

SPECIFIC CHARACTERISTICS OF PEOPLE'S WAR IN THE PHILIPPINES

Guide Questions from ND Online School of Anakbayan-Europe Answers by Prof. Jose Maria Sison

June 27, 2021

- 1. For fifty-two (52) years the Communist Party of the Philippines (CPP) is said to be waging protracted people's war (ppw). What is the nature and particularity of a protracted people's war as opposed to an insurrectionary warfare?*

JMS: The strategic line of protracted people's war by encircling the cities from the countryside means the working class leadership in a semicolonial and semifeudal like the Philippines availing of the peasant masses as the main force of the armed revolution and the countryside as the widest area for maneuver while the people's army is still small and weak and still needs to accumulate political and military strength to be able to seize the cities in concert with the urban mass uprisings of the people.

The probable stages in the development of protracted people's war are the strategic defensive, strategic stalemate and strategic offensive. In the strategic defensive, the people's army is far too inferior to the enemy in terms of armed strength. In strategic stalemate, the warring sides have more or less the same armed strength. In the strategic offensive, the people's army has achieved superior armed strength and proceeds to seize political power from the enemy in the cities.

In a country like the Philippines, it is wrong and disastrous for a people's army to prematurely engage in urban insurrectionary warfare, especially in the major cities well-secured by the reactionary armed forces. It is highly probable that in the strategic stalemate lesser cities can be seized for short periods of time. But the best time to seize the cities on a permanent basis is when the enemy has been thoroughly weakened by defeats in the countryside.

In the experience of the CPP, the subjectivist notion that the Philippines had ceased to be semifeudal and had become industrial capitalist gained ground in certain regions at different times from 1980 onward. This ideological error led to the Right opportunist error of exaggerating the role of urban legal struggle and depreciating the role of the working class in the united front and also led to the "Left" opportunist error of urban insurrectionism and depreciating the protracted people's war in the countryside.

One major variant of urban insurrectionism was the line of intensifying both the armed city partisan warfare and the protest mass actions in the national capital region, with the working class seizing political power as in the October Revolution of 1917. Another variant was the line of making urban insurrection the leading politico-military factor in the armed revolution and reducing the NPA to being merely a military adjunct which was ordered to engage in premature regularization and verticalization as the reinforcement to the "people's strike" of the armed city partisans and spontaneous masses in the city.

In the worst case of urban insurrectionism, in which too many companies were formed rapidly and prematurely for the purpose of urban insurrection, the flexibility of strategy and tactics in rural-based guerrilla warfare, the balance of the relative concentration and relative dispersal of NPA units and the mass work needed to support the armed struggle were abandoned to the prejudice of the revolution.

The companies were unsustainable, lost initiative in fighting and became vulnerable to enemy surveillance and attacks. When setbacks occurred, the wrong line was not reviewed and corrected but hysteria was fanned to blame supposed deep penetration agents. The anti-DPA witch hunt did not follow the principle of due process and the correct methods of investigation, prosecution, trial and judgment on the basis of evidence. Thus, serious damage was done to the revolution.

In certain regions and areas, timely corrections were made by the principled and sober CPP cadres and NPA commanders. But in 1992, the CPP Central Committee found it necessary to launch the Second Great Rectification Movement as a campaign of ideological and education to identify, criticize and repudiate in the main the “Left” opportunist errors of urban insurrectionism and to reaffirm the basic principles of the revolution and the general line of people’s democratic revolution through protracted people’s war.

2. Is protracted people’s war (PPW) an original idea from the CPP-NPA-NDF? From where did this pattern of warfare originate? Why should the Filipino people’s war be a protracted one? How could a protracted people’s war benefit Philippine society?

JMS: Comrade Mao Zedong developed the theory and practice of protracted people’s war in the course of the Chinese revolution. Chinese history is rich with the history of peasant wars. Mao also learned from the war in the countryside in Russia during the civil war and against the foreign interventionists after the seizure of political power by the Bolsheviks in Petrograd in the October Revolution of 1917.

In the history of Europe, two thirds of the Grand Army of Napoleon were destroyed by guerrilla warfare in the countryside in Spain and Russia. By the time that he was at Waterloo, he had only one-third left of his Grand Army. He was also outmaneuvered when he became so obsessed with frontally attacking Wellington’s forces and was attacked from the side by the Prussian cavalry forces galloping in from the woods.

