

What Giap Did Not Say

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Taken from FOREWORD to the book *People's War, People's Army* by Vo Nguyên Giap; F. A. Praeger, N. Y., \$5.00. Copyright © 1962 by F. A. Praeger. Reprinted with permission.

OME of the most important things about Giap's military and political views are the things he did not say [in his book, *People's War, Peoples' Army*]. He has little to say, for example, about Asians fighting Asians. But for many months he has directed the Communists of North Viet-Nam against their former countrymen in South Viet-Nam. The Communists, as this book testifies, think they must constantly mention foreign imperialists, but they must realize they are "running out" of foreign regimes in Southeast Asia and elsewhere. Although Giap cannot say so, their tactics have had to change—in the direction of even more ruthlessness and terror.

In South Viet-Nam, as this is written, more effective plans of protection for the villages are being carried out. Consequently, some of the villagers who have been frightened and coerced into the Communist guerrilla forces—the Viet Cộng—are returning to their homes. They have been given weapons—and they want to use them against the Communists and for the protection of their homes.

Another omission is the lack of any honest acknowledgment of debt to the famous writings on guerrilla strategy by Mao Tse-tung. Gen Giap is actually an "advance man" for Chinese Communist power. But he cannot, of course, admit this or make any but token references to the Chinese. Today, he and his doctrines are serving Chinese purposes by accomplishments that could not be brought about by the Chinese or by open and avowed friends of theirs.

Another omission is his failure to discuss the international issues bearing on the Indochinese campaign and, in fact, a pervading lack of any world view or any historical view. Gen Giap apparently concentrates upon specific measures, with due allowance for the usual references to "our brothers" in Russia—and "US imperialists and their myrmidons."

The General is not much interested in generalizations about different kinds of war—but I think we should be.

And it might be noted that guerrillas do not always

win against superior and better organized forces. Against organized opposition, they are generally effective under two sets of circumstances: one, when the main body of their enemy is otherwise engaged, and, two, when they operate in a country of isolated communities—as in Southeast Asia today.

The second set of circumstances is the more usual locale for guerrillas—i.e., communities that are isolated by lack of communications or by the terrain, as in mountains, islands, or a desert.

As a general, Giap probably knows well that not all times and places are suited to the skills he has developed, but as a propagandist, he apparently sees no reason to mention this truth. Gen Giap's omissions, however, do not invalidate his accounts of specific campaigns or his basic formula for internal war. From his book, three basic points seem to emerge about the kind of war he knows:

(1) An internal war is a long-term proposition in which innumerable small military victories against a numerically superior enemy are necessary to redress the initial power balance working against the Communist side.



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Gen Giap's rule: First the political lesson . . .

(2) The stages of internal war begin with a Communist "defensive" campaign, followed by achievement of "equilibrium" with the government forces, and are capped by a "counteroffensive."

(3) As the power balance shifts in favor of the Communists, guerrilla warfare gives way to a war of mobility, using regular forces but without fixed battle lines. In the final stages, this is combined with some positional warfare.

These are the principles by which Giap has won. His strategy and tactics must interest us, for we now recognize that guerrillas must be countered with guerrilla methods.

The underpinnings of internal war are secured in the support of the people, thus making a political campaign as important to success as military operations. Giap and his colleagues must know, however, that "political education" from now on will become increasingly difficult—for many reasons. As soon as the Asians of the villages get *any* rudimentary education, they ask more questions. Asians who have become free from foreign domination do not wish to be "educated" for a new kind of domination.

Guerrillas can live off the unwilling support of a countryside. They can buy food. They can steal it. They can obtain it by threats of reprisals. Guerrillas can and do exist where *much* of the countryside is hostile or—as is frequently the case in Asia—where the villages are turned inward on themselves, indifferent or apathetic to events outside their own village life.

This is a reality Giap has come to know well, as he sends his paid agents into South Viet-Nam. It is an important omission, today, that Giap does not spell out many details of how his dedicated guerrillas are to win a broad base of support. He is eloquent—if clichés can be eloquent—when he speaks of the day of rebellion against the foreigner: "They rose as one man." But he says little of those situations—so frequent in the emerging nations—where there is no such magic unanimity, and where true popular support has not yet crystallized or swung toward any side.

Giap's book gives clues toward understanding Communist tactics for tomorrow. But like many other old soldiers, he gives some impression that he would rather deal with the victories of the past than with the unknown complications of the future. As old-fashioned

imperialism fades away, Southeast Asia becomes more and not less complicated. Gen Giap's doctrines are addressed *mainly* to military situations, although he constantly speaks of a broad base of support, of education for the soldier and gains for the economy.

In all these areas, we must compete with him in the real world.

In appraising Giap and the challenge in Southeast Asia he symbolizes, we should consider four basic military-political principles that *seem* to emerge from the experience our generation has had in recent and current conflicts.

(1) *Guerrillas do not need majority support from the entire countryside.* They can operate effectively even if some of the populace is hostile and the rest indifferent. Of course, the guerrillas can sustain themselves even longer if, as in the case with Communist guerrillas sent abroad, they are financed and in part supplied from abroad. The average American, who lives in an entirely different countryside, finds it difficult to believe that guerrillas can be quite successful for some time without sympathy and support from the local inhabitants. The average American finds it difficult to visualize nations that do not have a common tradition, or an educational system, or a communications network. So he cannot understand how readily marauders can move from place to place in an Asian country, trying a different tactic upon each person from whom they wish to get food or supplies.

