Part I
1 People's War: A Conceptual Odyssey

One of the great characteristics of Mao's military thought is its flexibility. Many elements can be changed while arguing that nothing has changed.

Gerald Segal, 1982

The Chinese slogan for defence development in since 1977 has been people's war under modern conditions. To understand the implications of this statement in present and future defence planning, it is necessary to examine first the original concept of 'people's war', prior to any analysis of the meaning of 'modern conditions', and then to examine the phrase as a whole.

PEOPLE'S WAR

Although the expression 'people's war' may be traced to the advent of the mass armies of the Napoleonic era, it was brought to prominence by the revolution of mid-twentieth-century China. Generically, people's war must be viewed not as a type of war, in the sense of total, general, limited or revolutionary wars, but rather as a strategy of warfare typically applied to revolutionary wars, including those denoted as wars of national liberation and resistance. Guerilla, insurgency, insurrectionary and other identifiable modes of irregular warfare are terms which are sometimes used interchangeably, and sometimes descriptively - in part or in whole - with broad reference to people's war. Beyond such confusions and employed within the Chinese revolutionary model, by which people's war is distinguished in modern times, the term may be defined simply as 'the traditional Chinese military doctrine designed to deter or repel invasion with massive insurgent forces'.

While there are definitions specific to China, people's war – in concept – is not uniquely Chinese. It no more belongs to the Chinese than it does to the Spanish whose campaigns against Napoleon inspired the term guerilla or 'little war'. The people's war concept issues from the interdependence of War and Politics and represents a
distinctive combat genre that has found application throughout recorded military history. This is true not only of ancient China where guerilla operations may be traced back to as early as 360 BC, but also to other parts of the ancient world. Alexander the Great, for instance, responded in kind to guerilla resistance during his central Asian campaign. Across centuries, continents and cultures, the reality of people's war - whatever its precise designation - can be clearly identified.

For the Arabs led by T.E. Lawrence against the Turks in 1916-18, people's war represented the normal combat mode for tribes or clans to whom the bearing of arms was a commonplace, whilst in other locations evolved or discovered tactics equally represented people's war. To cite but a few, there was the Apache guerilla-style resistance during the American colonisation, American use of such methods against the British in the southern theatre of the War of Independence, and Second World War European partisan activities. However, the lessons of one episode, and indeed its attendant theories (if any), cannot be indiscriminately applied to another. The context within which people's war is applied is crucial to an understanding of any particular people's war theory. Nevertheless, there remains an identifiable common ground of the people's war experience. This can be simply illustrated by comparing such disparate sources as the descriptions of a classical nineteenth-century European strategist, Henri Jomini, in reference to Spanish popular resistance against Napoleon, with the US Defense Intelligence Agency's synoptic view of the twentieth-century Chinese version of people's war.

Jomini:

The invader has an army: his adversaries have an army, and a people wholly or almost wholly in arms, and making means of resistance out of every thing, each individual of whom conspires against the common enemy; even the non-combatants have an interest in his ruin and accelerate it by every means in their power.

... he finds no signs of the enemy but his campfires: so that while, like Don Quixote, he is attacking windmills, his adversary is on his line of communications, destroys the detachments left to guard it, surprises his convoys, his depots, and carries on a war so disastrous for the invader that he must inevitably yield after a time.3

US Defense Intelligence Agency:

In People's War, the army and the paramilitary forces, supported by the populace, would conduct a protracted war against an invader. Initially the Chinese main forces, using conventional tactics, would carry out a strategic withdrawal supported by guerilla-type operations until the invading forces were overextended and dispersed. When this occurred, overwhelming Chinese forces would be concentrated to annihilate the enemy forces in detail.4

Both passages refer specifically to: first, the involvement of the entire populations, not just the professional military forces; second, an accompanying use of irregular rather than codified combat methods (that is, the accepted laws and customs of war, today embodied in international law); and third, to territorial wars, fought through land operations for political control of a given territory. This is true not only of the above examples, but also of all the historical examples mentioned earlier, and of twentieth-century revolutionary wars generally.

