

A review

Alice Langley Hsieh, *Communist China's Strategy in the Nuclear Era*
George K. Tanham, *Communist Revolutionary Warfare: The Vietminh
in Indochina*

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In the last two years a significant number of books and articles have appeared on the subject of guerrilla warfare. As the military component of Premier Nikita Khrushchev's wars of "national liberation," guerrilla warfare promises to receive more sustained attention by writers than that recently given the "national purpose." On the other hand, Peking's strategy in the nuclear age is a topic that is just beginning to receive public attention and one that authors will be considering with growing concern and emphasis for many years ahead. Although guerrilla warfare and nuclear warfare are poles apart they are interrelated both in Communist military considerations and in noncommunist efforts to cope with them.

In many respects *Communist China's Strategy in the Nuclear Era* stands as a model for comparable attempts. It also illustrates the difficulties involved in trying to write on such a topic. Although the author has made excellent use of available sources and has benefited from the advice of colleagues in The RAND Corporation, the outsider can never be certain of the actual thinking of the decision-makers in Peking. How would Mao Tse-tung, for instance, react to this book? In addition, the time element always enters into the equation, for the

outlooks of the Chinese Communist leaders have been influenced by changes on the domestic front, in the distribution of world power, and in the field of technology. The large number of variables renders even more difficult any attempt to analyze how Peking will behave in the international community once it becomes a nuclear power in terms of an atomic arsenal and delivery capacity. These considerations, however, do not detract from the need for scholarly but imaginative study of one of the increasingly important challenges in world politics. The final product of the author's painstaking research and sound methodology is indicative of what can be achieved in the face of the many obstacles.

Mrs. Hsieh has organized her book around three integrated topics reflecting a chronological approach: the first chapter considers the disparagement of nuclear arms by the Chinese Communists, 1945-1954, the second traces the increasing awareness by Peking of the implications of nuclear conflict, 1954-mid-1957, and the third, appropriately called the "search for decision," continues the study to the cut-off date of July, 1959. Two addenda deal with Peking's military thinking as of January, 1960 and changes in its military leadership as of September,

1959. At the time the preface was written, October, 1961, the author indicates that subsequent developments had produced "no important modification of the argument." Her concluding chapter of six pages should be read by all students of world politics even if they do not have the time to read the rest of the book. As for those who want to pursue the subject in depth, the author's meticulous footnoting and selected bibliography are very helpful. Seven pages devoted to nineteen leading men in the People's Republic with thumbnail sketches of their military interests and outlook add to the value of the book.

Throughout the study Mrs. Hsieh stresses the military relationships between Peking and Moscow drawing conclusions on the basis of the available evidence. These relationships, in turn, she indicates, condition the posture Communist China can and does adopt toward the United States. Her handling of the crisis in the Taiwan Strait in 1958 is especially well done. She concludes that "as of early 1960 it appeared, despite indications of friction in the Sino-Soviet relationship, that the key to China's military moves in the Far East, insofar as they might directly involve United States interests, remained in Moscow" (p. 186). If this assumption is accepted, the Soviet Union is in a position to exercise real moderation on Communist China's foreign policy.

Although Moscow carefully keeps exclusive control over the use of its arsenal of nuclear weapons, Peking still has various means at its own disposal in an effort to attain its national objectives that do not call for a direct confrontation between the two great nuclear powers. The danger in the situation, of course, lies in the possibility that a war of "national liberation" or even a "limited war," especially in Southeast Asia, involving the United States and the People's Republic, might escalate to a world conflict

in which the nuclear threshold is quickly crossed. Peking has given evidence of taking greater risks and probing more deeply along its part of the Sino-Soviet periphery than Moscow. It may well be argued that Premier Nikita Khrushchev, despite his monopoly of nuclear weapons in the Communist world, intervened in Laos through the Soviet airlift in order to prevent, at least for a while, the People's Republic of China from taking action that might lead to a general conflagration. At the same time the United States by placing less stress on massive retaliation and by building up a greater capability for limited war with conventional weapons is seeking to cope with the Communist threat in some areas and the reality of indirect aggression in others. These considerations do not weaken the basic conclusions of Mrs. Hsieh but they point up the dangers involved in an explosive situation conducive to escalation.

The author gives brief attention to how Peking may "exploit varying degrees of nuclear capability." This subject, of course, deals with the intangibles of the future, but because of its importance, merits a book of its own. Because Mrs. Hsieh has already made such a solid contribution in *Communist China's Strategy in the Nuclear Era*, it is hoped that she will give emphasis in a subsequent study to Peking's role as a nuclear power.

