

IN THE AFTERMATH OF THE  
PERSIAN GULF WAR, MORE ON

**COULD**

**WE**

PROSPECTS  
FOR REVOLUTION

**REALLY**

**WIN?**

**BOB AVAKIAN**

**In the Aftermath of the  
Persian Gulf War,  
More on  
“Could We Really Win?”**

**Prospects for Revolution**

Bob Avakian

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*Bob Avakian,  
Chairman of the Revolutionary Communist Party, USA*

## **In the Aftermath of the Persian Gulf War, More on “Could We Really Win?”**

Recently some comrades had an opportunity to interview Comrade Avakian. In the aftermath of the Persian Gulf war and the victory of the U.S. side over Iraq, they posed a number of important and probing questions concerning revolutionary struggle in imperialist countries like the U.S. and in particular the possibility of waging revolutionary war against such an imperialist power, right in its “homeland.” The following is the text of that interview, which has been edited for publication.

*Q.: In "Could We Really Win?"\* you wrote that—when the right conditions came together—it really would be possible not only to launch an armed insurrection in a country like the U.S. and follow it up with a civil war to seize power nationwide, but that we could actually win: defeat the ruling powers militarily and begin building a whole new kind of society. The recent war with Iraq was a sober reminder of what the military power of the U.S. is like. The Iraqis had a million soldiers under arms and quite a few modern airplanes and other weapons, but the U.S. was able to utterly defeat them, primarily with more than forty days of relentless and massive bombing from the air. When you look at that, do you still feel we could defeat them militarily—that we could win?*

*A.: No, I don't. I think we should give up and kiss the ass of the ruling class! (Uproarious laughter all around)*

To give the *real* answer: Yes, I definitely still believe what I wrote in "Could We Really Win?".

*Q.: But how do you go up against their power? This war was described as a blitzkrieg with a lot of new technology thrown in. What they have is massive, sophisticated and overwhelming weaponry and lots and lots of troops. Their key objective was to win quickly and decisively, in order to break Iraq as a potential military threat. And a major goal in this war of aggression against Iraq was to avoid having to engage Iraq in a major conflict on the ground which might lead to significant U.S. casualties and military setbacks. I think the U.S. rulers feared that such a scenario would bring about a major fracture of support for the war within the U.S., might unleash deeper opposition to U.S. imperialism within the U.S., and might also unleash broad and deep opposition internationally and especially within the Gulf region among the Arab masses and others.*

*So the major tactical thrust of the U.S. was murder and destruction from the air, and even their land operation plans were weighted heavily to broad sweeps around and behind the main Iraqi troop concentrations, combined with air attacks on Iraqi ground forces. Again the whole point of this was to try and prevent massive ground*

\* "Could We Really Win? The Possibility of Revolutionary War," *Revolutionary Worker* #431, November 16, 1987. Also published as an appendix in this book.

*fighting. Clearly at this time, in this particular war at least, this was a major feature of how they fought "their way." We've said many times that the key is not to try to defeat them at their own game but to "fight our way." But how do you fight "our way" against an enemy which you can't even engage directly, who kills from a distance in such relentless fashion?*

*A.: Well, to give a basic answer, you would have to find the ways to engage them, or force them to get into a position where you could engage them, in situations and on terms where they were more vulnerable and where you could bring your own strengths to bear. You would have to have a military doctrine that could enable you to do that, and you would have to concretely deploy your forces and use tactics that could make this work. We can talk about this some more, but you would have to have doctrine and tactics that enabled you to move right up into contact with them—to move in ways that would leave you as little vulnerable as possible to attack from their forces in the air and on the ground. And I believe there are doctrine and tactics that could accomplish this. The essential thing—the basis for such doctrine and tactics—is to understand the strengths and the weaknesses of both sides, of your own side and of the enemy.*

Now, as you said, this recent war was a sober reminder of what the military power of the U.S. is like. It was sobering, but it should not be demoralizing. It was a real reminder of what Mao said—that, tactically, these imperialists are tigers with real teeth. They can do a lot of damage. This was very graphically illustrated through the course of this war. They did a tremendous amount of damage. The crimes they committed—the full scale and extent of it—are still to be fully revealed. Talk about war crimes! This is one of the greatest war crimes of all time. Again this is a sobering reminder of the military might and of the murderous nature of these imperialists. But, on the other hand, it's not as if we thought the U.S. military was somehow not capable of tremendous destructive power.

At the same time we should say that if there were any notions that we could count on a lot of their technology just breaking down and not working, that was shown to be basically an illusion. Or if anybody thought that merely because the war they fought was not objectively in the interests of the majority of their soldiers—or, let's put it this way, this war was not in the interests of the class from which these soldiers were drawn—if anybody thought that simply because of that the soldiers would lose heart at the first sign of any

battle and wouldn't fight for imperialism, we were again reminded that this is not the case. So when you say it was sobering, these are the kinds of things which were sharply brought out.

But again, these are points we've made before. For example, in *A Horrible End, or An End to the Horror?*, I addressed this question of what would we rely on, even in terms of winning over the troops of the other side. Could we rely mainly on our political work, our agitation, our appeals to their actual interests? Or would we have to primarily rely on administering them *defeats* on the battlefield, deflating their morale, disintegrating their ranks? I stressed that we would have to rely on this—actually defeating them on the battlefield—and at the same time it would be very important to carry out appeals to these soldiers' real interests and exposure of the real nature of the imperialists they are fighting for, the real nature of the war they are being ordered to fight—how it's against their own interests as well as against the interests of the oppressed people around the world, against the interests of justice and so on. And I made very clear—this is a point we've struggled through—that we could not count on winning over the troops just on moral appeals or political appeals: we'd have to administer defeats to them. We'd have to win them over primarily on the basis of what we'd do on the battlefield when it gets down to it. Once you engage an army like this on the battlefield—once you enter into warfare with them—you have to wage it as a war, you can't wage it as a political battle.

As Mao said, warfare has its own laws, and you have to master those laws and apply them in practice. It's a different sphere than politics. Now, war is a *continuation* of politics—and just as the kind of war *they* wage is a continuation of *their* politics and what class interests they represent, on the opposite side our kind of war is a continuation of *our* politics and our class interests—but it is a continuation *into a different sphere*. In short, war is a continuation of politics *by other means*. War has its own laws. This is a point we've made many times before. And in a certain sense we could say this recent Persian Gulf war confirms this in a very striking way. It makes very clear that you cannot wage a war primarily by waging it in the propaganda or public opinion spheres, even though those things are very important. That's one lesson I think has been driven home by this war.

*Q.: Let's go back to this point about how would you engage an enemy that you can't engage directly—that wants to attack you from*

*“beyond your reach.” In other words, there isn't that much prospect of winning over the types like the pilots bombing from the air. What about this “murder at a safe distance” point?*

A.: Well, that is an important point. First of all, these wars of the imperialists probably *are* in the class interests of the pilots: these pilots are elite strata within the military and generally they're drawn from the elite strata in society. They're overwhelmingly white-upper-middle-class and above in origin and their training is completely different from that of the basic soldier. Not only their training but their orientation, where they come from, their whole outlook—in short, what they do as well as how they think—is very different from the rank-and-file soldiers, particularly the “front line” ground troops.

This, I think, is important and relates to your question very directly, because in order to understand the strengths and the weaknesses of the other side, in order to know them, you have to analyze them concretely. This is one of the things Mao said—I think he was quoting Sun Tzu, an ancient Chinese official and scholar who wrote a lot on war and whose writings on war have influenced many, many people down through the ages, including Mao. Sun Tzu said—and Mao repeatedly stressed this point—know yourself and know the enemy and you can win a hundred battles.

So, it is crucial to know the enemy, not just politically but also militarily. If you analyze this recent war and in particular analyze the enemy—that is, imperialism and U.S. imperialism in particular—you can see even in its military configuration what its strengths are *and* what its weaknesses are and how it is strategically vulnerable.

For example, I started to talk about the pilots and how they're different from the rank-and-file soldiers. Well, in this war what you saw is that the U.S. force structure, as they call it, is one in which there are a certain number of fighting units on the ground and a tremendous “tail”—a massive logistical apparatus to support the ground fighting forces and the air forces. And the front-line troops, who would actually have to do a lot of the actual ground fighting, are to a significant degree—if not the majority then to a significant degree—Black and Latino and definitely in their majority are drawn from the lower classes of society, from *our* people essentially. Whereas the more you get into the positions that require higher levels of formal education and training, the more you find soldiers from more middle class type backgrounds. And, as I said, with groups like pilots and so on you're talking about people from more privileged, more “elite”

type backgrounds.

So what you have here is the indication of a strategic weakness that was not brought out, or that was not brought to the fore, in this war because of the way Saddam Hussein's army fought, and did *not* fight. This strategic weakness is that when you're talking about a country like the U.S. you have a society that is very parasitic. Its technology and its wealth is based on exploitation and plunder around the world. And *because* of its position in the world, it has a relatively large middle class, broadly speaking, whose life—especially relative to the people of the world—is one of privilege and comfort to one degree or another. And, to put it that way, they're very "soft": they're not used to real hardship.

That's why it was readily admitted that if there were a drawn-out war in which two things happened—one, the U.S. took a lot of casualties and two, there were no clear prospect of victory—then the support for the war, even among the more "loyal" sections of the population, would have been seriously and perhaps quickly undermined. Oh yes, some reactionaries can fight hard, even after taking casualties; and some of the really die-hard supporters of the system will continue in that stance even when the government gets into a war that goes badly. This has happened in past wars. But, overall, this is definitely not their strong suit.

Put it this way: the imperialists have a built-in contradiction. The people within their armed forces who are more like us, that is, soldiers drawn from the basic people, the ones who'd be more on the front ranks in the battlefield, are "harder"—they are more used to suffering and hardship—but *they're also the least loyal*. They have the least interest in fighting for the imperialists. Whereas the people (in their armed forces and in society generally) who are most loyal are the ones who are most "soft," the ones who are least able to put up with hardship, particularly the hardship of war with mounting losses and no clear prospect of victory on your side.

So this is a strategic weakness of theirs. And this dictates, or is a major factor in determining, a certain orientation and doctrine in their war-making: the necessity for going after quick, decisive victory with as few casualties on their side as possible. When you understand this—when you understand where this orientation and doctrine is coming from, that it is coming from weakness and not just from strength—then you can understand how you must fight in order to bring this strategic weakness of theirs increasingly into play. As I said, this did not happen in the recent Persian Gulf war because of the way

Iraq fought and also the way it did not fight. The point is that revolutionary forces must develop doctrine and tactics that bring out and give expression to the strategic weakness of the imperialists and give expression to our strengths—strengths that represent fighting "our way."

Mao talked in concrete terms about some of the essential qualities of the fighting style of the revolutionary army in China, and what he said applies generally to revolutionary forces fighting a people's war. Continuous fighting as well as moving and then fighting without rest, with no fear of fatigue; courage in battle and no fear of sacrifice; serving the people and fighting for their liberation, not for personal power or power for any small group or clique—these are essential qualities that Mao pointed to. Beyond that, Mao made the all-important point that these are qualities of a revolutionary army fighting a people's war and that no counterrevolutionary army can fight in this way—only a force that relies on the masses of people and fights in their revolutionary interests can fight in this way. Certainly it should be clear, including from the recent Persian Gulf war, that the armed forces of the U.S. imperialists cannot have such qualities and strengths in *their* way of fighting.

*Q.: OK, but maybe that's sort of the question here. It seems that very much part of U.S. military strategy is that they somewhat understand the strategic weakness that you're talking about and they don't want to get their ground forces drawn into any kind of protracted and costly battle because they realize that it is in such battle that things could fall apart for them. Particularly a situation where battles are causing them serious defeats and breaking up their army—that's a big danger for them. That's the whole point. So it seems that their whole strategy is going to be geared toward not having to do that—not getting into that kind of battle...*

*Q.: ... They did everything to avoid it...*

*Q.: ... Yeah, and if they were faced with a revolutionary war in their own "home base," it would seem they would try to do this even more. And that's the whole question—that's "their way"—so how would a revolutionary army deprive them of that, of the ability to fight "their way"? How could it force the fight onto terms more favorable to the revolutionary side—in short, how could it actually succeed in fighting "our way"? That's a question we're going to want to get into more.*

A.: Let me give you a short answer and then we'll get into a longer answer. I read somewhere that the U.S. declared that its primary objective in this war was to avoid casualties on its side. Now this is obviously a lie. That wasn't its primary objective. Its primary objective was to impose its imperialist "new world order" and to deliver a massively destructive blow to Iraq, both to put down Iraq and to be the opening declaration for this new world order—to deliver a statement to foes of all kinds. But despite the fact that minimizing their casualties was not their primary objective, it was definitely very important to them.

The short answer to your question is that in order to wage a war against a military power of this kind, you would have to find the ways to *make them* get into battle in such a way that they would suffer the kinds of losses and casualties and hardships that they want desperately to avoid. You would have to be able to exploit their strategic weaknesses and bring that into play through the course of the war. The question of *how* you would do that is probably our whole discussion, or a big part of our discussion. But that is the shorter answer.

Q.: *Force them to engage directly...*

A.: ...Yes, force them to engage directly and, even more than that, force them to engage in ways they don't want to engage, because there are some ways that you could engage them directly that are fine with them. They'll take casualties if they feel it's on terms they can definitely handle, where they can overwhelm you and wipe you out. You would have to force them to engage in ways they don't want to. I spoke to this point in a talk I gave not too long ago, "The End of a Stage—The Beginning of a New Stage":

"Just because in an imperialist country like the U.S. it is necessary to follow the strategic road of political work and struggle leading to insurrection in key urban areas, followed by civil war throughout the whole territory to fully and finally defeat the other side's armed forces—and just because the other side thinks more 'conventional' fighting in more defined battle areas is 'the kind of war they like'—this doesn't mean that we will give them the kind of war they like anyway. As we have repeatedly stressed, once we are into warfare with them, we will fight *our* way—and we will fight to deprive them of the ability to fight 'their way.' This is what it means to wage *people's* war." (See *Revolution* magazine, Fall 1990, p. 24.)

In basic terms, you would have to seize the initiative and you'd have to take the initiative away from them. You'd have to find the ways to reach them when they want to be beyond reach, and you'd have to find the ways to keep them from reaching *you*—at least with anything like the full force they want to "reach" you with.

For example, fighting "at close quarters" or "intermingled" with the enemy: this is one tactic revolutionary forces could use to deal with the airpower (and also the ground firepower) of the enemy, since it makes it very difficult for him to use this massive firepower without endangering his own forces. In the relatively few instances in which there were serious, fairly "close-up" ground battles in the recent war with Iraq, this problem for the U.S. imperialists already began to assert itself—some of their forces were hit by "friendly fire" (from their own side). This tactic of fighting "at close quarters" (or "intermingled" with the enemy) would depend on being able to "close" on the enemy, to get in close enough to make this tactic effective, to significantly blunt his massive firepower from the air and the ground. There should be more possibility for this in combat in built-up urban areas. This would apply in both the stage of insurrection in the cities and in combat in urban areas during the civil war stage of a revolutionary war in an imperialist country, but it would be more difficult to use this tactic when moving across open spaces away from built-up urban areas. This one tactic could not provide the whole solution to this problem. Other means would also have to be developed for dealing with and countering the overwhelming air supremacy of the imperialists.

Dispersed movement—breaking your forces down into smaller units when moving—is one such means. And the kind of revolutionary forces we're talking about, exactly because they would not possess a lot of heavy equipment, with its massive support systems, and because they could rely on their own efforts and the support of masses of people for much of their supply and logistics needs—such forces would therefore not be so "technology-heavy" and not as vulnerable to air attacks as, for example, the Iraqi army was. This would be true even in the civil war stage when the revolutionaries fielded a regular army—even then they would not and could not be relying on massive technological means of warfare. Thus it can be seen that one of the main weaknesses of such revolutionary armed forces—their weakness in advanced war technology—would also be one of their strengths, specifically in avoiding or blunting the tremendously destructive firepower of the imperialists, in particular air

power.

This whole question of countering the imperialists' air superiority and their decisive technological advantage generally is something that needs to be dug into much more fully. It is something that needs to be taken up on the level of military theory and doctrine and it is also something that will have to be solved concretely according to the actual circumstances of a particular people's war—here again the principle Mao stressed: learning warfare through warfare. One important aspect of taking this up in the realm of theory and doctrine is that there needs to be more summation of the Iraq war. We need to know to what degree Saddam Hussein and the Iraqi forces tried to seize the initiative and counter the strengths of the imperialist war machine but were *unable* to do this, and to what degree they never really made any concerted, systematic and ongoing effort to do this. Two things seem to be true: one, they made some partial attempts, and two, they never made a sustained attempt to do this. But there needs to be more summation. I certainly don't have a full understanding of this and I believe there needs to be more summation before we make any final assessment about what the Iraqi forces did and did not do and what they could and could not have done.

But it is clear that, for whatever reason or for a combination of reasons, they did not try to seize the initiative on any kind of sustained and ongoing basis. And it's very clear that they didn't try to have an all-out war. This is because of the class nature of Saddam Hussein and his regime—they are what we call *comprador bourgeois*—bourgeois elements in an oppressed nation that are fundamentally dependent on imperialism. Fundamentally because of this, it is a fact that from the very beginning—from the time that they invaded Kuwait and up through the whole war with the U.S.—they were always trying to find some way to negotiate out of this on some basis that they could accept. And that's different—that's very different—than the way any revolutionary force would fight and must fight these imperialists.

It is different, for example, than the way the Vietnamese fought them. Even though the Vietnamese entered into negotiations with the U.S. imperialists while fighting them—and even though we have criticisms of some of their strategy and tactics and some of the ways these became geared too much toward negotiations—still, they fought on a completely different basis than Saddam Hussein. Therefore they had a completely different morale among their forces and among the people. One thing that's clear, for example (and Viet-

namese military leaders commented about this during the recent war between the U.S. and Iraq), is that massive B-52 bombing did take a big toll on the Vietnamese, but it did *not* destroy their morale and their fighting capacity. Whereas, to a much greater degree, it did do this to the Iraqi army. And that has to do with the whole nature of the Iraqi regime, its relation with imperialism, what it was aiming for, and therefore how it fought.

But to sum up the essential point in few sentences: You would have to *make* the imperialists fight on terms more unfavorable for them and more favorable for you. You'd have to seize the initiative from them and make them engage in ways they don't want to engage. And if they want to fight from beyond your reach you would have to find the ways to reach them.

*Q.: You have said in an earlier interview that "we're not going to have a situation [like Russia in 1917] where a protracted 4 or 5 years of world war eventually thoroughly undermines the foundations of the existing power and it more or less topples from its rotten foundation with a push." ("Questions for These Times," Revolution, Winter/Spring 1986, p. 25) So in that sense it's not going to be like the Russian revolution—it's going to take more to get it started, and yet there won't be anything like 90 percent of the people on our side, certainly not at the beginning. This will definitely be a case of trying to do something that hasn't really been done anywhere yet. What do you say to someone who says "look, you're just going to have to wait until you do get a situation where the system is teetering on the brink of collapse, until it is more like the conditions that existed in Russia, or other revolutionary situations, where only a 'push' is needed to get things started and you can get more than 90 percent of the people on your side right at the beginning"?*

*A.: Well, I'd say this. First, to argue for waiting like that is essentially to argue for waiting forever and for giving up the goal of revolution, and I think that's wrong. Wrong, first because we can't give up the goal of revolution—revolution is what's needed. That's what the people of the world need. That's what the people in the U.S. need—the proletariat and the oppressed masses need revolution, and in an overall and historic sense the majority of people in the U.S. need revolution and certainly the great majority of people in the world need revolution, proletarian revolution.*

*But it's also wrong because it's not necessary to wait for condi-*

tions like that. It's not the case that we can't win unless we get conditions where the government is basically toppling on its own. That's on the one hand. On the other hand, a point our Party has made a number of times, and that is dramatically emphasized by this recent war, is that particularly at the very beginning of the revolutionary war, when you'd just be bringing your own armed forces into being, you wouldn't want to go up against the imperialists in a situation where they were in a very strong position, where they were not in any kind of crisis, and their military power was not only intact but was in "high gear," so to speak. Starting out as a revolutionary force, you'd be starting out by definition with nothing or next to nothing in the actual military sphere itself, so you'd want to make your move—launch an insurrection—when the other side was weakened and in crisis. This is a point our Party has stressed over and over, and for good reason.

Now, having said that, it is also very important to emphasize that things you've done leading up to the launching of the armed struggle would count for something. In the case of countries like the U.S. this means a period of political work and political battles and preparing public opinion, preparing minds and organizing forces for revolution, building the party and building broad organized ties with the masses—all these things count for something. They count for a great deal in fact. So you wouldn't be literally starting with nothing. But in terms of actually having an army in the strict sense you'd be starting with basically nothing. So, two things: first, you wouldn't want to go up against the full power of the imperialist armed forces right away; and two, you wouldn't want to go up against an imperialist regime when it has the most favorable situation and there is no serious economic or political crisis.