A conservative definition of people's war may offer amorphous military forces fighting by unorthodox means within a territory that is to be defended against conquest, or reclaimed in the event that the invader has established control. A radical definition would include this, essentially military, aspect of people's war, but would continue in the identification of a significant political component prevalent in modern revolutionary warfare.

In Marxist literature, people's war is the means to political ends. Just as the influential nineteenth-century military philosopher Carl von Clausewitz regarded war as an instrument of policy, Lenin adapted war as the tool of communist party power. Territory is not only defended or reclaimed, it is 'liberated' from the incumbent authorities. The radical definition of people's war is, in this spirit, addressing anti-colonial ('national liberation') wars or, for example, the Palestinian style of warfare: one waged by sporadic operations - such as bombings and hijackings - outside the disputed territory, while at the same time maintaining 'little wars' within that territory. In this definition, terrorism may be included in people's war where terrorism itself may be defined as the use of violent, politically motivated acts against civilians. Here, too, the formal conventions of warfare are ignored.

Whether people's war is conservatively or radically defined it may be said to display one key characteristic, that of the planned achievement of psychological ascendancy which denies the opponent the
choice of concepts of how a war is to be waged. The effect is intended to be disorienting, demoralising and therefore debilitating. Theoretically this amounts to a powerful psycho-military determinant of war outcome. In practice this may not be so, usually for reasons other than any inherent flaw in the people’s war logic. To use the examples already cited: in Spain the war against Napoleon’s forces was finally won through Wellington’s decisive intervention; and in T.E. Lawrence’s Arabian campaign by Allenby’s major offensive against the Turks. To use China’s own experience, the defeat of Japanese forces in 1945 was ultimately secured through American use of atomic weapons. People’s war, in these notable instances, had not been able to demonstrate the efficacy of its psychologically-based methods in the ultimate test of strategy – the claim to victory.

Despite this evidence, as well as that of the civil war which resumed after the fighting with Japan had ended, the credibility of the people’s war concept in present Chinese doctrine does rest on its ability to convince a potential enemy that the costs of aggression outweigh the expected benefits. This is people’s war in its preferred deterrent aspect. In short, the same objective applies to people’s war as it does to nuclear weapons: to deter. In both, the threat must be credible and to be credible it must be perceived as capable of actually inflicting the unacceptable losses that are threatened.

PEOPLE’S WAR IN CHINESE THEORY AND PRACTICE

The original theory of people’s war (renmin zhanzheng) in relation to China was expounded by Mao Zedong (Mao Tse-tung) in a series of lectures between 1936 and 1938. Mao’s military formulations may be traced to centuries of Chinese experience in peasant uprisings (and therefore the notion of peasant armies), to the insights of classical Chinese military philosophy, and to Mao’s immediate preoccupation with fighting Chiang Kai-shek’s Nationalist forces. In essence, as first expressed by Mao, people’s war is a doctrine of victory denial by means of ‘protracted war’ (chijiuzhan). Its aim is to erode the adversary’s strength by military and psychological attack on weak points (attrition warfare), and to secure opponent defeat in a final phase which is marked by decisive battle.

Specifically, the protracted war begins with a strategic retreat or ‘luring the enemy in deep’. This is the first of three stages in the progression of people’s war. In Mao’s words, it is ‘the period of the enemy’s strategic offensive and our strategic defensive’, for ‘a weak army fighting a strong army must preserve itself in order to prepare for a decisive counter-attack.’

During this early phase, swiftly executed surprise attacks alternate with elusive battle-avoidance behaviour, in line with Mao’s oft-cited dictum: ‘The enemy advances, we retreat; the enemy camps, we harass; the enemy tires, we attack; the enemy retreats, we pursue.’ Such guerilla tactics naturally favour fluid rather than fixed battle lines. The purpose is to avoid engaging the enemy force on its own self-serving terms – an example of the wider principle of denying the adversary its concepts of warfare. The terms by which battle must be fought to maximise the advantage of a ‘weak army’ capitalise on an abundance of numbers, space and time: attack the enemy forces piecemeal through a concentration of one’s own numerically superior forces; attract under conditions of mobile rather than positional warfare; protract the war by keeping the enemy ‘engaged in extensive theatres of war’. Further, Mao clearly understood that the advantageous use of space, and the freedom of movement it affords, is dependent on the co-operation of local rural populations in providing bases, fighters, food, and military intelligence.

