

Rise of the Civilian Soldier
From Resistance to Revolution,
Case Studies in Italian and Vietnamese Guerrilla Warfare

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Abstract

This thesis deals with the question of how revolutionary guerrilla warfare as we know it came to be and how it has shaped the history of geopolitics, military doctrines, and the way that wars are fought. It is easy to see that traditional interstate warfare is far less common today than intrastate warfare. Civil wars, terrorism, insurgencies, revolutions, and insurrections constitute the majority of modern conflicts. The purpose of this thesis is to explain the origins and development of the modern theories of revolutionary guerrilla warfare, such as Mao Tse-Tung's. It uses a comparative analysis of the Four Days of Naples and the Battle of Dien Bien Phu to demonstrate the historical evolution of guerrilla tactics, and how this evolution has continued to the present day.

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Part I: INTRODUCTION

Guerrilla warfare has always had a way of capturing the imagination. The simple idea of small, under-equipped forces thwarting better-armed and better-trained foes is a classic David-and-Goliath scenario, one that has played out countless times in the history of armed conflict. In the twenty-first century, this so-called unconventional warfare has grabbed our attention even more. Rare are the days of massive, coordinated, army-on-army, nation-on-nation clashes and “large wars.” Battles like those fought at Gettysburg, Verdun, Gallipoli, Kursk, Tarawa, El Alamein, Iwo Jima, Normandy, and Inchon fade fast into memory, then history, then legend. Here to stay, evidently, is a seemingly perpetual cycle of insurgencies, civil wars, revolutions, partisan conflicts, ethnic rivalries, terrorist campaigns, and other forms of irregular “small” warfare. Irregular has become the new regular, so to speak.

We should not treat this with surprise, however. What we are witnessing is simply the culmination of a tradition and trend, a chapter in the evolution of warfare that has been developing for almost a century. Specifically, we are witnessing the validation and verification of the tactical and strategic theories of Mao Tse-Tung. He famously published *Yu Chi Chan*, his treatise on guerrilla warfare in 1937, laying out a calculated vision for what would arguably become the biggest triumph in the history of guerrillas — the Chinese Communist Revolution in 1949. Guerrilla warfare has been chronicled as far back as ancient Sumer (Book 14), but what Mao prophesied and demonstrated was something new: a breed of guerrillas who were not tribal warriors or regular soldiers forced

into unorthodox tactics, but rather ordinary civilians who were compelled to take up arms. And while guerrillas of the past have always risen up to defy foreign invaders, Mao envisioned a new species of guerrilla who would wage war not merely as a resistance against an alien occupier, but as a revolutionary force, to overthrow domestic enemies and remake the homeland in accordance with a forceful political vision.

To grasp how and why Mao's prophecy has come true so completely in the twenty-first century, it is necessary to examine two battles from the twentieth century. In the darkest days of World War II, gangs of rebellious Neapolitans would unknowingly put Mao's blueprint into action. Their kinsmen across Italy would stun the world as they turned their resistance to Nazi occupation into a homegrown revolution to exorcise Fascism from its own birthplace and redefine Italy as a pluralistic, modern democracy in the post-war era. The second defining moment would come on the heels of Mao's victory, in the small country of Vietnam. The world was stunned and shocked when, in 1954, the improbable happened at Dien Bien Phu — the French military, fresh from its successes in World War II, was defeated by the Viet Minh insurgents. In both of these battles, the impossible happened: for the first time in the second World War, Hitler's legions succumbed to a civilian force. And for the first time, a modern European military suffered crushing defeat at the hands of a homegrown Asian rebellion. It is the objective of this thesis to demonstrate exactly how these conflicts evolved and how they affected the future of warfare.

“Regular” warfare remains the style of combat in which two officially sanctioned (usually representing separate nations), organized, and trained armies face each other in

open battle. This is what Mao called “the war of position and the war of movement” (Mao 51). The tactics, gear, and weaponry of the two opposing forces will inevitably differ, but they are understood to be relatively symmetrical and well-matched: two forces equipped and deployed to take a battlefield by sweeping away an enemy army. Conventional battles like the one fought at Waterloo in 1815 represent the “regular” end of the spectrum of warfare.

At the other extreme end of the spectrum, we find asymmetrical or “irregular” warfare. By its very nature, this is much harder to nail down because it covers such a broad range of violent activities. Terrorism, cyber-attacks, piracy, ethnic cleansing, civil wars, insurrections, and simple banditry have all been employed as tools of making war on a disproportionately strong enemy. Generally speaking, this thesis concerns itself with “guerrilla” warfare — a military campaign waged by armed civilians, either against a state military, a foreign military, or a different group of guerrillas. Other terms have been developed in an attempt to provide specific nuance to specific varieties of guerrilla warfare. “Partisan” warfare came into vogue to denote bands of guerrillas who rallied to a specific political cause or represented a single political party. “Insurgency” has been commonly used in recent decades to describe local resistance to foreign military occupation. More to the point, it was used mostly with a negative connotation to talk about the guerrilla campaigns against US forces in Vietnam, Iraq, and Afghanistan. To a layman’s eye, such terms may appear interchangeable, all equally appropriate to describe the phenomenon of ordinary civilians taking up arms for one cause or another. Yet, the differ-

ences are subtle and profound. The Four Days of Naples and Dien Bien Phu will illustrate just how dramatic these differences can be.

The most dramatic difference we must explore is how Mao's theory and its application evolved guerrilla warfare from simple resistance to radical revolution. Again, guerrilla warfare itself is ancient. But for most of its history, guerrilla warfare has typically assumed the form of a native people rising up to defy a foreign army that invades and occupies their land. The word *guerrilla* itself originally referred to the "little war" of Spanish peasants who took up arms to harass Napoleon's troops. In retrospect, the key factor to consider is that the Spanish guerrillas were rebels but not revolutionaries. All they — and most guerrillas throughout history — were fighting for was a restoration of the pre-war status quo.

Our two case studies are meant to epitomize the genesis and the coming of age of something newer and vastly more dangerous and potent: revolutionary guerrilla warfare. It is what happens when civilians rise up not necessarily against an alien foe but more often against a domestic enemy, usually an oppressive home-grown regime or even another guerrilla force. The campaign is not simply a reaction to occupation. It is a positive action, a deliberate movement to expunge the enemy, take and hold the nation, and bring about a revolution — political, economic, cultural, religious, or otherwise. Revolutionary guerrillas do not seek to restore a status quo. They seek to remake the status quo, on their own terms of creation and dictation.

While numerous primary and secondary sources exist to document both of the above battles, the wars they took place against, and their broader impact, one text in par-

ticular stands as foundational to this thesis. Mao Tse-Tung's treatise on guerrilla warfare, *Yu Chi Chan*, will be our common reference, the ideological and strategic thread to understand these two battles. It is the blueprint for revolutionary warfare that many insurgencies have followed over the past 70 years.

The Four Days of Naples and Dien Bien Phu are a rather odd pair of events to study side-by-side at first glance. Yet there are quite a few important similarities. To begin with, both were surprising. It was the first time the Nazi armies were beaten by the people they presumed to conquer, and the first time a European military power was beaten by an indigenous insurgency. Both played much larger roles in the events succeeding them. The Neapolitan uprising meant that the Allies were able to secure the vital port of Naples without a fight. Dien Bien Phu ended French colonial rule in Vietnam and the rest of Indochina, yet unintentionally resulted in the partition of Vietnam, triggering a civil war between the Communist North and the (allegedly) democratic South that would eventually draw in the United States. Both saw local insurgents using geography, intelligence, and communications to outfox their enemy. Both took the age-old practice of resistance against foreign occupiers and transcended into revolution — to defeat foreign and homegrown enemies and to remake the nation in accordance with a concrete political vision.