In my “Specific Characteristics of People’s War in the Philippines”, I tried to develop further the theory and practice of protracted people’s war by adding to the use of the rough physical terrain and socal terrain of the countryside the use of the archipelagic character of the Philippines to divide the enemy forces.

At first the islands are a disadvantage but become a long-term advantage when the revolutionary mass work and armed struggle are done successfully on a nationwide scale under the policy of centralized ideological and political leadership and decentralized

operations. The CPP, NPA and NDFP have been successful at developing a revolutionary movement that is deeply rooted among the workers and peasants on a nationwide scale.

The Filipino people have to carry out the protracted people's war because they have no other way for self-reliantly developing the people's army from being small and weak one to big and strong, especially because the Philippines is archipelagic and does not have common borders with any friendly country that can help. In certain periods, the Chinese revolution found useful the common borders with the Soviet Union and so did the Vietnamese revolutionaries the common borders with China.

Remember that the New People's Army started with only nine automatic rifles and 26 inferior firearms for 60 fighters. Over a protracted period of time, the NPA has grown to thousands of Red fighters with high-powered weapons, with reserve and auxiliary forces such as the people's militia with tens of thousands of members and self-defense units of the revolutionary mass organizations with hundreds of thousands of members.

The protracted people's war benefits Philippine society by propagating and realizing the people's democratic revolution against foreign monopoly capitalism, feudalism and bureaucrat capitalism. The Communist Party builds the New People's Army and the National Democratic Front to arouse, organize and mobilize the people in their millions. In concert with the armed struggle, the agrarian revolution is carried out and the revolutionary mass base is built.

The revolutionary mass organizations of various types are formed. And the organs of political power are built as the people's democratic government long before the seizure of the presidential palace in Manila. This people's government of workers and peasants is in charge of administration, public education, land reform, production, health care, social programs, cultural affairs, self-defense, the justice system, disaster relief and environmental protection.

3. It is said that the new people's army (NPA) is organized from elements of poor rag-tag band of men and women with poor and vintage weapons from variegated communities rather than from highly trained and schooled military experts. In what way will the war proceed with a semi-feudal and a semi-colonial political economy? How can it carry about a protracted military resistance against a modern and powerfully equipped bourgeois-state-funded military bureaucracy?

JMS: The NPA builds itself precisely from the most oppressed and exploited classes of people, the workers and peasants, who are 90 percent of the population. They need the revolution for national and social liberation the most and they are the most motivated to fight the local exploiting classes of big comprador, landlords and bureaucrat capitalists in the ongoing civil war and even the forces of US imperialism when it decides to wage a war of aggression.

As it has already been proven, the NPA can grow in strength by responding to the needs and demands of the toiling masses, gaining their active support, using the countryside and the

archipelagic character of the Philippines to split the forces of the enemy, waging a war of fluid movement by concentrating, dispersing and shifting according to circumstances and launching only those battles that can be surely won by the NPA. The NPA avoids decisive engagements that can result in its annihilation in any guerrilla base or region..

At the strategic level, the enemy can be superior to the NPA in all respects, numerical strength, military training and equipment. Rate the enemy as 10 times strategically superior to the NPA. But whenever the NPA launches its tactical offensives, it makes sure that it is 10 times superior to the enemy in the battle ground the NPA has chosen.

Thus, close to 100 percent of the arms of the NPA have been seized from the enemy. The reactionary armed forces publicly admit that the NPA has wiped out 13,300 of their troops since 1969 in contrast to their record of killing with impunity some 40,000 civilians in reprisal.

At any time, only two to five per cent of the arms in the hands of the entire NPA are donated by allies or bought from traders. In the course of the people's war, the NPA seizes weapons from its enemy and thereby raises its technological level. Ultimately, it will be able take over the high-tech weapons of the enemy as in successful revolutions.

The revolutionary movement aims to annihilate as well as disintegrate the reactionary military, police and paramilitary forces of the enemy. The principal policy is to annihilate or wipe out enemy units through ambushes, raids and disarming operations.

But there is also the secondary policy to disintegrate the enemy forces by persuading enemy units and personnel to change sides, when the crisis and losses of the ruling system have become so grave and the tide of war is going in favor of the revolution. Let us keep in mind that most of the enemy troops have been recruited from the toiling masses of workers and peasants.

4. How shall a social movement with a people's army sustain itself in a protracted scheme? What is the significance of a protracted people's war to the political advancement of the Communist Party in the Philippines?