Communist Revolutionary Warfare by George K. Tanham can be read with profit in conjunction with Mrs. Hsieh's contribution. The author has focused on the military aspects of the Vietminh of Ho Chi Minh in Indochina during the war against the French. Although most of the book deals with the past, the implications for the present counterinsurgency effort on the part of the Republic of Viet Nam and the United States in Viet Nam south of the seventeenth parallel are clear-cut. Developments in Laos and

Viet Nam since 1959, it might be pointed out, have already led to the appearance of a large number of special courses in various military and civilian institutions associated with the United States government on the political, economic, social, and military aspects of insurgency and counterinsurgency.

Tanham has organized his study around the topics of the Vietminh's military doctrine, organization, personnel and logistics, operations and tactics, and reactions to the tactics and air power of the French. A chapter on military developments since the Geneva Conference on Indochina in 1954 by Anne M. Jonas is included. The final chapter and epilogue point up the lessons for the present. The author who did most of his research in France includes a five-page bibliography of books, pamphlets, periodicals, and bulletins. Although the study as a whole is not so carefully integrated as that by Mrs. Hsieh, it is well worth reading.

Tanham's chapter on the development of Vietminh military doctrine stresses the roles of Mao Tse-tung and Vo Nguyen Giap. Cited are the former's *Strategic Problems of China's Revolutionary War and On Protracted War* and the latter's *The War of Liberation and the Popular Army*. Tanham skillfully analyzes the thinking of the two Communist leaders indicating Giap's application of Mao's ideas to revolutionary warfare in Indochina. The record from 1945 to 1954 clearly indicates that Vietminh military doctrine was well formulated in an effort to achieve Communist objectives.

The author puts considerable emphasis on the point that "in Vietminh theory—as in all Communist theory and practice—political and military aims are intertwined and inseparable, with the political objective taking precedence over the military at all times" (p. 140). He notes that the political consequences of the French defeat at Dien Bien Phu were far more grave than the military

and indicates that the Vietminh leaders accurately foresaw French reaction to the setback. In terms of the present crisis Tanham draws attention to the systematic efforts of the Vietminh to paralyze the government of President Ngo Dinh Diem by cutting it off from political contacts at the local level. At the same time the author realistically observes that until Diem "has the active and continuing support of the Vietnamese masses and the troops, all the economic and military aid in the world, though it may delay it, will not halt the Communist advance" (p. 157).

The observation just made needs to be stressed in the current conflict in South Viet Nam. Short-term military gains, for instance, by giving adequate mobility to the superior firepower of the government forces, may be lost if long-term measures to win active popular support for the Saigon authorities fail. Indeed, the application of modern technology and tactics to guerrilla warfare may already be outdistancing the political, economic, and social efforts in counterinsurgency. But how can the United States accomplish its objective of defeating the Vietcong in South Viet Nam through the government of President Ngo Dinh Diem? What are the limitations of American pressure for needed reforms on him and his associates in Saigon? On the one hand, Washington must be careful lest it find itself in the position of Paris prior to the Geneva settlement of 1954. The South Vietnamese themselves, it is certain, have the greater stake and must bear the brunt of the struggle in their own self-interest. On the other hand, a noncommunist alternative to the leadership of Diem may possibly present more problems than now exist. The margin of influence that the United States has in the Republic of Viet Nam through its extensive military and economic aid programs must be exploited to the utmost in the inter-

est of common objectives and endeavors.

Tanham in his concluding chapter draws attention to the role of Communist China as a sanctuary in the final victory of the Vietminh over the French. "There can be no doubt whatever," he says, "that China's interest in supporting the revolutionaries, coupled with the common border, was a strong contributing—if not the decisive—factor in the success of the Vietminh" (p. 144). In broader terms, it might also be stated that the use of a Communist sanctuary for mounting, directing, and in part supplying guerrillas in an adjacent area against an established, widely recognized government constitutes a form of indirect aggression. The international community has not yet been able to face up to the realities of this challenge and to take steps to cope with it. By keeping the tempo of the aggression at a relatively low pitch, the Communists are able to prevent the clear-cut establishment of aggression under international law and to sow discord among allies who might be prepared to check it. At the present time North Viet Nam is a sanctuary for such

aggression against South Viet Nam, as indicated in the findings of the International Commission for Supervision and Control in 1962, while Laos may continue to afford access for the Vietcong despite the neutrality arrangement concluded in the same year at the International Conference on the Settlement of the Laotian Question.

Tanham in his case study has succeeded not only in giving the reader an excellent analysis of Communist revolutionary warfare in Indochina from 1945 to 1954 but also in providing him with valuable insights on the present. It is hoped that the great attention now being given in Washington to insurgency and counterinsurgency will bear dividends in the jungles, swamps, and mountains of Viet Nam.

REFERENCES

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