The battles' differences, if anything, mean we should study them even closer, for such differences demonstrate the versatility and universality of Mao's teachings. The Four Days of Naples was the first armed engagement of the Italian Resistance in World War II. Dien Bien Phu was the final, decisive battle of the Viet Minh's war to drive out

the French (though it would be but a prelude to the vicious Civil War). As its name spells out, the Neapolitan insurrection lasted four days and took place within the winding alleys and cobbled streets of a single city. Dien Bien Phu was a battle lasting for several months, covering a river valley floor that encompassed multiple hills and mountains. The Four Days of Naples was an example of almost complete spontaneity: the Italian rebels' assembly, organization, deployment, armament, equipment, and tactics was largely ad hoc. Dien Bien Phu was the climax of a decade's worth of training, drilling, fighting, refinement through trial-and-error, and geopolitical maneuvering by Ho Chi Minh and Vo Nguyen Giap. The Neapolitans were a rather stereotypical "torches and pitchforks" peasant mob, except that they were armed with Molotov cocktails and captured German sub-machine guns. The Viet Minh, by 1954, had evolved from a rag-tag peasant horde armed with flintlocks and spears, into a well-oiled, well-heeled military force that astounded the French by deploying heavy artillery to pound their positions into submission.

For all these reasons and more, we look to this pair of battles to capture a pivotal moment in military history when, in a time of great transition and upheaval, the new breed of revolutionary guerrillas envisioned by Mao, proved their existence, their worth in battle, and their ability to alter history forever. "Evolved from the theory and practice of Mao Zedong's communist forces in China in the 1930s and 1940s and of anti-Nazi partisans in Europe in World War II," (Grant 331) guerrilla warfare has since grown to become the dominant form of warfare in the present day. The argument is *not* that most decisive military action has been decided by asymmetrical warfare since World War II. But it is true that in the recent past, the role of guerrillas, and revolutionary partisans in

particular, has grown more decisive. “Insurgencies have been getting more successful since 1945” (Boot 559). Guerrillas have been winning battles for millennia. But in recent memory, those victories have grown remarkably more portentous and meaningful. More and more, global events are being framed through irregular conflicts, fought by irregular warriors. To understand the present and future dangers and opportunities at hand, we have to study the issue at its source: in the darkest days of World War II.

The Second World War was a radical game-changer in so many ways. It fundamentally revised everything: war making, industrial production, agriculture, medicine, transportation, global and national politics, and every kind of technology imaginable. The belligerents charging into war in 1939 were still using, for the most part, the same helmets, rifles, grenades, packs, uniforms, vehicles, aircraft, and artillery used in the previous World War. By 1945, the Allied and Axis forces were using assault rifles, radar, sonar, guided bombs, air-to-air rockets, RPGs, ballistic missiles, jet fighters, and nuclear weapons. But another, more insidious revolution had also taken place in the War. To fully appreciate the impact of this shift, let us examine P.W. Singer’s book, *Children at War*. In describing the distressing phenomenon of child soldiers, Singer reminds us how, for the vast majority of warfare’s history, the rules of war largely excluded civilians from battles and their consequences. One notable exception was made for siege warfare; in such cases, the city’s populace was considered fair game for a victorious invader. That exception aside, wars were to be fought between armies, preferably on open fields. Civilians were liable to be conquered, but almost never involved in the battles themselves. In the past several decades, however, Singer points out that this ancient rule has been turned on its

head. Now, we have reached a point where it is expected that wars will deliberately include civilians. Regular and irregular armies alike now consider it routine to target civilians, and involve them directly in the conduct of wars.

Singer's point in his book was to specifically zero in on how this has led to the pervasive problem of children being forced into soldiering. From Singer's basic observation — that civilians, once protected by the rules of combat, are now specifically targeted by the rules of combat — I draw a corollary on which to build this thesis: that civilians, one excluded from fighting wars, are now increasingly the ones who participate in wars and even initiate them. In recent memory, fewer and fewer wars are fought between standing national armies. Far more common are wars in which civilian forces and non-state actors initiate hostilities, either against foreign governments, their own governments, or other rival bands of civilian fighters.

To draw this back to World War II, we must remind ourselves that the war's most brutal legacy was the unprecedented way that its belligerents deliberately targeted civilians. Allied and Axis leaders alike displayed a chilling indifference to collateral damage and a brutal acceptance, even endorsement, of the fact that civilians were being targeted and destroyed throughout the course of this war. Air Force General Curtis LeMay famously quipped, "there are no innocent civilians," in reference to the US bombing campaign over Japan — in which fire-bomb raids completely wiped out entire residential areas, famously torching Tokyo in March of 1945. Such tactics were inspired by the British Royal Air Force's own fire-bombing campaign against German cities. A particularly gruesome example was the raid on Hamburg in the summer of 1943, in which the fires

burned so fiercely that the asphalt on the streets literally melted like tar, trapping and frying alive anyone unfortunate enough to trip and fall on them. The bombing of Dresden in 1945 was another famously grisly example. Easily the most fearsome incident of Allied cold-bloodedness was the decision to drop atomic bombs over Hiroshima and Nagasaki: the first (and, we pray, the only) time nuclear weapons were used in anger to scorch entire cities into radioactive ash.

However, the Allies' disregard for civilian casualties could hold no candle to the Axis' brutality. Even before the War, the Italian military had used toxic gas to slaughter Ethiopian resisters. Japanese soldiers revolted the world during the brutal Rape of Nanking, when they entered the city in 1937 and embarked on an orgy of murder, torture, and rape against the city's inhabitants. For the duration of the war, Japan's soldiers maintained their notoriety through their heinous treatment of civilians.

But, by far, the most reprehensible crimes in World War II were those committed by Nazi Germany. From the savage crackdown on the Warsaw Ghetto, to the *Einsatzgruppen*, to the endorsement of the *Ustaše* militia in Yugoslavia, to the Lidice Massacre, to the mechanized industrial killing of the "Final Solution," the minions of the Third Reich waged a war of suppression and extermination against the people of occupied Europe that was as comprehensive as it was cruel. The most superficial study of the crimes and atrocities committed against civilians during the Second World War reveals mountains of evidence to back up Singer's theory that civilians have recently shifted from being spectators of war, to being the targets and objectives of war.

Concurrently, an examination of World War II also yields mountains of evidence that civilian populations across the world went from being spectators to being targets, and then, most notably, to being belligerents and participants in war. Every country occupied by the Axis Powers during World War II offered some form of local resistance. In each country, the brutality of the German, Japanese, or Italian occupation compelled the native people to take up arms in some form or fashion and defy their overlords. The scale and type of guerrilla operations varied from country to country, and some were more successful than others. But they all left a lasting impression on their countries. Together, they ushered in the new age of revolutionary warfare waged by civilian fighters.

For the most part, these individual resistance movements were little more than the natural reactions of invaded and oppressed peoples taking on their foreign oppressors. In such cases, the resistance was to restore the pre-war status quo. The Soviet partisans, for example, fought to expel the Germans but not to alter the Communist nature of their country. "What the people were defending was their citizenship (not the oppressive regime) against alien domination" (Fall 371). Anti-Communist rebels who did spring up in Poland, Ukraine, and other Eastern European countries were swiftly put down by the Soviet government at the war's end (Lotnik 203). In most of Nazi-occupied Europe, the resistance fought simply to restore their nations to their pre-war democratic status.

The exceptions, however, were numerous and notable. In China, a civil war between Communists and Nationalists was more or less put on hold while the latter bore the brunt of the fighting against the invading Japanese. Officially, Mao and Chiang Kai-Shek were in a temporary alliance. In *Yu Chi Chan*, Mao paid lip service to the "guerrilla war

of resistance against Japan” (Mao 50). Unofficially, the Communist leader used the world war to give his Red army a much-needed period of rest and refitting, knowing full well that he intended to resume and win the civil war as soon as the Japanese were expelled. In his writings on guerrilla strategy, his real, unstated goal was the defeat of the Kuomintang. This, of course, is exactly what transpired. For Mao, the Nationalists’ heroic resistance was nothing more than a prologue and a segue to his own revolution. As soon as the threat from Japan was neutralized, the Red Army resumed the offensive and proceeded to thrash the Nationalists, finally forcing them to flee to Taiwan while they took over the Chinese mainland in 1949.

