yet have to contend with the B-52 bombers and Huey and Sikorsky helicopters of the 60s and 70s which made base areas easily accessible to enemy troops. Nonetheless, in winning their 1945 Revolution, the Vietnamese did not really have to encircle the cities from the countryside - they only had some base areas in the north and none in the south. Today, in such a small country as El Salvador, “stable base areas” are even more impracticable, if not impossible.

From the beginning up to the present, Party documents have stipulated that in line with the “encircling the cities from the countryside” doctrine, “the principal stress should be on revolutionary struggle in the countryside and the secondary stress on revolutionary struggle in the cities”. [42] “Rectify Errors” declares, “The principal form of struggle is waged in the countryside; the secondary one, in the city. It is in the countryside that the people’s armed forces can take the offensive against

the enemy, while in the city the revolutionary forces must take the defensive until such time that the people's armed forces in the countryside can seize the city." [43] The concept of the primacy of the rural struggle over the urban struggle is but the reflection of the bias for military struggle over political struggle. Under the "armed struggle-legal struggle" framework, where armed struggle is principal, the rural struggle naturally assumes primacy over urban struggle, since conditions for waging armed (military) struggle are certainly much more favourable in the countryside than in the cities.

Under the "politico-military" framework, where political and military struggles are both considered as fundamental and decisive, stipulating a fixed long-term principal-secondary relationship between rural and urban work becomes pointless. The Vietnamese did not bother to fix principal-secondary roles for rural and urban areas. Their guideline was simply to "attack the enemy in all three strategic areas [hill forests, plains and cities]". Le Duan said, "Strong bases are built in the hill forests and plains areas at the same time as footholds are gained in the cities and insurrections are staged in both urban and rural regions." [44] The Nicaraguans employed "a creative combination of all forms of struggle wherever they can take place: city, town, neighbourhood, mountain, etc." [45]

The Philippines is now much more advanced in urban development than China in the 40s, and Vietnam and Nicaragua in the 70s (even if a larger proportion of Nicaragua's population is urban-based). According to studies made by the Party in 1980-81, approximately 30 percent of the population of the Philippines was urban-based - double the 15 percent figure implied in *Specific Characteristics. Ang Bayan* (November 1983), citing 1980 national census statistics, reported that 38 percent of the Philippine population lived in urban areas, and that the urban population was growing faster (5.7 percent) than that of the rural (1.1 percent). [46] Even if the national census urban figures cited may have been exaggerated, the urban population should still be approximately 40 percent now.

The implications of these urban statistics on the strategy of the Philippine revolution cannot be ignored. At the minimum, they call for a higher premium for urban struggle and for political struggle. What the adjustments after the EDSA uprising - on uprising and insurrection, electoral struggle and negotiations, as well as urban partisan warfare - do indicate is that there is indeed a greater appreciation of the role of urban struggle. The concept of "encircling the cities from the countryside", however, is impeding the further development of the urban struggle.

The relationship between rural and urban struggle should not be treated in terms of principal and secondary. The roles of rural and urban work are just different. At this point, it is important to point out a concept that the Mindanao Commission of the Party, adapting from the Vietnamese experience, introduced in 1984. According to the commission, while the revolutionary forces launch military and political struggles in both the countryside and the cities, the stress in the rural areas is on the armed (or military) struggle and the stress in the cities is on the political struggle. [47] The concept, which was already being implemented in Mindanao starting 1984, has not been adopted by the national leadership.

In the event of another revolutionary or insurrectionary situation, the main focus of attention of the revolutionary movement could shift to the urban struggle - no matter if, in the countryside, the units of the people's army are still mainly platoon-sized or they are already battalion-sized or bigger. The existence of such a situation simply means that the possibilities for the occurrence of an uprising or insurrection (whether spontaneous or planned well in advance) in major centres are much greater; a revolutionary vanguard worthy of the name cannot lag behind the urban masses when they are already rising up and taking up arms.