‘The second stage,’ said Mao, ‘will be the period of the enemy’s strategic consolidation and our preparation for the strategic offensive.’ At this level, essentially one of stalemate, the disparity in the balance of forces is minimised. The ‘weak army’ has armed itself with an arsenal captured from the ‘strong’, ruptured adversary morale, and mobilised the masses against the enemy. Finally, as ‘guerilla units waging guerilla warfare’ are transformed into ‘regular forces waging mobile warfare’, the balance turns in favour of the people’s forces who initiate the concluding ‘period of our strategic counter-offensive and the enemy’s strategic retreat’.

However, if a common view is to regard the PLA (and, by extension, its supporting doctrine) as purely defensive in capability and intent, then this is misleading. The Chinese are cognisant of the principle that military victory cannot be assured by defence alone. After all, Mao’s classical reference, The Art of War, a Chinese text ascribed to Sun Tzu and dated at circa 350 BC, categorically states: ‘Invincibility lies in defence; the possibility of victory in the attack.’ Apart from making obvious military sense, it fits the logic of deterrence: Mao’s concept of people’s war represents a two-tiered deterrent of (a) threat of protracted resistance; followed by (b) threat of
opponent annihilation through counter-attack. This means that even if undeterred by the prospect of a lengthy engagement against defensive forces, the enemy must still take into account the eventual offensive intent of that protraction. It is therefore important to recognise that people's war, as set forth by Mao, is not wholly a defensive mode of guerilla harassment in support of mobile main force units, nor are the Chinese content to resist by swamping the invader with human wave tactics – though this is expected to constitute a considerable threat in itself. The whole point of the protraction exercise is to prepare for victory through attack. As Mao stated: 'the only real defence is active defence, defence for the purpose of counter-attacking and taking the offensive'. Indeed, the final credibility of people's war as a deterrent depends not on the defence but on the offence:

It should be pointed out that destruction of the enemy is the primary object of war and self-preservation the secondary, because only by destroying the enemy in large numbers can one effectively preserve oneself. Therefore attack, the chief means of destroying the enemy, is primary, while defence, a supplementary means of destroying the enemy and a means of self-preservation, is secondary. In actual warfare the chief role is played by defence much of the time and by attack for the rest of the time, but if war is to be taken as a whole, attack remains primary.

Nevertheless, existing practical demonstrations in support of this proposition are inadequate. People's war was not demonstrated in its entirety against the Japanese invasion. Mao called for total commitment – 'everything for the front, everything for the defeat of the Japanese aggressors and for the liberation of the Chinese people'. Indeed, people's war at this time may be judged to have been more propaganda than reality. Mao expended less effort on the Japanese than on his own party and its primary enemy, the Guomindang (Kuomintang) government of Chiang Kai-shek. The war of resistance against the Japanese was useful for advancing the national appeal of the Communist Party of China (CPC). 'Such is a real people's war,' said Mao of the Communist resistance. 'Only by waging such a people's war can we defeat the national enemy. The Kuomintang has failed precisely because of its desperate opposition to people's war.' In terms of the realities of that time, Walter Laqueur has written:

In the search for historical truth, one has to proceed beyond mythology and political polemics: despite all the tenacity and courage displayed by the Chinese Communists, they were on more than one occasion exceedingly lucky. They operated in near ideal conditions: there was no strong central authority in China even before the Japanese invasion. Once the war had started in 1937 the Communists enjoyed virtual immunity in their bases in northern China. For the Japanese, the Communist guerrillas were not a serious danger, and this [was] despite [the fact] that the Japanese occupation army was small by any standards. Indeed, the Chinese Communists did little fighting against the Japanese after 1940, though Chiang Kai-shek's troops did even less. Mao's policy was to devote seventy percent of the Communists' effort to expansion, twenty percent to coping with the Kuomintang government and ten per cent to fighting the Japanese.