Yugoslavia was a brutal example of how resistance quickly gave way to civil war and eventual revolution. Once the Germans had overrun the country, they quickly set up a puppet state with a puppet army, the Croatian *Ustaše*, who quickly gained a reputation for savagery that surpassed even the Nazis’ (Bailey 106). Reacting both to the Germans and the *Ustaše*, multiple groups of rebels sprang up, such as the Chetniks. Ultimately, the most formidable sect would prove to be the Communist Partisans, led by the famous Marshal Josip Broz Tito (Bailey 142). Tito’s struggle was initially a resistance to Nazi occupation, but this became eclipsed by the fact that he was fighting rival guerrilla factions as much as (if not more than) the Germans. That Tito survived the war is remarkable; that he won the battle against his foreign and domestic enemies is more remarkable still. The way he successfully initiated a Communist Revolution in Yugoslavia and crafted a regime that would hold the country together for decades seems near miraculous, given the current division of the Balkan States.

Part II: ITALY

Arguably the most impressive example of revolutionary guerrillas during the war was the Italian Resistance. If we are to measure the resistance movements of World War II by the change they affected, then I maintain that the one in Italy was the most successful militarily, politically, and culturally. Italy was the only nation to enter World War II as a Fascist empire and a key founding member of the Axis; and to exit it as a multiparty democracy. Benito Mussolini was the only Axis ruler who was executed by his own subjects. To really dig into the full significance of the events in Italy between 1943 and 1945, we now focus our attention on the port city where the first spark of armed resistance flared up.

A bit of context is necessary to effectively grasp the significance of the Four Days of Naples and the guerrilla war it inspired. Italy itself was a very young and underdeveloped country among the ancient nations of Europe like England, France, and Spain. Much like Germany, Italy had only become a unified nation in the mid-1800s. The unified Kingdom of Italy was proclaimed in 1861, after a spirited campaign of liberation and unification by the famed revolutionary Giuseppe Garibaldi. The German Empire was officially announced shortly afterward in 1870. Not surprisingly, the two young nations soon found common cause as the entire continent reeled from the First World War's devastation.

Like Japan, Italy had fought on the side of the Allies in WWI, but believed it was cheated out of its rightful compensation and territorial gains at the Conference of Versailles. Like most other European nations, post-war Italy found itself wracked by eco-

conomic and political chaos (Adams 24). In particular, Italians lived in fear of a Communist revolution like that which had taken over Russia. Into this void stepped a wounded war veteran and former Socialist named Benito Mussolini, who wasted no time founding his own party, the Fascists, and vowing to restore order and prosperity to the nation. Organizing his followers into black-shirted bands of paramilitary thugs called *squadristi* (Wilhelm 17), Mussolini (or *Il Duce* as he was affectionately nicknamed) quickly cowed their rivals. In 1922, the Fascists staged their famous March on Rome. Desperate to end the chaos, King Victor Emanuel III gladly invited Mussolini to form a new government (Adams 25).

What followed were almost two decades of Fascist rule, presided over by Italy's headstrong dictator. At first glance, the *Duce* had indeed made good on his promises. The country's agriculture and manufacturing rebounded (Adams 11), unemployment and riots became distant memories, and most famously, "the trains ran on time." That is to say, Italy's infrastructure was rejuvenated as it had never been before. The most lasting effect of Mussolini's rule was the patriotic unity it gave his people. A persistent problem of Italy's early history had been its lack of political self-definition. Garibaldi's campaigns of the *Risorgimento* had carved out a geographical boundary for the House of Savoy to rule over, but not even he could transcend the sharp regional divisions in Italy. For decades thereafter, people in Sicily, Naples, Rome, and Genoa continued to identify themselves more by locality than by any sort of nationhood. Their respective dialects were incomprehensible to the others, and their customs were similarly alien. In the words of one scholar, "Italy was created, but not Italians" (Wilhelm 16). Fascism and Mussolini

changed all that. By using internal improvements to bring the people together, the new regime fanned the flames of an intense nationalism and patriotism among the common people. For the first time in the adolescent nation's history, people living all across Italy flocked to their colors, their anthem, and their *Duce* as proud Italians.

Had the Fascists done that and only that, Mussolini would likely be remembered fondly as a nationalist hero. As it was, many foreign observers, including Winston Churchill, praised the way that Fascist rule had dragged Italy out of the doldrums that afflicted so many countries following the Great War. Unfortunately, the Duce would not be content with simply making life better at home. He desired an empire, and was committed to acquiring it through force if necessary. Even more unfortunately, his most ardent foreign admirer was another wounded war veteran — a certain Austrian corporal named Adolf Hitler. Throughout the 1930s, Mussolini would pursue both an overseas empire and a deeply personal friendship and political alliance with the *Führer*. Both ambitions would drag him and his countrymen into ruin.

When Hitler invaded France in the summer of 1940, the *Duce* was compelled to enter the war and prove the martial glory of his new Fascist empire. For three years, Mussolini attempted to emulate the German conqueror who had once been his pupil. Instead, the relationship between the two rulers and the two countries underwent a tragicomic reversal. While the Third Reich's military machine made mincemeat out of the Allies, Italy's armed forces suffered a perpetual cycle of setbacks and defeats. The harsh truth was that the Italian military was in no condition to fight any war, let alone a World War. Its easy victories over Ethiopian tribesmen, Libyan raiders, and a passive Albanian popu-

lation had imbued Italy's fighting men, and their commander-in-chief, with a false confidence. Such confidence blew apart when they engaged enemies as heavily armed and tightly disciplined as the British, Soviets, and Americans. In North Africa, Greece, and Russia, Italian soldiers were humiliated by a constant lack of arms, ammunition, basic supplies, by incompetent commanders, outdated uniforms and equipment, and by the superiority of their foes (Adams 102).

Catastrophe on foreign battlefields mirrored the deadly chaos brewing at home. Allied naval and air forces put a stranglehold on Italy's commerce. Within a couple years, the price of basic foodstuffs skyrocketed. Consumer goods of all description began to grow scarcer and scarcer. As conditions steadily grew worse, the appeal of Mussolini and Fascism began to dim in the eyes of ordinary Italians who suddenly found themselves lacking shoes, bread, eggs, gasoline, and electricity (Adams 136). Allied bombing raids only compounded their misery.

The important thing to note is that the *Duce* had never enjoyed the same degree of control over his people that Hitler did. During the glory years of Fascism in the 1920s and 1930s, this would not have been apparent, as the vast majority of Italians supported him. But even then, there had remained a strong, subdued core of dissidents, intellectuals, and Italian thinkers who held out the hope that Italy would be defined as a modern nation through democracy rather than dictatorship (Wilhelm 19). Mussolini was the first man to capitalize on Italian nationalism, but he had not invented it. Before the March on Rome, there had been a growing plethora of political parties and social viewpoints in the first decades of the twentieth century — this was part and parcel to the chaos gripping Italy.

Fascist thuggery had driven its opposition underground or abroad, but it had not completely extinguished it. Even as they lived in silence, in exile, or in prison, the Italian intelligentsia still envisioned a prosperous, democratic future for their country.

Italy's rotten luck in the War had fanned the flames of dissent back into full health. The turning point came in the summer of 1943. After driving the German Africa Korps and their hapless Italian comrades from Tunisia that May, the Allies proceeded to invade Sicily in July. Losing so badly in foreign campaigns had been painful enough. When it was obvious that Mussolini could no longer even defend the soil of Italy itself, a decision was made among the country's political leaders that the *Duce* had to go. Informing the dictator that "you are the most hated man in Italy," the Italian King Victor Emanuel III accepted Mussolini's resignation before putting him under house arrest. Field Marshal Pietro Badoglio took over the government and began to secretly negotiate conditions for a truce with the Allies.

