

Chapter 5

The Strategic Envelope

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*Subtle and insubstantial, the expert
leaves no trace; divinely mysterious,
he is inaudible. Thus he is master of
his enemy's fate.*

--Sun Tzu: *The Art of War*
(400-320 BCE)

'Strategy is the study of communication': I know nothing about the author of that insight beyond his name, [Karl Wilhelm von Willisen]. The quotation occurs in *The Seven Pillars of Wisdom* (1935) and other writings by T. E. Lawrence (1888-1935), the English archeology student who played a leading if still disputed role in the Arab Revolt against the Turks of the Ottoman Empire in 1916-1918. . . .

He was made world-famous after the war as Lawrence of Arabia by the films and lectures of the American war correspondent Lowell Thomas, who had met him while covering the Middle Eastern war, and who wrote a romantic book about him, *With Lawrence in Arabia*, in 1924. He owed his reputation as a strategist largely to Basil Liddell Hart, who called him 'one of the great captains' and compared him with Napoleon in a reverent biography, *Colonel Lawrence*, first published in 1934. . . .

The following outline of Lawrence's strategy of guerrilla warfare is taken from his article on the lessons of Arabia published in the 14th edition of the *Encyclopedia Britannica* in 1929. Similar accounts appear in *The Seven Pillars of Wisdom* and in Liddell Hart's biography. The only doubts raised about Lawrence on this score suggest that he made the theory up after the war as part of the creation of his own legend, having arrived at the results by intuition at the time. This of course does not invalidate the theory itself.

It is not known precisely who –Arab or English- actually made the key decision on which the novelty of the new strategy hinged –the decision not to attack Media [directly] –at the time.

. . .

Among the [seven] classical maneuvers the . . . indirect approach or strategic envelopment, developed to near perfection by Napoleon, is not of the same logical type, or level of communication and reality, as [the other six tactical maneuvers]. In classical warfare the indirect approach forces on the opponent a radical shift in battle strategy. In modern war, where the indirect approach has become the basis of revolutionary and guerrilla war waged offensively, it forces on the opponent a radical shift in grand strategy, for offensive guerrilla

warfare is not simply a new strategy but a new kind of war entirely. (See David Chandler's book, *The Art of Warfare on Land* (London: Hamlyn, 1974.)

Napoleon called guerrilla warfare 'A war without a front', like Mao's well-worn definition of the guerrilla fighter as 'a fish in the sea', and Ché Guevara's remark that the freedom fighter aims to be 'everywhere but nowhere' at the same time. Or as Sun Tzu puts it: 'The ultimate in disposing one's troops is to be without discernable shape'. (p.100)

Before 1945, with the exception of the Arab Revolt, most if not all guerrilla warfare was employed defensively as a last resort in a regular war, as the Spanish did against the French in the Peninsular War (1808-14), as the Boers did against the British in South Africa (1900-02), and as Russian, Yugoslav, and other partisans did against the Germans and their collaborators in World War Two.

Offensive guerilla war is another matter, says Chandler:

Part of its originality lies in the relative unimportance of conventional military success. The revolutionary cause, indeed, may even be able to absorb conventional military defeat and still emerge as the ultimate political winner.

The political aim is twofold:

to persuade the uninvolved part of the population to support the guerrilla program; and to convince the third-world nations and the liberal elements within the power whose influence is under attack, that right and justice, as well as convenience, lie in recognition of the new regime.

The principle target of the guerrillas is not the colonizer's military forces, but their morale and the morale and staying power of their home population and government. What Chandler calls 'the Third World War' is being fought 'on the psychological and political planes', not simply on the military one. 'The French army won the war in Algeria [1954-62], but French power collapsed soon afterwards. The British defeated the Mau Mau in Kenya [1948-60], but victory served only to hasten the granting of independence' (p.20). The successful anti-colonial wars in Indochina, Indonesia, Tunisia, Vietnam, Angola, Mozambique, Aden, and Zimbabwe are other examples.

Successful guerrilla war –and guerrillas are not to be confused with bandits, mercenaries, dirty tricksters, *agents provocateurs*, or special service units operating in disguise—is the prime example of the power of ideological commitment, strict discipline, and strategic flexibility over superior technology, industrial might, machine mobility, massive firepower, tactical air support, and strategic command of the air.

Chandler concludes:

An eighth manoeuvre of war –one that favors the physically weak (but strongly motivated) group over the physically stronger but less inspired conventional power—may therefore be justly recognized.

That at least was his view in 1974. In his later *Atlas of Military Strategy* (1980), Chandler summarizes the seven classical manoeuvres but makes no mention of the eighth.