Even in the civil war between the Communists and the Guomindang (GMD), it would be misleading to attribute Mao's CPC victory in 1949 to the strength of the people's war concept. The GMD's ineptitude – of which the Communist forces naturally took advantage – made a contribution at least as great. Chiang's government presided over a disintegrating economy, alienated the populace and some of the powerful Triad (secret society) leaders who were used in the GMD intelligence service. It failed to carry out the very socio-economic reforms which sparked revolt against the old imperial order of the Manchus, and generally promoted self-defeat through internal quarrels, corruption and, in the words of Chiang's American adviser, Major General David Barr, 'by a politically influenced and military inept high command'.

Given the natural advantages gained from these internal problems of the GMD, the Communists' performance was still far from Mao's ideal – largely because of the CPC's own internal dispute on strategy in the early 1930s. Chiang Kai-shek's Fifth Campaign in 1933 highlighted the inadequacy of Communist forces fighting pitched battles. This, according to people's war doctrine, they were not supposed to do. Mao criticised the tactical blunder of attempting to 'engage the enemy outside the base area', and worse still – of attacking 'enemy strongpoint' locations. Chiang, in a manoeuvre which befits the people's war principle of inducing the enemy to fight on one's own terms, caused the Communists to engage prematurely in regular warfare. He did this by changing his methods to 'blockhouse war-
Modern Chinese Defence Strategy

fate', whereby the encircling force 'advanced gradually and entrenched itself at every step', at the same time isolating the Communist forces from supplies and intelligence. 'Then in seeking battle,' Mao complained, 'we milled around between the enemy's main forces and his blockhouses and were reduced to complete passivity ... we showed not the slightest initiative or drive.' In one analysis, Mao focused blame on faulty assessment of enemy strength: 'The military adventurism of attacking the key cities in 1932 was the root cause of the line of passive defence subsequently adopted in coping with the enemy's fifth “encirclement and suppression” campaign.' In another, he deplored the lack of strategic foresight. For Mao, people's war must not only plan for change, but accommodate change within that plan:

Even though future changes are difficult to foresee ... a general calculation is possible and an appraisal of distant prospects is necessary. In war as well as in politics, planning only one step at a time as one goes along is a harmful way of directing matters. After each step, it is necessary to examine the ensuing concrete changes and to modify or develop one's strategic and operational plans accordingly, or otherwise one is liable to make the mistake of rushing straight ahead regardless of danger.

In Chiang's Fifth Campaign, the danger towards which the Communists 'rushed', and then 'passively' remained, was such that they were left with no alternative but to flee. The subsequent Long March, 12 000 kilometres northwest from the southern province of Jiangxi to Shaanxi near Mongolia, was therefore a symptom of defeat. As Laqueur again astutely observed: 'The Long March was not a major victory but a great retreat. But the Communists turned military defeat into a propagandistic victory, for Chiang had failed to destroy them; their forces seemed invincible.'

If victory came eventually and for reasons beyond the correct application of people's war theory, then the whole issue of whether Mao's theories actually had practical results must be considered. Was the relationship between people's war and the 1949 Communist victory one of cause and effect or was it that the Guomindang lost the capacity to fight for other reasons? Whichever, it is at least true that the ideas of how a people's war ought to be fought were evident on the field in many instances, and not just on the part of the Communists. Chiang demonstrated the importance of seizing the initiative and of reducing the enemy into a state of passive defence during the

Fifth Campaign, as did the Communists during the decisive battle of Huai-Hai by which the PLA encircled, isolated and destroyed the Nationalist government forces piecemeal.