The initial reaction to Mussolini's ouster was euphoria from Italian citizens who were thoroughly sick of the war and disillusioned by Fascism. Ada Gobetti, widow of the ardent anti-Fascist Piero Gobetti, described feeling "a joy that seemed just compensation for so many years of isolation" (Gobetti 19). With the now-disgraced *Duce* out of power, the people hoped that Italy could switch sides and avoid the devastation that had befallen the soldiers abroad. As it turned out, this was just the beginning of the nation's suffering. Hitler, anticipating that the weakening Italians would defect, had funneled thousands of German troops into the country. When the interim Italian government officially proclaimed an Armistice with the Allies on September 8, the Nazi retaliation was swift and

brutal. Overnight, the men of the Italian armed forces were forcibly disarmed (Atkinson 203) and rounded up to work as slave laborers for the Reich. Those who could escape shed their uniforms and fled for the mountains. Those who resisted were executed. Italian civilians began to be rounded up as well, both as labor and as hostages in an effort to deter would-be-deserters. Mussolini was rescued in a daring raid by glider-borne SS commandos and spirited away to meet with Hitler, who convinced his old ally to become the “ruler” of a Fascist puppet state in occupied Italy.

This was the setup for what the Italians remember as the *Resistenza* and what some scholars call the Italian Civil War. As the Allies landed at Salerno and began the painful process of liberating the Italian mainland, the people of Italy faced an abysmal situation and a stark choice. It was obvious that Mussolini had ceased to be the leader of his country. Now, he was simply the face and voice of Nazi occupation. Nevertheless, thousands of die-hard Fascists remained loyal. As the Allies occupied southern Italy and began to crawl up the peninsula, the *Duce* rallied whatever troops he could for the “Italian Social Republic.” Meanwhile, the real rulers of northern Italy, the Germans, ruthlessly set about trying to hold back the Allies while taming an increasingly mutinous population. Unfortunately for them, governing wartime Italy would be a task far more difficult and dangerous than they could have imagined.

During the three years the two countries had fought together in the Axis, the Germans had come to view the Italians as a spineless, foolhardy race incapable of waging war or holding any coherent political thought. And to a point, they had been right. The war itself had never been popular with the people of Italy, who felt a kinship with France

and Britain, (and many of whom had relatives living in the United States), and a historic animosity towards Germany (Wilhelm 30). Forced to fight with antiquated weapons, insufficient artillery and machine guns, lousy equipment and lousier food, and cowardly and inept commanders, Italian soldiers were justly described as “probably less motivated than those of any other major combatant in World War II” (Adams 59).

But when faced with an implacable, ruthless alien occupier who used a vicious puppet army to subdue the people with raw cruelty, the Italians were aroused as never before. And so began one of the War’s most vehement and most daring resistance struggles, which would in turn become a revolution for the soul of Italy. “The Italian Resistance was a people’s war...It was a desperate, uneven attack on the German invader but it was also a civil war, a final recognition that the real enemy, fascism, was within” (Wilhelm 15).

The first taste of this struggle would come in late September in the old city of Naples, in southern Italy only a few miles from the beaches at Salerno where the British and American armies were coming ashore. For the time being, rugged mountain chains and pugnacious *Wehrmacht* defensive lines separated Naples from the Allies. Waging a skilled fighting retreat, the Germans were determined to deny the port-city to their enemies. The German garrison commander, a Colonel Scholl, had received direct orders from Hitler to reduce Naples to “mud and ashes” (Wilhelm 41). The Nazi dictator determined to punish the Neapolitans for their “betrayal,” and to leave nothing of use for the British and the Americans.

Allied bombing raids in the past year had already made life in Naples difficult. But now, with the Germans systematically sabotaging the city's infrastructure, looting anything of value that they could snatch, and terrorizing the people, life steadily became unbearable.

Scholl carried out his orders with typically ruthless German efficiency. Time bombs were carefully seeded within Naples' public buildings. Men and boys of military age were targeted in roundups (Menen 77). Anyone trying to run away or resist was shot. Anyone caught trying to hide these men was also punished severely. When resentful Neapolitans began to take pot-shots at the Germans, Scholl's men set the University Library on fire on September 12. Then, with a crowd of townspeople being forced to watch, a young Italian sailor was forced to walk inside the inferno before being gunned down (Menen 37). After this grisly spectacle concluded, the German officers forced the Neapolitans to clap and cheer.

By September 27, the city was at the breaking point. For three weeks, the Nazis had ravaged Naples and ground its people under their heels. Abruptly and furiously, the entire city rose up in revolt. Exactly how and exactly when is open to speculation. "The spontaneity of the rebellion in a city of over a million is the phenomenon that makes the Four Days so special" (Wilhelm 36). There was no advance planning, no firebrand leader, no coordination of strategy: just a shared sentiment among the Neapolitans that something had to be done immediately about the Germans. In the words of Mao Tse-Tung, the uprising was "the inevitable result of the clash between oppressor and oppressed when the latter reach the limits of their endurance" (Mao 41).

The rebellion began as a classic display of urban guerrilla warfare. Naples had seen foreign occupation in centuries past, and its citizens had a rough, proud tradition of defiance and unruliness towards their would-be overlords. When they began throwing up barricades, the Germans were taken almost totally by surprise on the first day. While the soldiers recovered from their shock and began the chore of trying to tame the city, it became a tactical nightmare for them. They had mastered *blitzkrieg* tactics in the hills of France, on the Russian steppe, and in the deserts of Libya. In the narrow, winding cobblestone streets of Naples, such tactics were not only useless but counterproductive. When the rebel barricades were cleverly placed, it was child's play to get German tanks and trucks stuck, cornered, or overturned in the intersections and narrow streets. If a vehicle stopped or stalled for any reason, it would soon find itself pelted with rocks, grenades, and Molotov cocktails thrown from all directions (Menen 135).

The alleys of Naples made for a claustrophobic labyrinth that the rebels knew by heart, and that was nearly inaccessible to German vehicles. Adding to this was a problem of the Nazis' own making: with the city's electricity cut, effective communications and coordination became almost impossible (Wilhelm 52). And without street lamps, nighttime brought absolute blackness — a blackness that allowed the Neapolitans to dart out, attack hapless German patrols, and vanish with frightening speed.

The second and third days of the revolt were a great deal hotter and bloodier. Having recovered from their shock at being attacked by ragtag bands of *scugnizzi* (the famous street urchins of Naples), dock workers, and housewives, the Germans now began bringing in tanks and artillery, trying to blast the Neapolitans out house by house. Hundreds of

citizens would die, but the Germans found themselves fighting an increasingly futile struggle. While they took several Neapolitans hostage in an effort to curb the revolt, it soon became clear that the Nazis themselves were the real prisoners. They were outnumbered, stranded in hostile territory in which their *blitzkrieg* training was worthless, outflanked, and strung out amid a hornets' nest of apartment blocks, alleys, streets, and cellars where every window seemed to conceal a sniper and every balcony a grenade thrower. The Neapolitans were getting more organized, more vicious, and better armed with weapons they had taken from slain Germans. And the Allies were breaking out of the Salerno beachhead and getting closer every day. By the fourth day, the situation had clearly become untenable. After some terse negotiations with partisan leader Ezio Stimo-
lo, Scholl agreed to release his hostages in exchange for being allowed to leave Naples unmolested (Menen 272). The triumph had been bloody and hard-won, but definite. "For the first time in the European war, German officers capitulated to a band of civilians" (Wilhelm 37).

But the Four Days were not over yet. In fact, the bloodiest chapter of the revolt was its finale, as the newly formed Neapolitan Partisans went block-to-block in the Vomero district, rooting out Fascist snipers (Menen 267). This epilogue to the daring rebellion saw the spontaneous resistance turn into a domestic revolution. As one American GI wrote upon entering Naples, "the Italians were fighting each other, accusing friends and foes alike of being Fascists or *tedeschi*" (Atkinson 240). In addition to resisting the Germans, Italians were now fighting other Italians, in the name of a vision. That vision which almost all the rebels shared was an Italy without Fascism.