In other words, when the middle classes are more or less solidly behind the ruling class, when the basic people are not in a fighting mood or don't see the possibility of revolution—that's not when you'd want to launch a revolutionary war against the system. You'd want things to be the *opposite* of that. When people are in a combative mood, when they've been fighting the powers-that-be, when they see the chance of standing up and delivering some real blows, when in fact they've been doing that, when you've been building up your own organized forces, when the party's been built broadly and deeply among the masses, when other revolutionary forms of organization among the masses have been developed, when the middle classes are splitting and many of them are losing their allegiance

to the system: it's a situation like *that* that you'd need politically in order to be able to then go over to launching the insurrection. And you *do* want to have crisis in the system—you not only *want* to, you *have* to have crisis in the system.

In the "Could We" article you referred to, I pointed this out—that you have to have a serious crisis in society *and in government*. In other words, it's not enough to just have a generalized kind of situation of chaos, upheaval, economic crisis, political crisis—you also have to have a crisis in government. Let's take an example of a war similar to the recent Persian Gulf war, but let's imagine that this war goes badly for the ruling class. Even from the experience of this recent war it is clear that, if a war of this kind went badly for the imperialists, then many within the ruling class would turn with a vengeance on the leaders they held responsible for getting them into what would then be seen as a reckless adventure. And then you might very well get a real crisis in government. You would need something like that—that is one of the necessary conditions for launching an armed insurrection in an imperialist country.

You'd want this in an overall sense and also more particularly because this would be reflected in the imperialist armed forces. I'm not saying they wouldn't be able to fight at all, but you'd want to have as much turmoil and division as possible in the ranks of the enemy, including within their armed forces. The launching of an armed insurrection as the first step in a revolutionary war in a country like the U.S. would have to be based to a large degree on political and social conditions like this. You'd have to have these kinds of conditions. This is the first necessary condition spoken to in "Could We." It doesn't say you can just go off and start the armed struggle in a country like the U.S. whenever anybody wants to. In fact it criticizes that view, it starts right out criticizing that view and says you have to have certain necessary conditions. And the first one it mentions is this: a serious crisis in society and in government.

You do have to have these necessary conditions. But, on the other hand, you don't have to have a situation where the ruling structures are ready to topple on their own.

*Q.: I'd like to get more into what the armed insurrection would look like and particularly what people would be facing at the very beginning. In "Could We" you said that at any one time their troops are tied up in other theaters and this causes problems for redeployment of their forces "back home," and so on. But I'm not so sure that they*

would have so much trouble redeploying and concentrating their weapons and troops against an armed insurrection in the U.S. Depending on the world situation, they might not be tied up in so many places abroad. Plus, the U.S. is after all their home base—they have lots of troops there already, they know the geographic and political terrain, they have huge areas from which they could stage redeployment and resupply operations, including underground command centers, arms depots, etc. They have communication systems designed to withstand sophisticated Soviet breaching, a great ability to manipulate the media and craft the news any way they see fit. And they have quite a bit of experience sealing off and isolating ghetto areas.

It seems that at the first signs of armed insurrection they would rapidly move to contain the urban neighborhoods seen as “trouble spots,” setting up barricades, curfews, martial law restrictions on movement and assembly, laying siege to deny food and medical care, maybe conducting precision strikes from the air with helicopters, manipulating the media to black out or distort news of the risings. There is in “*Could We*” the view that at first, people would not be fighting against “all that,” that at first people would have to deal only with local police forces (and maybe some National Guard-type units or something like that) and the insurgents would be able to score some key victories for a day or two before the regular army would come in. But why? After all, they would have been monitoring the development of the crisis conditions and revolutionary upsurges among the people which would have led up to the time when armed insurrection became possible. Why wouldn’t they have done their preparations accordingly? It seems to me they could have just as good a sense of the timing of the initial armed insurrection as the revolutionary forces. So, unless they’re really stretched thin in some conflicts abroad or something, I’d expect them to have more than the local police on hand to deal with things right from the get.

A.: Well, you asked about 10 different questions—there are a lot of different parts to that question—so let’s take them one by one if we can. First of all, on the question of their being stretched thin internationally: I heard one report that during the high point of this great buildup and preparation for this Iraq war they had less than 50,000 combat troops in the United States itself. Now those are unusual circumstances, I recognize that, but still, that indicates something about their international commitments, that what was said in “*Could*

We” is true—these international commitments do mean that it would be extremely difficult for them to have all their forces concentrated toward putting down rebellion in the U.S. at any given time.

This remains true even with the changed circumstances with the Soviet Union. Now, at least for the present time, a direct military confrontation with the Soviet Union is not a very high probability, and it’s not what U.S. military planning is putting as a first priority right at this time (although they certainly haven’t forgotten about it and are certainly not failing to continue to be prepared for that). Now fighting the kind of war they fought against Iraq, or fighting wars against more revolutionary forces directly—counterinsurgency or counterrevolutionary wars—these kinds of things have a higher priority right now on their military agenda. But these things also require applications of force.

In fact, as people have pointed out, these imperialists’ summation of Vietnam is not that it was too bloody but that it was not bloody enough, fast enough. So that’s one of the things they tried to apply and did apply against Iraq. Now I believe this applies against Iraq in ways it does not apply against people’s wars in countries like Vietnam or even more so the Maoist people’s war in Peru today. I don’t believe the imperialists can fight against genuine people’s wars the same way they fought against Iraq. In a certain way Iraq was made to order for them: they knew that and they took advantage of it, and they’re trying to make a lot of political gains out of it, on top of the military gains, by acting as if this proves they’re invincible. It doesn’t. It proves that when they have the kind of setup they like, they’re very effective at dealing with it. And that’s exactly what they had in this war.

But still, all this shows that they do have major international military commitments, and they will continue to have such commitments internationally. They are compelled to have a large number of their forces outside the U.S. at any given time. And it’s very likely they will continue to be repeatedly engaged in various ways in military adventures and military encounters in various parts of the world. They have to be prepared for that and they have to have forces allocated for that. One thing it is important to remember about an insurrection and civil war in an imperialist country is that to a significant degree the revolutionaries would have the initiative at the beginning—particularly in deciding precisely when to launch the insurrection.

What I’m trying to say is this: the revolutionaries would decide

when they're going to do that. Now they wouldn't have complete freedom because there are times when the crisis and the revolutionary situation develop, and if you don't seize it then you lose the initiative and you lose the opportunity—maybe for a long time. But on the other hand you'd decide, the revolutionary forces would decide, when they see the conditions are ripe. As I said before, you wouldn't just jump out and do it at any time, you'd do it when the conditions are as favorable as they can get (relatively speaking—you never can know with complete certainty when the conditions will be absolutely most favorable and you can't wait for a perfect situation because there is no such thing—but you'd have to make a judgment of when the necessary conditions have developed to the greatest degree possible).

You can't become impatient. Just like people waging a protracted people's war in a Third World country who might be in the mountains for ten, twenty or more years can't just decide "we've got to go down and take the cities because it's been too long." They have to fight through and they have to wait until they can really take them—although in that situation too there is a question of preparing the ground for seizing the cities in the ways appropriate for the particular situation. We have seen how the comrades of the Communist Party of Peru and their leader, Chairman Gonzalo, have set an example in rejecting any kind of "get-rich-quick" schemes or "shortcuts" and have instead taken a serious, systematic approach to waging people's war, with a clear eye toward winning nationwide victory and serving the world revolution. And with regard to an insurrection in an imperialist country, the same basic principle applies. You don't launch an insurrection just because you're impatient. You have to launch it when the conditions are ripe.

*Q.: Yes, but they'll be able to anticipate the timing also. The ruling class would be able to pick up on the fact that there's increasing domestic turmoil, that the revolutionary forces are gearing up—all this wouldn't come "out of the blue."*

A.: Right, but that doesn't mean they can just decide to forget about all their international obligations, all their international commitments and involvements. This is an imperialist system, and it cannot work, it cannot maintain itself, without serious military commitments internationally.

*Q.: So is their being stretched thin internationally a prerequisite to being able to launch an armed insurrection?*

A.: It is not a prerequisite in the sense of there being some kind of "absolute requirement" that they be deeply entangled in some military adventure—bogged down in a war—or something like that, before an insurrection could possibly be launched in their "home base." But ongoing international military commitments and the continual possibility of actual military engagement internationally is a part of the *objective picture*—it is one of the major features of any imperialist power. You cannot sit here and say they must be engaged to  $x$  degree, or have their forces abroad committed to  $x$  degree of involvement in so many places, or with so much depth or whatever, before you could do something. It depends on the total picture, but such international military involvement, on one level or another, is a part of this total picture.

This is an imperialist system that *depends upon* suppressing people and dealing with rivals with force or with the threat of force in all parts of the world—that is an ongoing feature of this system. One very favorable factor, in terms of launching the insurrection, would be a situation where they were more deeply engaged, and in fact bogged down, in some kind of military adventure internationally. But whether or not that proves to be part of the mix that leads to the possibility of waging revolutionary war in an imperialist country is something nobody can say in advance.

But I will say that you can't sit around and wait for something like what happened with the Vietnam war—or for the way many people, the majority of people in the world, would have liked the Iraq war to go—with the U.S. getting its nose bloodied and getting bogged down with no prospect of immediate victory. That would be great! But let's face it: that could happen but other things might not come together and you still couldn't launch an insurrection. Or the reverse might be true: other factors might be very favorable while that factor (of their being bogged down in war and taking big losses) wasn't as developed as you'd like and you might *still* be able to launch an insurrection. So you'd have to look at the total mix.

And to go back to a point you raised earlier: yes, of course, especially as they get into a serious crisis and even more so as they are faced with a revolutionary people—revolutionary-minded masses ready to rise up against them—right in their "home base," the imperialists will be closely monitoring the situation and they will be

stepping up their suppression. But here we can look at some history and we can learn from such things as the Warsaw Ghetto uprising during World War 2. Even though it wasn't an insurrection in the way we're talking about it—in a way that would be part of an actual offensive thrust to launch a revolutionary war with a chance of actually overthrowing an imperialist power—still the Warsaw Ghetto uprising was a serious act of mass armed resistance that took place under conditions where the German occupiers were very definitely aware that something was in the making. They'd been aware for some time. And this uprising took place at a time when the German Nazis were moving to implement further their Final Solution to exterminate the Jews, including the Jews herded into this Warsaw Ghetto. Yet the Warsaw Ghetto uprising was still able to jump off and deliver some blows to the Germans before it was finally crushed.

Now we don't want to see a situation where an armed uprising is launched in such unfavorable conditions as the Warsaw Ghetto rebellion, but the point I'm making is that even in conditions where the other side is very repressive, taking vicious reprisals against any kind of resistance, and even when it is expecting some kind of uprising—it's still possible to launch an armed struggle against them. That point is very important.

Related to this, you raised this question of encirclement and suppression...

*Q.: ... Yes, we'll want to get into that quite a bit in a minute, but first, could you speak more about this point that in the first couple of days people would be dealing mainly with local forces? Quite frankly I still have a lot of trouble with that. I really feel that they would get enough of a sense that their domestic situation was going all to hell and that they had to reinforce their local forces, bring the National Guard in and so on. They already have some National Guard forces inside cities, they already have ghettos partially sealed off even today. I just don't see this thing about how for "a couple of days" it would be possible to win all these crucial victories against local forces without having to face their big power.*

A.: Well, in this regard, there are two basic scenarios. One, you could have a situation of outright military occupation by regular armed forces, which is a very extreme situation, but not impossible to conceive of. If you had that, over an extended period of time, then that would be a different situation. If that were the generalized

situation in most of the major cities in the U.S., for example, not only would that put tremendous strains on *our people*—the basic masses—it would also put tremendous strains on *the other side*—the armed forces of the state—to maintain that. All kinds of strains: political strains, logistical strains, strains in terms of their international commitments. But if they were to maintain that over a protracted period of time then you'd be dealing with a different situation—you'd be dealing with a situation of *military occupation*, and your tactics would have to be adjusted accordingly.

Now if, on the other hand, you were dealing with something less than that—if the situation were one where something like National Guard units were deployed off and on, and there was stepped-up police repression, cordoning off areas and so on—all these things also would have to be taken into account tactically, but they would not make impossible the launching of an armed insurrection. Such things only emphasize the fact that to do this you'd have to do it seriously: you'd have to be well organized; you'd have to have a strong mass base; you'd have to have your party deeply rooted among the revolutionary people; you'd have to have broad influence in society; you'd have to have deep and wide organized ties among the basic people and among other strata in society as well; and you'd have to have the correct strategy, program, plan, and doctrine—in short, the correct political line and the correct military line.

When "Could We" says what it says about not being up against "all that" right away, it's talking about how at the start of an insurrection you would not be up against the kind of thing that we saw in Iraq once the war started there. It's very unlikely that you'd be up against anything approaching that kind of emplacement and preparation of military power and then the actual use of that military power in that concentrated and massive a way at the very beginning. This is both because of the imperialists' overall military commitments and because it would put tremendous strains on them, militarily as well as politically, to try to maintain a massive military force within their own country in readiness for the possible outbreak of an armed insurrection against them.

"Could We" sums up its discussion of the "all that" question in this way: "In any case, it is unlikely that right at the start an insurrection would be up against the other side's most powerfully and effectively armed and organized units, deployed offensively in an all-out effort to crush the insurrection." I still feel this is correct.

Yes, they have air bases, yes they have other kinds of military

bases, yes they certainly have logistical facilities, they certainly have lots of supplies, and these would be brought to bear in the course of a revolutionary war in a country like the U.S. "Could We" certainly says this would be brought to bear, especially in the civil war stage, although the article itself doesn't deal with the civil war stage—it specifically says it isn't dealing with that—"Could We" ends just when the civil war stage would begin, so to speak. But it is during that civil war stage that the kind of massive military force that was used against Iraq would be brought to bear.

Summing up this war against Iraq, we can sort of characterize the way the imperialist army moved there, and the way they like to move in general, as a very slow, methodical and almost "plodding" build-up, followed by rapid and massive attack. That's the way they initiated the war with the phase of air attacks against Iraq—keeping in mind the months of buildup before that—and that's also the way they initiated the ground phase of that war. I think that's generally a military characteristic that conforms to their kind of society, to their kind of military power.

*Q.: But I see that as a completely different situation: they were preparing for a desert blitzkrieg type situation which required a lot of slow, plodding buildup of armor and so on, which I don't think is what they would need in the U.S. to deal with armed insurrection.*

A.: Well, there are things they would try to do quicker than that. For instance, you brought up earlier that they might conduct helicopter assaults against revolutionary strongholds right at the beginning of an insurrectionary phase. But this is still not the same as the kind of military power which we saw brought to bear against Iraq, or that we'd see brought to bear as things actually moved into the stage of civil war—all-out war between two regimes, and two organized armed forces—which is what you'd get in the second, and longer, stage of the revolutionary war in a country like the U.S.

The armed insurrection—the initial stage—would be shorter and more telescoped. In the longer stage of civil war you would get more of these things—these means of mass destruction—brought to bear. But I don't think that in the first few days during the insurrection they would be able to marshal anything like that kind of massive force. As you said, Iraq was a different situation, but that works both ways. And on the positive side for the revolutionaries is the fact that these imperialists couldn't bring that kind of power to bear in this kind of

situation—of insurrection in the urban areas of their own country—in a period of time of a few days or even a week. As I said before, not only are there political considerations and contradictions they'd have to be dealing with, but just in terms of logistics and supply it takes time to prepare that level of military assault—something even approaching what they used in the war against Iraq.

And, beyond that, the revolutionaries' actions would be *depriving* the other side, to some extent, of the ability to concentrate everything. First, one of the general principles of armed insurrection in an imperialist country is "simultaneity" (or at least rough simultaneity). That is, once the conditions existed to launch the revolutionary war, the revolutionaries would strive to begin armed insurrections at roughly the same time in a number of key urban centers of the country. This, in itself, would give the imperialists trouble in concentrating all their forces against any one place. In the original, successful revolution in an imperialist country—Russia in 1917—the Bolsheviks led roughly simultaneous insurrections in the two main cities of the country, St. Petersburg and Moscow. In a country like the U.S., this same principle would have to be applied by the revolutionaries—but to even more cities.

Second, by the very act of rising up right in the "home base" of the imperialists, the revolutionaries would be "hitting them where it hurts." The beginning of powerful, mass armed insurrections in the "home base" would itself cause significant disruptions and difficulties for the imperialists in terms of their well-integrated war machine. I'm not saying all this would make them helpless and feeble. Not at all. But it would present them with some problems they've never faced before in deploying and concentrating their forces.

*Q.: Sort of on the same question, but from a different aspect: Isn't it true that in terms of military problems, one of the main contradictions that revolutionaries in an imperialist country would face early on is that the imperialists are going to come into the war with a high level of troop training, weaponry, transportation, communication and control. They'd have the ability to fight in a coordinated and concentrated way. Whereas the revolutionaries would have to forge and develop all these aspects needed to fight a war in the very midst of combat. In other words, what you said before: up until it happens the revolutionaries are not going to have an army. They'll have a lot of political upheaval, they'll have a lot of developing organization, things like that, but the revolutionaries won't have an army. So it*

seems that in the initial phase of the armed insurrection the imperialists would sort of "have it together" whereas the revolutionary forces would be "getting it together." And it seems that an initial mission of these revolutionary forces would be to find the ways to deprive the enemy of the ability to bring to bear all these strengths—deprive them of the ability to fight "their way"—while the revolutionaries would be developing "our way."

You've talked to some of this just now, but could you speak a little bit more to how some of this might unfold. You've talked about some of the other contradictions—about how it wouldn't be so easy for them to bring all this to bear—but still, how would the revolutionaries go from "almost nothing" in terms of military aspects to actually getting it going?

Q.: In the initial phase, when you're having to move so fast and yet you have to learn as you go.

A.: Let me put it this way: I think there is doctrine that could be developed and tactics that could be employed, and I've spoken to that somewhat. There isn't much historical precedent for precisely this kind of thing. There are historical examples, including from other kinds of warfare, where *elements* of what was done by revolutionary forces could be applied to waging revolutionary war—insurrection and civil war—in an imperialist country. First of all, there is the experience of the October 1917 insurrections in Russia. There are also experiences involving more full-scale and longer-lasting urban combat, like for instance the Battle of Stalingrad in World War 2. And there's the Chinese Revolution, where they fought mainly guerrilla warfare for a long time, or similar wars like in Peru and other places today. These are some important historical experiences, all of which hold some valuable lessons, even though some of these experiences are somewhat similar to and some of them are quite a bit different, overall, from what a revolutionary war would be like in a country like the U.S.

There are also other examples which are not the same in general terms as what a revolutionary war would be like in a country like the U.S., but which have *elements* that lessons can be drawn from—elements that would be similar—elements of either urban combat, or of some guerrilla tactics that could be useful. But all this would be *in a different context* when you're talking about insurrection and civil war in an imperialist country like the United States.

In such a country, as I pointed out in "Could We," trying to apply the strategy of guerrilla warfare, in the form of urban guerrilla warfare, will not work. That's not a winning strategy. The winning strategy involves politically preparing for and then, when conditions are ripe, launching a massive armed insurrection (or simultaneous insurrections), which from the very beginning would involve broad masses of the people. In a very short period it would have to involve millions of people—on one level or another, and certainly in support activity—and it would have to involve tens of thousands of people directly as combatants in a number of major cities. But on the *tactical* level, some of the lessons that can be learned from urban warfare in things like the great Stalingrad battle in World War 2 or other important urban battles, and some of the tactical things that have been done in protracted guerrilla warfare, such as in China or today in Peru—those things can and should be learned from.

There are these kinds of lessons that could be applied and would have to be applied by any revolutionary force seeking to wage a people's war in an imperialist country. But you'd have to apply them according to the actual conditions you'd be dealing with. It is necessary to study the concrete conditions of any particular country. And, to win, you'd have to master such things as knowledge of terrain, logistics, the tactics of the enemy, and so on, and apply that knowledge concretely. I believe that that could be done.

Let's not make these things mysterious, or hold them in some kind of religious awe. Let's have a serious scientific approach, let's make a sober analysis, take real stock of the actual power of the enemy, and more than that of its actual doctrine and tactics, and so on. But after all, these things all depend on human beings. Tanks, for example, are armored vehicles—they're vehicles that have armor and are mounted with weapons—they're not magical things. There is experience, even from the Spanish Civil War in the 1930s, both positive and negative experience, that people can learn from in terms of the masses innovating military vehicles and weaponry. After all, it is the masses who make the weapons the imperialists use; and if they can do that, then, when the time comes, they can innovate various kinds of weapons and means of waging war that suit the strengths of *our* side—the strengths of the revolutionary masses fighting in *their own* interests.

The point is this: if you have the masses on your side—and this is the most decisive factor—you can innovate all sorts of things. When the time comes, you'd have the ability to produce weaponry

of your own, for example to make homemade tanks, to the degree that would be desirable and necessary. And, on the other hand, you'd be able to develop weapons to help deal with the tanks and even various kinds of aircraft the enemy was using. You could do this as well as capturing many (or most) of your weapons from the other side, and perhaps adapting many of these captured weapons to make them more suitable for waging *revolutionary* warfare—for fighting "our way." There are all kinds of things that can be done if you have masses of people who are rising up with revolutionary determination and heightening their revolutionary consciousness. On this basis—once you had the necessary objective conditions and the masses were unleashed—you could radically change the situation in a very rapid time. These are the kinds of things that are talked about in general terms in "Could We," and this is what you would have to do.