## **The Main Form of Struggle in the Cities is Political, not Legal**

Another indication of the underrating of the role of the urban struggle is the formulation that the main form of struggle in urban areas is legal. The mainly “nonarmed and legal” character of the urban struggle is explained in a document of the Party leadership dated May 1, 1977 explaining the responsibilities of the Manila-Rizal Party organisation. [48] After the EDSA uprising, this is reiterated in a statement on the 20<sup>th</sup> anniversary of the Party: “Before the [strategic offensive], the principal form of struggle in the urban areas is legal and defensive.” [49]

The above formulations are too limiting and conservative. During major upsurges of the mass movement and especially during revolutionary or insurrectionary situations, the main form of struggle in the cities may cease to be legal. The mass movement could take a turn towards illegal forms such as uprising or insurrection. In February 1986, for instance, at a time when the movement was still supposed to be in the strategic defensive, the main form of struggle in Metro Manila certainly was not legal anymore. If uprisings are indeed now considered a component of the strategic defensive, then the formulation that the main form of struggle in the cities before the strategic offensive is legal and defensive becomes awkward, if not contradictory. To retain such a formulation would only bring about confusion.

It would be much better to adopt the formulation - implied in the 1984 Mindanao Commission paper - that the main form of struggle in the cities is political. The term *political* here is not limited to just legal and nonarmed actions of the masses, but includes *armed* actions of the masses, the highest form of which is the armed insurrection of the masses. Rather than continue emphasising the mainly legal character of the urban mass movement, it is more important to clarify that it has a clear insurrectional direction. Is it not correct that the Party prepares the masses for actually engaging in armed struggle themselves instead of just leaving this function to the people’s army?

Not being conscious of the insurrectional direction of the mass movement could leave the Party grossly unprepared again for insurrectional explosions such as the EDSA uprising. Restricting the mass movement to legal confines and not clarifying and pursuing its insurrectional direction could stunt or even retard its development.

The principle that the main form of struggle in the cities is legal has sometimes been cited as a reason for putting some restraint on the development of urban partisan warfare: “The offensive actions by the armed city partisans should be supportive but not openly linked to any mass action in accordance with the line that legal and defensive struggle is the principal form of struggle in the urban areas.” [50] Hence, the following standard has been set: “The operations of armed city partisans should run at a rate and in a style not overshadowing the violent internal strife of the reactionaries and not prejudicial to the legal democratic mass movement.” [51]

Urban partisan warfare is indeed in support of the mass movement in the cities, but it does not necessarily follow the logic that the main form of struggle in the cities is legal. It defends the gains of the urban mass struggle, contributes to the political propaganda of the revolutionary movement and boosts the morale of the urban masses. The main contribution of urban partisan warfare to the mass movement, however, is that it prepares the masses to break out of legal confines and participate directly in armed struggle. In other words, it helps develop the insurrectional consciousness, as well as the insurrectional movement, of the masses.

While there have indeed been some excesses by armed city partisans which proved prejudicial to the mass movement such as the bus burning incidents during the *welgang bayan* (people’s strike) in October 1990, the solution lies not so much in limiting the number of armed actions in absolute



terms or pegging the rate of such actions below that of “the violent internal strife of the reactionaries”. The correction lies in requiring greater selectivity and raising the political standard of armed or violent actions. This means that for every military action, the political basis is well established and the political impact is well considered. The basic tenet should be: military in form, but highly political in content.

Urban partisan warfare is not a mere extension of the guerrilla warfare in the countryside. It interacts principally with the political struggle in the cities, not the military struggle in the countryside. Its effectivity cannot be measured in terms of the evolution from guerrilla warfare to regular mobile warfare and higher forms of warfare, but more in terms of the development of the insurrectional movement of the masses.

### **On the Concept of Stages**

A mechanical fixation with stages and higher forms of military struggle is the third major objection to the “protracted people’s war” strategy currently being followed by the Party. The concept of the three stages - strategic defensive, strategic stalemate and strategic offensive - is again a reflection of the bias for military struggle, military forces and military attrition. It fails to take into account the role and the development of the political struggle.

In some documents, the three stages are mentioned as the course of development of the “protracted people’s war” that the people’s army will have to undergo; in other documents, there is the qualification “probable” to describe this course of development. Whichever it is, the documents are nevertheless replete with references to the three stages.