The Allies arrived in Naples to find the Germans already gone, and cheering, armed Neapolitans greeting them. But the cost of the insurrection had been dear. Nearly 300 civilians had died in the Four Days, and the city itself was also a casualty. The infrastructure was in tatters. The harbor of Naples had been thoroughly trashed by the Germans, with the harbor clogged with scuttled ships (Atkinson 242). As Scholl departed, he made a brief stop to burn down the Historical Archives of Naples — a priceless collection of ancient and medieval manuscripts, destroyed out of pure spite (Wilhelm 56). And the German time bombs would go off over a period of weeks, making for a nasty post-script to the Nazi rule of the city. On October 20, for example, a bomb's detonation would strike the Central Post Office, claiming 72 casualties (Adams 168).

Still, the city was free. In retrospect, as horrifically as Naples suffered, the suffering would have been much, much worse without the Four Days. Scholl had the city damaged, but Naples was nowhere close to being left in “mud and ashes” as Hitler had desired. For each place the Nazis managed to destroy, the rebels secured a different one from destruction. A particularly fierce fight raged for control of the bridge over the Via Sanita. An entire neighborhood rested right under the bridge's stone span. Had the Germans set off their demolition charges, everyone living under the bridge would have been crushed. Instead, a frantic charge by the rebels drove off the engineers and allowed the rebels to defuse the charges (Wilhelm 53). Another group of Neapolitans secured the city's remaining reservoir and its water supply before the Germans could destroy it (Wilhelm 54).

Naples would rebuild and recover physically. More important and lasting was the moral and psychological effect of the revolt. The Four Days “was the first case of an Italian city fighting for its own liberation before the Allies arrived. It did much to restore Italian self-respect at a time when the country was under the thumb of foreigners who had little regard for it” (Adams 168). That self-respect would be desperately needed for the duration of the war. For the rest of the country, the ordeal had just begun. It was amid this suffering in occupied Italy that the *Resistenza* would flare into being, waging a two-front war: against the German occupiers, and against their Fascist puppets. The bulk of the Resistance consisted of rural partisans who sheltered in the hill country and treacherous mountain ranges, out of the reach of Axis vehicles. Emerging from their hideouts, the rebels would inflict numerous stings on their enemies: derailing trains, sniping at patrols, mining roads, and then melting away (Wilhelm 111).

The most decisive chapters of the Italian Resistance would be the urban insurrections staged by the partisans to free Italy’s major cities. Naples had been the first city to free itself. It would not be the last. The next large Italian city to be liberated would be Florence. In August 1944, as the Allies pressed northward from Rome, the Florentine patriots rose up to defy the Germans and flush out the Fascists. Again, Hitler ordered a brutal retaliation. Roughly 300 Florentine patriots would die exchanging fire with Fascist snipers and German troops (Adams 196). As in Naples, this retaliation claimed some of the city’s most priceless heritage. The Germans dynamited all the bridges across the Arno River except for the Ponte Vecchio, Hitler’s personal favorite (Wilhelm 228). Despite earlier guarantees to keep Florence an open city, the Germans deployed heavy artillery to

attack the partisans. Undaunted by these setbacks, the Florentine rebels held their ground. When the Allied armies began to press into Florence, they and the partisans fought side-by-side for two weeks to clear the city. Wanting to minimize the chaos that tends to accompany urban insurrections, the CTLN (Tuscan Committee of National Liberation) had carefully set up an interim government which took care of the city's institutions and infrastructure even as the battle raged for its liberation. The Allies were notably impressed with this achievement. An OSS report said, "When the Allied armies arrived in Florence they encountered, for the first time in a major Italian city, a nearly complete administrative organization established by determined and purposeful anti-Fascist forces" (Wilhelm 215-16). The goal of the *Resistenza* was not merely to expel the Nazi-Fascist Occupation but to create something orderly and democratic in its place.

The final chapter, and the definitive battle of the Italian Resistance, came in the spring of 1945. As the Allies broke through the Gothic Line in April and closed in on the German armies, a coordinated chain of urban uprisings broke out. The Italians had learned much from Naples and Florence, and they were determined to spare the northern cities from Nazi-Fascist retaliation and sabotage as much as they could. In advance, plans were laid for special squads of partisans to seize and secure critical infrastructure in the cities to protect them from demolition. While the urban patriots threw up barricades and tried to wrest away control of the cities and towns, rural partisans were to cut off the roads and to attack columns, isolating and dividing the Germans and Fascists as best they could. And lastly, plans were carefully laid for provisional governments to take control of

the cities as soon as the Germans were expelled and the Fascists liquidated (Wilhelm 211).

In the last weeks of April, the final uprising began. And it remains to this day one of the most resounding successes in the history of insurgency. The German garrisons, already in disarray as they retreated from the relentless northward march of the Americans and the British, were caught flat-footed by the rebellions in what was supposed to be their rear area. In Turin, Genoa, Milan, Bologna, Venice, and many other cities, the partisans speedily seized control and put down whatever resistance the Germans were able to offer. Many Fascists even switched sides and joined the partisans to fight their former masters (Wilhelm 241). Those who held out were ruthlessly hunted down, including the *Duce* himself. With Mussolini's death at the hands of the people he had once ruled, tyrannized, and led into ruin, the future of Italy was renewed.

That new Italy created by the *Resistenza* survives to this day — democratic, pluralist, capitalist, liberalized, and free. In words of Ennio Di Nolfo, “The Resistance was a catharsis which cancelled the past and permitted hope for a new society...Hope did not belong to only one political group or to one class...the idea of hope belonged to all, it was a way of thinking that crisscrossed the fabric of Italian society, independent of political affiliations” (Wilhelm 262). Every major demographic in the country had played some part in the Resistance, so every one of them achieved something in the Revolution. Women like Ada Gobetti made invaluable contributions to the partisan struggle as smugglers, spies, couriers, organizers, even guerrillas. The Constitution ratified in 1947 guar-

anted women the right to vote and run for office (Wilhelm 259), and many female rebels would go on to play major social and political roles in post-War Italy.

While Pope Pius XII officially maintained the Vatican's neutral stance throughout the War, unofficially he marshaled the Church's human resources to shield and protect the intended victims of the Fascist/Nazi manhunts and roundups. In particular, the Italian clergy worked hard to protect the country's Jewish population. "All in all, 32,000 Italian Jews and several thousand foreign Jews were hidden successfully by the Italian people, most of them in monasteries and religious institutions" (Ramati 178). The town of Assisi, in particular, was renowned for the daring risks its priests took by hiding, sheltering, and smuggling hundreds of Jews. "By the end of the war some 3,000 Jews had joined the armed Resistance, almost ten percent of the Jews living in Italy (Wilhelm 147). One statistic sums it up: out of all the countries occupied by the Nazis, only in two of them did the majority of the Jewish people survive the Holocaust. In Denmark, the Resistance smuggled the vast majority of Danish Jews overseas to Sweden. And in Italy, the spirited rebellion against Hitler's Final Solution in turn gave Italian Jews the incentive to fight furiously for their own survival and freedom.

The role of women, Catholics, and Jews, and the cooperation of Communists, Liberals, Christian Democrats, and Action Party members all fostered a spirit of national unity and solidarity that cemented Italy's legacy of political and religious freedom. All who had come together to fight the Nazis and their Fascist stooges now had a claim to their country's future. While political squabbles would plague Italy's new democracy, it would nevertheless come into being and endure. Unlike Yugoslavia, which emerged un-

der the dictatorship of Tito, Italy's Revolution was that of a pluralist, tolerant, liberal multiparty democracy. Remarkable, indeed, in the country that had been the original incubator of Fascism.