One of the things that characterizes an armed insurrection of this kind is that political work and political organization lay the groundwork for it. And once you'd made the qualitative change, once you'd entered a whole new stage where you'd actually be engaging in military struggle as such, then a lot of these things that you had done in the phase of political preparation would have to be and could be *transformed* into things that would be directly military. For example, the groundwork you had laid of organized ties with broad masses of people could be transformed into military organization of the masses—that is, organization to wage and support the revolutionary war—when it was actually underway.

And there are other ways in which the same principle could be applied. That's why the period of political preparation is not nothing; it's very important even in organizational terms as well as in political terms. And at the same time emphasis has to be laid on learning the lessons of wars that are fought by both sides—both the enemy side and our side, globally speaking. This means learning from the U.S.-Iraq war, learning from military history generally, and especially where revolutionary wars have been fought, and seeing what lessons can be applied so that a *doctrine* can be developed that fits the concrete conditions. So even if there is not yet a situation where they are engaged in revolutionary war, revolutionaries should be looking at things in terms of the future, and part of that involves studying how things like mass political organization could be transformed into military terms when that was the appropriate and necessary thing to do. And that has to do with how you could go from almost nothing—or from just having the *seeds* of something—to having things blossom

very rapidly, once the ground had been prepared both by your political work and by the development of the objective conditions.

*Q.: Some of what I'm trying to get at is what is the basis for being able to do this?*

*A.:* In an overall sense, two things are the basis: one, the work you do in the period of political preparation—the political, ideological, and organizational work and struggle—and the other thing is the study of military history and military theory and the development of doctrine. Those two things would get brought together—in a new way, on a higher level—when you actually entered into the stage of waging warfare, that's the point.

*Q.: Let's imagine a situation where there is armed insurrection in the U.S. and the imperialists are stretched thin in terms of their military commitments, a situation where their whole system is being threatened. Now we know that one of their main concerns is that they don't want to be in a position where their troops have to get into fierce and protracted combat and there's a risk that their whole military structure could fall apart. Given exactly that type of situation, isn't there the possibility that if they saw an armed insurrection coming down in a number of cities, they might take a city like, say, Detroit, where the Black population is very much concentrated and set off from the white population even somewhat more than in other cities—isn't there the possibility they might just take it and, not necessarily nuke it, but really go into a massive bombardment and completely destroy that city, causing hundreds of thousands of casualties? They could do it more in the inner-city areas, not necessarily hitting their production capabilities, the auto plants and so on, but mainly going after the Black masses in the inner city, and then use that, publicize it broadly to everybody else to say, "look, this is what we're going to do to this thing; either you're going to stop, or we're going to do this."*

*Wouldn't this be a very decisive thing, particularly in terms of stopping our side from being able to bring broader forces—our reserves—into play, right at that crucial moment? Right at the point where we're making our initial gains, where broader forces are starting to come into the picture—right at that point they might say we've got to stop it and this is the way to do it: give everybody a powerful message that "look, you carry on with this insurrection and*

there's going to be horrible destruction and annihilation, so you better stop it right here."

*Q.: A scenario where, like in Iraq, they would want to win quickly and decisively and avoid involving too many of their ground troops that they know are not all that reliable. They'd want to set an example and try to nip the insurrection in the bud.*

A.: First, this kind of action would be a great gamble for their side. While they would want it to have the effect you say, it would also dramatize the fact that there was a deep, all-out crisis and struggle in society and, especially if the revolutionary forces, the most determined revolutionary forces, kept firm and all over the country they intensified both the struggle and the exposure of the vicious nature of the state, such a measure might fail. It might even be made to backfire on them and be the "last straw" in actually winning many more middle forces to the revolutionary side at this crucial moment. The whole armed insurrection as well as the civil war period in a country like the U.S. would have as one of its features, no matter what, a battle for the allegiance of the middle. A vicious act like this would be a pivotal point in that way, too, and might be made to backfire on them—deepening their isolation from even the people in the middle. So that's one point.

Second point is, all this does emphasize again the importance of the work of political preparation and also *ideological* preparation. I keep emphasizing this because one of the particular characteristics of a country like the U.S. and the way the revolutionary struggle goes down there is that it does follow the general strategic road of a period of political preparation followed by the launching of the insurrection, giving way to a civil war, which is all-out warfare between the two sides and two armed forces. And understanding the particular characteristics of the revolutionary road is very important.

There are advantages and disadvantages to everything. The advantages of a situation like Peru, for example, where they can follow the path charted by Mao for countries of that kind, oppressed countries, is that they can wage the armed struggle from the very beginning of the revolutionary struggle. This is both a particular feature of a country like that and also a particular advantage—that the revolutionaries are able to build up their armed forces slowly, over a period of time, without having to enter into decisive military engagements with the other side, that is, military engagements that

could decisively affect the war situation as a whole and the outcome of the war overall. So if the revolutionaries in such countries carry out their strategy and tactics correctly, they can gradually build up their armed forces and gradually surround and then finally defeat the ruling class which is having to become more and more entrenched in the cities as it's encircled from the countryside. Such a situation has its obvious particular features and advantages.

On the other hand, when you're talking about making revolution and waging revolutionary war in an imperialist country, you have the disadvantage that you cannot wage the armed struggle from the beginning and you cannot start small and gradually build up your armed forces over a protracted period of time, avoiding decisive engagements until you build up your armed forces more, and so on. That you cannot do this has its definite disadvantages, no question. But on the other hand, you have to seize on the positive things there are in this situation.

The positive thing, that you have to turn to your advantage, is what you *can* do: engage in political work, carry out militant political struggle with the other side, and carry out a lot of ideological work and struggle as well, in building up to the time when the *objective conditions*—that is, what's going on in society and the world, crisis, all these things we've talked about—become favorable enough that you can then jump off into the armed struggle in the form of a very telescoped and concentrated armed insurrection. The point of all this here, how this relates to the scenario you described, is that whether or not they can get away with something like you're talking about—just devastating a whole urban area with massive bombing—has a lot to do with the kind of political and ideological work...

*Q.: ...What is the link... you're talking about the ideological work...?*

A.: ...The link is this: In preparing the ground for revolution, not only do you have to do political work and have organized ties and *build the party* wisely and well, and very broadly and deeply among the basic masses of the proletariat; you have to do the same thing, to the greatest degree possible, among other strata of society, among the middle class, where other people are standing up and fighting against the system. And this will have very important bearing on the outcome of the military struggle when you do enter that stage. This is a point that is stressed in "Could We."

One of the things about this recent war—I do not believe their

polls! Their polls are ridiculous. I don't believe their claims of overwhelming, basically unanimous, support for the war in the U.S. It's obvious there was a lot of opposition to this war. In a lot of ways people opposing it were put on the defensive for a certain period of time, and then the imperialists won the war, which gave them a certain advantage politically, obviously, but it's clear that there was a tremendous outpouring of opposition all over the world and including in the U.S. Things like the outpouring of opposition to that war, along with things like the rebellions of Black people against racist oppression and the battle of women standing up and fighting around the question of abortion and more generally around not being oppressed and abused, and many other things that we've called fault-lines in society: these provide fertile soil in terms of preparing the ground for revolution.

Waging political battles and creating revolutionary public opinion, not only influencing people but recasting the political terms, realigning the forces so that they're more favorable to the proletariat, and building not only *influence* among the middle class but also *organized ties* very broadly and deeply as much as possible there: all this is very important. It is this kind of work that would put you in the best position to deal with the kind of situation you are talking about—when conditions do sharpen up and the armed struggle is underway and you might get the scenario you're talking about, with massive bombing of inner-city areas. Having done political and ideological work—and having those organized ties—you'd be in a much stronger position to be able to move on that in a way that they couldn't simply isolate and attack concentrations of the most basic people and murder them off without the rest of society being thrown into tremendous upheaval and turmoil, and even organized opposition.

*Q.: So you're saying it's a question of political costs? That they wouldn't do that kind of Detroit scenario, or that they would but couldn't get away with it because of political costs?*

A.: No, I'm not saying exactly that—or not just that. Let me quote something I wrote in *An End to the Horror* which I think speaks directly to this:

“The insurrection and civil war to follow must be viewed, strategically, as a whole, and in an overall sense must be guided by a unified doctrine and strategic orientation.

“This is especially important given the concrete conditions and

relations in the U.S., where the social base for proletarian revolution is concentrated so preponderantly in the 'urban cores' and where a key question from the beginning of the armed insurrection will be to 'break out' of an enemy encirclement, containment, and suppression of these 'cores.' In fact, the emergence of a situation in which there is a 'good shot' at doing this in at least a number of urban concentrations is a decisive aspect of the objective conditions needed to launch the armed struggle for power.” (*An End to the Horror*, p. 78; also in *Bullets*, p. 105)

In other words, I'm not simply saying that it's a question of too high a political cost. I'm saying that you have to do your political work, and your ideological work (and I'm going to come back to the ideological work in a second), *in such a way* that when things get to this point then you'd be able to move. And at that point this would include being able to move in a military way to prevent them from just carrying this off, just destroying whole urban areas without suffering serious political losses *and* military losses as a consequence. They would lose the allegiance of broader sections of the people *and* this would be translated into military gains for the revolutionary forces.

The *ideological* element comes in, particularly among our people, among the basic masses, but also generally in society. A very important part of it is the whole question of “Fear nothing, be down for the whole thing.” We have to raise up people ideologically and politically so that we're prepared for what the enemy will bring down. Because part of what would be necessary then would be for the masses to fight even amidst the rubble and to withstand this—to be in such a mood and to have such a level of understanding that they'd fight through this, as horrible as it would be.

When I say that we have to raise up people ideologically and politically so that they are prepared and could stand up to this and fight through it, I mean first and foremost that we have to bring forward an advanced section of our people who have proletarian *class-consciousness*—who have really taken up and taken to heart the stand, viewpoint and method of the revolutionary proletariat, including proletarian internationalism. Lenin made the very important point that until people become class-conscious they can always be played for suckers—they will always be the victims of deception and self-deception in politics, is how he put it. And if we consider the kind of scenario you've raised, where the revolutionary war has begun and the ruling class has responded with massive, murderous

bombardment of urban areas, then you can see very clearly how without proletarian class-consciousness—without a leading section of our people who have the largeness of mind and the self-sacrificing spirit of the revolutionary proletariat—the pull toward narrow interests and concerns, toward looking out just for yourself and maybe a narrow circle of friends, would take hold and have sway. Then you'd be on the way to be defeated and crushed—there's no way that people would hold out and fight through the kinds of extreme devastation we're talking about.

So this shows how crucial it is to wage an active ideological struggle and to boldly bring forward our ideology, Marxism-Leninism-Maoism, and win people to that ideology. People need to be trained to understand the nature of the enemy and who their real friends are (all over the country and all around the world). They have to learn to see through the tricks and intimidation of the enemy, see that their concerns have to go beyond themselves, their own family and neighbors, etc. If this proletarian class outlook has some real influence in society and if there's a core trained solidly in this kind of worldview, this class-conscious largeness of mind and self-sacrificing spirit, all kinds of miracles will be possible. You can see how that would have literally life-and-death implications, especially looking to the time when everything would be on the line. That ideological orientation itself would be what we call a mood-creating factor within the war situation. That itself would have both political and military implications.

In another place in "Could We" I discussed, in concrete terms, the point about breaking out of this encirclement we have been talking about here. I said the kind of political work that had been carried out and the political situation that existed would have not only political meaning but military meaning. It would have a lot to do with whether or not you were able to move through certain areas; whether you'd be given a friendly or hostile response; whether you'd be given support while support was denied to the other side; whether you'd be given intelligence while intelligence was denied to the other side—in other words, whether people would tell you where the enemy is and not tell the enemy where you are, whether people would actually consciously mislead the enemy. This has to do with where people's sympathies lie. And that, in turn, has a lot to do with the question of all the political work and struggle that marks the stage of preparing for revolution. This includes creating public opinion broadly; it includes taking on the enemy in political battle;

and it also includes building up organized ties and building the party, broadly and deeply, both among the basic people and among those other strata.

When you come down to the point where things jump off in the openly military sphere, these things would have direct military meaning in the kinds of ways I've just talked about. And that has to do with whether they could get away with the kind of massive destruction of urban areas that you raised, or whether you'd be able to counter this, not only politically but also militarily.

*Q.: Still on this point, I'd like to raise another scenario, in terms of practical questions involved in breaking out of an encirclement. You've emphasized in other talks and writings the importance of relying primarily on those who don't have a love-hate relationship with this system and way of life, right?*

A.: You mean who just have *hatred* for it.

*Q.: Right, who aren't ambivalent in terms of wanting to hold on to this system, who really don't have allegiance to this way of life and to this system. If that's who we mainly rely on, and if these kinds of forces are primarily concentrated in certain neighborhoods, in the ghettos and barrios of the big cities primarily, then these areas could be quickly isolated and contained by the enemy who would use bombs, incendiary devices, night-time raids, etc., to quickly squash the uprising and keep it from spreading—I'm still talking about those first couple of days or so. Talk about shooting fish in a barrel! Remember what they did to the "MOVE" people in Philadelphia? Not letting them get out, and then using a helicopter to drop an incendiary bomb on the roof! I think that is how they would try to play it, except on a bigger scale, on the scale of whole neighborhoods. I understand the point about...*

A.: ...Yeah, but we won't...

*Q.: ...I understand the point about how if, in those first couple of days or so, you could take the initiative and hold on to it, break out, and get some key victories against the other side's local forces, that you'd actually have more of a material basis, a political basis, to break out of the encirclement and draw some of those reserve forces and allied forces from other strata to your side. But you'd have to be*

able to get those first steps in before you had a basis for doing that. And if they did sort of a "MOVE"-type scenario, but on a bigger scale, how would you get out of that literally geographic isolation for one thing?

A.: Well, the MOVE situation is completely different. Without getting into the question of the politics of MOVE, and so on—let's be clear that this was a vicious murderous attack on MOVE, but it's a completely different kind of situation than what we're talking about.

When you're talking about armed insurrection, first of all the orientation of the revolutionaries would be *offensive*, not defensive: you couldn't sit in a static position and let the other side attack you. This is not a criticism of MOVE: they weren't trying to have an armed insurrection. But in terms of an armed insurrection, this is not what you'd do. As I said, you have to not only do political work, you have to study military theory and develop military doctrine, even in the period before things have directly gone over to military struggle. And your doctrine would have nothing to do with sitting there and letting them come and attack you. Your doctrine would have to do with going on the offensive with various tactics; your doctrine would have to do with, from the beginning, creating a situation where you wouldn't be stuck within the confines that they wanted to keep you rounded up within; and your doctrine would have to do with breaking out of any encirclement and suppression that they would set up: it would have to do with attacking them rather than waiting for them to attack you—that's what would be required once you actually reached the point where the insurrection was on the order of the day.

All these things would be a necessary part of a doctrine of armed insurrection. It's a completely different situation than one in which ...

Q.: ...But how? For instance, in terms of the concentration of the basic masses in ghettos and barrios, does that mean that you would somehow make sure that you were not geographically concentrated like that before the armed insurrection would start?

A.: No, it means that when you go over to warfare, you wage warfare. And part of waging that warfare would be breaking out of any kind of encirclement—to the degree possible before they'd be able to set up such encirclement, but even after they'd set it up. Finding the ways to break out of that. Having the doctrine and the tactics for doing that. Warfare is warfare. Encirclements are only encirclements

as long as you don't break through them.

I mean, what is a *front* in battle? A front means that one force is on one side and the other force is on the other side and that you can't penetrate—I'm on this side and you're on that side and I can't come on your side, and *vice versa*—that's what a front means. But fronts in war are only relative and not absolute. And you can say that fronts are meant to be broken, they're meant to be penetrated. So a front is only a relative thing, you'd change the front by how you'd fight. And if you couldn't go through frontally you'd go on the flanks, if you couldn't go directly, you'd go indirectly. In other words you wouldn't let the situation develop in which they set up an encirclement that you weren't capable of breaking through. Both by seizing the initiative and also by breaking through when they did set up an encirclement—you'd counter this tactic of theirs. And this goes back to what I said earlier about having a doctrine that not only indicates *your* methods and means of fighting but that also reflects an understanding of how the *other side* wants to fight and anticipates their strategy and tactics, at least in basic terms.

Q.: Look, I know they're not all-powerful, but I'm having trouble picturing *this*. Because I don't think it's like the situation in Iraq where it took them a long time to build up all these tank battalions, move all this heavy hardware and so on. It took months to build that all up. But inside the U.S. they'd be using more like urban counter-insurgency tactics that could be put into effect very, very rapidly.

It seems like the time factor is a big factor in terms of being able to break out of the encirclement. Why couldn't they basically fly over key neighborhoods, drop incendiary bombs on rooftops, do "mass murder from a safe distance" in that way? It would be very difficult to engage them, they might not even use low-flying helicopters that can be shot down, they might use airplanes higher up. It seems that this could be done by them in a matter of hours!

A.: Perhaps it could, theoretically, be done in a matter of hours. But first of all, experience doesn't indicate—even up against more spontaneous rebellions—that these things get done that quickly. For one thing, there are political decisions on their part. I don't care how ruthless and bloody they are, there are still tactical questions, political questions that have tactical implications. It takes time for them to make political decisions. They can't just do these things without serious political considerations. That's one thing.

Another thing is, logistically, they'd have to be in a position to be able to resupply, to be able to set up landing areas, and so on. They could do much of this quickly, but not necessarily in a matter of a few hours. Certainly they can move this way relatively quickly and it's quite possible that they *would* move very rapidly. But that wouldn't settle the matter. Again, there would be several things that would come together. The *political* work you'd done in preparation. The *ideological* work, so people were prepared for this, so people, instead of saying I'm willing to risk death so I can "live large" for a little while before I go to jail or am killed, are ready to live their lives and risk death for much greater things. Now you have a situation where a lot of the youth are willing to kill each other off just for a few moments of glory, or a few moments of living large or riding high. Our political and ideological work has to *change that*, has to move people in a different direction where they're prepared to fight and die for much greater things and to stand up to what the imperialists would bring down against a revolutionary rising.

But there's also the directly *military* sphere. Anybody fighting in this type of situation on the revolutionary side would have to have doctrine and tactics to deal with this, to break out of this, so you weren't just sitting there. Yes, of course, they'd bring down tremendous destruction! But that's not the only thing that would be happening. There's the question of what the revolutionary side would be doing, how it'd be moving. For example, I raised before the example of Stalingrad and places like that. That was a different situation, and perhaps later we can talk more about how it was different and what can and can't be learned. But one thing that can be learned is that people fought from the rubble there. If the enemy bombs places and burns them, he creates rubble. That's what happened in Stalingrad when the Germans bombed and burned that city: people fought from rubble! But, besides fighting from rubble and resisting in a defensive mode, more important, especially in the opening phases of an insurrection, would be to move in an *offensive* mode. To actually move through gaps in their lines, around their lines, attack targets...you know, they are not God! First of all there is no God, and second of all, they're not it!

So they couldn't defend everything equally at all times. They'd have to make decisions and have priorities too. You'd have to anticipate what those would be and you'd have to be able to react if it turned out mainly the way you expected but some minor parts were different, *or* if they did a whole different kind of thing than what you

expected. You'd have to have a flexible enough doctrine and a flexible enough force to be able to respond. I'm not saying that it would be easy, but it could be done! You couldn't just sit around and let them attack you without you attacking them. They couldn't both attack and guard everything equally—with equal force.

The whole point of insurrection is that no matter how much foreknowledge the powers-that-be might have in a general sense that it's coming, it's still very likely that it's going to surprise them! The Germans were surprised when they were attacked and they were surprised by how they were attacked by the Jewish resistance fighters in the Warsaw Ghetto, even though they knew something was coming! They don't really expect this from the oppressed, they certainly don't expect it to be organized, and they don't have any expectation of the kind of commitment, the kind of daring, the kind of courage...

*Q.: ...and they always underestimate the masses.*

*A.:* They always underestimate the masses, and that is a law: they will underestimate the masses. No matter how much they anticipate an uprising of some kind, they will not understand the well of deep hatred and also the tremendous and lofty spirit that is potentially there among the masses. And that is exactly what could and would be brought out through the political and ideological work of revolutionaries and then the direct military organization of revolutionary masses when that was the order of the day.

And this could translate, in military terms, into surprise and initiative, if you had the right doctrine and tactics. So yes, they would do these things—make these massive assaults—if not in the first few hours, certainly before very long, and you'd have to be prepared to deal with it.

*Q.: So it wouldn't look like just riots in the ghetto when it started off. There'd be a sort of breaking-out-of-the-ghetto aspect to the offensive right from the start, right?*

*A.:* Riots or rebellions are very good. They are the oppressed rising up to fight back, going up in the face of their oppressors. This is very important even if it is spontaneous and not led and organized by a revolutionary vanguard. Such rebellions are part of the necessary preparation for what we're talking about. But that's exactly what they are—part of the period of preparation—they are part of that par-

ticularly in the sense that they represent the heightening of the masses' willingness and readiness to really take on the enemy. Yet what we're talking about is completely different—it's on a whole other level—insurrection and civil war. And this is one important reason why you'd need a vanguard party to lead it. Because it would have to be organized, it would have to be led in an organized, disciplined, systematic way. It would have to follow a plan—different parts of the revolutionary forces would have to all fit together in terms of the general plan while also having initiative and flexibility in what they'd do. It would have to be following doctrine and tactics actually geared to waging warfare.