The indirect approach of the eighth manoeuvre is much more than a mere physical act. As Brigadier General Samuel B. Griffith remarks in the introduction to his translation of Sun Tzu (p.39): 'Sun Tzu believed that the moral strength and intellectual faculty of man [are] decisive in war.'

His primary target is the mind of the opposing commander; the victorious situation, a product of his creative imagination. Sun Tzu realized that an indispensable preliminary to battle was to attack the mind of the enemy (pp.41-42).

'Shape him', says Sun Tzu.

In 'shaping' the opposition one seizes the initiative, attacks the opponent's strategy, and obliges him to maneuver within the unfavorable strategic context thus created. But that is not all, says Sun Tzu, for there is a still greater subtlety to be sought after (p.139): shaping him while letting him think he is shaping you:

The crux of military operations lies in the pretence of accommodating one's self to the designs of the enemy.

This was the essence of Iran's startlingly successful strategic envelopment of the Reagan Administration's strategy in the arms affair of 1985-86.

When there is no alternative to war, says Sun Tzu, the following principles apply:

All warfare is based on deception [of the opponent].
Therefore, when capable, feign incapacity; when active, inactivity.
When near, make it appear that you are far away; when far away, that you are near.
Offer the enemy a bait to lure him; feign disorder and strike him . . .
When he concentrates, prepare against him; where he is strong, avoid him.
Anger his general and confuse him . . .
Pretend inferiority and encourage his arrogance . . .
Keep him under strain and wear him down . . .
When he is united, divide him . . .
Attack where he is unprepared; sally out when he does not expect you . . .
These are the strategist's keys to victory.

Thus although attacking the minds of one's opponents may not necessarily involve the strategic envelopment of their forces, it always involves the strategic envelopment of their strategy.

*The power that makes the trigger-finger
hesitate, or obey, is more powerful
than armed force.*

It controls it.

The power is the Power of the Word.

*The Word of Persuasion –the Word of
Command.*

Words are weapons.

*We must not despise words and the use
of words.*

Words win wars.

--John Hargrave: Words Win Wars (1940)

Guerrilla strategy.

The system we live in is at war with itself. Its dominant parts divide and rule the rest by means of every kind of war, using every kind of weapon, including the stuff of life itself. People are pitted against people, religion against religion, class against class, race against race, family against family, adult against child, man against woman. We are at war with nature too, and any society that competes with nature is doomed to complete and devastating defeat.

Like revolutions in ideas, revolutions in society do not come about until they are called for, until conditions make them necessary. Revolutions are radical changes in the basic structure and grand strategy –the basic aims and values— of a dominant science, philosophy of life, society, or economic system. They are successful solutions to insoluble conflicts generated by the system they overthrow.

Whether measured in moments ($E=mc^2$), or spread over centuries (the capitalist revolution beginning with the sixteenth-century Age of Discovery), revolutions are the processes by which solutions impossible in one system are discovered by transforming it into another one. The system survives, not by staying the same, but by a radical transformation, a radical change in structure.

If a way of thinking and being does not in fact subvert the grand strategy –the real goals- of the dominant ways of thinking and being it is in conflict with, then by the same definition it is not a revolution, but a rearrangement.

A revolution is a strategic envelopment of the system in which it arises. In a tactical envelopment, as we have seen, one outflanks and surrounds parts of the system, but not the whole. In a strategic envelopment, your normal or *cheng* forces hold the opponents' attention, while your special or *ch'i* forces cut between the opponents and their base. You cut into the very roots of the dominating system, you break through its established lines of communication and supply, you capture its base.

By capturing the base of the dominating system, I mean gaining command of its basic imagery and ideas, and recognizing what they stand for, when it is a question of imagery and

ideas, and gaining political and economic control over our own resources –our own defenses- when it is a question of society.

Here, as elsewhere, honesty is the best policy; quality, the best argument; diversity, the best method; example, the best teacher; and reality, the best proof.

In 1931, in *The European Revolutions*, the historian Eugene Rosenstock-Huessy (1888-1973), using the masculine gender, put it this way (he is discussion the Russian Revolution, the French Revolution, and the Reformation):

Revolution . . . implies the speaking of a previously unheard of language. . . . the emergence of another kind of logic, operations with other proofs . . . Each major revolution has used another style of argument, a way of thinking which pre-revolutionary men simply could not conceive or understand. Men might hear with their ears, but there could be no meeting of minds between [French President] Poincaré and Lenin, Burke and Robespierre, Henry V and Luther. Once men begin to talk according to the new syntax of a major revolution, a rupture of meaning has occurred ; and the old and the new type of man appear insane to each other.