Mao's propaganda war capitalised on the failures to implement people's war at a strategic level. This involved not only the Long March which ironically enshrined the mystique of people's war in the popular imagination, but its use against the Japanese. By fighting a war of resistance against the Japanese invaders, the CPC acquired the appearance of being involved not only in a class war but a broad national struggle, hence tapping the potent force of national appeal – a force which was turned against the CPC's primary enemy, the Guomindang.

From the above, one may conclude that Mao's people's war succeeded in demonstrating its possibilities in revolutionary China, rather than offering a complete and satisfying demonstration of success in war wholly attributable to this strategy. By contrast, General Vo Nguyen Giap did prove people's war in Vietnam. During the First Indochina War of 1948-54, his Vietminh (Vietnamese Independence League) army successfully employed Mao's three-phased strategy of protracted people's war against the French colonial forces. The Vietminh numbered 300 000, with a roughly equal ratio of guerillas and regular forces, against an enemy strength of 415 000. Only when Giap was confident that his forces were sufficiently superior in men and matériel, did he launch the final and decisive offensive against the French at Dien Bien Phu.

The North Vietnamese Army's performance against technologically superior American forces in subsequent years also provides valuable lessons to the aspirant of modern people's war. These are detailed in the next chapter, but for the purposes of the present discussion, it is important to note that in the pre-1949 laboratory of its formulation, the Chinese model sought to create military insights appropriate to observable conditions. Mao understood the constants, especially China's magnitude, and their value; he studied change, including tactical defeat, and how to use it. That the PLA was, as Harlan Jencks put it, 'outgunned and outnumbered until 1949', shows that Mao's theory – if it is to be meaningful – must be read as a strategy based only on the pragmatic (and as a result, primarily psychological) exploitation of immediate conditions to attain the objective. The important proviso is that contemporary circumstances cannot be assumed to be as accommodating as they have been in the past. Hence the need to prepare for the more complex strategic
environment in which China now finds itself. China's chief perceived adversary is no longer an internal rival but a global superpower. Apart from the possibility of direct confrontation with technologically superior Soviet forces, the broader strategic circumstances of Soviet-American rivalry may be as much a cause of any Chinese participation in future conflict.

TOWARD A GENERAL CONCEPT:
(a) CONTRIBUTIONS FROM MILITARY PHILOSOPHY

Having examined the theory and practice of people's war in recent Chinese history, it is possible to arrive at a general concept which can be applied to understanding its role in modern or even post-nuclear battlefield conditions in China, if they too may be deemed 'modern'. To do this one must connect - or perhaps in some instances reconnect - Mao's thought to the wider field of military philosophy, and establish the set of conditions distinct to the Chinese situation and under which the concept must operate.

Mao's concept of people's war is regarded in the PRC as part of a 'unified system of knowledge' known as 'military science' (junshi xueshu). The Chinese have defined this term as: 'The study of war and of the laws for directing wars, with the theory of war and strategy being the basic framework. Military science comes from military practice and in turn plays a major, directing role in military practice.'

Mao's call for flexibility and a responsiveness to change allude to his 'military art' (junshi xueshu), which is considered in China to be an important branch of military science. With the stress on people's war under modern conditions, this facet appears to have been further emphasised by the Chinese, as in the 1978 observation of CPC Vice Chairman Ye Jianying (Yeh Chienying), namely: 'We must not stick to the beaten track. We must accept new things and study new problems.'

When applied to Mao's indirect strategy of undermining the material and moral foundations of enemy strength, before attempting to achieve victory through direct assault, irregular warfare may be interpreted as a predilection of form. Mao judged the irregular guerilla component as suitable to the conditions of time and place then characterising China. However, because it is a question of form, which may change as conditions change, guerilla warfare (fought by non-regular forces) is an option, not an essential, in an enduring general concept of people's war. To return to the example of Vietnam, one may distinguish the professional military usage of guerilla warfare. Referring to the Second Indochina War of 1965-75, Paddy Griffith explains:

For the village fighter there was essentially no alternative to fighting as a guerilla. It was inherent in his relationship with his village and his local political cell. For the mainforce fighter, by contrast, ... it was a military stratagem adopted by choice, which could be abandoned, if circumstances were appropriate, in favour of more overt or close-order fighting.