That's what you're doing when you wage an armed insurrection—you're fighting a war. You're not having a spontaneous rebellion. As I said, spontaneous rebellions are great, they're definitely part of developing the fighting spirit of the masses, breaking down the awe the masses have of the other side, bringing the hatred the masses have for this system into concrete expression, giving life to the desire of the masses for a better way, and so on and so forth. But what we're talking about here is warfare, and warfare has to be waged like warfare, it has to be led like warfare. Otherwise you're not talking about revolutionary warfare. You're not talking about armed insurrection and civil war. And that's what is being talked about.

*Q.: It seems like a lot of attention has to be paid to that point about "when Jupiter aligns itself with Mars," that is, to the degree possible, it's better to launch the armed insurrection at the point when many middle forces in society are leaning away from the rulers. You'd even want that to include some sections of society that have traditionally been very backward, tending strongly to support the ruling class. Yet, looking at the recent war against Iraq, it was clear that once the war began, despite the fact that there was unprecedented mass outrage and opposition to the war at the outset, the imperialists were able to maneuver broad sections of the masses into "friendly neutrality" on the side of the rulers. Or at least they were able to make it appear that way, what with the patriotic hoopla, yellow ribbons, flag-waving and so on. It seems that the force of tradition and stability really count for a lot in U.S. society.*

*To continue on this: regardless of how "just" our cause is, the armed insurrection would be very bloody, and the normal social fabric would be severely disrupted. And in a country like the U.S., it*

*seems like a lot of people would say: "I hate the way things were, but this is WORSE!" The media will portray the masses as "hostages of the revolutionary fanatics" or maybe as "caught between the terror of both sides." There will be a pull toward wanting to cling desperately to the side most likely to win and to restore order. And, at first, that's bound to appear to be the side of those who are already in power. How would you overcome that in the initial stages of the armed insurrection?*

A.: Well, again, there are two things. One, this does have to do with the kind of political and ideological work you've done, building up. Let's get right down on the ground: you're getting bombed, you're getting burned out—who do the masses *blame*? That has a lot to do with whose side they see justice on. That's one thing. That has to do with all the political work you do, all the political struggle and ideological struggle during the period of political preparation as we've generally defined it.

But, at the same time, people's attitude also has to do with who they think is going to win. Everybody is affected by that question, their morale is affected to one degree or another. The most dedicated, hard-core, conscious revolutionary forces are going to have the stand of holding out no matter what. But you'd have to win broader masses, among the basic people, and also among the broader middle class forces: who are they going to blame if revolutionaries are moving through their neighborhoods and those neighborhoods are bombed? This has to do with the general situation in the society and the world, and with the kind of political work and ideological work you've done. That's point one.

Point two comes back to the other thing I've been stressing: it comes back to your military doctrine and tactics and how you'd deal with this—whether you were able to seize back the initiative. When they attack you, can you seize back the initiative? This question gets posed in political struggle, but it also gets posed in a concentrated way in military struggle.

I'm not familiar from where I'm sitting with all the ins and outs of what happened in the U.S. in the political struggle around the war. But a general pattern that can be discerned is that in the beginning the forces in opposition to the war had a great deal of initiative—so much so that Bush and the rest had to comment on it directly and were obviously very angry and upset about it. Then they counter-attacked politically: they called forth their forces, they suppressed

information and news about people opposing the war, they made it seem like everybody was going along, and so on and so forth. And this kind of sent the forces opposing the war reeling back a little bit. Especially some of the less experienced and less firm ones. From what I have learned, many got caught up in all this "support the troops" stuff and weren't clear about that. And before all this could get sorted through and the forces most solidly in opposition to the war could regain the initiative and counterattack politically against this offensive coming from the ruling class, the U.S. was able to break through and win the war.

Now, this kind of thing is bad enough when it happens in political struggles, but it has far greater consequences when it happens in the directly military sphere—it can't be allowed to happen!—you cannot let the other side seize and maintain the initiative. In other words, the revolutionaries would seize the initiative at the very start. I don't care how much the ruling class knew it was coming, there's a good chance—and history argues—that the revolutionary forces could seize the initiative in the beginning. Then the other side would counterattack and regain at least a good measure of initiative. Lenin, in talking about insurrection, quoted a statement from Marx that says that an insurrectionary struggle develops in this way: the revolutionary attack leads to counterrevolutionary counterattack, in turn compelling higher forms of revolutionary attack. That's the way it would have to go. That's a law, if you want to put it that way, of how it's going to go. That's the nature of the thing.

So, you'd be able to get some surprise and initiative, catch them off-balance in various ways, attack in places they weren't expecting, in ways they weren't expecting, with tactics they weren't expecting, and so on and so forth. Then they'd begin to get a sense of that and they'd bring to bear a superior force to begin to regain the initiative, begin to bring down tremendous destruction. You'd have to be able to meet that, on a higher level. And your doctrine—your principles for fighting—would have to *anticipate* that this is going to happen, and anticipate in general terms (not in every detail, that's impossible, but anticipate in general terms at least) *how* it's going to happen, so that you could prepare and plan in advance to meet this counter-attack by them.

All these things have to do with keeping the initiative. The initiative is tremendously important. Mao said it is *decisive* in warfare. The initiative means the ability to do what you want and to impose your will on the other side and deprive them of the ability to do what

they want. It's not so much just a question of who appears to be more powerful at any given time, it's also very much a question of who has the initiative. To take the example of the recent war, the Iraqi forces, pretty much from the beginning of the war, lost the initiative, and they never gained the initiative. They did try some things. How much they tried, and how much they were prepared to really carry through on the initiatives they began, still, as I said, needs to be summed up more. But they were never able to deal with this dialectic that I'm talking about where one side seizes the initiative, the other side counterattacks, reseizes the initiative, and you have to meet it and go back on a higher level.

So the initiative is extremely important. It's important in two ways. It's very important in directly military terms—whether you have freedom of movement and whether you can do what you want to do and impose your will relatively speaking (not in absolute terms but relatively speaking) and deny that to the other side. And it also has very important implications politically, which in turn have direct bearing on the military situation. In other words, if you've got initiative—if you're able to move in ways that you want to move, to strike the enemy where they're not expecting it and inflict blows on them and deny them initiative, then you've created a good situation. Even if the other side still appears very powerful and is still capable of inflicting tremendous damage, destruction, and suffering and is even doing that, still, if you have initiative, you can sway masses, you can firm up the people who are already inclined to support you, you can influence wavering forces toward your side. If you *lose* the initiative and can't get it back, then you're on your way to being done in, and you're going to lose the masses. Even many among your firmer supporters are going to waver.

*Q.: Jumping ahead, at the point where the revolutionary forces had basically accomplished the goals of the armed insurrection in a number of large cities, where they had actual base areas of revolution which they controlled and had already initiated some forms of the dictatorship of the proletariat, of people's power: at this point, it seems like things would be pretty much getting into the transition to all-out civil war. Now, if the imperialist forces had been basically driven out of the cities, it seems that much of their social base and administrative and military structure would most likely be concentrated in the suburbs and countryside, some cities in certain geographical parts of the country, and possibly in parts of other*

nearby countries.

*It seems that in general terms the goals of the revolutionaries would be to extend their political influence more broadly in society, including winning over as many people as possible in the suburbs and farmlands to join the struggle, to establish the embryonic new society and to establish political and military control, linking up the separated liberated base areas together through regional and countrywide consolidation. This would have to go on even while being engaged in fierce battles to defend what has already been liberated and to destroy the military power and political and geographic positions of power of the enemy.*

*The point here is that you'd better not just keep your armies in the cities, in a defensive posture, after you'd driven the enemy forces out to a certain extent. With the Iraqi army we've seen what that "bunkering down"—even in a very strong passive defensive position—can lead to. So you'd have to go out and at some point secure broader areas and engage the enemy in mobile warfare. Here it seems that, when you're out in the open, they'd have better opportunities to cut you up from the air. You'd have real problems in maintaining supply lines to your rear, maintaining communications between your center and the various parts of the revolutionary army on a nationwide basis, things like that.*

*I think their strategy would be to cut the various revolutionary armies off from each other and from their supply bases, and then to wipe them out, mainly by destroying them from the air but also by ground combat supported by air power. The question is, what would be the way to deprive them of that, and to fight "our way" under those circumstances?*

A.: Right from the beginning, even in the phase of armed insurrection at the very start, one of the goals would be seizing, and learning how to use, equipment, while at the same time beginning to make your own equipment. That was my point earlier about tanks. Tanks are armored vehicles. So long as masses of people were with you, under those circumstances, you could make vehicles and you could make armor: you could make armored vehicles. To what degree specific things like tanks would be desirable and usable is a question that would have to be determined concretely. Also, it would be necessary in that situation to come up with ways and means of countering and at least blunting the effect of helicopters and other aircraft that they would use to attack. And especially as things moved into this phase

you're talking about now—the civil war stage—it would be necessary to do a number of things to deal with what would be thrown at you by the other side.

One of these things at that time would be developing ways of countering at least to some degree some of the higher-flying aircraft—including, to the degree possible, forcing them out of the patterns in which they want to attack—while also understanding that the revolutionary forces would have to *withstand* a lot of this kind of attack as part of the picture. That would be part of the equation for some time. Again, the political and ideological questions interact very powerfully with the military questions.

Thinking further about this civil war stage, we can learn from a general point Mao made. He said this in terms of revolutionary China vs. the imperialist powers: they have their forces among us and we have our forces among them. He explained that the imperialists had counterrevolutionaries within China even while it was a revolutionary country; and, at the same time, in these imperialist countries, he said, we have revolutionary or potentially revolutionary forces among them—the workers and other strata whose interests are opposed to the system.

This kind of thing would exist in a situation of civil war within (what has been) an imperialist country. At a certain point if the armed insurrection is successful things would look a little like a checkerboard, even within particular cities. There'd probably be a crazy checkerboard of areas held here and there by each side. But then, things would get "sorted out" through the continuing warfare, first in cities where the armed insurrection, if it were successful, would overwhelmingly clear out the counterrevolutionary forces, and as that happened there'd be some linking up between the revolutionary forces in different cities and in the areas between them—at least there would be areas where they could travel and link up, areas they'd control, where they could move supplies and so on.

So the revolutionary regime, or the different parts of it, would be linked up to some degree. Things would "congeal" into fronts and into opposing forces—opposing regimes and opposing armed forces. And then that would be a different situation. The quote I read earlier (from *An End to the Horror*) says you have to have an "overall strategy for the whole revolutionary war" in a country like the U.S., an overall strategy that takes into account both the initial insurrectionary stage and then the civil war stage. Still, each stage is distinct, with its own features, even while they would have to be approached

with one overall strategy. And when you got to the civil war stage and you had these two opposing regimes, then the point Mao made would apply and would have important implications: They would be among us, and we would be among them—they would have counterrevolutionary forces within the areas controlled by the revolutionary regime, and *vice versa*.

*Q.: Before going further into this whole question—and in order to get a clearer sense of it—maybe it would be good to back up a little and speak to what are the objectives of the armed insurrection and what would define the transition to the civil war stage.*

A.: What generally would define the transition is what I just spoke to—that basically you would have established liberated areas, linked them up, and formed, at least in a beginning but functioning way, a revolutionary regime that actually exercised power and authority over a certain area. There might still be scattered fighting within the revolutionary area (or areas). Undoubtedly there would be scattered fighting against at least remnants of the counterrevolutionary forces, of both the actual army of the other side and of “civilian” counterrevolutionaries who’d get together to oppose you. But nevertheless you would exercise authority and power within a certain area (or areas). On the other hand, it’s unlikely that you’d conquer the territory of the whole country all in one stroke. That would be great, but it’s unlikely.

Much more likely, and almost certain in fact, is that even if the insurrection were successful, you’d complete a certain stage where insurrections in various cities basically would have driven out the opposing forces (at least to the degree that the revolutionaries exercised basic power and authority) and where some of these liberated cities had been linked up. Still, as you just suggested, you probably wouldn’t have it all in one continuous area. It could well be that you’d have areas that are linked up but at the same time they’re separated from other revolutionary areas by enemy-controlled territory. So over the country as a whole you’d have a larger kind of checkerboard, where there’d be revolutionary areas, governed by a revolutionary regime, but they’d be isolated from each other and in between the old regime or counterrevolutionary forces of one kind or another would still be exercising military control.

There would be a civil war between these two opposing forces, these two *powers*: one representing the old regime, the old rule, the

oppression of the people; and the other representing the new, the revolutionary, the liberation of the people. Then you’d be into warfare which, even though it would have unconventional features, particularly on the revolutionary side, would more resemble “classical” warfare between two armed forces and two regimes. Once you got that situation, where you’d cleared certain cities and established revolutionary authority and military control and linked them up to the degree possible, and the other side had the areas it controlled, *then* you’d be into the civil war stage. That’s what would define the leap from the insurrectionary stage to the civil war stage.

Another key aspect that would define it, in military terms, is that the revolutionary forces had defeated the first attempts of the other side to crush the initial uprising. In other words, I still don’t believe that in the first few days of the insurrection the imperialists would be able to bring to bear “all that”—their massive military force on anything approximating the level of what they were able to bring to bear against Iraq in that war after a long buildup. But as the insurrection went on, and probably even within a few days, they would bring to bear a significant military force from the air as well as on the ground, including helicopters undoubtedly and very likely other aircraft, as well as tanks and other armored vehicles. The insurrectionary stage would only be successful and would only give way to the civil war stage if, and as, the revolutionary forces defeated these initial attempts at crushing the uprising in that way.

*Q.: If I could interject here on the question of being able, in the transition, to establish in a beginning way “red political power” in these liberated zones, I was trying to think about the differences in terms of what that would look like in a country like the U.S. vs. in Third World countries. In Third World countries you have protracted people’s war based in the countryside and involving the establishment of liberated base areas in parts of the country where red political power is actually exercised in a beginning way prior to the countrywide seizure of power. In those areas the red power immediately changes the daily conditions of life of the people, often in dramatic ways: first steps are taken to do such things as redistribute land; institute some education and health care for the masses; forcibly remove tyrannical landlords, politicians, and police from the scene; decisively put a stop to some of the predatory behavior to be found among the people themselves which victimizes especially the most poor and powerless; revitalize agriculture to better meet the*

*needs of the people; etc., etc.*

*There are many such things that are immediately begun. And this is very important because, right away, there's a big material basis to strengthen and develop the allegiance of the popular masses and their involvement in the armed red power, the revolutionary regime and armed forces. Of course it gets complicated there too because sometimes liberated areas get retaken by the enemy and severe repression can then befall those who took part in or supported the revolution. But still, liberated base areas in Third World countries give people an immediate and dramatic sense of what kind of future society the reds are trying to bring into being on a more national scale.*

*But in a country like the U.S., the initial advantages of being the first on your block, or the first area in your city or whatever, to welcome, support and fight along with the revolutionary forces—to try to establish that red political power—these advantages might not be so apparent.*

A.: First of all, some sense of this, only in a beginning way and mainly in terms of potential, will be gotten by the masses through the period of political preparation—political work and struggle, ideological struggle, and organizational work—that goes on even before you get into the military struggle. People will *begin* to get a sense of the kind of changes that will come into being, just as when people rise up in any kind of struggle they begin to get an embryonic sense of that. But of course, until the old order is overthrown, sooner or later a particular struggle ebbs or is defeated and the ruling class is still in power and the relations don't change in a basic way, so things more or less go back to "business as usual." But still, people can get a beginning sense. And then, once the revolutionaries broke through in the initial insurrection, some of the things you're talking about would begin to take place.

You would be building on the work and struggle that has gone on in the period of political preparation, but it would represent a great new leap when the insurrection jumped off. In those areas where the revolutionary forces seized power and unleashed the revolutionary energy of the masses, giving this conscious expression and leadership, relations among people would change dramatically, radically, right away. For instance, the old police forces would no longer have power and authority. People would not be brutalized by the police. Women would not be afraid to walk down the streets, day

or night. I'm not saying there would no longer be any instances of such things as rape, because things can't be completely changed that rapidly, but the whole situation, even in those terms, will change radically. Women would be rising up in arms, everybody would be oriented in a different way, the whole situation would be radically different. Even among the middle classes. Debts would be canceled by the revolutionary regime, debts to the old authority and institutions would be immediately abolished as a general rule.

All kinds of things would change, people would get a living sense of that, even though, as compared with what you describe about protracted people's war in Third World countries, it would be much more telescoped and opposing forces would be fighting at much more close quarters, so you wouldn't be able to exercise power and authority over a protracted period without having to continue to fight even to some degree within those liberated areas. So here again things would be different than where the revolutionaries wage a people's war as you discussed it, a protracted people's war in a Third World country. But there will be elements...

*Q.: ...So these changes would be taking place even as people were fighting not to get confined to the cities but get out there ...*

A.: ...From the first day of the insurrection these changes would begin to be made—radical changes would begin to be made right away. They would be made much more fully once the cities got cleared of the counterrevolutionaries, at least to the point where throughout many of the urban areas (and territory between these urban areas) the revolutionaries began to exercise military control and political authority. Then you'd begin to make broader changes, even if those were still really only beginning transformations.

As you carried forward with the civil war you'd make still greater changes. And of course upon victory even more fully developed changes would be made, and so on. But from the beginning, and on a certain level, dramatic changes would be made in people's lives—changes in the way people relate, in who is exercising authority, how, and for what. The masses would be unleashed to exercise authority in various ways. They would be led, they would be organized politically, but *they* would exercise authority. From the very beginning of the insurrection this would begin to be brought into being. It certainly would be developed further as the revolutionary forces fought through the insurrectionary stage and actually estab-

lished a regime (or regimes) and then moved into the civil war stage.

So turning to the civil war stage, I started to speak to this point that they are among us and we are among them, as Mao put it. This has political expression, but it also has military expression. The reactionaries would be among the revolutionary forces, at least in the sense that they would be over the people's heads dropping bombs. They would be "among" the revolutionaries in that sense. It wouldn't be possible to prevent that, certainly not to prevent it altogether at that point and for some time. It would be necessary to find ways to counter it and, as I said, to try at that time to disrupt the patterns of how they'd do it, to make it more difficult for them and so on. But you wouldn't be able to stop it altogether. That's going to be a major factor—they are going to be among you in the military sense, at least in the sense of dropping bombs down on the revolutionary people.

I think the revolutionaries would have to be among them in the military sense too. That is, I don't believe it would be correct to simply fight from a defensive posture, and certainly not a passive defensive posture.

It might be the case that at least for phases of the civil war the revolutionary forces and the revolutionary regime would have to fight from a strategic defensive posture. In other words, a situation where the other side is attacking and you're defending is what would essentially characterize what's happening for a certain period during the civil war. It is possible that would happen. But even then you would have to have tactical counteroffensives, even within that phase when you were strategically on the defensive. You would have to find ways to go into their midst and attack them—especially in places and in ways they were not expecting. You would have to be "among them" militarily. You would do this partly by stirring up rebellions and uprisings within their rear areas, because don't forget there would be basic masses and other revolutionary-minded people also in the areas they control.

But that would not be enough. As Mao said—and I'm going to apply it to the kind of situation we're talking about now—where the broom doesn't reach the dust doesn't vanish of itself. One important lesson in this regard is that sympathy for the revolutionary cause is not enough to enable the masses to be able to rise up and overthrow the old authority. In other words, sympathy for the revolutionary regime would not, by itself, directly translate into the masses successfully rising up and overthrowing the reactionary regime within its rear areas. That would take organization, it would take planning, it

would take doctrine, and it would have to be coordinated with actual military attacks by the armed forces of the revolutionary regime from the outside in various ways. So that would have to be a part of what the revolutionary forces were doing even during a time when they were fighting from the strategic defensive, if that proved to be a necessary phase. In that phase the role of armed insurrections would be different than in the beginning stage of the revolutionary war. And in an overall sense, during the course of the civil war stage, uprisings in the enemy's rear would mainly hinge on successes at the front by the armed forces of the new revolutionary regime.

The other thing is, even if, during this civil war stage, you did have to fight for a time from the strategic defensive, it would have to be *active*, not passive defense. This means you couldn't be static, you couldn't just sit in one place or sit in certain isolated places and wait to be attacked. And it means there'd have to be tactical counter-offensives and tactical counterattacks coming from your side as part of your overall strategic defensive.

And in general during the civil war stage there would have to be movement and a great deal of mobile warfare, and that would be difficult. Because one thing that has been shown is that these imperialists have highly developed mechanized means of mobility, both air and ground mobility. And to be able to counter that and be able to move in ways you'd want to move and deny them the ability to just have complete freedom of movement—that would be difficult. But that would be a part of what the revolutionary forces would have to do.

*Q.: What's the basis to have the ability to deprive them of that and to develop your own mobility?*

*A.:* Well, I've spoken to some of that, and we can get into it further, but I'm not sitting here pretending that I have all the answers to all of these questions. These are questions that have to be studied, these are problems that doctrine has to be developed on. Things that certainly should be studied are experiences like the revolutionary war of the People's Liberation Army, led by the the Chinese Communist Party, against Chiang Kai-shek after World War 2. This war, which led to the complete liberation of China, was a war in which you did have two regimes and a civil war between them, and the war went through various phases. In the first phase Chiang Kai-shek's forces (backed and armed by U.S. imperialism) were on the strategic

offensive. They were defeated in this strategic offensive and the People's Liberation Army went over to the strategic offensive itself, thoroughly defeating the counterrevolutionary forces of Chiang Kai-shek and winning nationwide victory.