If the course of the people’s war will be solely or mainly determined by the development of the military struggle, then the three-stage concept may work just fine. The development of the military struggle, barring serious mistakes, follows a steady upward slope or stepladder - from squads, to platoons, to companies, etc.; and from squad-sized military operations to platoon-sized operations, and so on. When the people’s army draws even in strength with the reactionary military, then it is strategic stalemate. When the people’s army surpasses the enemy troops, it is strategic offensive.

But what about the political struggle, the mass movement?

The development of the political struggle does not follow a stagist ascent; it follows a wave-like motion - ebb and flow. Sometimes the revolutionary flow gives rise to a revolutionary situation or even an insurrectionary situation. Unlike the development of the military struggle, that of the political struggle is much harder to predict.

According to Lenin, the indications of a revolutionary situation are: (1) when it is impossible for the ruling classes to maintain their rule without any change; (2) when the suffering and want of the oppressed classes have grown more acute than usual; and (3) when, as a consequence of the above causes, there is a considerable increase in the activity of the masses, who are drawn into independent historical action. Lenin clarified that the emergence of the three symptoms of a revolutionary situation are “independent of the will, not only of individual groups and parties but even of individual classes”. Russia experienced a revolutionary situation in 1905 which gave rise to the 1905 revolution. When this revolution was crushed by the czarist regime, the Russian revolutionary movement went through an ebb before recovering starting 1910. The revolutionary flow developed into a revolutionary situation in 1914-17, which in turn led to the October Revolution of 1917. [\[52\]](#)

In its partiality for military struggle, the current “protracted people’s war” strategy being followed glosses over the ebb and flow motion of the mass movement. Even the inclusion of uprisings as a component of the strategic defensive falls flat because there is no way of predicting when the objective symptoms of an uprising will emerge, except perhaps just weeks or months ahead.

The Philippine revolutionary forces should abandon completely the stagist concept of people’s war. It is mechanical thinking to try to arrange the development of both the military and political struggles into neat stages, to force various elements - both measurable as well as fluid elements - to fit into boxes.

The Vietnamese, who started out defining stages just as the Chinese did, discarded the stagist concept along the way. The Tet offensive and uprising of 1968 does not fall in any of the three classical stages. It was not really a military success, but it was a major political victory. The Vietnamese refer to the final scenario of their revolutionary struggle in 1975 as a combination of a general offensive and a general uprising - not as the strategic offensive.

Instead of being encumbered with stages - whose components have been defined and redefined a countless number of times - the revolutionary forces should simply develop the political and military forces along their respective lines of motion and be keen in assessing the balance and correlation of political and military forces. At a proper conjuncture, they can seize the political moment and take power.

Very much related to the fixation with stages is the excessive predilection to move towards higher forms of military struggle - regular mobile warfare (as the main form of warfare in the strategic stalemate) and positional warfare (strategic offensive). It is possible that the Philippine revolutionary movement may have to engage in regular mobile warfare, but it is almost impossible, given current international conditions and the continuing inability of the movement to develop a steady source of military hardware, that the revolutionary war will still reach the level of positional warfare.

Nonetheless, higher forms of military struggle are not always a prerequisite for revolutionary victory. There is a long list of revolutionary movements which have succeeded without having to go beyond guerrilla warfare - Algeria, Cuba, Nicaragua, Mozambique, Angola, Guinea-Bissau, Zimbabwe, Namibia, and so on.

In the end, what counts is still the overall balance or correlation of forces. The objective is to accumulate sufficient strength - the combined strength of political and military forces - to defeat and smash the political and military machinery of the reactionary state.

## **On the Protracted Character of the People’s War**

A mindset on protraction and military attrition is the fourth major criticism against the Maoist version of “protracted people’s war” as applied in the Philippine context.

In the debates on strategy over the last several years, the most shallow defence of the *protracted* character of the people’s war has been the argument that since the people’s war in the Philippines has been going on for the last 22 years, then it is protracted. Indeed, the term protracted is an apt description for a war that has gone on for over two decades. But description is different from strategy. In the first place, any guerrilla movement in the Third World can claim to be fighting a “*protracted* people’s war” to hide or justify its inability to achieve victory or make significant progress over an extended period of time.