That is why, in such epochs, times are truly out of joint. Brothers, friends, colleagues, who shared a common education, suddenly rise up against each other and understand each other no more. They can no longer deal as man to man: the old are for the new corpses, ripe to rot; and to the old, the new appear as madmen. Both are indignant. The old Adam is inwardly beside himself with rage about this new madness. The revolutionist lifts his sword because he lives outside this dead world and considers it good riddance.

. . . The result is a revaluation of all values. The men who have not been revolutionized, and those who have, live in opposite [i.e. contradiction] universes of values, and, therefore, do not seem human to each other

No epoch of revolution ends with the complete erasure of the old type of man, but rather with a new reunion . . . a symbiosis of the old natural ethnic traditions with the spiritualized carriers of the revolution. Instead of the mutual war of annihilation there follows . . . the labor of education . . . the test of everyday life.

The passage is quoted by Karl W. Deutsch in *Nationalism and Social Communication* (1953, 1966, pp. 290-1).

In *The War of the Flea* (1965), Richard Taber calls guerrilla warfare ‘the strategy of contradictions’ (p.16). It is the manipulation of the contradictions of colonization, no longer in the interests of the colonizer, but in the interests of the colonized –who must liberate themselves from the mental and physical acting out in their daily tactics of the strategy of domination and destruction imposed on them by the power of the colonizer to manipulate and undermine their self-esteem, their pride in their heritage, their respect for their peers, their trust in each other, and their belief in the real possibility of change.

One begins to think about the unthinkable, and this is critically important. As Saul Alinsky (1909-1972) said in *Rules for Radicals* in 1971 (p.105):

The issue that is not clear to organizers, missionaries, educators, or any outsider, is simply that if people feel they don't have the power to change a bad situation, *then they do not think about it.*

The *will* to revolt, says Taber, seems to express

A newly awakened consciousness, not of [political] 'causes' but of potentiality. It is a spreading scarceness of the possibilities of human existence, coupled with the growing sense of the causal nature of the universe, that together inspire, first in individuals, then in communities and entire nations, an entirely new attitude to life (pp.18-19).

The will to revolt, says Taber, is allied with the conviction that radical change is actually possible, that individuals (including oneself) can actually make a difference, from which there arises the *will to act*. This describes the state of mind of the modern insurgent, 'whatever his slogans or his cause':

His secret weapon, above and beyond any question of strategy or tactics or techniques of irregular warfare, is nothing more than *the ability to inspire this state of mind in others* (p.19).

The primary effort of the guerrilla, therefore, 'is to militate the population, without whose consent no government can stand for a day'.

Moreover:

The guerrilla fighter is primarily a propagandist, an agitator, a disseminator of the revolutionary ideas, who uses the struggle itself –the actual physical conflict- as an instrument [or medium] of agitation (p.23).

As a result the guerrilla's mere survival is already a political victory.

The object of the guerrilla is not to win battles, but to avoid defeat, not to end the war, but to prolong it, until political victory, more important than any battlefield victory has been won (p.130).

Success must invariably depend on constant and careful reconnaissance, the best sources of the best information, and the ability to tell good information from bad. It depends also on the way one uses what one has, for above all:

Revolutionary propaganda must be essentially true in order to be believed. . . .
A high degree of selfless dedication and high purpose is required. . . .
Insurgency is thus not a matter of manipulation but of inspiration (p.138).

And finally:

To be successful, the guerrilla must be loved and admired.

-and be armed with an unfailing sense of humor.

As it happens the punch line of a joke is not unlike a strategic envelopment of the text leading up to it, for both strategy and jokes are dialectical operations. Just as a strategic envelopment creates a new context that changes the meaning of our original dispositions, making us act, so also does a punch line create a new context that changes the meaning of the original text, making us laugh:

For twenty years Mr Sokoloff had been eating at the same restaurant on Second Avenue. On this night, as on every other, Mr Sokoloff ordered Chicken soup. The waiter set it down and started off. Mr Sokoloff called 'Waiter!'

'Yeah?'

'Please taste this soup.'

The waiter said, 'Hanh? Twenty years you've been eating the chicken soup here, no? Have you ever had a bad plate –'

'Waiter', said Sokoloff firmly, 'taste the soup.'

'Sokoloff, what's the matter with you?'

'Taste the soup!'

'All right, all right', grimaced the waiter.

'I'll taste –where's the spoon?'

'Aha!' cried Sokoloff.

The story is from Leo Rosten's *Joys of Yiddish* (1968). Like the dialectic, the joke is discontinuous and irreversible (Anthony Wilden, *The Rules are No Game*, New York: Routledge, 1987, pp.246-50, 271-8. For a catastrophe theory model of the joke process, see John Allen Paulos, *Mathematics and Humor*, Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1980.)