JMS: The CPP operates in both urban and rural areas. For quite some time already, it is in practically all provinces of the Philippines, whereas the NPA forces and units are in more than 110 guerrilla bases in 74 provinces out of 81 Philippine provinces. In the course of the protracted people's war, the CPP has provided the leadership to the NPA and has increased its membership among the Red commanders and fighters and among the mass organizations arising from the mass work of the CPP and NPA.

The CPP promotes the social movement by encouraging the urban-based legal patriotic and democratic organizations and building the revolutionary mass organizations in both urban and rural areas. The CPP as well as the NDFP develops the urban underground and its linkages and coordination with the revolutionary forces in the rural areas.

The social movement becomes stronger and more respected because of the existence and growing strength of the NPA and the over-all rise of the revolutionary movement under the leadership of the CPP. Without the people's army for the reactionaries to reckon with, they will take lightly the demands and protests of the social movement. With the people's army, the people's government can enforce its policies.

Where the NPA is strong, the CPP is likewise strong. The two can be strong only because the CPP is at the lead and core of the NPA and the revolutionary mass movement. The CPP and NPA are deeply rooted among the workers and peasants. They have won over the middle forces as a result of united front work by the NDFP. And they are taking advantage of the contradictions among the reactionaries in order to isolate, weaken and destroy the enemy.

5. In what manner can the CPP win in a protracted people's war? How do you envision the course of the protracted people's war that the NPA engages? What should be considered as tactical as against strategic victory (and vice versa) in a protracted people's war?

JMS: I have already explained how the NPA grows in strength and advances from one strategic stage to another. In the stage of strategic defensive, the NPA launches the tactical offensives through guerrilla warfare in order to seize arms, gain strength and frustrate the superior strategic strength of the enemy.

The people keep the enemy forces blind and deaf and the NPA makes them suffer casualties and defeats through ambushes, raids, arrest operations, demolition work and other forms of sabotage. The enemy is like a big monster that cannot protect its body parts and is bleeding to death from many wounds.

In the strategic stalemate, the NPA shall already have the strength to wage regular mobile warfare and launch tactical offensives that are much bigger than those of guerrilla warfare in the strategic defensive. Thus, the NPA can further increase its armed strength and further change the balance of forces in its favor. In the strategic offensive, the NPA has the armed strength already superior to that of the enemy and launches a combination of regular mobile warfare and regular warfare to inflict final defeat on the enemy.

It is possible that when the reactionary armed forces are already losing heavily and fast during the civil war US imperialism would escalate its level of military intervention or even carry out a full-blown war of aggression. But by that time, the NPA shall have gained the over-all political and military strength and the ability to adjust its strategy and tactics for a war of national liberation against foreign aggression.

It is highly probable that the NPA shall have the weapons that caused the defeat of the US in its war of aggression in Vietnam. Portable ground to air missiles are far cheaper than the costly targets, such as the drones, AUVs, helicopters and airplanes. It is also highly probable that the US shall have declined further strategically or become preoccupied with other areas of conflict and the Philippine revolution will be somehow assisted directly or indirectly by the anti-imperialist and democratic mass struggles and socialist revolutions abroad.

6. Is it correct to call the protracted people's war (PPW) as a war without end? Why?

JMS: It is wrong to say that the protracted people's war is a war without end. The limits are actually recognized and set when you say that the protracted people's war will continue so long as imperialism and the local exploiting classes persist. These monsters cannot be forever oppressing and exploiting the Filipino people who are resisting.

It took more than 300 years for the Filipino people to gain the national consciousness, direction and strength to defeat Spanish colonialism. It will take a much shorter time for the Filipino people to defeat US imperialism and the local exploiting classes.

It is because the Filipino people and their revolutionary forces are guided by the theory and practice of Marxism-Leninism-Maoism, the general political line of people's democratic revolution with a socialist perspective and the strategy of protracted people's war.

Unremolded petty bourgeois elements can drop out of the revolutionary movement but the proletariat, peasantry and most of the urban petty bourgeoisie are fed up with the escalating conditions of oppression and exploitation and will not get tired from fighting for national and social liberation by every possible and necessary means.

-7. How long shall a protracted people's war sustain?

JMS: So long as the semicolonial and semifeastal ruling system exists and its chronic crisis worsens, there will be fertile conditions for the protracted people's war to continue and grow in strength. The people's war will be self-reliant and sustainable for as long as long as necessary.