For a good discussion on the protracted character of the people's war, the rationale for stipulating protractedness needs to be reviewed thoroughly.

In *Specific Characteristics*, the basis for protractedness is explained as follows: "As matters now stand, we are small and weak while the enemy is big and strong. There is no doubt that he is extremely superior to us in such specific terms as number of troops, formations, equipment, technique, training, foreign assistance and supplies in general. It will take a protracted period of time for us to change this balance of forces in our favor. Thus, *protractedness is a basic characteristic of our people's war.*" [53] (Underscoring supplied.)

Protractedness is very much tied up with the concept of "encircling the cities from the countryside", of building "stable base areas": "Our strategic line is to encircle the cities from the countryside and through a protracted period of time develop rural bases from which to advance to seize political power." [54] Guerrilla zones are to be elevated to the level of stable base areas which would serve as the great rears of the revolutionary forces. [55] The reactionary armed forces have to "first be defeated in the countryside" [56], before the revolutionary forces can advance to the cities.

Protractedness is likewise very much linked with the growth of the military forces. The revolutionary forces have to "accumulate strength until the people's army is strong enough to defeat the enemy forces entrenched in the cities". [57] The people's army is projected to "advance wave upon wave over a protracted period of time to destroy the enemy in the whole country". [58]

Protractedness is further closely related to the concept of stages: "[I]n the long process of its growing from small and weak to big and strong, our people's army will have to undergo certain stages and substages. . ." [59]

Finally, protractedness also has to do with moving to higher forms of warfare: "To graduate from guerrilla warfare to regular mobile warfare as the main form of warfare, we have to exert a great deal of effort over a long period of time." [60]

If the case for protractedness rests on fulfilling what are perceived to be such "requirements" for victory as developing guerrilla zones and bases into stable base areas; fully encircling the cities from the countryside; developing the people's army into a force that is superior to the reactionary armed forces in absolute terms; passing through the stages of strategic defensive, strategic stalemate and strategic offensive; and graduating from guerrilla warfare to regular mobile warfare and positional warfare - then it is weak. To win victory, the revolutionary forces do not necessarily have to build stable base areas and encircle the cities from the countryside. The people's army does not have to absolutely surpass the reactionary armed forces in strength, nor does it have to move to regular mobile warfare, as the main form of warfare, and more so, positional warfare. And the people's war does not have to be charted out along neat stages based purely or mainly on the balance of military forces.

Revolutionary wars for national liberation are not predestined to be protracted. They may be relatively short or they may be prolonged depending on how long it takes, from the start of actual armed hostilities, for the balance of military and political forces to change in favour of the revolutionary forces. Sometimes, the armed struggle happens to be initiated or re-initiated at a time when a revolutionary or insurrectionary situation has emerged or is about to emerge. Hence, the revolution may be able to take a relatively fast track to victory, as in Cuba and Nicaragua. Sometimes, however, the revolutionary situation takes a long time to emerge, or even when it has emerged, the revolutionary movement is not yet able to muster sufficient political and military strength to turn the balance of forces in their favour, as in Vietnam in the 50s to the 70s. Hence, the revolution becomes protracted.

The point is to win the war in as short a time as possible, not to unnecessarily prolong it by setting all sorts of “requirements” which may have been valid in a vast country like China in the 1930s, but are grossly inappropriate for a small, archipelagic country like the Philippines in the 1990s. If the Philippine revolutionary movement would still want to retain the term *protracted* in its strategy of people’s war, then it has to abandon certain inappropriate Maoist concepts and redefine the basis for “protractedness”, as the Vietnamese have done. Because erroneous, long-held notions associated with the word *protracted* are difficult to eradicate, it would be preferable to simply drop the term as the Salvadorans have done.

## **On Military Victory and Total Victory**

The fifth major objection to the continued application of the Maoist version of “protracted people’s war” is that it is much too predisposed to a military victory and does not really seriously consider other possible denouements of the revolutionary struggle such as insurrectionary victory.