In my opinion the partisan is of all leaders in war the most justified in tempting fate and , by trusting to his own eye and talent for making snap decisions, in thumbing his nose at the sacred rules constructed on matematical principles. . . . Let him develop his military gifts to the highest degree and, above all, let him acquire that attentiveness which allows us to exploit the present moment to the full and

*enables us to learn more form practical
life than from books.*

*--Georg Wilhelm Freiherr von Valentini:
A Treastis on the Small War and the
Employment of light Troops (Berlin, 1799)*

Respect, love, zeal, and vigilance.

'Partisan' is the early term for 'guerrilla' (from the Spanish for 'small war'). As quoted by Walter Laqueur in his indispensable *Guerrilla Reader* (1977, pp.86-87), the Polish strategist Karol Stolzman wrote in 1844:

[Guerrilla] war gives rise to countless reasons for solidarity between one province and another, one district and another, and one man and another. It leaves room for personal talent, arouses the nation from its lethargy, and both cultivates and channels a feeling of independence, . . . It helps . . . to bring out the most talented among the masses, those who desire to throw off as soon as possible their shameful shackles . . . Guerrilla warfare causes minds to adapt themselves to independence and to an active and heroic life. . .

The center of guerrilla warfare is everywhere, says Stolzman, its range of activity is unlimited.

In 1795 a book appeared in Holland on 'the art of waging little wars', written by a certain De Jeney, a man about whom little is known beyond the fact that he served in the French Army of the Rhine. *Le partisan ou l'art de faire la petite guerre* (excerpted in Laqueur, 1977, pp.19-20) is the first systematic treatise on guerrilla war. De Jeney lists the qualities required of the guerrilla:

A good partisan should posses:

- 1 An imagination fertile in schemes, ruses, and recourses.
- 2 A shrewd intelligence, to orchestrate every incident in an action.
- 3 A fearless heart in the face of all apparent danger.
- 4 A steady countenance, always unmoved by any token of anxiety.
- 5 An apt memory, to speak to all by name.
- 6 An alert, sturdy, and tireless constitution, to endure all and inspire all.
- 7 A rapid and accurate glance, to grasp immediately the defects and advantages, obstacles and risks presented by a terrain, or by anything it scans.
- 8 Sentiments that will engage the respect, confidence, and affection of the whole corps. . . .

Besides this, the partisan must know Latin, German, and French so as to make his meaning clear when he may meet men of all nations. He

should have a perfect knowledge of military practice, chiefly that of light troops, and not forget that of the enemy. He should possess the most exact map of the theater of war, examine it well, and master it thoroughly. It will be highly advantageous to him to keep some able geographers under his orders who can draw up correct plans of the armies' routes, their camps, and all places to be reconnoitered. . . .

Nor should he be at all parsimonious, if he can thereby obtain from able spies sure information of the enemy's line of march, his forces, his intentions, and his position. All such disclosures will enable him to serve his general to great advantage; they will be of incalculable benefit to the army's security and to his own corps' standing, good fortune, and glory.

His own interest and honor also require that he should retain a secretary to draw up the diary of his campaign. In it, he will cause to be set down all orders received and given, as in general all his troop's actions and marches; so that he may always be in a position to account for his conduct and justify himself when attacked by criticism, which never spares partisans.

As a leader, he owes to his troops the example of blameless conduct, entirely commensurate with the care of affection of a father for his children. He will thereby inspire them all with respect, love, zeal, and vigilance, and will win all hearts to his service.

I leave the final word to General Chu Teh (b.1886) and the Fifteen Rules of Discipline he drew up in 1928, when his peasant guerrillas were fighting the Nationalist troops of General Chiang Kai-shek and the warlords, in the uprising whose failure led to the formation of the famous 4th Red Army and the 22-year-long partnership between Chu Teh and Mao Tse-tung. I quote these rules with due allowance for the military nature of the first rule, while drawing your attention to the tenth (implicitly observed by the victors in Vietnam), for, other than Giuseppe Mazzini's rule, it is the only one of its kind I have seen:

Rules of Discipline:

- 1 Obey orders in all your actions.
- 2 Do not take a single needle or piece of thread from the people.
- 3 Turn in everything captured.
- 4 Speak politely.
- 5 Pay fairly for what you buy.
- 6 Return everything you borrow.
- 7 Pay for anything you damage.
- 8 Do not hit people or swear at them.
- 9 Do not damage crops.
- 10 Do not take liberties with women.
- 11 Do not ill-treat prisoners.
- 12 Keep your eyes and ears open.
- 13 Know the enemy within.
- 14 Always guide and protect the children.
- 15 Always be the servant of the people.