So this is one of the experiences that definitely should be studied. There is a lot more study and summation that needs to go on of historical examples, both on the revolutionary side and on the side of the imperialists, including recent experience such as the war between Iraq and the U.S. (and its imperialist "coalition").

I am stressing the need for such study because it would be wrong to sit here and act as if all the answers are known concerning the questions we're discussing. On the other hand, some things can be said about this and we can get into some particulars.

*Q.: Can we back up a little on this question of strategic offensive and strategic defensive? I'm trying to understand this more completely in terms of how it's different from a Third World country. At one point, in speaking of a situation where the revolutionary forces in China were on the strategic defensive, Mao talked about how this was a situation where they were "one against ten" (in terms of the ratio of their forces vs. the enemy's forces), but within that they waged tactical offensives and battles where they had the overwhelming numerical advantage ("ten against one") in fighting a part of the enemy forces. Earlier you said there might be aspects of the strategic defensive in a civil war in a country like the U.S. Could you speak to that a bit more? To what extent would it be similar to or different from the approach in a protracted people's war in a Third World country like China?*

A.: Well, as you noted, "one against ten" means you're greatly outnumbered in terms of total forces. That's what Mao was talking about when he used the formulation, "strategy: one against ten." But you move in such a way as to fight battles where you have the overwhelming advantage in numbers (as well as surprise and so on), which is expressed by the other half of the formulation, "tactics: ten against one."

Now, exactly how the situation would fall out, once this kind of warfare we are talking about in an imperialist country developed to the civil war stage—what the strategic balance would be—I don't think anybody could say in advance. In other words, it might and it might not be the case that you'd be outnumbered ten to one. It would

depend on how well you did in the insurrectionary stage and how well the other side did, and how things kind of fell out through that.

But in some very basic ways things would be different than the kind of warfare that Mao is talking about in China. He's talking about protracted people's warfare where they start out with small forces and relatively quickly they are able to establish base areas, but these are relatively isolated, even from each other, almost like islands in a sea of enemy-held territory, in the beginning; whereas the ruling regime of Chiang Kai-shek in the early stages of the Chinese revolution controlled most of the country—it not only had overwhelming technological superiority but it had overwhelming control of most of the country, had much larger numbers of troops, and so on. When Chiang Kai-shek's troops attacked the base areas, the revolutionary forces would evade the initial attacks and would move and encircle in ways to be able to attack a flank or a part of the enemy forces, isolate that part, overwhelm it with superior numbers and defeat it. They'd seek to annihilate it—in other words, either kill the enemy troops or completely put them out of action, if not permanently then for a considerable period of time.

So there are some radical differences, qualitative differences, between that kind of war situation and the kind of civil war between two regimes that would come about as part of revolutionary war in imperialist countries. In this kind of civil war the fighting would not be the same kind of protracted guerrilla warfare but in its main character would be more like conventional warfare between armies of two regimes. It would certainly involve forms of guerrilla warfare, especially on the revolutionary side. There would be a role for guerrilla operations in areas where the enemy held sway but wasn't able to exercise firm control (weakly held enemy areas), in contested areas, and even to some degree in areas under firmer enemy control. And besides a role for various forms of guerrilla warfare, there definitely would be forms of mobile warfare that would have to be engaged in by both sides, including by the revolutionary side.

*Q.: When you say there would be mainly conventional warfare, what do you mean by that?*

A.: What I mean is this: There would be some more traditional forms of warfare, including some positional warfare, where each side is basically established in and fights from definite positions and there are more fixed battle lines. At the same time, much of the fighting

would probably not be positional but would be mobile warfare—warfare where one or both sides engage in extensive movement and even fight while on the move. And it's likely that this would not be mainly mobile guerrilla warfare, waged by irregular armed forces mainly fighting in smaller units, but would be mainly mobile warfare waged by regular armed forces, most often fighting in larger formations.

This would be one of the distinguishing features of the fighting style of the revolutionary forces in such a civil war (and even in the insurrectionary stage): to fight on the move. Because one of the things the revolutionary forces would have to master is the dialectic—in other words, the back-and-forth—between concentration and dispersal. Being able to concentrate to fight and then disperse to move: that would be one of the things that would be necessary to master, even in the insurrectionary phase, but very definitely in the civil war phase as well.

Again, this would probably not mainly be guerrilla warfare—smaller units using the tactics of hit and run and then melting back into the population or moving away and evading battle. Rather, in the main it would probably involve larger units—at least concentrating larger units for battle, then perhaps dispersing to move, and then once again reconcentrating larger units for battle. And so on. It's likely the fighting would involve many battles pitting larger units on both sides against each other—that would characterize the warfare in this stage, not only on the counterrevolutionary side but on the revolutionary side as well.

*Q.: What, or where, would the revolutionary forces disperse to when they disperse?*

A.: Well, you would disperse to move for one thing—either to move to an area to wage a battle or to move back to a secure area to regroup, and so on. You'd assemble a larger force over a larger area to fight a battle in that area, then if you were going to move to another area to fight (or to regroup) you would disperse some of your ranks—break them up into smaller units—to move, in order not to be as vulnerable to attack, especially from the air. That would be one thing you would have to do. Also you would have to be good at fighting on the move. Imperialist armies do this in their own way, but the revolutionary forces would have to learn to master this in “our way.” For example, to fight while moving, or to move to an area and fight immediately without taking time to set up a whole logistical

base and everything. This would be one of the advantages the revolutionary forces would have. Again, crucial to this is enjoying the support of the people in the areas you are moving through.

*Q.: So if you're holding some cities and you don't want to be sitting ducks, you might move out to areas of the suburbs and countryside where the other side has set up its forces and is massing to attack you—you might move out there and attack them first? Or would you draw them into your strongholds in the cities and then attack them there?*

A.: There might be some application of both of these kinds of tactics. First of all, the revolutionaries would have their most solid strongholds in the cities, but it might be necessary, for a certain period during the civil war stage, to give up a city, or temporarily move your forces out of a particular city, while leaving behind underground forces and leadership to organize resistance against the enemy's occupation forces. This is one of the reasons it is important to study the experience of the civil war in China between 1946 and 1949, which I referred to earlier. In that war the communist forces did give up territory, they even gave up their headquarters in Yen-an for a certain period of time. And while a civil war in an imperialist country would be different in some important ways than that war in China, there are definitely things to learn from that experience and it might be that you would have to give up certain areas or certain cities rather than fighting to the last person to defend certain cities.

On other occasions you might fight “to the last person”—that is, refuse to give up an area and fight stubbornly to beat back an attack on it. You might do that not only to defend that place (for example, a certain city) but to absorb a major attack in order to tie down large numbers of enemy forces, thereby making it possible for you to attack in other places and win decisive victories, perhaps changing the course of the war as a whole.

Here again is where the experience of Stalingrad would have to be studied to see what application there would be. In that situation the Soviet forces fought a bitter, prolonged battle with their backs to the Volga River, absorbing the brunt of a massive German attack and tying down large numbers of German forces, who had air superiority and overall superiority in weapons and technology. Then, once these German forces had been fought to a standstill and denied their objective of conquering the whole city of Stalingrad, the Soviet forces

unleashed a massive counterattack, utilizing large numbers of forces they had held in reserve, to encircle and annihilate hundreds of thousands of German forces and their equipment. This battle was a turning point in the overall war against Germany. As a result of this battle, the Soviets seized the initiative and soon launched a strategic counteroffensive across the whole Eastern front of the war with Germany. This counteroffensive not only drove the Germans out of Soviet territory and back into Germany, it played the major part in defeating Germany altogether.

This and similar experiences would have to be studied to see what application there might be in the context of waging a revolutionary war, particularly in its civil war stage, in an imperialist country. You would have to concretely analyze what your situation was. There would be cases where you would be controlling cities and outlying areas around cities and also controlling areas of movement between cities but you would also be moving some of your forces out from these areas you controlled. You wouldn't simply be sitting in the cities waiting for the enemy to come and attack you. There would be some battles that would take form like that, very probably, but I don't think the situation would be such that it would be likely that you would want to fight only in that kind of way, only from that kind of defensive position within the cities you controlled.

So while there might be lessons from Stalingrad, I don't think the Stalingrad model is the way you'd want to fight the whole war, even after you'd entered the civil war stage.

There would almost certainly be situations where you would be moving out to attack the other side. You'd be moving through areas to cut off the army of the other side from where they wanted to go, or to cut their supply lines; or to isolate them and maybe come back later and attack them from the rear as well as making some attacks on their flanks or even, in certain cases, from the front. Various movements and engagements like that, which you have to do in order to fight—that's what you have when you have warfare between two armies, two regimes...

*Q.: ...But let's get back to this question of how you would deal with this thing of being cut off by air power once you are in the open. Because you'd have to get in the open. It makes me think of that seven miles of highway out of Kuwait, where the U.S. had all of these people (Iraqi soldiers in flight, mostly) out on the road and basically sealed it off and pounded it from the air.*

A.: Well, that was an army that was in retreat at that time and to a significant degree was in disarray. This was partly because of the pounding it had taken and partly because of the whole way in which the Iraqi regime was maneuvering and seeking some accommodation with the imperialists. Again, this needs to be studied more but it is clear that this is what they were doing at the end. They were in retreat and they were also seeking accommodation, so this was more like *flight*. At least from the initial appearances this was not even an organized retreat of an army fighting its way out.

You wouldn't want to be put in that kind of situation. There would be times when you'd have to retreat. But then you'd want an orderly retreat or evacuation of your forces from an area. You wouldn't want to be in flight and be routed and wiped out like that.

How to deal with the air power of the enemy? I spoke to this in a beginning way at the start, but to go into it more: there seem to be two general ways air power could be dealt with. One is by the extensive use of tunnels and things like that. In the areas that you were holding onto, particularly in the cities, there'd be a lot of tunneling, a lot of operation out of tunnels. The Chinese did this extensively in Korea, for example. Mao talks about how they literally carried on their business while the enemy was moving right overhead at certain times. And of course the Vietnamese made very extensive and successful use of tunnels in fighting against the U.S. imperialists. So there would be some application of the lessons from experiences like that—again, you'd have to apply this concretely.

And there also would be the question of mastering dispersal and concentration, particularly dispersal of movement and concentration to fight. But even in concentration to fight, there is a question of relative dispersal within that. In other words, you wouldn't have to just line up so that you're the most easy target: you could still deploy your forces in a way that they'd be relatively dispersed over a battlefield while they'd be concentrated in the sense of being coordinated to fight one overall battle over one large area. These are some of the things that would have to be applied.

You would have vehicles, you couldn't move only on foot. You'd have vehicles, and you'd have to figure out ways to move that would make you as little vulnerable as possible. You wouldn't be able to completely avoid being hit from the air, but you'd have to be as little vulnerable as possible. For example, one thing about B52s is that they seem to be very good against mass concentrations but not as good against small groupings of soldiers or vehicles that are moving

but are not massed. Also, you wouldn't have to only move on roads. Vehicles could be seized or innovated at the time that could move through different types of terrain. But you'd have to do some movement on the roads. Again, there is the example of Korea, when the Chinese fought there (together with the revolutionary Korean forces) against the U.S. (and another of its imperialist "coalitions" under UN cover). Mao talks about how they mobilized masses to send off flares and so on to warn of approaching enemy airplanes, to help avoid or minimize damage from enemy air attacks.

Today, the imperialists have more developed technology, electronic means, etc., but there's nothing that people can invent that other people can't learn how to counter. That's the nature of reality, that's the nature of existence, that's the nature of life. The Vietnamese found ways to counter the technology they were up against. The imperialist technology has been qualitatively developed since then in some important ways. The revolutionary forces would have to find the ways to analyze and counter that, partly through studying it and partly, as Mao said, by learning warfare through making warfare.

One favorable factor in this, speaking particularly about a country like the U.S., is that it has a large territory. This affords room for maneuver and for carrying out the tactic of dispersed movement, followed by concentration for battle. This would have particular application in the civil war stage. It would apply then not only in terms of the defensive—for example, maneuvering to avoid battle where the enemy seeks to engage you and forcing the enemy to fight when and where you want to—but also in terms of offensive tactics, such as moving around enemy strong points to attack the flanks or in the rear of enemy forces.

Especially in a situation where large territory is involved—in other words, in a large territory like what is now the U.S.A., or significant parts of it, even after things "congealed" into more clearly defined battle lines—it would not be possible to maintain absolute control over a large continuous front. I am speaking particularly about the civil war stage of a revolutionary war in such a country. In this situation military force and control would have to be concentrated in certain key strategic locations at any given time. This would apply for both sides—not only for the revolutionary side but also for the imperialist side, the counterrevolutionary side. And this would make it possible to explore and exploit gaps in the other side's forces.

Ironically in this regard there are things the revolutionary forces

could learn from the U.S. war against Iraq: Iraq got itself into the position of trying to defend basically all of the area of Kuwait, and since this was not possible—since it was not possible to mass force for defense in all parts of this area—this left weak spots or gaps that the U.S. side exploited. In a civil war in an imperialist country like the U.S., the revolutionary forces would also be able to seek out and exploit gaps and could employ tactics of bypassing strongly fortified areas and encircling and defeating more weakly defended enemy areas and weaker enemy forces and over time isolating and then defeating the stronger enemy positions and forces. Of course, the revolutionary forces could not use exactly the same tactics as the imperialists used in Iraq: the revolutionaries would not have the means to duplicate all these tactics—including particularly the use of air power and rapid movement of massed armored vehicles. Nor would all these tactics correspond to the nature and strengths of revolutionary fighting forces. Still there are things from this experience that revolutionary forces could learn from and adapt to their own doctrine and way of fighting in a revolutionary war against an imperialist power.

I should add that another favorable factor for the revolutionary forces in North America is something I have stressed in *An End to the Horror* and elsewhere. That is, the U.S. shares a long border with a Third World country, Mexico, and the revolutionary struggles in the U.S. on the one hand and in Mexico (and Central America) on the other hand are bound to closely interact with each other in various aspects. In strategic terms this is an advantage for the revolutionary forces in what is now the U.S. and to the "South." It is a strategically favorable factor in political terms and ultimately would be in military terms.

*Q.: In "Eye on the Prize," when you talked about how "Mao knew a thing or two" about decentralization and consolidation, about dispersing forces and so on to avoid being wiped out, you said that revolutionary forces are going to have to avoid being "sitting ducks for the other side militarily, and also ideologically and politically." You were just giving some examples of this militarily. Could you expand on this point?*

*A.:* The problem we're talking about—being vulnerable to highly destructive attack, particularly from the air—is a problem which would apply not only to the revolutionary forces in the course of a revolutionary war in an imperialist country, but would apply to every

revolutionary force that seizes power. In other words, at some point, to seize power you're going to take over the cities. That's the way you win complete victory in whatever country you're in—countrywide victory cannot be won without taking over the cities. Now cities by definition are massed and concentrated: revolutionary forces become more vulnerable to air attack. In the countryside or jungle terrain, like in Vietnam for example, or in mountainous terrain, revolutionary forces are less vulnerable. It's not that you're not vulnerable at all, but you're less vulnerable. Every revolutionary force, everywhere in the world, is going to confront this problem at one time or another—taking over the cities makes you more vulnerable, especially to massive attacks from the air—and there are going to be some common features. So we're going to have to sum up experience and we're going to have to learn from each other. And again, I think that in general terms the answer would involve a combination of tunneling and dispersal in various forms.

In other words, I don't think it would be correct in most circumstances to move everybody out of the cities, or you might as well not seize them in the first place. But there will be means of dispersal. Particularly if you've exercised power over a number of years you can do this in a more organized, planned way. That's what Mao did. He argued against concentrating everything just in the cities and in fact argued for moving more and more toward the countryside, for both political reasons as well as military reasons.

You wouldn't want to have everybody coming into the cities and the gap between the cities and the countryside and the people living in those two areas *growing* rather than being overcome. But also militarily, you wouldn't want to concentrate everything where you're more vulnerable, and that's one of the things about this situation in Iraq that leads me to say it was a situation made to order for the U.S.: Iraq had undergone a tremendous leap in its urban development over the past ten or twenty years and in some ways that made it more vulnerable to the kind of assault that the U.S. brought down on it.

On the other hand, revolutionaries do have to develop the cities. Mao, in 1956, when he gave that talk "On The Ten Major Relationships," talked about "do we want to develop the coastal areas *and* the interior?" He said yes. He said that if we expected war right away (in other words, a major attack on China), then we should give less emphasis to the coastal areas (the more built-up urban areas, whereas the interior was more rural and less built up), but since we don't expect a major attack on China soon, then we should be able

to give some emphasis to building up these coastal areas even while we continue to develop the interior, the more rural areas. So there are two sides of the picture, you can't just look at one side of the picture or one side of the contradiction.

But every revolutionary force, every revolutionary regime, will come up against this. To some extent this problem would be handled by dispersal, but it couldn't be completely handled that way and I think other means, like tunneling and other things, would have to be used. They had a slogan in China: "Dig tunnels deep, store grain everywhere, do everything for the people." This was their way, when Mao was leading China, of preparing for imperialist attack, including nuclear attack if it came. So tunneling and also dispersal of various kinds—dispersal of the population overall and various kinds of dispersal of the armed forces in warfare—these are two basic means revolutionaries have developed for dealing with this. And, in the future, revolutionaries will also learn from each other and learn warfare through warfare in order to deal with this problem of being vulnerable, particularly to attack from the air.

One thing, you know, is that airplanes have to take off from airfields, or have to take off from other things, like ships. In the course of a future armed insurrection and civil war in an imperialist county, airfields could be conquered, or destroyed—put out of commission. If you couldn't reach the air maybe you could reach the airfield. These are things that would have to be taken into account in fighting warfare. Planes have to have places to land and refuel—they've got to come down to earth sometimes. I don't care if they are planes that can be refueled in the air: even these planes that refuel other planes have to be refueled, they have to come down on the ground. And planes have to be repaired, given new assignments—all of those things. They can't stay in the air forever, they have to come down to the airfields (or at least to the ships). Faced with air power in a war, you might not be able to reach all of them but you might be able to reach some and push them further back from where you'd be at a given time. While you might not be able to get to the ships—while many of them might be beyond your reach—if you forced the planes to come from the ocean that might well be farther than they would have to fly otherwise. This would create or heighten logistical problems for the other side. And maybe at some point in such a war you would be able to reach the ships too, in one way or another.

We have to break this down analytically into concretes, demystify it. Just because they have tremendous force, we can't look at it

like it's a godlike force. Like I said before, it's still made by people and operated by people and it has its laws—everything has its laws. This technology has its laws—it has its contradictions—it has its strengths, it has its weaknesses. It has what it can do to you *and* it has ways it's vulnerable. And you have to learn how to deal on that when the time comes.

*Q.: It seems like there's a link between the political and the military there. For instance, if you take the cities and you have some liberated areas, and you're doing good political work so you can actually turn over the establishment and conduct of red political power to new forces coming forward, to people's committees, to neighborhood committees (to both help defend the cities and to establish some of these new ways of functioning): this would free up a lot of the more tempered troops on your side to actually move out more and do things like go search out the airfields or whatever needed to be done.*

A.: Yes, and that should be a constant process: generating new forces both to take on all kinds of support tasks—including logistical tasks and economic tasks, and also, very importantly, political tasks—and also to replenish the military. Because you would take a lot of losses in this kind of war. There is no sense in pretending that you would not. I've said many times, fighting imperialism is not easy, it's not going to be without tremendous sacrifice, and this again is why ideological as well as political work has to go on to prepare people and has to be carried out consistently to strengthen people's understanding, resolve, determination and courage all the way through. But you'd have to replenish the ranks, and this would be a constant process of bringing forth new forces.

Strategically speaking, we do have very important reserves, let's not forget this. A lot of people go along with the existing social relations because they don't see any other way, but it is true that many of these people would jump at the chance when they do see the way to really go up against this shit, and they would continue to come forward, in ever greater numbers, if the revolutionary forces were able to seize and then re seize the initiative continually. This would bring these people forward. Even in the rear areas of the enemy. Again, sympathy for the revolution by itself would not be enough to overthrow the enemy in its rear areas—their forces would have to be militarily defeated, and upheaval from within enemy-held territory (its rear areas) would have to be combined with military

attack from without in order to finally finish off the other side. But the point is, we'd have tremendous reserves and even in the civil war stage many of our reserves would be within the enemy's rear areas.

In "Could We" I cited Lenin's statement that one of the distinguishing features of a civil war, particularly a revolutionary civil war, is that many of the reserves of the revolutionary side are initially in the camp of the other side. Tremendous numbers! Even in these suburbs there are a lot of women, for example, who are suffering tremendously in all kinds of ways. They go along with the normal routine, maybe even defend it in normal times when it's business as usual and through the force of habit, but given a radical tearing of the whole social fabric there are tremendous potential reserves among such women. This is just one example, but one very important example for our side. I believe there is a tremendous latent revolutionary force there, among these women, as well as among other important sections of the masses.