The toiling masses of workers and even the urban petty bourgeoisie will oppose the escalating conditions of oppression and exploitation and will recognize the need to wage a protracted people's war and will continue to join the CPP, NPA, NDFP, the revolutionary mass organizations and the people's democratic government in the countryside.

It is well-proven in the last more than five decades that the NPA can preserve itself, grow in strength and advance from its measly 9 automatic rifles to its current strength of so many thousands of high-powered weapons with practically no military assistance from abroad. The NPA has withstood even the Dengist drive to liquidate the revolutionary armed struggle in Southeast Asia and the setbacks of the socialist cause due to revisionist betrayal and the subsequent neoliberal offensive.

-8. What is the penultimate goal of a protracted people's war? Is there a significant timeline that the CPP and the NPA have set? Why and why not?

JMS: The people's democratic revolution shall be basically completed upon the nationwide seizure of political power as a result of the NPA's victorious strategic offensive in the protracted people's power. Then, it shall be possible to begin the socialist revolution.

In general and probable terms, there is already a schedule of strategic stages for the NPA to go through in carrying out the necessary tactical offensives at each stage. But there is yet no schedule as precise as the train schedule which is set by the owners and managers of the train company. We have seen how the NPA has grown from teams and squads to platoons and companies as combat units in the strategic defensive.

We still have to see NPA combat units develop further and fight as companies and battalions in regular mobile warfare in the strategic defensive. Further into the future we shall see in the strategic offensive the combinations of battalions and regiments taking over cities through regular mobile warfare and positional warfare.

9. In a general manner, SCPW mentions “...popular uprisings in the future and for the advance of the people’s army” .How is this in anyway comparable to the Huaihai, PingJin and LiaoShen Campaign in the North (1948-1949), Nanjing and Shanghai Campaign (1949) in China or the 1945 uprising and 1975 Saigon Offensive in Vietnam?

JMS: When the people’s army starts the strategic offensive, the masses in most parts of the Philippines shall be able to start uprisings to seize power on a wide scale. This was demonstrated twice in Philippine history, when Spanish colonialism started to collapse in 1898 and when the Japanese invaders abandoned their positions in many parts of the country and concentrated in the mountain provinces in 1944-45. The Hukbalahap took over power in several provinces in Central Luzon, the Igorots and Ilocanos wiped out 100,000 out of the 150, 000 Japanese troops and the USAFFE took over most of the archipelago.

The Huaihai, Pingjin and Liaoshen Campaigns in the North (1948-1949) and Nanjing and Shanghai Campaign (1949) in China were campaigns in the strategic offensive of the people’s army towards the complete defeat of the Guomindang. The people’s army had overwhelming superiority over the enemy and even the US ultimately decided to withdraw its three divisions already in China to back the GMD.

From the strategic stalemate to the strategic offensive, the people’s army used regular mobile warfare to knock out enemy positions and allow the people to rise up, take over power and allow the people’s army to keep on moving to knock out enemy positions. During the strategic offensive, the combined encirclement campaigns by the people’s army and the mass uprising compelled the GMD generals to surrender entire cities such as Shanghai.

In the 1975 Saigon Offensive, the combined armed strength of the DRV and SVNLF was superior to the already demoralized and beleaguered enemy forces and was able to take over Saigon. Like many elsewhere in South Vietnam, the people of Saigon rose up in concert with the people’s army. The strength of the strategic offensive was so overwhelming that the remaining US armed forces had no choice but to withdraw totally from Vietnam.

10. With the Philippines geographic realities, wherein major islands of Luzon and Mindanao is separated with the smaller numerous islands of Visayas, do you think there’s a likelihood that the Philippines will be separated like Vietnam and Korea with the escalation of people’s war?

JMS: There are only 11 major islands which carry 94 per cent of the population in the Philippines. The reactionary armed forces will continue to have relatively strong forces in only a few forts in some of these islands. Thus, it is not impossible for the NPA to isolate and encircle these forts and take them over ultimately. The combinations of regular mobile, positional warfare, the people's uprising, decisive defeats of the enemy, mass defections and surrender of enemy forces and other factors will come into play.

As of now, the more than 110 NPA guerrilla fronts are on a nationwide scale and can serve as the base for building wider revolutionary base areas and for develop the strength to defeat the reactionary armed forces totally in the future. This is more likely to happen than the prolonged and indefinite division of the Philippines into two parts as in the Vietnam and Korea in the aftermath of World War II. The US is known to avoid launching a war of aggression when it sees that that it has no chance of achieving quick victory.