Considered from a classical Chinese and European military perspective: irregular warfare is not crucial, or even relevant, to the application of an indirect strategy. What counts is the ability to demoralise the enemy. In other words, one cannot expect to succeed with such a strategy against an enemy who has not lost the will to fight. 'What-
ever the form,’ wrote B.H. Liddell Hart, ‘the effect to be sought is the
dislocation of the opponent’s mind and dispositions – such an effect is
the true gauge of an indirect approach’ (emphasis in the original).32
However, both Liddell Hart and Jomini – who advocated concentra-
tion upon enemy weak points – were concerned with professional
armies rather than armed citizens.

Similarly, in The Art of War Sun Tzu discussed the subject in
relation to the operations of conventional armies and not in the
context of a protracted people’s war. To Sun Tzu, deception and
surprise were the key factors in formulating a strategy of indirect
approach. Described by him as an ‘offensive strategy’, it is neverthe-
less similar to Mao’s concept of active defence: both propose that the
psychological initiative must be held. Thus, withdrawal of forces in
the face of enemy strength,33 is as much a deliberate exercise of
initiative as offensive action when circumstances are considered
appropriate. The underlying logic of strategic initiative corresponds
to the requirements of manipulating the adversary’s responses to the
ideal point of rendering them ineffectual. ‘Therefore against those
skilled in attack, an enemy does not know where to defend; against
the experts in defence, the enemy does not know where to attack.’34
Sun Tzu’s injunctions establish the salient features of indirect
strategy as we have come to know it in the more recent European and
Maoist formulations. They include:

(i) mobility: ‘Appear in places to which [the enemy] must hasten;
move swiftly where he does not expect you’;
(ii) effecting adversary dispersion: ‘If I am able to determine the
enemy’s dispositions while at the same time conceal my own
then I can concentrate and he must divide’;
(iii) confounding the opponent with unexpected theatres of battle:
‘The enemy must not know where I intend to give battle . . .
And when he prepares in a great many places, those I have to
fight in any one place will be few.’35

A strategy based on deception may be of more general use than
reliance on mass mobilisation: unless, of course, the enemy is de-
ceived (such as through official articulations on the theme of ‘every-
one a soldier’, and the maintenance of an extensive militia) into
believing that the masses will be mobilised in a lengthy war of
resistance. To openly prepare for one strategy, but to surprise the
enemy with another, is totally in accord with psychological warfare.
This is more so the case where mass mobilisation does remain a
genuine option, if conditions are indeed genuinely conducive to its
employment. By creating uncertainty in the adversary’s mind, the
threat of war by the Chinese masses (even if it is not intended) still
serves a useful psychological – and thus deterrent – function.
Therefore, an indirect strategy based on psychological warfare is also
relevant to a general concept. Because all deterrence is psychologi-
cal, such a people’s war concept is far from a strategic anachronism.
Rather, it offers an application of modern deterrence theory.

At this stage, the objection may be raised that a concept of
people’s war which does not incorporate mobilisation of the masses is
no longer representative of a true people’s war – in effect, a people’s
war without ‘the people’. In the first instance, there has been no
demonstration of a ‘true’ people’s war in China. The second and
related point concerns the understanding of people’s war as a theory
of deterrence and which, with nuclear weapons, is China’s deterrent
strategy. The reality of people’s war would signify a failed
deterrent. However, as considered earlier, for a deterrent to be credible, it must
be capable of being used successfully. A third consideration is that if
the deterrent which is people’s war does fail, its war-fighting role
through mass resistance can be used only if mass loyalty is assured,
and the political values associated with people’s war in the pre-1949
era were not assured in the China of Deng Xiaoping. The contem-
porary social fabric is qualitatively different from that of the revolu-
tionary era. China’s people are learning to be consumers in an
economically driven environment. As will be shown in the context of
China’s modernisation efforts (Chapter 2), the qualities of national
survival – those that are encouraged and rewarded – call for a
professional, ‘efficiency-first’ ethic, rather than the former ideological
fervour. Moreover, ideological fervour may not only be irrelevant in
the post-Mao political climate, but potentially dangerous, especially
when armed. (That China’s ordinary militia are generally unarmed
makes eminent sense on that basis alone.)