But again, even if things had advanced as far as the civil war stage, you'd definitely need to have a doctrine and the tactics and the actual successes on the battlefield that translated into military victories. Without these things, then this potential enthusiasm for the revolutionary cause would not be unleashed, or it would be suppressed even after it had been unleashed. So when you get down to warfare, you have to fight warfare and you have to win. If you can't win right away then you have to find the ways to continually seize the initiative. It doesn't always mean taking the strategic offensive, but even if, for a time, you were on the strategic defensive you would have to find the ways to seize the initiative within that.

*Q.: You have spoken to the possibilities of concentrating forces to fight and then dispersing them to move as a way to deny the imperialists fat targets to destroy from the air. You also raised the possibility of tunneling and stressed that, in general, creative ways would have to be found so that, to the extent possible, the enemy would be denied the ability to bring its air power to play in a decisive way. While we don't know exactly what happened in Iraq, there was a period where the Iraqi army moved its troops in somewhat of a tactical offensive move or probe around the town of Khafji along with some other moves into Saudi Arabia to the west of Khafji, but it seems from what we have heard that overall they took a real beating from the air, with extensive destruction to their tanks and other armored vehicles. It seemed that they weren't even able to really*

*bring their anti-aircraft guns into play against the U.S. air power, that their whole ability to make mobile forays against and engage U.S. forces on the ground was negated by U.S. air power. How does this relate to the problems the revolutionaries would face in the kind of war we've been talking about, particularly in the civil war stage?*

A.: As you say, this does need more summation because it's not clear exactly what the Iraqi forces were trying to do with this Khafji battle. On one level it seems that it was some sort of armed probe, if you will. Whether it was intended to be more than that, and then it was repulsed by the U.S. forces so the Iraqis weren't able to do more with it, and whether it was supposed to be part of a larger, at least tactical, offensive within Iraq's strategic defensive and the U.S. was able to thwart that—we don't know the answers to all that. It's still not clear. It is clear in general strategic terms that Iraq did not fight with the perspective of going all out for victory and risking what was necessary and incurring the losses that needed to be incurred in order to possibly achieve victory. They were aiming for something short of that all the way along. And obviously that affects your tactics.

One of the most laughable things about this whole war is these ridiculous attempts of the imperialists to create *heroes* out of this war! To make its military commanders seem like some kind of geniuses! There's all this propaganda being created about what a political genius Bush is and what military geniuses Powell and Schwarzkopf are. I saw Schwarzkopf's statement dissing Hussein, ridiculing him as a military leader. All you have to say is this: make the situation reversed. Give Saddam Hussein everything that Schwarzkopf and Powell had at their disposal, and give them what he had, and see if the outcome would have been any different! I guess that would have made Saddam Hussein a brilliant military general!

I mean, you can give them credit on one level for knowing how to pick an uneven fight, and for being able to have doctrine and force structure and tactics to win an uneven fight like that. And that's about all they can have credit for. There's certainly no innovation and no "genius" in this at all.

But more specific and concrete summation needs to go on, because even given the various limitations, political as well as military, on the Iraqi side, there is still the question of what they tried to do, what they were and were not able to do, and why. For example, right after Khafji it was reported in various imperialist media that there was this massing of up to fifty or sixty thousand Iraqi

troops and all kinds of armored vehicles and so on, as if they were planning to follow up this Khafji battle with some sort of major invasion or incursion across the border from Kuwait into Saudi Arabia. What the deal was with that and whether that was part of a broader offensive—at least a tactical offensive—all that is not clear and needs to be summed up more concretely. (In fact, already it's been reported that overall the U.S. significantly inflated the total numbers of Iraqi troops present in Kuwait.) But it is clear Iraq never had a strategic orientation of going all out to win victory, and that the battle plan it did have was overwhelmingly a passive defense.

There were things they did, like missile attacks on Israel and Saudi Arabia, which were attempts at some tactical offensive action, and there was the Khafji thing. But this was very limited, and again, we don't know exactly why it was this limited, but it is clear that, when they made these probes in Khafji or when they made certain other initiatives and then they were met and countered, they didn't follow that up by countering in turn—by raising the level again themselves. Here again is the question of that dialectic of one side seizing the initiative, the other side counterattacking, and then the first side has to answer again on a higher level and re seize the initiative. That was not done by the Iraqis.

But all this relates to the battle array and battle plan and doctrine of the Iraqis, which was radically different than what we have been talking about. It is radically different from how a revolutionary war, an insurrection and civil war, would be carried out in an imperialist country. In very basic terms, the Iraqi doctrine depended on static defense, massed force and mass attacks from more or less static, dug-in positions. And the imperialists knew this. Both the Soviets and the Western imperialists who armed Iraq with its weapons had a lot to do with the formation of its military planning, the scheme of its disposition of forces, its whole doctrine. So they knew how the Iraqi forces would be arrayed, how they would be oriented, how they would fight and not fight—they anticipated this and, as I said, in a certain way this was made to order for them.

It's not that revolutionary forces fighting the kind of warfare we have been talking about in an imperialist country would be able to—or would want to completely—avoid massing forces for battle. But first, they could mass them in a different way than the Iraqis did, with a different battle plan and different battle array; and second, there is the question that's been spoken to, of massing and dispersing, particularly dispersing for movement. The point here is that if

you rely upon technology, if your whole way of warfare is based upon relying on technology rather than on people, and if you are trying to fight the imperialists on their own terms—which is essentially what Iraq did—you are setting yourself up for the imperialists, you are kind of setting yourself up for slaughter.

Somebody made the analogy that Iraq was fighting a combination of World War 1 and World War 2 while the U.S. was fighting on the basis of World War 3 preparations, and the result was what we saw. We don't want to fight them the way the imperialists have fought any of their wars. We also can't fight them in the imperialist countries themselves the same way revolutionary forces fight in other types of countries. And in general revolutionary wars won't be able to be fought in exactly the same way they have been fought in the past, because there is this principle that military historians talk about—and it has some validity—that you should not fall into the trap of fighting “the last war.”

That applies to people's war too—it applies to the revolutionary side as well as to the counterrevolutionary side. There are fundamental principles of people's war that we can say are universally valid and must be applied in that sense, but when it comes to the particulars of wars, even people's wars, you have to fight them concretely—according to the actual conditions, both in the particular country and internationally. And you have to fight on the basis of really knowing the enemy as well as knowing yourself.

*Q.: Stepping back once again to more overall-strategic questions, when “Could We” was written this was a period of intense U.S.-Soviet contention where the U.S. military scenarios and war plans were geared towards war with the Soviets. Also in various places you have made the point (basing yourself on the analysis in America in Decline\*) that the current spiral of development of world relations and contradictions can't be resolved short of a world-historic conjuncture leading to a major violent readjustment of world relations of one kind or another—that is, world war and/or revolution in one or more strategic parts of the world. But, as you have also pointed out, in recent years there have been some major shifts in the character and intensity of U.S.-Soviet relations—there is not now the same*

*kind of contention there was previously—and this was certainly a factor in the U.S. imperialists' ability to launch and carry out with relative impunity their murderous aggression against Iraq. With this war against Iraq the U.S. has signaled its intention to aggressively reassert its role as the dominant superpower and to protect Western imperialist interests by controlling Third World countries at the point of U.S. guns. What are the implications of these changes in the world for revolution in the U.S. and particularly in terms of being able to launch the armed struggle, the insurrection?*

A.: Well, first of all, we can't completely rule out, by any means, the re-emergence of intensified contradictions between the imperialists, in particular between the Soviet Union and the U.S. and blocs that would line up with them, even if there is significant realignment among the imperialists and the blocs don't look exactly the way they looked ten years ago. That's one point. We shouldn't just go to sleep on that, that's a general point of importance.

At the same time, it is true that this contradiction between the U.S. and the Soviet Union is not nearly as intense as it has been, and it doesn't seem there is going to be a direct military confrontation or even the serious approach of that in the next period of time. That changed situation, as you pointed out, had a very significant bearing on the Persian Gulf war and what the U.S. was able to do and what Iraq was not able to do, frankly. Iraq was not able to play off contradictions among the imperialists, in particular between the U.S. and the Soviets, in a way they might have tried to do, perhaps with some success, in the past. Changes in the Soviet Union and in Soviet-U.S. relations also have had a bearing on what the U.S. is doing in the international arena generally, as you referred to: much more aggressively asserting itself and certainly declaring in action as well as by words that it is going to be the number one military power in the world and on that basis the number one imperialist power overall in the world, atop this “new world order.”

These changes do have to be taken into account. But certainly this does not mean—going back to the beginning of our discussion—that the U.S. is not going to be embroiled in military encounters and military adventures (in warfare, to speak plainly) of various kinds around the world. Life will assert itself, and simply the fact that the U.S. devastatingly put down any attempt by Iraq to stand up to it doesn't mean that other forces are not going to oppose the U.S., including in warfare. Certainly revolutionary forces will do so. And

\* Raymond Lotta with Frank Shannon, *America in Decline: An Analysis of the Developments Toward War and Revolution, in the U.S. and Worldwide, in the 1980s*, Vol. 1 (Chicago: Banner Press, 1984).

no one can say with any certainty that other bourgeois forces in the Third World, for example, will not come into military confrontation with the U.S.

It is no doubt true that a lot of these bourgeois forces will think twice about it in the short term after what happened to Iraq. But again, life will assert itself, underlying interests will assert themselves. And, as Lenin pointed out, imperialist alliances are always and only temporary agreements among international gangsters. These are bound to break up, and imperialist rivalries are bound to assert themselves in various ways, in indirect as well as more direct ways.

This has much to do with the question of Third World forces that might again come into confrontation with the U.S. Various imperialists may, behind the scenes, encourage them to do so. No one can rule out these kind of things, and certainly as I said revolutionary forces will continue to wage revolutionary struggle and to stand up to the threat of force, or even the use of force, by the U.S. imperialists in their attempts to suppress revolution. And revolutionaries will draw lessons and should draw lessons from what happened in Iraq. As I said, this should not be a demoralizing experience, but it is and should be a sobering experience. The lesson to be drawn from this experience is not that you cannot stand up against and fight imperialism militarily, but that you have to approach this in a serious way and in a way that conforms to what you are fighting for, conforms to the revolutionary interests of the masses of people and finds a military expression that gives play to the strengths of the revolutionary masses in warfare—which Iraq did not do.

So, even if there is not now the prospect of a military encounter with the Soviet Union—that is, a direct all-out military confrontation between the U.S. and the Soviet Union—and even if the U.S. can shift the deployment of its forces and its doctrine and tactics at least to a significant degree accordingly, there is still going to be a significant element of U.S. forces being tied down and involved militarily all over the world. By definition, that's what this is all about, after all. This is what this Iraq war was all about—the forceful assertion of U.S. world domination by massive military means—and you can't do what the U.S. has done and then expect that just delivering this message in and of itself will be enough. It won't.

*Q.: They have to back it up...*

*A.: ...They have to back it up and they have to be prepared to back*

it up, that's one point.

Second, the massive orientation of U.S. forces toward a confrontation with the Soviet Union tied them down in significantly greater ways perhaps than the present world situation might. In that sense the fact that the U.S. doesn't have to be so concerned with the Soviet threat in the same way may be favorable for them. But it's also favorable for our side, not just in one particular country, but internationally, that the threat of world war has receded. It will give more opportunity for situations to develop that put real strains on the imperialist system, without that exploding into all-out world war, with all its devastation. This could have happened in the U.S.-Iraq war. It didn't, but it could have. Nobody can say it was impossible for that war to go in such a way that the U.S. and its allies got tied down and bogged down in war long enough for various underlying contradictions in the U.S. and in a number of other countries to very forcefully come to the surface. (And, in the present world situation, if this had happened it probably wouldn't have led right over the brink of worldwide devastation which would result from a world war between the U.S. and the Soviet blocs.) This kind of mess for the U.S. *didn't* happen through this war, but again, it *could have*. And certainly it could in some other war the U.S. gets involved in.

The fact that this can happen is a strategically favorable factor for our side. The fact that there can be a longer development of war in which they can get more bogged down, more tied down, without that going over to worldwide devastation, that's favorable for our side. So we have to look at the situation in an all-around way and, yes, look at the things that are favorable for the other side, but also look at the things that are favorable for our side. We have to have a correct view of the situation in its contradictory aspects and not just see one side of the picture.

*Q.: Just on that—from the viewpoint of our side and how it's favorable—it is true that at the time when it seemed more like things were going to come down to the question of a war between the U.S. and the Soviets, with the possibility of nuclear war, a lot of the orientation of Maoists, especially in a country like the U.S., a lot of the tasks and work preparing for revolution, was linked very much to that scenario. It involved a lot of attention on preparing people for the fact that such a war could come down and in the course of that there could still be possibilities of revolution. And it also involved putting a big emphasis on trying to prevent that type of war and in*

*the course of that trying to bring forward the question of revolution. Some of that has changed, like you were saying, some aspects of the international situation are changing and are more favorable for our side. What does that mean in terms of how we orient ourselves internationally, what does it mean for the tasks in terms of preparing for revolution in the U.S.?*

A.: Again, a situation like Iraq was more or less "made to order" for the U.S.: even though things could have gone badly for the U.S. and it wasn't all wrapped up from the beginning, it was quite favorable for them. And to a considerable degree they knew that, and they even set it up that way in terms of how they went into war with Iraq. But, on the other hand, if the U.S. imperialists get themselves into a situation where they are attempting to put down a real revolutionary people's war—for example in Peru—this is exactly the kind of situation where they are much more vulnerable to getting bogged down without any clear prospect of victory. The old "Vietnam Syndrome" could reassert itself very powerfully again.

That's not to say that they haven't learned anything from Vietnam, but what they've learned (or think they've learned) is not going to change the fundamental nature of things. In other words, if they try to draw from their war with Iraq the lesson that they should do the same thing in Peru, or in some other country where they face a real people's war, then they're going to make a big blunder. If they think that is the lesson of Vietnam—that if they had gone in with a massive attack right from the beginning in Vietnam this would have given them the same kind of victory they got against Iraq—then they are going to be very disappointed. This isn't going to work out for them when they have to deal with a real people's war, as in Peru. Our Peruvian comrades won't allow that, our Party and revolutionary people in the U.S. won't allow it, the Revolutionary Internationalist Movement and revolutionary forces worldwide who support the people's war in Peru and want to see U.S. imperialism go down to defeat will not allow it.

So I think that there are elements in the present world situation that, again, are very favorable for our side, and once more let's be clear: for the U.S. to take this kind of an action, to declare a "new world order" and announce the arrival of this "order" with this kind of devastating war, means that they have to back it up and they have to be continually prepared to back it up. You can't do that and just say, "well, we delivered our message and that's the end of that."

What if the people of the world don't listen? Which they won't, in strategic terms, because the people of the world still need revolution. And there are revolutionary forces in the world who on the basis of that are organizing revolutionary struggle and revolutionary war.

The imperialists, precisely by having done this, have set themselves on a certain dynamic. They might prefer to let people of other countries do the dying for them, but where they can't do that, they're going to have to get drawn in more themselves—with their own armed forces. This is the kind of dynamic they've set themselves on. This is the tiger they've grabbed by the tail. While this does create some real difficulties for our side, particularly where these imperialists are able to win quick and decisive victories, as in this recent war, in strategic terms it poses real problems and dangers for them and is favorable for us.

*Q.: Just as an aside on this for a second. What do you say to somebody who says this: It seems like you people have a contradictory position, because on the one hand you're saying that you have to do everything you can to oppose U.S. aggressive moves against the Maoist revolution in Peru, but on the other hand you also seem to welcome the idea of the U.S. going into Peru, saying that if the U.S. got drawn in and bogged down trying to crush the people's war in Peru that would create more favorable conditions for revolution in the U.S. and overall. Some people would say that that seems a little contradictory.*

A.: Well, it is contradictory in one sense, because life is contradictory. In other words, let's put it this way: The imperialists are bent on attempting to suppress and defeat the revolutionary people's war in Peru by one means or another. And obviously they're getting more and more concerned about it because it's gaining more and more victories, making more and more advances.

Now we on our side—right now I'm speaking particularly about our Party in the United States—we are carrying out work in political support of the people's war in Peru, uniting with others in committees and so on, as well as doing work ourselves directly as the Party, to politically support this people's war and to build opposition to U.S. intervention. This is extremely important because, as I said in "The End of a Stage—The Beginning of a New Stage," this "is a revolutionary war led by a party based in Marxism-Leninism-Maoism and winning great victories on that basis, striking real blows not only at

the local reactionaries but at U.S. imperialism (and Soviet imperialism as well)." (*Revolution*, Fall 1990, p. 8) If through this political work we were able to create the kind of situation whereby massive outpourings prevented U.S. imperialism from carrying further its intervention, and it was even forced to pull back from its intervention in Peru because the situation became so volatile and there was so much upheaval and rebellion about this in the U.S., and elsewhere, that the imperialists considered it too costly and risky to continue their intervention—well, that would be great.

At the same time, we have to recognize that it's very likely that, even as we build up more opposition, the U.S. is going to feel more and more compelled to become increasingly involved there. If that's the case, on the one hand we have to continue and intensify our efforts to oppose that increasing involvement, but also we have to recognize that it's like that old Chinese saying about lifting a rock to drop it on your own feet: by intervening against the people's war in Peru that's what they'll be doing. It's not that we *want* them to do it, but if they do it then we have to seize on the favorable aspects of that, and seize on it specifically by stepping up our revolutionary work, both in general and particularly in support of the people's war and in opposition to U.S. intervention.

Right now there's a campaign that's been declared by the Revolutionary Internationalist Movement (RIM): a year of support for the people's war in Peru and opposition to U.S. intervention under the slogan "Yankee Go Home!" This is very important. A lot of work has to be done around this. But of course the struggle is not going to be over in one year and the RIM is not gearing the struggle toward only one year either. It's declaring a special focus right now on this because it's becoming a sharper question. But this will be an ongoing question, and either the U.S. imperialists will be *defeated* in their attempts to intervene further, or they *will* become further involved, in which case the revolutionaries, and first of all we Maoists—in Peru, in the United States, and around the world—have to turn that further to the advantage of the proletarian revolution.

*Q.: Returning to the fact that there is a certain lessening of the confrontation between the Soviet Union and the U.S., and that accordingly the U.S. imperialists are making some necessary changes in their military doctrine, in their force structure, in the weapons they're developing, in how they're training people, so that they can more deal with military confrontations in the Third World,*

*including people's wars in different countries: I'm just wondering, to what degree is that going to strengthen their ability to deal with a revolutionary war in the U.S. itself?*

A.: Again, we've talked about how their commitments and their engagements internationally is one of the features that go into the mix of what would make possible the beginning of a revolutionary war. And these international commitments and (at least potential) military engagements require them to have certain priorities in terms of how and toward what they orient the kinds of things you've mentioned: their doctrine, their force structure, their weapons systems, training, and so on.

At the present time, while obviously they are very concerned with keeping their home base stable—or, in military terms, "keeping their rear secure"—they are *not* primarily oriented at this time toward developing a military doctrine and force structure for putting down insurrection and civil war *in* the U.S. They're not neglecting that question altogether, of course, but right now that's not high on their list of what they have to do. That's the other side of the fact that right now the development of things toward revolution in the U.S. is not advancing to the point where this has become an immediate question.

As it becomes more of an immediate question, at whatever time that happens, then they will obviously devote more attention to it, to put it mildly. In the meantime they can develop some general doctrine and have some sense of the force structure they will need to deal with this, just as the revolutionaries can think about the question of doctrine and potential organizational and tactical methods to carry out a revolutionary war. But the outcome is not going to be determined just by force structure and doctrine and preparation. It's going to be determined by the actual situation at the time, and by the actual conduct of the opposing forces once things got under way. They'll prepare on their side in their way, and we'll prepare on our side in our way, but when the time comes the question is going to come down to the revolutionaries being able to seize the right moment and on that basis being able to seize the initiative and, as I said, continue to re seize the initiative.

We can't expect them not to be prepared. We can't hope to make revolution based on best-case scenarios—that they're going to ignore their "home front," or something like that! We have to prepare for the opposite. At the same time, as I've said, an insurrection should not be launched when the other side is at its strongest. Being right within the

imperialists' "rear area"—which they're obviously very concerned to keep secure—revolutionaries in countries like the U.S. have to carry out their work in such a way as to prepare politically for the time when there is the most trouble within this "rear area," or "home base." Going back to our earlier discussion, that doesn't mean that you can wait until their system and machinery of government is ready to fall over of its own weight and only needs a little push, but you do want it to be weakened and in crisis and in turmoil within itself. Once more the very important point—the first necessary condition—spoken to in "Could We": there must be a serious crisis in society and in government.

So these are the kinds of things that are going to be decisive: the ability of the revolutionaries to prepare for and then seize on such a situation and to avoid the temptation to try to launch a revolutionary armed struggle in the absence of the necessary conditions; and on the other hand, avoiding the even greater danger of conservatism, rightism. That would amount to losing sight of the goal of overthrowing the system, losing the sharp edge of constantly building toward the time when that becomes possible and making your work of today preparing for that circumstance, and instead degenerating into reformism and accepting the system and not really preparing to rise up against it.