11. Armed revolutionaries are fighting in “narrow fighting fronts” in the Philippines. How does this differ with the Indochinese and Chinese experience in terms of rear/base building and warfare conduct?

JMS: In general, as it has already done, the NPA has to wage extensive and intensive guerrilla warfare for a long period of time because of the elongated archipelagic character of the Philippines and the narrow fighting fronts. The Filipinos do not have the advantage of the Chinese such as having a large expanse of land and common borders with the Soviet Union; and the Indochinese such as having common borders with China.

The NPA has already achieved a great victory in self-reliantly building its nationwide strength without any significant military assistance from abroad even under conditions when the revisionist betrayal of socialism in the Soviet Union and then in China resulted in strategic setbacks for the world proletarian revolution. Deng Xiao ping also liquidated the armed struggles in Thailand, Burma and other Southeast Asian countries and withdrew support from that in the Philippines.

12. Can you give us an approximate picture of stages of strategic stalemate and strategic offensive may look like in the Philippines in the future? What it also may look like if there is direct aggression of US Forces, Chinese Armed Forces or if there would be imperialist war/global war among imperialist powers?

JMS: So far, I have been able to prognosticate on the probable strategic stages of the people's war in the Philippines in terms of the size of combat units and the type of warfare that can be carried out. In the strategic defensive, platoons and companies play an effective role in extensive and intensive guerrilla warfare. In the strategic stalemate, companies and battalions will carry out the regular mobile warfare. And in the strategic offensive, battalion and regiments in combination with people's uprisings will accomplish the strategic offensive.

There is a possibility that the US will wage a war of aggression during the strategic stalemate when it thinks it can still save its puppet state but the NPA can do some adjustments to defeat the US combat regiments and air power as did the Vietnamese when they defeated the US from 1965 to 1975. China has no compelling reason to wage a war of aggression against the Philippines. As a matter of principle, the Filipino revolutionaries assert Philippine sovereign and maritime rights in the West Philippines but support China's national sovereignty over Taiwan, Hong Kong, Xinjiang, Tibet and the Daoyu islands.

13. What the legal democratic forces/non-parties to the armed conflict (church people, peace advocates, anti-war reactionaries, people's organizations, progressive lawmakers etc.) can and must do with the progress of People's War in the Philippines (under stalemate or offensive stage or conditions of National War) on one hand and the likelihood of fascist terror by reactionaries on the other hand? What lessons can be learned in the Chinese and Vietnamese experience?

JMS: The best time for the Filipino revolutionaries to engage in peace negotiations is when they are about to win and the enemy sues for peace negotiations. The Filipino revolutionaries can carry out peace negotiations as the Chinese CP did with the GMD after the defeat of Japan and the Vietnamese did when they were already preparing their strategic offensive. The Filipino revolutionaries must be prepared to fight all the way to the total victory of the Philippine revolution.

Duterte has made peace negotiations impossible. Even peace consultants of the NDFP are being butchered by him. There can be no peace negotiations any more unless the peace negotiators, consultants and staff of the NDFP are assured of indefinite refuge abroad. Localized peace talks so-called are actually intelligence, psywar and combat schemes of the enemy at the expense of the revolutionaries and the peace advocates. They have a longer history of failure since the National Unification Commission in 1992 than the GRP-NDF peace negotiations which started later in 1994.

14. What are objective (international and domestic) and subjective (forces) conditions that made the people's war in the Philippines more protracted than other countries that waged people's war in Asia?"

JMS: The objective conditions that have made the the people's war in the Philippines even more protracted than in China and Vietnam include the following: the lack of common borders with supportive countries, the absence of conditions similar to those of World War II which compelled the US and European powers to focus on Europe and allowed the people to fight Japan alone as imperialist power and then the revisionist betrayal of of socialism from 1956 onward, especially the Dengist counterrevolution from 1976 onward.

The subjective factors include the following: the major errors of the series of Lavaite leaders which disabled the Hukbalahap from achieving more, the welcoming of the return of US domination and stabilization of the puppet state, the military adventurism of 1949 and the policies to liquidate the HMB in 1955 and the old CP-SP merger party in 1957. In the time of the reestablished CPP, the Left opportunist errors of urban insurrectionism from 1981 to

1992 mainly and the error of conservatism that set in after 2005 have been the adverse subjectivist factors. The latter error is being corrected by the proper proportioning of the deployment of forces and the balance of the tactical offensives and mass work. ###