When Clausewitz and Jomini expressed esteem for irregular
warfare,36 they did so in reference to detached, regular, units. They
were well aware of the political objection to irregular troops: trained
in arms they may be a threat to social order. After all, Clausewitz had
fought against the French revolutionary armies whose doctrine was,
the people in arms. When Clausewitz proposed his concept of war as
a trinity (comprising the people, the army and the government), the
people en masse, in this revolutionary sense, were not Clausewitz’s
intention. Rather, he meant people loyal to the king. Similarly, the
ruling elites of the PRC must be assured of their citizens' loyalty. The havoc caused by militant citizens during the Cultural Revolution has not been forgotten, nor have the more recent expressions of citizen dissent – the 'pro-democracy movement' of June 1989 – been tolerated.

In summary, the general (contemporary) concept of people's war entails a deterrent doctrine of victory denial whose credibility derives from a combination of classical Chinese and Western formulae:

(i) intent – the communication of a national will to first resist and second, to destroy an aggressor;
(ii) capability – sufficient flexibility at an operational level to address the demands of contemporary warfare;
(iii) deception – use of an indirect strategy of psychological warfare premised on deception, ambiguity and, generally, the manipulation of adversary perceptions.

The last of the above elements furthers the accepted understanding of the manipulative role of deterrence, to encompass the core psychological characteristic of people's war, as stated at the outset of this chapter. Thus, in the case of the militarily inferior, it is not enough that 'Threat Perception = Estimated Capability x Estimated Intent', to borrow the brevity of J. David Singer's quasi-mathematical formulation. The opponent, his gameplan frustrated, must be forced to resign – preferably before the physical game begins and the game of deterrence has ended. 'To subdue the enemy without fighting is the acme of skill.' The tiger is seen for what it is, a paper tiger, a ghost, for it is without substance in the face of the people. This view is plausible when one considers that, in the final analysis, victory can only be achieved by occupation and that would be impossible in the case of China, given its people's continued loyalty to Beijing.

Within the overall philosophical orientation represented by the paper tiger thesis, there are psychological means for dealing with the tactical reality of weapons-based strength. Some of these are well illustrated by the paper tiger's lesser known alias, the 'ghosts' analogy, developed in Stories About Not Being Afraid of Ghosts, first published in 1961. China's decision to develop nuclear weapons, for example, may be likened to the method of paying ghosts back 'in their own coin'. Impression management is another recommended method of dealing with one's tactical superior. In the tale of 'Sung Ting'po Catches a Ghost', the ghost is deceived when the hero also plays the role of a ghost. 'Mentally he completely held the initiative,' note the editors. 'Besides, he was clever at doing what was appropriate to a specific situation so as to keep the ghost under his control from start to finish.'

TOWARD A GENERAL CONCEPT:
(b) PEOPLE'S WAR UNDER CHINESE CONDITIONS

That the tradition and practice of people's war should be adapted to Chinese conditions (one of which was – and still is – a condition of relative weakness) is unremarkable. Any strategy of warfare must address indigenous conditions if it is to accord with the military logic of obtaining the maximum objective with the means available. That which is especially pertinent to China's adoption of people's war is the nature of the combination or coincidence of those conditions that are peculiarly Chinese. These may be summarised as vast land mass and population, a largely agrarian and therefore decentralised economy, and cultural and historical predispositions, including the historically significant influence of one man. Mao Zedong himself constitutes a 'Chinese condition' beyond a mere catalytic synthesis of the other components, inasmuch as his ideas, politics, personality, and influence stimulated the moral (or spiritual) dimension of people's war with its paramount concern for the value of human resources. Manpower is regarded, qualitatively and quantitatively, to be a more decisive factor than weapons superiority. The man-over-weapons concept, popularised as the 'paper tiger' thesis, does not tactically underestimate the power that the enemy (then the United States) and its weapons (atomic bombs) can bring to bear: the 'tiger' in that sense is real enough. But such power is morally questioned, and hence strategically despised, on the basis that it is 'divorced from the people'. The tiger is seen for what it is, a paper tiger, a ghost, for it is without substance in the face of the people. This view is plausible when one considers that, in the final analysis, victory can only be achieved by occupation and that would be impossible in the case of China, given its people's continued loyalty to Beijing.