What happened in every country occupied by the Axis Powers during World War II was some form of Resistance. What happened in a few countries, including Yugoslavia, Italy and (to a lesser extent) France, was a Resistance that gave way to and combined with revolutionary guerrilla warfare. They became struggles not only to expel foreign armies but struggles and civil wars within the country itself. There is little evidence that Mao's writings on guerrilla warfare were read at all by the Italian partisans. Even the Italian Communists drew much greater inspiration from Giuseppe Garibaldi (they named their partisan formations Garibaldi Brigades) than from Mao. In point of fact, the Italians had a rich national tradition of guerrilla warfare and revolution even before World War II. Giuseppe Mazzini, the man who had inspired Garibaldi and other Italian revolutionaries, had actually written a book entitled *Rules for the Conduct of Guerrilla Bands* in 1832. "Mazzini, like Mao, posited a multistage struggle beginning with hit-and-run raids and culminating in 'the formation of a national army.'...like Mao, he demanded that guerrillas be scrupulous in their dealings with the people whose support they sought...Even Mazzini's tactical instructions were proto-maoist. 'The band must be ready to assault when the enemy believe them to be retiring...' " (Boot 342). The evidence for Italy's anti-Fascist rebels reading Mao is uncertain, but it is entirely possible that Mao's *Yu Chi Chan* was influenced by Mazzini's *Rules*.

Intentionally or not, the Italian rebels and revolutionaries in World War II were providing early evidence of the veracity of Mao's theory: that guerrillas would define modern warfare not merely through nativist resistance but by remaking the country from within. Their victory was military but also political and social. It is worth repeating just how prominent women, peasants, religious minorities, and disparate political parties were in the Resistance. Their contributions not only secured victories in battle but also their rightful place in the post-war democracy of Italy. Describing guerrilla strategy, Mao had written, "Without a political goal, guerrilla warfare must fail" (Mao 43).

Regardless of whether the Italian partisans were ever aware of Mao's writings on guerrilla warfare, the fact remains that their struggle provided many examples of the revolutionary guerrilla fighting that he described in *Yu Chi Chan*. To begin with, Mao described seven possible origins for a guerrilla army (Mao 71-72): from the masses of the people, from regular army units temporarily or permanently detailed for guerrilla duties, from a combination of civilians and soldiers, from local militia, from enemy deserters, or from bandits. Incredibly, almost all of these types were represented in the ranks of the Italian Resistance. While harsh German reprisals guaranteed that the masses would sympathize with the Partisan cause, the military backbone of the Resistance came from Italian soldiers who went underground after the Armistice, and from Allied POWs who had escaped from Italian prison camps and into the hills. Those Italian men who were drafted into the puppet Fascist army often deserted if they could, boosting the partisan ranks. Combined, these different elements made the Italian Resistance into a diverse but potent force able to win over the people and take the fight to the Germans and Fascists.

Also of note is the way Mao described the political leadership of a guerrilla army; he described “committees” of political officers who would oversee the districts and sub-districts where the guerrillas operated (Mao 78). In occupied Italy, numerous “Committees of National Liberation” sprang up, representing individual cities or regions of the country. Even as early as the Four Days of Naples, a Committee of Liberation had set itself up to try to provide leadership to the urban rebellion (Menen 208). As the war progressed, the separate committees established communication and a degree of cooperation that made the daring uprisings across northern Italy at the war’s end possible.

What is truly intriguing is how Mao’s theories were put into practice by the Italian rebels in spite of several key differences between their war and the Red Army’s war. Comparatively, the Italian Civil War was quite brief, lasting from September 1943 to May 1945. Mao, on the other hand, was engaged in continuous guerrilla warfare against either Chiang Kai Shek’s Nationalists and/or the invading Japanese Imperial Army between 1927 and 1949. Another key difference was geographical space. China’s vast territory gave Mao considerable strategic leverage and opportunities to establish bases and lines of supply and communication. Italy was much smaller; while the Apennines did give the Resistance some natural strongholds, on the whole they had much less ability to evade or retreat from their adversaries, making them considerably more vulnerable to Nazi-Fascist raids.

In *Yu Chi Chan*, Mao made frequent reference to the cooperation between his guerrilla bands and the regular Red Army, between the orthodox and the irregular troops. In Italy, the Resistance had no regular forces to speak of, but they did work in coopera-

tion and concert (to a point) with the advancing Allied armies. The Allies also were a vital source of weapons and supplies for the partisan formations, filling the fundamental need for foreign assistance that most guerrilla armies need to achieve victory. “No other factor has been as important in the outcome of low-intensity conflicts” (Boot 343). It was the combination of the Allies’ territorial gains and their raw firepower, and the harassment, confusion, and terror sown by the Resistance in the German-Fascists’ rear areas, that ensured the liberation of Italy. Mao’s own victory was facilitated by Soviet assistance, and by the vast quantities of American-made weaponry and supplies that defecting Nationalists brought to the Reds. And it would be the Red Chinese themselves who would provide the aid necessary for their Vietnamese comrades to achieve their own stunning triumph at Dien Bien Phu.

The brevity of the *Resistenza* meant that in some ways, Mao’s vision was not fully realized by the Italian rebels. Their tactics, strategy, and coordination were plagued by political differences, and the relentlessness of Nazi reprisals and anti-partisan raids. The guerrilla campaign as a whole was messy and haphazard. Not until the very end did the Italian resistance achieve something resembling the coherence, discipline, and military and political effectiveness that Mao detailed in his book. But in those two short years, what is remarkable is how much they *did* accomplish.

Part III: VIETNAM

What happened after World War II across the world was the phenomenon known as decolonization. Exhausted and bankrupt, the European powers were forced to abandon their empires and colonies in Africa and Asia one by one. France, however, was reluctant

to let go of its colonies. Its determination to cling to its empire would end up directly clashing with the rising tide of Maoist-inspired “Wars of Liberation.” In the remote jungles of Southeast Asia, this conflict would dramatically come to a head in the Battle of Dien Bien Phu. The world would be shocked by French defeat at the hands of a native rebellion, and it became clear that nothing would ever be the same again — not for Europe, not for Asia, not for the history of warfare.

When the French began colonizing the region known as Indochina in the 1880s, (the modern countries of Laos, Cambodia, and Vietnam) they found themselves confronting native rebellions from the get go. Vietnam in particular had a proud history of defying foreign occupation dating back to the first century AD, when the legendary Trung sisters led an insurrection against the Chinese from the backs of elephants (Karnow 100). However, the sisters ended up going down in glorious defeat much like Boudicca did on the other side of the world. Similarly, the raw firepower of the French allowed them to subdue Indochina and ruthlessly put down the different uprisings that confronted them. There was steady resistance, but no revolution in sight.

World War II changed that. The Japanese had occupied French Indochina in 1940. The French colonial administration, having sworn allegiance to the Vichy regime, cooperated with them. The Japanese used Vietnam as a staging area for their campaigns to invade the rest of Southeast Asia. During the war, they also exploited its crops, leading to a severe famine that killed hundreds of thousands of Vietnamese (Morgan 41). The combination of two foreign powers oppressing the country gave Vietnamese revolutionaries like

Ho Chi Minh ample leverage to begin recruiting and organizing their forces. Having been forced to hide in southern China for several years, Ho and his top general, Vo Nguyen Giap, deftly infiltrated northern Vietnam in 1941 as the world war rapidly expanded and grew worse. The two men anticipated that the Japanese occupation would irrevocably weaken French colonial power in the region, opening up an eventual opportunity for revolution.

Giap organized his first armed “propaganda team” on December 22, 1944. The group of thirty-one men and women had only seventeen rifles and one machine gun, but they were able to conduct discreet small-scale raids that built up their arsenal with captured weapons (Morgan 35) and gradually won more recruits for the growing guerrilla group known as *Viet Nam Doc Lap Dong Minh* — the Vietnam Independence League, or Viet Minh as the world would come to call it (Karnow 127). With aid from the American OSS, Ho, Giap, and the other Viet Minh leaders built up a sizable force of nationalist rebels. In 1945, they launched a rapid and successful uprising against the Japanese troops and the Vichy French who had been ruling Indochina with their blessing. That September, Ho rallied his followers in Hanoi and publicly proclaimed Vietnam’s independence to a euphoric crowd. Having sided with the victorious Allies against the Japanese, he hoped that his people would be rewarded with international recognition.