The final scenario of the “protracted people’s war” has been frequently depicted as that of a military victory in which the people’s army, advancing “wave upon wave” from the countryside, launches a general offensive and seizes the cities. “On the eve of the nationwide seizure of power,” states *Specific Characteristics*, “Manila-Rizal shall be caught in a pincer between regular mobile forces from the north and from the two regions of Southern Luzon.” [61] While a general uprising is now more often mentioned as coinciding with the general offensive, it is still the latter which is viewed as playing the principal role. The people’s army is still seen as playing the decisive role in defeating enemy forces. Nowhere does it appear in Party documents that an insurrectionary endgame or a mainly insurrectionary victory has seriously been entertained.

For a revolutionary movement in the Third World, a military victory is not the only means of seizing power and smashing the bureaucratic-military machinery of a reactionary state. Other means include insurrection, a combination of insurrection and military offensive, left-wing coup, etc. Neither is military victory the only possible endgame scenario for an armed revolutionary struggle. Other endgames include insurrection, negotiated political settlement, elections, etc. The Philippine revolutionary movement should be open to various possibilities.

A mainly military victory may not even be the most feasible nor likeliest final scenario for the Philippine revolutionary struggle. The chances for a mainly insurrectionary endgame (insurrection combined with a guerrilla offensive) are much greater. In the first place, the experience of the 1986 uprising has had a profound effect on the Filipino masses, the Filipino psyche. Secondly, the growth of the mass movement and the political forces is currently running much faster than the development of the military struggle and the military forces. Thirdly, the problem of a steady source and entry of military hardware (requisites for higher forms of military struggle) will probably remain unsolved for some time, as there have been no major breakthroughs up to now. Even if it were solved, the US and its allies are capable of matching any military escalation by the revolutionary forces for an indefinite period. Lastly, international parties are likely to intervene to prevent an escalation of the war to the scale of the Vietnam War. Between military victory and political settlement, the latter may even be likelier, also because of the last item.

If a mainly insurrectionary victory (insurrection combined with a guerrilla offensive) is deemed the most feasible and likeliest endgame scenario, then the main preparations should by all means be for it. But the revolutionary forces should be prepared to shift to other possibilities when major changes in the situation occur. Preparing for an insurrectionary endgame means not only developing the mass movement into an insurrectional one but also building up the people’s army (the military

forces) into a force that would be capable of, as the Salvadorans would say, “converting an insurrectional explosion into victory” for the revolution. [62]

Contrary to what some comrades think, girding for an insurrectionary endgame does not mean an immediate redeployment of the main units of the people’s army to the urban areas. What it entails is more a reorientation of both political and military forces away from Maoist “protracted people’s war” towards a more balanced or all-sided development of political and military struggles and of rural and urban struggles. Major shifting of military forces may have to be done, however, during revolutionary or insurrectionary situations. At such times, the people’s army not only has to intensify military offensives. Some units and key military cadres have to be redeployed to the centres of the insurrectional movement to help provide politico-military leadership and guidance.

The possibility of an insurrectionary victory continues to be ignored or shut out completely. The “insurrectionist line”, in fact, is under fire. In an editorial, *Rebolusyon* (April-June 1991) criticises “erroneous currents of thought which try to ride on the achievements of protracted people’s war and at the same time belittle or even undermine these under the guise of accelerating total victory by glossing over or skipping stages of development”. To discredit the “insurrectionist’ idea”, the Party journal presents the negative experiences with uprisings and insurrections of various movements in the Philippines and abroad and even makes critical remarks about the Nicaraguan and Salvadoran insurrectionary movements. [63]

Insurrection and negotiated settlement are different endgames, but they are very much related. The insurrectional movement of the masses combined with guerrilla warfare may force the reactionary state to negotiate seriously a political solution. Conversely, the breakdown or frustration of negotiations due to the state’s intransigence may help pave the way for an insurrectionary or military victory.

While the Party and the NDF have declared openness to the possibility of a negotiated political settlement, the role of negotiations in the overall strategy remains to be clarified. If armed struggle will always be the principal form of struggle, does this not mean that negotiations - which are a form of politico-diplomatic struggle - will always be secondary, always serve the armed struggle, and hence are essentially a tactic to pave the way for eventual military victory? If, on the other hand, the Party and the NDF are indeed serious about, and open to, a political settlement, then do they not in effect open themselves to the possibility that, at some point, their military struggle becomes subordinated to political negotiations - e.g. that their military actions serve mainly to push the negotiation process forward (as in El Salvador) or are suspended in favour of negotiations (as in South Africa)?