All your work of political preparation has to be preparation precisely for leading the revolutionary masses to rise up and overthrow the system when the necessary conditions have emerged. And you must base yourself on a sober scientific analysis of the situation and the tasks, of the strengths and weaknesses of yourself and the enemy, and with the full understanding that to actually wage revolutionary war against such an imperialist power, right in its "home base," is going to require tremendous self-sacrificing effort and ferocious battle, from the very beginning and all the way through until the final victory is won.

*Q.: In "Could We" you said that the political work of preparing minds and organizing forces for revolution is key to "soften up" the enemy in preparation for the armed insurrection. Are there also military aspects for softening up the enemy or "preparing the battleground" before the actual insurrection? For instance, why is terrorism not a valid softening-up tactic to prepare the terrain for the armed insurrection? One could argue that it would create instability, politicize the atmosphere, set an example, draw in the*

*"brave elements" earlier rather than later, perhaps. Lenin said that the armed insurrection must: rely on the advanced class; be an upsurge of the people; and occur at a turning point where the enemy is vulnerable and the strata in society who normally support the system are vacillating to a great extent. Why couldn't terrorist tactics help to bring these conditions about, opening the door for the mass upsurge?*

A.: I've spoken before, including in "Could We," about why terrorism as a strategy has to be rejected. The essential point is that you don't want to go on a war footing with the enemy—particularly a powerful enemy like this—until you're prepared to go into war as your main form of activity.

If you try to engage in forms of warfare, especially in a country like the U.S., before you're prepared to make it your main form of activity, you're going to be put on a war footing anyway. You'll be forced into a position of making it your main form of activity whether you want to or not. That's going to be the logic of events, because the other side's going to react and you're going to be drawn more and more into that. Along with that you're going to be put into a defensive military position, where you're going to lose more and more of the initiative. We've talked over and over about how disastrous that can be and how important it is to seize and maintain the initiative and to re-seize the initiative when you lose it. So, very briefly, those are the reasons why terrorism is not right and why it doesn't lead to winning—why it's not a winning strategy or doctrine.

Further, a *positive* reason for the correct strategy is that, in a country like the U.S., once the situation existed where you could start the armed struggle, it would be best to hit them with a hard blow all at once. And that's what an armed insurrection would do.

Of course, once you'd reached the stage where the armed struggle is called for, when the armed struggle is and should be the main activity you're engaging in—in other words, once you'd arrived at the point of launching the insurrection and beginning the revolutionary war—then various forms of military activity which would be wrong at other times or in other circumstances might perhaps have some role. That's a tactical question that would have to be examined concretely. So when you're going over to the actual armed struggle then you look at those things differently.

The ruling class will always characterize the armed uprising against it as terrorism, so we can't let that throw us off. The question

is: what's a winning strategy? And the winning strategy in a country like the U.S. has to take into account that you are in fact up against a very powerful enemy—recent events have once again dramatically demonstrated this. As we've said over and over again, the correct strategy in such a country is to carry out a process of political preparation and then to go over to the armed struggle when the time is right. When the right "mix" is there. When there is a serious crisis in society and in government. When there is a revolutionary people and when the revolutionary people do have initiative and are in a combative mood. When the people in the middle class, or significant sections of them, have lost or are losing their allegiance to the powers-that-be and are not in a mood to support them in suppressing the revolutionary masses, with some middle class people inclining more and more toward support for the revolution. *Then* is the time to launch the armed struggle, the time to make it the main form of activity—then is the time to carry it out very seriously and carry it through to completion, to victory.

At that point, the questions of initiative and all those things that we've talked about would come to the forefront. At that point it would be a military struggle—it would be warfare and would have to be dealt with as warfare. And while politics and ideology would play even a *heightened* role in that situation as compared to before, the *focus* of struggle would be military, the main form of struggle would be military, and this struggle would have to be won on the battlefield. It couldn't be won anywhere else.

As far as the "brave elements" are concerned—those youth and others who are drawn spontaneously into various forms of activity which is violent but is destructive, or in any case not revolutionary—the political work and struggle that characterizes the phase going on now involves plenty of ways to unleash forces like this. There's plenty for them to do, there's plenty for anyone to do, if they want to stand up to the other side and engage them in struggle, even though it's not yet directly a military struggle. They can make a big contribution to preparing politically for the military struggle in the future.

It's not like we have nothing for those people to do if they want to stand up and fight the enemy and do it in a way to serve the people, serve their revolutionary interests. If they want to win and get rid of this system and put something far better in its place, there are very important things for them to do in this period of political preparation. And not the least important thing for them to do is to relate to the vanguard, get down with our Party—take up its revolu-

tionary ideology—support, join, and build our Party. There's nothing more serious than that, nothing "badder" than that.

*Q.: I'd like to get more into the question of the role of the masses and the relation between the masses and the leadership in revolutionary war. In summing up how the U.S. lost its three-year war in Korea, Mao said that the forces fighting the U.S. had had to deal with questions such as: Could they fight to begin with? Could they hold their lines? Could they maintain their supply lines? Could they deal with germ warfare? He said they were able to solve each of these problems because, at every point, they relied on the ideas of the masses. He gives wonderful practical examples of this, such as the one you mentioned earlier: 10,000 people were organized to line up along a highway and fire signal shots in the air whenever they saw incoming aircraft; this way they could warn the drivers of the supply trucks to hide their trucks before they could be spotted from the air and bombed. In this way they were able to reduce their loss of trucks to U.S. air strikes from 40 percent in the first month of the war to less than 1 percent. And Mao makes the point that, while "nothing can succeed without correct leadership," leadership never has all the answers and is only as effective as its ability to rely on the masses and unleash them. This is how he summed it up: "Our experience has shown that reliance on the people together with a fairly correct leadership enables us to defeat a better equipped enemy with our inferior equipment."*

*This relying on the masses is a central principle for successful people's war. Clearly this would apply in the stage of civil war to seize power in a country like the U.S. Leadership would have to be good at unleashing the ideas and innovations of the masses to resolve in creative ways all the problems that the enemy would keep throwing at the revolutionary forces. But what about in that very rapid, make it or break it, first stage—that of armed insurrection taking place in a number of cities simultaneously? To what extent do you think it would have to be precisely orchestrated and synchronized centrally, and to what extent would there be the basis to unleash the masses in a more decentralized fashion? It doesn't seem that in those crucial first hours or days there would be much time to "learn and adjust as you go along." Things would be happening very fast, and you couldn't afford to lose the momentum and initiative for even one minute. And yet, a real rigid central plan could also be disastrous, especially in relation to the rapidly evolving—and uneven—local*

conditions in the different cities and neighborhoods. Any thoughts on this? Would the relationship of the leadership to the led be handled with basically the same approach in the armed insurrection as in the civil war to follow?

A.: At various times within the revolutionary warfare in an imperialist country, one or the other aspect would be emphasized more strongly. For example, at the very beginning, if you weren't able to have almost instantaneous or very rapid communication between your command and your forces actually in the field fighting—and this would be very difficult for the insurrectionary forces to achieve and maintain—then you'd have to rely on the one hand on the initiative of the forces actually in the field fighting, in terms of responding to what happens; but, on the other hand, you might also want to have very precise orders to begin with. You might want to set down very clear parameters—frameworks and limits as to what they should (and should not) do. Because, lacking a lot of experience, if you just sort of set them off on their own and said "take initiative," they might lose all initiative. So it's not so simple. You have to look at the situation in concrete terms. You have to look at each particular situation and you have to look at the different aspects of the different parts of the picture.

The more the actual insurrection went over to civil war—and even in the later phases of the insurrection—the further you advanced in turning the masses of people into an organized armed force, the more you'd need centralized command. The larger the units you'd be moving, the more there would be the need not only for centralized command but for more developed communications and other things that would make that command a reality and give it life and expression in the battlefield.

At the same time though, you'd always have to allow initiative on the local level and at the unit level, and one of the key things about this would be the role of commanders below the level of the top command. The role of commanders actually in the field would be extremely important in this kind of revolutionary warfare. In particular, people who have military experience of various kinds would be extremely important: people who have studied warfare; people who have had experience in warfare, even in an imperialist army (a lot of veterans have become revolutionaries and many more will do so, especially as society develops toward and then erupts into revolutionary crisis); people who have come from other countries and have

had experience in revolutionary warfare there; and people who on the basis of study and summing up experience can develop crucial skills and knowledge. Such people could be potential military leaders, including on the basic unit level, which would be very important. They could play an extremely important role in warfare like this because of the conditions that you'd start out with, where you would not have highly developed means of communication and you'd have to rely a lot upon this level of basic unit leadership to make things happen.

But there might be times, including at the very beginning, when I would think the necessity for both things would be sharply expressed—the revolutionary forces would need to have this kind of initiative and on the other hand the central command would have to give fairly concrete and detailed instructions exactly because people are inexperienced. So it would depend upon the situation and the place and it would depend on correctly handling the relationship between centralized command and initiative at the lower levels and in the local areas.

As an overall approach, revolutionaries fighting in an imperialist country should apply the same principle that Mao developed in terms of people's war in China: on the *strategic* level *centralized* leadership; on the *tactical* level (in other words, in particular battles and particular parts of the overall situation) *decentralized* leadership, local initiative, initiative of particular units, to the greatest degree possible, within an overall centralized plan and under overall centralized leadership.

Returning to the example of Korea, it was a very important event in the world that the revolutionary forces of Korea and China defeated the imperialists in the sense of fighting them to a standstill and preventing them from achieving their objectives. This was extremely important. And as Mao said, during the course of this war they were also able to fight and "take the measure" of the imperialists. They learned that these imperialist forces weren't invincible and that you could find ways to fight them. This is very important. At the same time, the imperialists—since, as Mao said, historically speaking, they're fighting a last-ditch struggle to avoid extinction—they are going to fight desperately. And they're going to try to learn too.

They've tried to sum up some things like Korea as well as Vietnam. For example, I was reading somewhere that imperialist "experts" think that some of the Chinese tactics I was talking about

earlier, of dispersal and concentration, would be less effective now, because of the use of helicopter reconnaissance that has developed a great deal since the time of that Korean war. Now, without getting back into the Korea situation *per se*, we can say that fundamentally these imperialist "experts" are wrong, but these are the kinds of things you have to keep learning about. To carry out dispersal in movement and then concentrate to fight, you'd have to take into account things like aerial—including helicopter—reconnaissance, as well as the latest means of aerial bombardment. All these are things revolutionary forces will have to learn how to deal with.

To take another case—a more recent one—that illustrates once again that these imperialist powers don't have everything all sewn up, the Soviets thought they were going to have an easy time in Afghanistan. They found out otherwise. For one thing the Afghanistan resistance—or, the reactionary fundamentalist and pro-Western resistance groups—had the support of the U.S. imperialists and of Deng Xiaoping's China as well as Pakistan and so on. From those sources they had access to things to deal with helicopters—certain kinds of hand-held missile launchers, and so on. But again, there's nothing mysterious about these things, and once you're into warfare with the imperialists all kinds of things become possible.

When he was fighting against Chiang Kai-shek, particularly during the war of 1946-49, Mao said Chiang Kai-shek was "the quartermaster" of the People's Liberation Army—that Chiang Kai-shek supplied the PLA with most of its equipment and materiel. By this Mao meant that the PLA got most of its weapons by capturing them from the enemy, from Chiang Kai-shek's army in this case. Really it was the U.S. that was "the quartermaster" of the PLA, because the U.S. gave billions of dollars of weapons and equipment to Chiang Kai-shek to fight the PLA, and the PLA defeated his forces and captured much of his weapons and materiel. Any revolutionary force can learn to do the same thing—that's one point to keep in mind. We can learn to deal with these things.

And that gets to the pivotal point of your whole question. What Mao said is fundamentally true and decisive: with the masses of people, unleashed to fight consciously in their own interests, all kinds of obstacles can be overcome. As long as there are people, all kinds of miracles are possible. This is true in warfare as in other spheres. When Mao said this, he knew what he was talking about—he was basing this on years of arduous struggle that overcame all kinds of tremendous obstacles.

But this has to be given concrete expression: the masses have to be led politically, and they have to be organized. That's where the role of the vanguard comes in. It applies the mass line, it learns from the masses and unleashes them. It does this by drawing from the knowledge of the masses and, by applying the communist viewpoint and method, concentrating this knowledge, raising it to a higher level, and then taking this back to the masses and unleashing them to struggle things through, whether it's economic construction or scientific experiment, cultural and ideological questions, political struggle or warfare.

The masses are the makers of history: this principle that Mao stressed really is the most decisive thing—it is something only the revolutionary proletariat can really, fully grasp and act on. The imperialists and all reactionaries can never do this. This is the most important thing to grasp in understanding why we really could win and why in the final analysis the proletariat and oppressed people of the world will win.

*Q.: Before we conclude, I want to bring up something that I know many people will think about when they really grapple seriously with the questions we've been talking about: what if the imperialists actually used nuclear weapons against the revolutionary forces, or against the new revolutionary regimes that are established?*

A.: If they used nuclear weapons on a more "limited" scale—so-called "tactical" battlefield nuclear weapons—then the revolutionary forces would have to apply battlefield tactics to counter this as much as possible. Some of the tactics I've talked about, such as fighting "at close quarters" or "intermingled" with the enemy forces and dispersed movement followed by rapid concentration for battle—tactics such as these would have some application to a situation where "tactical" battlefield nuclear weapons were used against the revolutionary forces.

If the imperialists used nuclear weapons on a massive scale—"strategic" nuclear strikes—then the revolutionary forces and revolutionary people who survived these attacks would still have to fight on. And more than that, in such a case, the masses of people in the whole world—and not only in the present generation but future generations to come—would call these imperialists to account for their monstrous crimes. When the history of this period of human history is finally written by the people, these imperialists will be put

down for the reactionary and cowardly criminals and mass murderers they are—they will be consigned to the garbage bin of history—and using nuclear weapons to murder still more masses of people would do nothing to change that.

*Q.: To pursue this further, but in a somewhat different way, one final question. What would you say to someone who, after hearing all this, says: "Look, even if we leave aside the question of the imperialists using nuclear weapons against us, and even if we could actually get into a serious battle for power with them, still there's a good chance that we could lose, and this would mean horrible destruction for oppressed people, and very likely decades of fierce repression and oppression to follow. And even if we could win such a war, what would it be like afterwards? The country would literally be torn to shreds from one end to the other, both the material destruction and the social polarization and hostility would probably make rebuilding anything impossible. So it comes down to this: as horrible as the status quo is, isn't it possible that the alternative, trying to overthrow the system, however well-intentioned, may be worse, and for generations to come?"*

A.: First of all, what that amounts to is saying that because the imperialists are such criminals, we should put up with their crimes. Because they might bring down worse suffering and destruction on people, particularly within the U.S. itself, we should put up with what they continuously bring down on the oppressed people within the U.S., and not only that but around the world! We should strengthen their hand by not opposing them, for fear that they might be even more vicious if we opposed them, and certainly if we stood up all the way against them. On that level I can't—I just can't go along with that.

Second of all, it is true—and we have said this over and over again—that warfare in general, and particularly war against a powerful imperialist force like this, *will* involve tremendous destruction and sacrifice. But here again what Mao said is very important: To talk all the time about the destructive aspect of war and not about its liberating aspect is not any good for the people. It's not right and it's no good for the people's cause.

The point is that while it is true that war is very destructive, you've got to keep sight of the fact that what would be achieved through revolutionary war would be tremendously *liberating*. Not just for the people in the U.S., but it would open up tremendous

possibilities for the emancipation of people and the end of cruel and unnecessary suffering all over the world. It wouldn't in and of itself be the final battle, but it would certainly push things to a whole new higher level to actually overthrow U.S. imperialism which is now riding on top of the world, declaring itself the number one power in this "new world order," and so on.

To see this monster brought down would be tremendously liberating and be a major advance for the people of the whole world, for the international proletariat—a major step toward abolishing these kinds of systems once and for all, worldwide.

And I don't believe it's true that it would not be possible to rebuild anything! If people could learn to wage a war in such heroic ways and against such an overwhelming force, they could also learn to rebuild things, *and on a far better basis*. And thinking of future generations and the future of humanity as a whole, I believe things could be rebuilt on a far better basis, not just in material terms but particularly in terms of the relations between people.

Furthermore, there's no guarantee that the imperialists won't do all this anyway! Let's be very clear on this: they *did* come *very close* to having an all-out confrontation, a nuclear war, between the two major imperialist powers (and their war blocs) in very recent history. They came very close to this in the 1980s in particular. We were right to point to the very real possibility and danger of that. And imperialism is what it is: *they're going to keep doing this!* Not only against other lesser forces in the world, such as Third World regimes like Saddam Hussein's, and not only against revolutionary forces, but also as I said, imperialist agreements are always and only temporary alignments and temporary truces among the imperialists. They will break up, they will realign, and they will go back at each other, with tremendously devastating results, anyway.

And then there's the fact that for the great majority of people in the world, and for great numbers of people even in imperialist countries like the U.S., life *is* a daily horror under imperialism. Look at the examples of the things which have just come out—like the videotaped police brutality in Los Angeles—just *one* of the constant stream of such outrages and injustices. Or the fact that in a country like the U.S. a woman is raped every few minutes, leaving aside all the other outrages and the brutality that's carried out. And there's the tremendous daily suffering of people all over the world: the fact that every year people are dying of starvation by the millions in parts of the world and that hundreds of millions more are suffering from

malnutrition and disease—all because of the system people are forced to live under. All these kinds of things are going to go on until people rise up and put an end to the social conditions and the economic and political system that keeps these things going, that *thrives* on these things—imperialism *thrives* on these things, it cannot do without them. And on top of all that, it will *continually* bring down wars and destruction.

*You cannot escape the wars and destruction of imperialism by trying to make your peace with imperialism.*

And furthermore, I'll say it again: I believe that people can rebuild, they can rebuild in what can be called miraculous ways. As I said before, if it's possible to find the ways to rise up and actually militarily defeat the imperialists on the battlefield, it is certainly possible to rebuild after that—to rebuild to make a far better society, and to contribute to making a far better world, than anything that's been seen before.

That is my answer.

## *Appendix*

# **Could We Really Win? The Possibility of Revolutionary War**

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It is a fundamental truth that revolutionary war is the necessary road to real liberation: Revolutionary war is the only means through which it is really possible to clear the ground for a radical change that will uproot exploitation and oppression. But in a country like the USA, is revolutionary war really possible? Or to put it another way: Could we really win? And if so, how?

Recently a letter that was forwarded to me speaks to these questions. It argues that the imperialists are too powerful and could not be overthrown through a mass insurrection, as our party has pictured it. The letter insists that the only possible way of overthrowing them is by waging urban guerrilla warfare. Therefore, the letter says, if we are really serious about revolution, we should not be concentrating now on political work, as our party is doing; instead we should be focusing work on military tasks. This letter raises a number of serious questions and they deserve serious answers.

Right away, as we see from this letter, as soon as the question of waging revolutionary war in a country like the USA is raised, the big

problem comes up: How to deal with the awesome arsenal, the technological strength, and the vast number of troops of the ruling class and its armed forces. "We can't go up against all that," is something that is said over and over again, even by many people who would love to be able to go up against and defeat the armed enforcers of this system—if only there were a way to do it! By "all that" people have in mind the huge amounts of guns and ammunition, tanks, artillery, naval and air bombardment, helicopter and other air transport and mobility, electronic warfare technology, and so on. . . all the way up to chemical, even nuclear, weapons in the arsenal of the ruling imperialists, along with several million troops under their command. But the fact is that "all that" is not something the enemy could just immediately bring to bear on a particular theater of war or particular battlefield, *especially* not a situation of insurrection and civil war in its own home territory.

First off, a ruling class like the U.S. imperialists has worldwide commitments and is constantly entangled in actual military encounters or situations that threaten to erupt into combat. Large numbers of its troops and tremendous amounts of its war materiel are tied up, all around the world, in facing off against the rival imperialist bloc (headed by the Soviet Union) and also against actual or potential revolutionary struggles, including revolutionary armed struggles, in many different countries. Such revolutionary uprisings and revolutionary wars continue to erupt and develop, often with little or no warning and seemingly "out of nowhere." So, too, "hot spots" of conflict with the rival imperialists (and their proxies) are continually erupting. And all this is being greatly magnified in this present period of intense conflicts between the imperialist blocs and growing storms of revolutionary struggle. Thus, for the ruling class of a country like the U.S. to concentrate a very large part of its military forces in its own home territory would be a very difficult and dangerous proposition for them, just in terms of their global interests and commitments.

Furthermore, there would be very real political as well as military-tactical problems for them in concentrating a very large part of their armed forces and unleashing their most destructive weapons to put down an armed revolt in their own home territory. There is the question of what effects this would have, politically and militarily, on their whole system of alliances and pacts throughout the world. They would have to wonder and worry about the reliability of many of their troops, especially those drawn from among the most oppressed in society, when it came to putting down such a revolt based among

those very oppressed people. And on the military-tactical level there would also be problems for them in using some of their arsenal—including massive air attacks and weapons of mass destruction, such as nuclear weapons—in the conditions of urban combat that would find troops from both sides engaged in very close combat and generally closely "intertwined" with each other. This does not mean that the ruling imperialists would be unwilling or unable to use very violent means to try and put down such a revolt: Certainly their actions, inside their own home territory as well as all around the world, make it very clear that in the final analysis they would try to unleash whatever bloodshed and destruction they think is necessary to put down, and put down hard, any attempt at such an armed revolt "at home." But what they would try to do and what they would be able to do are not necessarily the same, especially keeping in mind the global commitments and conflicts they are already involved in—and the much bigger ones approaching—and all the political-military problems for them that have been mentioned.