The celebration turned out to be premature. The French were determined to reclaim their empire, as a balm for their bruised national ego after the dual humiliations of German occupation and Vichy collaboration. The first spark of the First Indochina War (or the Resistance War Against the French, as the Vietnamese remember it) came in De-

cember 1946, when the French used artillery, machine guns, and tanks to wrest Hanoi from the grasp of a Viet Minh uprising (Vien 233). As the next several years passed, Giap steadily built up a base of support in the northern highlands of the Viet Bac region and kept growing his forces from the ranks of the peasants. An attempted French airborne assault into the Viet Bac in 1947 (Fall 29) failed to capture Ho or break the insurgency, and was forced to retreat. Instead, the French retained control of the major cities in Vietnam, and used their advantage in armor, aircraft, artillery, and naval transport to maintain their grip on the major roads, passes, and coastline.

The table leveled out, however, after the Communist Revolution in China in 1949. With Mao in charge of the Chinese mainland, he now was at liberty to supply the Viet Minh with vast quantities of weapons, ammunition, and gear captured from the vanquished Nationalists (Karnow 184). Within a couple of years, Giap had built up a strong enough conventional force to shut down the line of French fortifications lining the Chinese border. Although his forces were badly mauled in a series of ill-advised frontal assaults against French fortifications in the Red River delta in 1951 (Fall 39), Giap had secured and expanded the Viet Minh safe zone next to the frontier with China, from which a steady stream of supplies flowed. The forests and mountains of the northern borderlands made for an excellent guerrilla base (Mao 109) where Giap could train and conceal his armies as well as supply depots, armories, even schools and government offices (Vien 237-41).

The climax of Giap's revolutionary guerrilla campaign came in 1954 at the Battle of Dien Bien Phu. The previous winter, the French command had dropped paratroopers

into the forested valley of Dien Bien Phu near the Laotian border and built a series of fortified fire bases. Aware of the mounting pressure the Viet Minh were putting on their supply lines, and nervous about the declining morale and support on the home front, the French hoped to use the open plain of the Nam Yum river valley as a trap, to lure Giap into another frontal assault where they would cut him to ribbons.

Dien Bien Phu turned out to be an excellent trap, but it was the French themselves who would be ensnared. The first fundamental error the French had made was failing to secure the mountain ridges overlooking the river. This automatically gave the high ground to Giap when he answered the French challenge (Karnow 191). He quickly deployed three Viet Minh divisions — the 308th, the 312th, and the 316th — to surround and blockade the valley, outnumbering Dien Bien Phu's defenders five to one. The second fatal error was the arrogant assumption by the French that they would maintain superior firepower. Instead, Giap's peasant soldiers spent several months doing what the French had declared impossible: transporting artillery through the mountains and setting up batteries on the slopes overlooking Dien Bien Phu. In what has gone down as one of the greatest logistical feats of modern warfare, the Viet Minh disassembled 206 field guns and mortars and used massive teams of men with ropes to push and pull them up and over the mountain trails, through the jungle, and methodically reassemble them and place them into expertly placed gun pits on the heights over the valley (Boot 358).

By the time the French realized what was happening, it was too late. Giap's own trap had snapped shut, and the French would forever curse Dien Bien Phu as the "valley of death." When the Viet Minh opened up with their first barrage, they easily outgunned

the French several times over. Their superior view from the mountains allowed them to fire with great accuracy and coordination, laying waste to the French fortifications. French attempts at counter-battery fire only gave the Viet Minh gunners fresh targets.

Giap kept up the bombardments as his troops began to dig trenches snaking right up to the French positions. The first Viet Minh infantry assault came from the north, and swiftly overran four of the base's strong points (Morgan 279). Some fire bases would change several times in vicious hand-to-hand combat, but the die had been cast. Outnumbered, outgunned, and surrounded, the French could only watch as Giap tightened the noose.

A third fatal flaw in the French plan became obvious when the Viet Minh began to set up anti-aircraft guns around the base. The high command had assumed that the base could be adequately supplied via the airstrip near the river. Within the first month of the assault, the airstrip was shut down; no plane could safely land or take off without being shredded by enemy fire. The French air force continued to supply Dien Bien Phu with parachute drops of supplies, but even these proved to be a risky venture. Forty-eight planes would be shot down by Giap's gunners before the siege ended. The French could receive a trickle of food, ammo, and medicine, but they had no way to evacuate the wounded. As the Viet Minh attacks continued and the casualties mounted, the throngs of wounded became the single biggest drain on the defenders' logistics and morale.

When the remaining French troops were surrounded and forced to surrender in May of 1954, the world was stunned. To Western observers, it was one thing for the German blitzkrieg to defeat France. It was another thing entirely for a "bamboo army" of na-

tive Asian rebels to defeat a European world power. Dien Bien Phu terrorized the West, and invigorated nationalist rebels throughout Asia, Africa, and Latin America. For them, the battle was a vindication of guerrilla warfare and an example of how to humble colonial powers (Boot 363).

Truth be told, the French defeat at Dien Bien Phu is not too shocking in retrospect, given the numerous strategic and tactical errors they made. The classic, and unforgivable, military sin is underestimating one's enemy. "Ignoring their own intelligence, the French remained enamored of their certainties" (Morgan 262). The French brass had based their strategy on a series of assumptions — that it was impossible to supply an army through the mountainous terrain, that it was impossible to position artillery in the mountains, that the base's airfield would remain open, that Giap would simply repeat his blunders from the Red River campaign and charge suicidally into the teeth of French machine guns — that all proved incorrect one by one.

The First Indochina War stands out as a textbook demonstration of Mao's doctrine of revolutionary guerrilla warfare. Vo Nguyen Giap was an avid student of military history — his passion was Napoleon's campaigns and the writings of Clausewitz — and a faithful disciple of *Yu Chi Chan*. His forces had followed the revolutionary pattern set forth by Mao, and he took care to structure his forces using the three-tier system that Mao laid out: small mobile units, larger formations, and a lightly armed "self-defense" militia (Mao 78). Using the French, then the Chinese, as sources of weapons and ammo, Giap grew his forces, and used both conventional and guerrilla units in concert. "A proper conception of the relationship that exists between guerrilla effort and that of the regular

forces is essential” (Mao 56). The Viet Minh had started as a ragtag band of poorly armed peasants. Using Mao’s doctrines, Giap gradually evolved his forces into the conventional formations able to go toe-to-toe with the French and win.

The Viet Bac highlands provided a natural sanctuary for the Viet Minh where they could organize, train, gather supplies, and hide. Like Mao, Giap used a protracted campaign to bleed and exhaust his foes until the final victory (Mao 69). When the stage was set by the French for a confrontation at Dien Bien Phu, Giap refused to play by their terms. Instead, by seizing the high ground, placing his artillery there, and closing off the base from reinforcement, Giap prepared for his own attacks, ensuring that his enemy would be boxed in, and eventually wiped out.

At first glance, this dramatic battle stands as a superb example of resistance to colonialism. But, even at this early stage, Ho and Giap’s war was taking on the properties of a civil war and revolution. This is an easy fact to overlook, but when the French paratroopers jumped into Dien Bien Phu, they did so alongside a large force of French colonial troops. Most hailed from places like Algeria, Morocco, or Senegal. But a large contingent were Vietnamese soldiers who had been recruited, trained, and equipped in a vain effort by the French to build a loyal indigenous force to counter the Viet Minh. “One-third of the garrison was Vietnamese when the battle opened” (Fall 327). And these men would die by the thousands fighting for the French against Giap’s armies. Many minorities in Vietnam, including the sizable Catholic population, the cults of Hoa Hao, and Cao Dai, the Montagnard tribesmen living in the hill country bordering Laos and Cambodia, and the Binh Xuyen gangsters in Saigon were loyal allies of the French. These same

groups, especially the Montagnards, would be some of the US military's most effective allies during their own war in Vietnam.