Any comparison with our own world must be somewhat farfetched, but one may ask whether the citizens of Chicago "supported" the gangs that flourished in the 1920s. The shopkeeper who was "hit" by the "protection" racket did not support the gangs, but he often went along with them. He thought he had a weak government, and it seemed far away, and the threats of the hoodlums were close by. The dedicated hard-core Communist and the peasants who follow him in the 1960s are not out for private gain, as were the gangsters of the 1920s. But the violence and threats and death they leave behind are much the same.

When a humble peasant is visited by a tough band of marauders who can steal what they ask him to give, he goes along with the idea of a gift to make it easier for himself. Is that grudging support to be considered evidence of voluntary cooperation?

In my own experience in Burma, and in the experience of others who have waged guerrilla warfare in Asia, the people of the countryside may be apathetic toward both sides. In Burma, during World War II, my own observation was that perhaps 10% supported us and 10% the Japanese, but the overwhelming majority of the people were isolated and dissociated from the history of their time. There is no parallel in Europe to the vacuum of political power in Asia.

(2) *A guerrilla war is a political war.* War has been defined as the continuation of politics by other means. In guerrilla war, politics and violence are intertwined.

Guerrilla war, like more formal civil war, is a war in which the participants are highly motivated, sometimes to a fanatical degree. Troops assigned to armies, with more patterned behavior and more technical equipment, may be remote from combat most of the time. Many such troops have no awareness that they are fight-



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... then the attack (Dien Bien Phu, March 1954).

ing for survival. Guerrilla war, like civil war, is bloody war, with a high casualty rate. It is a war in which men know why they fight. Guerrillas may be tragically misinformed and misled, but they fight with conviction, and as the war goes on, bringing the deaths of relatives and friends, they frequently acquire deep personal motives and sometimes a bitter desire for vengeance. Many regard it, not without some justification, as a very democratic kind of struggle—with bullets for ballots. And if each side has a fair chance to obtain arms, this would be a kind of bloody continuous referendum, pending the time when order is restored and a true referendum may be held.

To speed that time, the United States now recognizes that education must become a primary instrument in carrying out many different aspects of its foreign policy. We are striving by the most modern techniques to help the new nations build up their educational facilities. And we are trying to tell our story and to help the other democratic nations to tell their story to their most remote citizens.

Thus, we hoped for greater political education when we began to distribute 50,000 transistor radios in South Viet-Nam. Any political invention or technical aid which can help these villages of Asia develop into mature nations is a step toward winning against guerrilla actions. Such measures are also positive steps toward solving the national problems that will remain when the bloodshed has stopped.

(3) *The villages must be made physically secure.* This is not the place to discuss physical measures now becoming accepted for protecting the citizens of nations like Viet-Nam. We cannot explore the military and social complexities of executing such concepts as "the strategic village," but they are crucial in countering the tactics of Gen Giap.

It is possible and economical to set up a fortified "strategic village," and such protected centers have saved countless lives in Malaya and elsewhere. This physical protection of the village seems to be an absolute precondition for the restoration of order in Southeast Asia. There is no doubt that some of the measures taken will dislocate some communities, but the purpose is to protect human life. The experience of other nations has shown that men, women, and children can be saved by these methods and that, at the same time, other objectives can be denied to the enemy.

Of course, when one throws a barbed-wire fence around a village, when one sets up a curfew system and fires upon any moving object outside the fence at that hour, a degree of regimentation is implied. Our great-grandfathers did not like to have to ask everyone to be "inside the stockade at sundown." They did not like to bring up their children in such an atmosphere—but they built the stockades as a first step toward building a civilization in which stockades would be unnecessary.

Today, the non-Communist governments in Southeast Asia are similarly placing more and more emphasis upon safeguarding their people, and upon various kinds of police forces and police protection as well as upon regular and guerrilla troops.

(4) *Guerrilla warfare is different—and it must be countered with guerrilla methods.* General Giap in this repetitive book returns many times to the theme that guerrilla methods enable a small but determined band of raiders to snipe away for years at the communications, movement, and support lines of a superior enemy. It should be clear to the most casual observer of recent history that even massive armies, well-organized in conventional patterns, cannot cope with hundreds of bands of guerrillas in the jungle or in virtually impenetrable mountains.

It was once thought that in more open country the airplane and air patrols meant the end of guerrilla success. Today in Asia, a cluster of guerrillas in a clearing can be sighted from a plane—but the guerrillas will have completely disappeared by the time the plane reaches striking distance. The helicopter has proved valuable in stepping up the mobility of the men searching for guerrillas, but helpful though machines may be, the final answer must be the man on the ground, fighting the guerrilla with his own methods, on foot, with small arms, automatic rifles, and grenades.

Therefore, it seems probable that Communist guerrillas, as Giap says, can expect a long period of conflict. And we must be patient and enduring in helping free people wage war against them.

This is a war requiring courage, stamina, and patience.

The battle for the villages demands the best of American skills and tradition. We can help those who are now struggling against discouragement. They are trying to find their way to their freedom.

USMC

On Call Excavators

The order stood: trenchlines *would be* six feet deep. In one company area, the process was slow, due primarily to the incoming fire every time troops attempted to deepen that part of the trench that wound around the forward slope.

A haggard company commander who had spent a sleepless night controlling patrols was being questioned by a Division staff officer who'd arrived to inspect the trench-digging project. The two approached the unfinished shallow portion. The inspector mounted the incline, walked fifty yards to the other end, and returned to the skipper—who was waiting in the deep trench. Still standing exposed the inspector fired more questions. He was interrupted by a familiar noise and just managed to dive into the deeper trench when shells burst along the area he had just vacated.

When the shelling stopped a somewhat chagrined inspector asked: "Say, have you tried any TNT on this section of the trench?"

"No," replied the company commander. "I figured if we got enough inspections, the Chinese might do it for us!"

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