For all these reasons, an armed uprising in a country like the USA would not be going up against "all that"—and certainly nothing like "all that" at the very start. The most likely scenario that could be pictured is one where at the start such an uprising, occurring in a number of cities at (more or less) the same time, would be facing only a fraction of the enemy forces—mainly those already on the scene with the level of organization and armament that they have on hand for putting down uprisings. It is quite possible that within a day or two after the actual insurrection started, some regular army reinforcements, with their weapons and support systems, would be sent in; but by that time, if it was winning initial victories against the local forces, the insurrectionary armed force would have gained valuable experience and tempering in the heat of battle, as well as gaining a lot more fighters from the ranks of the people and also some useful equipment. In any case, it is unlikely that right at the start an insurrection would be up against the other side's most powerfully and effectively armed and organized units, deployed offensively in an all-out effort to crush the insurrection.

And it is important to note that, in their typical arrogant contempt for the masses of oppressed people, the ruling authorities and their forces of "law and order" think of uprisings against them overwhelmingly in terms of "unruly mobs," without political consciousness and disciplined organization, or as the actions of small bands of "terrorists," cut off from the masses of oppressed people and having no

support among them. But an actual armed uprising—one that has a real shot at winning—cannot be either of these: It would have to be firmly based among the masses of the oppressed, and would have to draw in thousands, tens of thousands, and ultimately millions of them in various forms of combat and support activity.

### Two Basic Paths

In one discussion, Mao Tsetung said that all military logic could be reduced to this: “You fight your way and I’ll fight my way.” But what forms this takes, how it all comes down, depends on the situation. For example, in the revolutionary struggle Mao led in China, it was possible to take up armed struggle as the main form of revolutionary struggle, more or less from the beginning. Every other form of struggle—including agitation and propaganda and other political work, as well as struggles around economic conditions, and so on—was secondary to the armed struggle and took place in the context of revolutionary war, from the beginning and all the way through the revolution, until it seized power throughout the country in 1949. Mao recognized that it was possible to carry out the revolutionary struggle in the form of waging localized guerrilla warfare in the countryside, beginning where government authority was weakest, and to gradually build up the revolutionary armed forces and the liberated areas they controlled. Then, after a protracted period of such warfare, when the balance of forces had shifted in favor of the revolutionary forces—because of military victories won and other factors, including international developments—large-scale warfare would be waged to deliver the decisive defeat to the counter-revolutionary armed forces and liberate the whole country. And this is what did happen in China.

In conceiving this road to revolution, and in leading the many struggles to actually carry it out, through all the twists and turns, Mao blazed a new trail: He established protracted people’s war as the basic path for the revolution in countries like China—a path that remains the correct and necessary road, as a general rule, in the Third World today—and he also developed the first, really comprehensive Marxist military line, whose basic principles apply to all revolutionary armed struggles.

But, again, *how* they apply depends on the situation. For Mao also recognized that, in terms of specific military strategy and operations, what was correct for countries like China was not correct for imperialist countries like the USA. The path of protracted people’s war was possible in China—and is the strategic path being followed

in the Maoist people’s war in Peru today—because of a combination of factors. The level of technology, including means of transportation and communication, is not so highly developed in such countries. The general backwardness and uneven development of the countryside provides relatively greater opportunity for local self-sufficiency in parts of the countryside. The authority of the central government does not extend in a uniform and powerful way throughout the country. The social antagonisms in these countries are generally very acute, and the situation of the broad masses of people is desperate. The reactionary ruling class (and its imperialist masters) is not able to concentrate its armed forces with enough speed, coordination, and massive force to encircle and wipe out guerrilla forces that can hit quickly and with surprise and then move away, or “melt back into the local population,” just as quickly.

Such tactics by the revolutionary armed forces are the concrete application of the principles of revolutionary warfare—developed to their highest level so far by Mao Tsetung—to the actual situation in countries of this kind. They represent a living embodiment of the fundamental principle summarized by Mao: Revolutionary war is a war of the masses. In the actual circumstances of such countries, these tactics and their guiding military strategy provide the way for masses of people to support the revolutionary war, to actively join in this war in ever-increasing numbers, and through this war develop their ability to become masters of society. This is what it means, in such conditions, for the revolutionary forces to fight “our way.”

But this is not the case in a country like the USA, where the grip of the ruling class on society is very highly centralized in a strong national government and at the same time is powerfully extended throughout the country; where the level of technology, including means of transportation and communication, is very highly developed; where the ruling class can concentrate massive armed force in any particular place within a relatively short period of time; and where the general situation, including the conditions of the broad masses, does not incline and enable them to support and actively take part in revolutionary war except at relatively rare periods of extremely intense crisis and social upheaval. In countries of this kind, as Mao pointed out, the revolutionary path lies first in the preparation for waging revolutionary warfare—preparation that hinges on political work to influence the masses of people in a revolutionary way, to lead them in militantly confronting the system, to recruit the advanced into the vanguard revolutionary party, and to

build organized bases of support for the revolution among the masses. And when the time is right for launching revolutionary warfare, it must take the form of mass insurrections, centered in the urban areas, leading to the establishment of a revolutionary regime in as much of the territory as possible, and then the waging of a civil war to finally and completely defeat the old ruling class and its counterrevolutionary armed forces.

So, in broad terms, we can sum up in the following way the difference in the strategic path of armed struggle in the two general types of countries (Third World countries and imperialist states like the U.S.): As a general rule in Third World countries it is possible and necessary to start the armed struggle in one or a few local, rural areas and wage war over a relatively protracted period of time before going over to a nationwide armed offensive to seize nationwide political power. But in countries like the U.S. the armed struggle must be initiated only when it is possible to do so roughly at the same time in a number of major urban areas and *quickly* go over to a basically nationwide armed struggle.

To look at it from another angle, the way you accumulate forces for the seizure of nationwide political power in imperialist countries is through a period of political work that prepares the ground for the armed struggle; in the Third World countries generally these forces are accumulated mainly through the waging of the armed struggle itself on a protracted basis.

### Serious About Winning

This is the basic answer to those who raise: If you are really serious about revolution, you should be getting it on with the armed struggle right now. The point is exactly to be *serious* and to be *about revolution*. To be serious in this way is to follow a strategic plan that has a real chance of *winning*, and of winning in a way that leads to the most radical revolutionary change in society and the world. Attempts to apply a guerrilla warfare strategy to countries like the USA—for example, under the banner of “urban guerrilla warfare”—will lead, and in practical cases already have led, either to being crushed right away, or to being driven increasingly into a defensive position with no prospect of eventually going over to the offensive. Most fundamentally, it leads to a position of not mobilizing the masses, not relying on them to wage and support revolutionary armed struggle, and not enabling them to strengthen their ability to rule and transform society. This provides an example of fighting not

“our way” but in the final analysis “their way”—and with the predictable results: isolation and defeat.

On the other hand, it must be said that an even greater danger in countries like the USA is that the necessary work of political preparation will degenerate into reformist politics, that it will lose its connection with the task of waging the revolutionary armed struggle when the possibility arises, and that the opening to wage such an armed struggle will not even be recognized—perhaps no longer even looked for. No matter how sharp the contradictions in society get, no matter how explosive the conflicts in society and the world become, no matter how much the anger of the masses builds up—now erupting, now smoldering—it will always be possible to point to the remaining strength of the ruling class, to the fact that it still has some reserves and some maneuvering room, that there are still many backward masses, even among the most oppressed, and on and on. And, as the “bottom line,” it will always be possible to say, “we can’t possibly win,” because it will *always look that way until the armed struggle is underway and gaining momentum*.

Lenin pointed out that one of the distinguishing features of civil war, revolutionary civil war especially, is that the reserves are found, to a large degree, among people who are at first not actively involved, or *even* are in the camp of the enemy at the start. The drawing of masses of formerly inactive people into the revolutionary armed forces, in a very short period of time, is something that makes insurrectionary warfare stand out and something that is vital for its success; and the winning over of troops from the other side, through the combination of fighting them on the battlefield and at the same time appealing to their basic interests as part of the oppressed masses, is also a vital part of insurrectional revolutionary warfare. These characteristics are factors that give an insurrection a chance of winning *when it may well appear* on the surface that *there is no such chance* at all. Even keeping in mind the crucial point that was made at the beginning—that, particularly at the start, an armed uprising in a country like the USA would not be going up against anything like the full military power of the ruling class—even keeping this in mind, it is still true that gaining initial victories and quickly building the kind of momentum that could draw in large numbers of masses would not be a “sure shot” for an insurrectionary force that would have to begin only lightly armed and with only a very elementary level of organization and training. So the pull to put off the launching of the insurrection, to put off the armed struggle...and put it off...and put it

off...this will always be a very powerful pull, *even when* there is actually the basis to have a real shot—if not a “sure shot”—at winning.

### Necessary Conditions

In light of this, we can return to the basic question posed at the very beginning of this article: What are the necessary conditions that have to exist for there to be an armed uprising that has a real chance of success? No one can set down an exact list of such conditions—one, two, three, four...—certainly not one that will provide a “guaranteed recipe for success.” But it is possible to identify some basic conditions, some basic elements that would be key ingredients of any possibly successful armed insurrection in a country like the USA.

*There must be a serious crisis in society and in government.* Such things as depressed economic conditions for large numbers of people and instability in the economic situation; disaffection and disillusionment with government institutions and leaders; widespread feelings that the institutions of society and government do not work as they’re supposed to, that things aren’t fair and are stacked in favor of certain groups, and so on: These kinds of things form a backdrop against which particularly sharp jolts in society and the world can cause a very acute crisis to erupt. Such jolts can come from a sudden, unexpected defeat or loss in a war or military adventure, or the exposure of a dangerous move toward war; from an attempt by the government to carry out repression that is handled badly and/or meets with unexpected and perhaps fierce resistance; from a particular incident (a legal case, a political event, racist mob attack...) that somehow acts as “the straw that broke the camel’s back” for many people; from a sudden and severe shock in the economy; and so on. In a sense, the point is: It could come from anywhere, if there just happens to be the right “mix” of events in society and the world at the particular time. Many of the kinds of things mentioned here can be seen, in one form or another, in the present-day situation, and there is definitely a very real possibility that this kind of “mix” could come together, suddenly and seemingly “out of nowhere,” and create the kind of serious crisis that would call forth turmoil and upheaval throughout society that could not be easily silenced or suppressed.

*There must be mass upheaval and rebellion, including among the basic proletarians and other oppressed people in society.* The oppressed masses must be in a combative mood, in a mood to support and protect those who would go up against the forces of

“law and order,” especially those who would do so in a politically conscious way. Such combativity, such upheaval and rebellion, creates the kind of atmosphere in which sympathy and support for revolution is gained among significant elements in the middle class who are fed up with the way things are going and are outraged by the ruthless determination of the ruling class to carry out its murderous program and to crush any opposition. This kind of atmosphere also gives more operating room to the revolutionary forces. It gives them more basis for resisting the intensifying repression, for enlisting masses in this, and for turning this resistance into an important part of the preparations for an insurrection. It spreads the “contagion” of rebellion and noncooperation with the authorities and disrupts their efforts to surveil, to train their sights on and wipe out revolutionary forces and revolutionary leadership before there is the chance to get the insurrection off the ground. Such combativity, rebellion, and widespread upheaval makes the question of armed uprising more of a real possibility and a practical, living question among broader numbers of the oppressed, and presents the best conditions for those most inclined toward revolutionary armed struggle to come forward.

It is very important to emphasize that certainly not all—in fact probably nothing like a majority—of those taking part in such upheaval and rebellion would start off as conscious supporters of the revolutionary program and leadership of the proletariat. More and more of the rebellious masses must be won to this program and leadership through the course of the struggle leading up to the insurrection and even after the insurrection has been launched. This points to the final crucial condition that must be focused on here.

*There must be a vanguard party capable of turning the mass upheaval and rebellion into an organized insurrection and giving it overall leadership and direction; and there must be a backbone force of proletarians and other oppressed masses who have been systematically trained in the line of the party and in work carried out according to this line.* What other force will be capable of carrying out the necessary preparations, of determining when the time is right to go over to the insurrectionary struggle, and of enabling this struggle to take an organized and disciplined character, guided by a vision of fighting to break all chains of enslavement, abolish all forms of exploitation and oppression?

What program, other than the program of the revolutionary proletariat, will be able to point the way to overcoming the divide-and-conquer tactics of the enemy and unite the oppressed of all

different nationalities on a revolutionary basis? What other program can really and fully unleash the fury of women as a mighty force for revolution? What other program can reach out to people in the middle classes—like farmers or (formerly) better-paid factory workers whose situation is becoming increasingly one of hardship if not of ruin; or people involved in struggles against the military aggression and the preparations for world war of the imperialist ruling class—reach out and show them the way out of all this madness and desperation? What other program can fire the imagination and daring of masses of youth, giving them a vision of a future worth believing in and fighting for? Who else besides the politically aware, class-conscious proletariat can make all this a powerful living force to attract all these diverse groups and both stiffen their resistance to the ruling class and move them in a direction of supporting revolution (or at least not helping the ruling class to put down the revolutionary uprising)?

These questions, and their answers in actual living terms, not only have real political meaning and importance, but once the armed struggle were underway they would have concrete military implications as well. What the attitude of various strata and groups would be toward the revolutionary attempt at seizing power would be reflected in whether the revolutionary armed forces were met with a friendly or a hostile reception as they moved through different neighborhoods and areas; whether people supported and sheltered these revolutionary armed forces and gave them vital information, while denying all this to the enemy; whether or not people would come forward and enlist with the revolutionary army and offer their knowledge and skills and resources of all kinds to aid it in its literally life-and-death struggle. In short, all this has everything to do with whether or not a revolutionary insurrection could really get off the ground and have a real chance at winning.

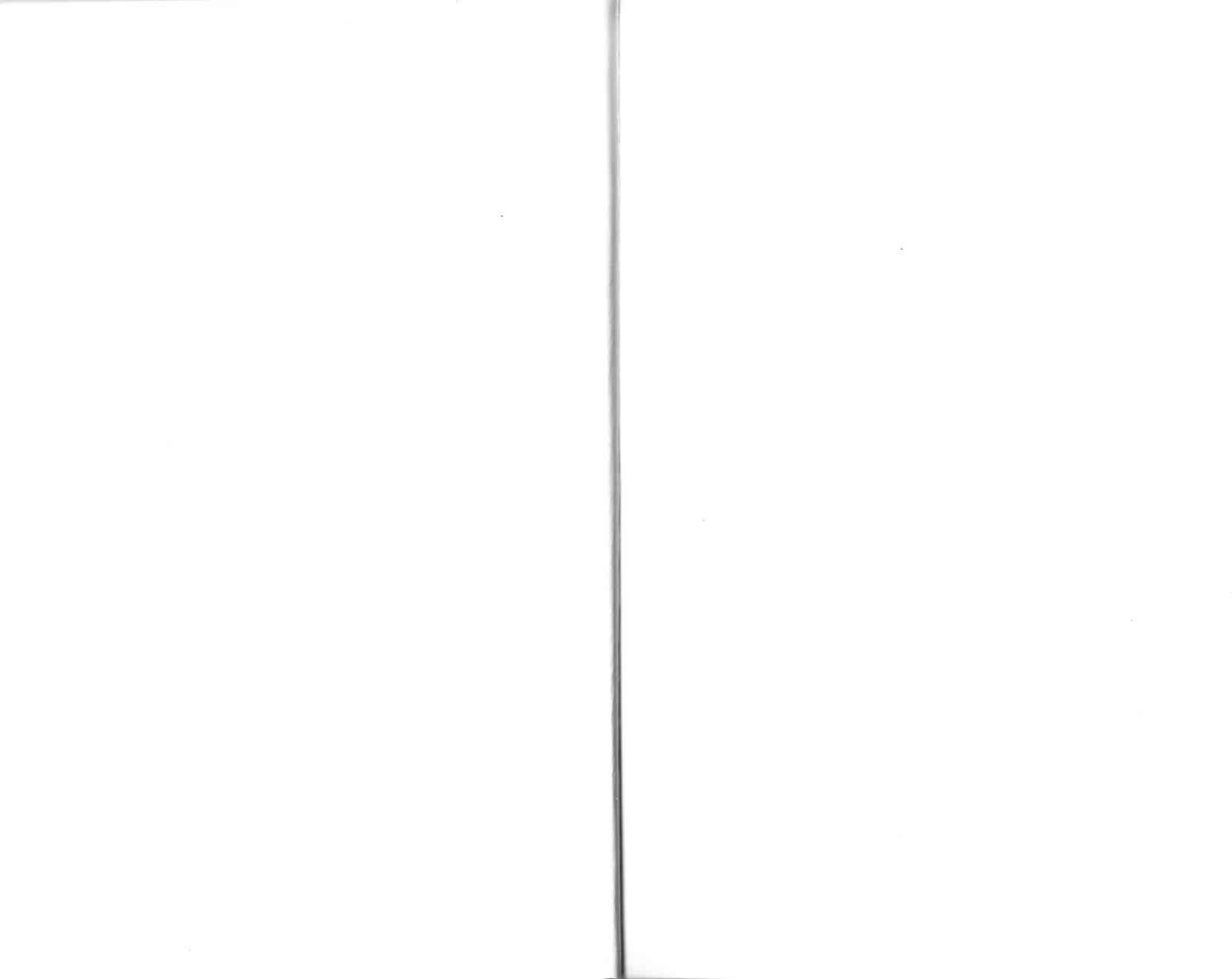
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At this point it could be raised that what has been discussed is only the revolutionary war at its beginning, insurrectionary phase in a country like the USA. And even if it could be conceived that this first, insurrectionary struggle, as pictured here, could succeed, there would still be the question of actually waging a revolutionary civil war against the imperialists, a war in which they would bring to bear a massive and powerful machinery of death and destruction. This is true, and there would indeed be many new problems and great obstacles for the new revolutionary armed forces to confront. That is a subject for another time. But let me just say here that, once the first,

insurrectionary warfare had succeeded—once the local enemy forces (and probably some enemy regular units sent as reinforcements) had been defeated in battle and the revolutionary forces had liberated some urban areas—then the revolutionary forces would have accomplished a great deal in revolutionary war and would have a basis for meeting the new challenges and for going ahead and winning. And if it is possible to conceive of *getting into* such a war with them, for real, then it is certainly possible to conceive of *winning* that war.

And let's not forget the tremendous worldwide effects of actually engaging in such a revolutionary war in a country that is a bastion of imperialism and oppression and enslavement of masses of people and whole nations all over the world—once revolutionary war broke out in such a country, the whole world would be thrown into turmoil such as it has never seen before—nothing would remain untouched by this. Rebellion, uprising, revolution, including revolutionary wars, would be given tremendous impulse, from the “backyard” of the imperialists to the far corners of the globe, on every continent and literally in every country. It would be as if a gigantic earthquake had erupted under the entire structure of world relations. Who would not give anything to be in that situation? How to get there returns us to the question: What is the correct and necessary work of revolutionaries today?

In the pamphlet *Preparing the Ground for Revolution* I emphasized that carrying out our party's central task—Create Public Opinion/Seize Power—provides the basic guideline for preparing the ground politically for revolution and then waging the revolutionary struggle to actually overthrow the system and establish a new revolutionary power and base area for the world revolution. Preparing minds and organizing forces for revolution: that is the content of preparing for the struggle to seize power, of preparing the ground for revolution. In that same pamphlet I compared this political work to laying siege to the fortress of imperialist rule. Such political work can also be compared to preparatory bombardment. This political work is our equivalent of artillery, with the party newspaper the heaviest gun. With such political artillery we are “softening up” the enemy, while at the same time we are carrying out political movements and engagements to arouse the masses, influence the political terrain, and gather and train our forces. And we are learning to do this in a way that strengthens and protects our organization, and in that way prepares for the future. When the conditions do emerge, when the “mix” comes together, when the ground has been prepared as much as it can be, then it is time to seize the ground that has been prepared.



Revolutionaries, especially Maoist revolutionaries, are famous for the view that “the power of the people is greater than the Man’s technology.” That was a spirit that marked the ’60s in particular—with the struggle of the Vietnamese people being an important and inspiring example. But the U.S. war against Iraq, with its massive “high tech” deployment, has posed new challenges to this view. How could a revolutionary army hope to defeat the modern imperialist powers? In this interview Bob Avakian explores this question, and concludes: the power of the people is *st///* greater than the Man’s technology. But he argues that to make it so requires combining the decisive thing—the revolutionary energy of the masses—with a scientific doctrine and strategy for people’s war. With that combination, he concludes, once the necessary conditions emerge, a people’s war could have a real chance for success—even in a country like the U.S.

This interview further develops the thesis in an earlier work by Bob Avakian, “Could We Really Win? The Possibility of Revolutionary War.” It does so through a serious examination of the military strengths and weaknesses demonstrated by the imperialist side in the Gulf war—comparing and contrasting their forces and way of fighting to the potential strengths of the people.

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