In many of the more recent documents of the Party, there is frequent reference to the term *total victory*. In particular, the Party statements on the occasion of the 20<sup>th</sup> anniversaries of the Party and the NPA are entitled “Onward to Total Victory!” and “Long Live the New People’s Army! Onward to Total Victory!”, respectively. [64] By itself, the term total victory is already problematical because, in the context of Maoist strategy, it really means nothing more than total *military* victory. Beyond this, the fixation with total victory as immediate objective is also problematical. The revolutionary forces should not be predisposed to total victory in the immediate future. Again they should be open to various possibilities: total victory (in which revolutionary and progressive forces control government fully), decisive victory (in which they share power with reactionary forces but are the dominant force in government) and partial victory (in which they are the minority partner in government). Of course, the revolutionary forces should not rest content once they achieve partial victory. They can very well struggle on towards decisive or total victory.



## On International Work

The sixth major criticism against the continued use of Maoist “protracted people’s war” in the Philippines is that it does not sharply define and position the role of international work in the overall strategy and it does not really give international work a commensurate role in relation to other fronts or arenas of struggle.

International work was a component of the Chinese revolution but it did not play as large a role as it has in the more recent revolutionary struggles of the Vietnamese, Zimbabweans, Namibians and Eritreans, and now of the Salvadorans, South Africans, Palestinians, Saharawis and East Timorese (Mauberes). Hence, it is hardly reflected in the basic Maoist concept of the “three main weapons” (communist party, armed struggle and united front) of the revolutionary struggle.

At least since the time of the Franco-Viet Minh War, the Vietnamese began to give more attention to mobilising international support. In 1967, in the course of their war against US imperialism, the Vietnamese decided to intensify their *diplomatic struggle*. Defining the role of diplomatic struggle vis-a-vis military and political struggles, the Party’s Central Committee declared: “In the anti-US resistance for national salvation of our people at present, the struggles on the military and political fronts in South Vietnam constitute the essential and decisive factor of victories on the battlefield and provide a basis for diplomatic victories. We can win at the negotiating table only what we have won on the battlefield. However, the diplomatic struggle does not simply reflect the struggle on the battlefield, in the present international conditions, given the nature of the struggle between our enemies and ourselves, the diplomatic struggle has an **important, positive and active role to play.**” [65] (Underscoring supplied.)

The Vietnamese decided to engage in struggle in not just two fronts (political and military) but three - with diplomatic struggle as the third front. Diplomatic struggle encompassed both state-to-state relations and people-to-people relations (“people’s diplomacy”). The elevation of diplomatic struggle to being the third front is a clear indication of how important the Vietnamese viewed it. Prior to this, the diplomatic struggle had merely been considered part of the political struggle.

In their struggle for the dismantling of apartheid rule, the South Africans regard *international isolation of the apartheid regime* as one of the “four pillars” of their revolutionary struggle, the other pillars being the political underground, the mass struggle and armed struggle.

When the Party adopted the Maoist version of “protracted people’s war” upon its inception in 1968, it also adopted the “three main weapons” concept. Since the Party cadres and members then had very little experience in international work, it is not surprising that the treatment of international work in the early days was limited and very general. Even as there were frequent enough analyses of the international situation, the early major documents devoted only a few paragraphs on international work itself; in *Our Urgent Tasks*, it was the last item - Task No. 7. Since then, the place of international work in strategy has not significantly changed. The inclusion of international work in the “three strategic combinations” concept could have meant a significant elevation of its role in overall strategy, if the concept had really been implemented and developed. After 1986, the Party issued a number of documents explaining its analysis of the international situation and its international line; the discussion on international work focused on party-to-party relations. [66]

International work is an important and indispensable weapon in a revolutionary struggle waged in a country like the Philippines that is very much integrated into the world capitalist system, and against a reactionary regime that is very much dependent on international support. It is likewise important when one considers the huge overseas Filipino population (over four million), scattered in over 120 countries, consisting mostly of those who have left the homeland for economic reasons - a unique

situation for a modern-day Third World liberation movement.