Just as Ho Chi Minh had euphorically proclaimed independence in 1945 only to be met with a French crackdown, the Viet Minh rejoiced over their triumph at Dien Bien Phu, confident that they had won their country's freedom at last...only for their own allies to pull the rug out from under them. Aware of Vietnam's historic hatred of China, and keen to keep Ho politically harmless, Mao and his foreign minister Zhou Enlai used their leverage at the Geneva Conference in 1954 to deny Ho the prize he had long sought: independence and unification of Vietnam. Instead, the Chinese, Soviets, British, and Americans all agreed to partition the country at the 17th parallel (Karnow 201). The Vietnamese Communists would retain control of the northern half of Vietnam. The southern half would be organized as a democratic nation, sponsored and protected by the United States. The idea was to replicate what had just transpired in Korea — divide the country into halves, and keep the Communist half from encroaching on the free half.

For multiple reasons, the Korean scenario would not repeat in Vietnam. Ho refused to accept partition, and insisted that the country remain whole. Ominously, the Geneva agreement prompted a massive exodus from north to south, as Catholics, other religious dissenters, and other non-Communist Vietnamese migrated (with the help of the US Navy) to the new republic of South Vietnam. Even the Viet Minh suffered from the new division. Many of its fighters were ardent nationalists but were not Communists; they wanted their country to be free from both the French and the Maoist regime of the

North. Such men would form the backbone of the Army of the Republic of Viet Nam, and would soon find themselves waging war against their former comrades.

What is remembered in the United States as the Vietnam War is more accurately described as the Vietnamese Civil War. This is where the revolutionary aspect of Giap's war fighting truly came into play. The war to throw out the French had mostly united the people of Vietnam. But the victory at Dien Bien Phu and subsequent French withdrawal had actually exposed and widened the rift between the Communists and their domestic rivals. The next two decades of war would contain both another war of resistance with the Americans filling the French vacancy, and a war of revolution against the Vietnamese who opposed Communist rule. The war of resistance ended in 1973 with the Paris Peace Accords. The revolution would be completed in 1975 when the North Vietnamese Army crushed the South in a matter of weeks and occupied Saigon as tanks crashed through the gates of the Presidential Palace. While the Communists hailed the reunification of their country, thousands of Vietnamese "boat people" would risk everything to escape from their grasp. The revolution triumphed, but not without a great cost.

Part IV: CONCLUSIONS

The significance of this thesis is that regardless of geography, this culture of "people's war," and revolutionary guerrilla warfare has steadily grown more pervasive and powerful in the decades since the Four Days of Naples and Dien Bien Phu. To put it succinctly, what was born during the partisan warfare of World War II came of age in the following decades through the Maoist "wars of liberation" fought throughout Asia, Africa, and Latin America. Even Eastern Europe got a taste of people-centric warfare

with the glorious but doomed Hungarian Revolt of 1956. The evolution of civilian soldiers and their craft continued into the era of Islamist jihadism and terrorism, and continues with the Arab Spring, the Ukrainian Civil War, and other conflicts. We are well into a chapter of warfare written not by land-seizing mechanized armies, but primarily by people-seizing guerrilla armies and land-infiltrating civilian warriors.

Conventional, symmetrical wars still occur. The Six-Day War, the Yom Kippur War, the Falklands War, the Gulf War, the Indo-Pakistani Wars, the 2008 war between Russia and Georgia, and others all involved standing national armies going toe-to-toe. But there are two things to notice. First, such open confrontations are becoming scarcer. Second, they are becoming smaller, shorter, faster, more technological, and less deadly (a paradox of modern military hardware: the more efficient armies are at killing, the better they are at preserving the lives of their own soldiers). All the above examples of modern warfare took place in relatively small geographic areas, were often fought between two primary opposing forces, and had a duration of less than a year. And the casualties they incurred are astronomically lower than those of the World Wars. In the nuclear age, it is highly unlikely that we will see all-encompassing conflicts that span many years, many countries, and reap casualties on a scale of the hundreds of thousands. Even the Global War on Terror, while certainly destructive, has achieved nothing coming close to the wholesale devastation of World War II. Conventional wars, if they are fought at all in this day and time, are typically short, quick exchanges between nations meant to decisively settle one dispute or dominate one territory.

Growing increasingly common is the revolutionary guerrilla warfare first codified by Mao, put into practice by the anti-Axis resistance, and demonstrated on the global stage by Giap. To be sure, the era of anti-colonialist “wars of liberation” have mostly faded away. The 1970s really marked the end of this era, with the Vietnamese unification (in turn giving way to the wars fought between Vietnam and Cambodia, then Vietnam and China) and the Portuguese giving up their last colonies in southern Africa. What took over as the dominating trend in global revolution was religious fundamentalism, particularly militant Islam. The Iranian Revolution of 1979 inaugurated this second generation of revolutionary guerrilla warfare, as well as the spirited resistance of the Afghan *mujahideen* against Soviet occupation in the 1980s. Similar religious conflicts erupted in India, Sri Lanka, Northern Ireland, and Chechnya over the next two decades. The Soviet withdrawal from Afghanistan in 1989 led in turn to an Afghan civil war which resulted in the Taliban ruling most of the country from 1996-2001. The far north of the country remained a stronghold for anti-Taliban Afghan rebels (the Northern Alliance), who worked together with US forces to oust the Taliban shortly after 9/11. Sadly, the civil war in Afghanistan continues even today, as a resurgent Taliban try to regain the country from an embattled US-backed government.

Iraq offers an even starker picture of the challenge that this age of revolutionary guerrillas poses for the world’s military powers. The initial invasion of Iraq in 2003 was a textbook demonstration of America’s complete military superiority. It took three weeks for US forces to plow through Saddam Hussein’s army and occupy Baghdad. It took eight years for those same forces to fight the Iraqi insurgents to a point where we could with-

draw from the country while saving face. But, within two short years, remnants of the insurgency had flared up anew under the banner of ISIS. This new jihadist group stunned the world by rapidly seizing large portions of Iraqi and Syrian territory, confiscating huge stocks of US-supplied weapons and vehicles abandoned by panicking Iraqi troops, and establishing their own “caliphate.” In the past year and a half, ISIS has undoubtedly achieved a revolution, as horrific as their methods are.

The Arab Spring of 2011 saw revolutionary guerrillas and people’s armies overthrow Mummer Qaddafi, a despot who had ruled Libya with an iron fist for 42 years, in roughly eight months. While Syrian dictator Bashar al-Assad has proved to be a great deal wiler than Qaddafi, even he barely controls a sixth of his own country as of this writing. The rest has been overrun by disparate factions of partisans (including ISIS), each trying to effect their own Syrian revolution. In Syria, both our best allies (the FSA, the Kurdish *peshmerga*) and our worst enemies (ISIS, Jabhat al-Nusra) are revolutionary guerrillas.

I could continue with pertinent examples of the modern evolution of what Mao outlined in *Yu Chi Chan* — the Sri Lankan Civil War, the wars within the Congo, the FARC insurgency in Colombia, the rise of Hamas and Hezbollah, the current conflicts in Yemen, Kurdistan, Sudan, Burma, Nigeria, Mexico, Crimea and Eastern Ukraine, etc. The point that must be made is that we are not facing anything new or unique. We have almost a century of precedent to look back on, to inform our strategy for dealing with the revolutions gripping the world today. To win this current war means abandoning the mindset with which we marched into Iraq. A military that would be superb for fighting

Russia head-on proved to be grossly unprepared for the fight against swarms of civilians-turned-guerrillas. By studying how they have won in the past, we can better adapt to the threat posed by them today, as well as the opportunities presented.

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