International work involves not just mobilising support from foreign friends and overseas Filipinos for the revolutionary movement but also eroding and eventually halting international support for the reactionary regime. It also means mutual cooperation with, and support for, the revolutionary struggles of other peoples. The international linkages established and strengthened now will be vital for the reconstruction period after revolutionary victory, especially in the likely event that imperialism would engage in economic and political destabilisation measures against the new government.

Certain international developments and trends - the collapse of the socialist bloc, the end of the Cold War, the decline of the left in many advanced capitalist countries and some developing countries, the weakening of solidarity for Third World struggles in both East and West - underscore the need for greater self-reliance of revolutionary movements in the Third World. Some may take these as a basis for putting international work at a lower priority. But while financial and material support for revolution may be harder to come by in the international scene these days, the international arena remains a major source. More importantly, the role of the politico-diplomatic aspect of international work has not been diminished and has even been enhanced.

Over the last five years, peace negotiations have been more commonly employed as a means to resolve major regional and civil armed conflicts in the Third World. Increasingly, it seems, international forces - governments, governmental and non-governmental organizations, church groups, peace groups, etc. - are forcing contending parties to negotiate and strive to put an end to war with all its human, material and environmental costs. The trend is towards political solution, and away from prolonged warfare.

As more and more revolutionary movements are realising, peace negotiations, aside from having a major impact on the political struggle and united front work in the home front, have become a major arena of struggle in the international front, especially the diplomatic front. Through these negotiations, revolutionary movements, as well as their adversaries, are subjected to international scrutiny vis-a-vis their commitment to peace based on freedom, social justice and human rights. International recognition and support are extended or withdrawn accordingly.

International work, especially the diplomatic struggle, needs to be positioned better in overall strategy. It has to be factored in in such a way that the revolutionary forces fully realise its role and importance in the struggle. The concept of the "three main weapons" has to be expanded to include the international dimension or be replaced by one that does. In elevating the role of international work, it may be possible to revive and develop the "three strategic combinations" concept (without its fixation with principal-secondary roles for military-political and rural-urban struggles). It may also be possible to adapt the Vietnamese concept of fighting in three fronts - political, military and international (international relations/diplomatic work and work among overseas Filipinos).

### **Needed: A Revolutionary Strategy of the 90s**

Defenders of Maoist 'protracted people's war' strategy credit it for much of the gains and achievements that the Philippine revolutionary movement has made in the last 22 years. They consider this strategy to be a framework that is broad and flexible enough to accommodate new concepts and ideas in a changing national and international environment. Hence, they see no reason for abandoning such a strategy.

The Maoist-based strategy was certainly a major factor for the movement's achievements and gains.

The very growth of the Party, the armed struggle and the united front on a nationwide scale can be ascribed to the strong Maoist emphasis on the “three main weapons”. The Maoist factor proved instrumental in such crucial correct decisions as the launching of armed struggle, together with agrarian revolution and base-building, in the late 60s; the massive shifting of urban cadres and activists to the countryside shortly after martial law was declared in 1972; the adoption of painstaking step-by-step organising methods in mass work in the mid-70s; and more. Significant strides have been made in the political struggle, the urban struggle and the struggle in the international front, as they have been afforded increasing attention.

Since the late 70s, however, the inherent weaknesses of the Maoist-influenced “protracted people’s war” strategy, the impediments posed on the revolutionary movement by its fixations on the predominance of military over political struggle and rural over urban struggle, have become more apparent. The weaknesses of the strategy were exposed fully in 1983-86, when a revolutionary situation had clearly emerged after the assassination of Benigno Aquino. Even when the political struggle and the urban struggle had become powerful instruments in the anti-dictatorship struggle, their roles were still officially viewed as being subordinate to the military and rural struggles. As it turned out, it was not the military nor the rural struggle, but the political and urban struggle - in the form of a popular uprising of the urban masses - which delivered the final decisive blow in the overthrow of the Marcos dictatorship.

Quite a number of the old basic formulations of Maoist strategy no longer gibe with current reality and actual practice. The limits of Maoist-based strategy have been reached. The clearest indication of this is that actual revolutionary practice over the last few years has been breaking out of the Maoist mould. While nothing significantly new has been introduced in the military struggle in the countryside, new forms and new arenas are being opened in the political struggle and the urban struggle: the arenas of electoral struggle and negotiations, urban partisan warfare, political work among enemy troops and diplomatic struggle. While the large formations of the people’s army in the countryside are being scaled down to levels “sustainable by the existing mass base” [67], urban forces are pushing towards a new upsurge of the mass movement and girding for a possible EDSA-type uprising notwithstanding admonitions against the “insurrectionist’ idea”.

The new concepts cannot be reconciled with the old formulations. Instead of reinforcing military predominance over political struggle and rural struggle over urban struggle, the new elements are putting the latter at par with the former, at the very least. They weaken and put into question, rather than strengthen the fundamental framework of Maoist “protracted people’s war”.

The Party leadership’s decision to overturn the policy on large formations of the people’s army, and in its stead, promote intensive and extensive guerrilla warfare and emphasise mass work is itself a sign of a greater awareness of the need for maintaining a good balance of military and political aspects. But was not the drive towards large military formations conditioned, in the first place, by the concepts that the people’s army is the main form of organisation and that it must graduate from guerrilla warfare to regular mobile warfare and eventually positional warfare?

Curiously enough, this decision to pursue the horizontal rather than the vertical development of the people’s army has parallels with the move undertaken by the Salvadoran revolutionaries in 1984, in line with a more all-sided politico-military strategy, to break up their large units, shift from regular to “irregular” warfare and redeploy more cadres to mass work. [68]

Prior to 1986, the study of the revolutionary experiences of other countries was largely limited to that of China. Since then, the experiences of other revolutionary movements have been more vigorously studied and these have helped in broadening horizons for the Philippine revolutionary forces. There is a continuing reluctance, however, to challenge old Maoist-based formulations with

concepts developed by other liberation movements.

Times have changed. While socialism has suffered major reverses in recent years, capitalism is intensifying its global expansion, an onslaught so strong that it has broken down national barriers, even of socialist countries, and penetrated the remotest and most backward areas. The inroads of capitalism in the Third World are such that many “developing” countries are now not as feudal or “semifeudal” as China in the 30s and much more “neocolonised”. The global picture is a far cry from Mao’s prediction in the 60s that imperialism is heading for imminent total collapse and socialism is advancing to worldwide victory.

Wars are no longer limited to conventional and guerrilla forms. The threat of nuclear war and the use of nuclear and other weapons of mass destruction remains even with the end of the Cold War. Imperialism now resorts to high-tech warfare when launching wars of aggression against Third World nations, be they “medium-intensity” or “low-intensity”. Third World revolutionary movements themselves now use modern weapons (even up to surface-to-air missiles), electronic equipment and computer technology in waging wars of national liberation.

Theory on strategy and tactics of revolution in the Third World has evolved considerably since Mao’s time, enriched through the years by the revolutionary experiences of various liberation movements. While the Chinese pioneering experience in “people’s war” should be recognised and studied, it is not necessarily the model par excellence, superior to all others, to be revered and followed by all. When the Vietnamese launched their own people’s war, they drew a lot of lessons from the Chinese experience, but they made a lot of changes - significant changes - in view of their own specific conditions. Revolutionary movements since then have done the same.

Filipino revolutionaries should not stick to a single “superior” strategic model, but draw lessons from other revolutionary experiences (not just China) as well as from their own, and institute changes in strategy in accordance with concrete Philippine conditions. Not a few vital and relevant things can be learned from the experiences of more recent national liberation movements fighting against modern imperialism.

In many ways, the Philippine revolutionary movement has outgrown the Maoist model of “protracted people’s war” and “encircling the cities from the countryside”. The movement has to make a final break with the Maoist framework and devise a new strategy of people’s war (or a combination of people’s war and negotiations) that is more flexible, more suited to Philippine conditions and more relevant to the times. It will be difficult, if not impossible, to win a revolution in the 90s by continuing to adhere to a basic strategic framework of a bygone era.

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## **P.S.**

\* From “Debate, Philippine Left Review”, issue n° 1, September 1991.

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## **Footnotes**

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