Within the overall philosophical orientation represented by the paper tiger thesis, there are psychological means for dealing with the tactical reality of weapons-based strength. Some of these are well illustrated by the paper tiger's lesser known alias, the 'ghosts' analogy, developed in Stories About Not Being Afraid of Ghosts, first published in 1961. China's decision to develop nuclear weapons, for example, may be likened to the method of paying ghosts back 'in their own coin'. Impression management is another recommended method of dealing with one's tactical superior. In the tale of 'Sung Ting'po Catches a Ghost', the ghost is deceived when the hero also plays the role of a ghost. 'Mentally he completely held the initiative,' note the editors. 'Besides, he was clever at doing what was appropriate to a specific situation so as to keep the ghost under his control from start to finish.'

Deng's 'capitalist reader' image must be seen in this light. (During the Cultural Revolution, he and Head of State Liu Shaoqi were called 'capitalist readers' because they appeared to represent right-wing values within the CPC.) China might appear to have drawn closer to the West – and indeed the West is useful to China as a source of technology – but ultimately the Chinese have relied on the 'American ghost' to complicate any Soviet designs on
war with China. Of interest here, however, is the deliberate cultivation of an attitudinal condition which states: ‘Nothing in the world should be feared, but there are men who scare themselves.’ In the psychology of people’s war, it is an attitude that can be used to bolster domestic morale and foster uncertainty in foreign perceptions. Certainly, the importance attached by Maoist doctrine to the ‘human element’ can refer to other nations too. But it is particularly pertinent in China’s case: the mobilisation of one billion (1000 million) ‘hearts and minds’ is as awesome a prospect as the literal mobilisation of their numbers. No adversary can afford to ignore this potential for ‘national will’.

The military asset of a large population, replete with the will to fight, is further enhanced by its predominantly rural character and the vast Chinese land mass. These mutually reinforcing characteristics strengthen the credibility of a people’s war under ‘Chinese conditions’. A peasant population is ideally placed to provide: (a) support for a protracted war in the country’s interior; and (b) a rural and agricultural economic base which is less easily paralysed, whether by conventional or nuclear military action, than an urban-based industrial economy. An effective example may be drawn from Ralph Clough’s comparison of Japanese and Chinese nuclear vulnerabilities. Japan is vulnerable to a small number of nuclear missiles because 32 per cent of its population and a large proportion of its industry are within a radius of 50 kilometres from Tokyo, Nagoya and Osaka. By contrast, China’s cities, Clough points out, contain only 11 per cent of the population. Even with the more recent figure of 14.6 per cent obtained from the 1982 census, the proportion of urban dwellers in China’s population is still relatively low. The urban figure is even smaller – 11.4 per cent – when one takes into account only the largest cities (totalling 324) with a minimum of 50 000 people. Clearly, China is not a good nuclear target. Nor is it likely to be in the near future, given official controls of urban migration from the countryside. The requirement for a residence permit which specifies each citizen’s residential location means that China can indeed adhere to its urban development policy slogan: ‘Keep the Cities Small’. Rural migration will be absorbed by the construction of 280 smaller cities – a policy of urban dispersal rather than concentration – allowing the Ministry of Urban and Rural Construction to project that China’s urban population will not exceed 175 million by the year 2000.

The nature of China’s military-industrial targets also poses difficulties for a potential aggressor. Since 1978 defence factories have been undergoing conversion toward dual military-civilian production, and by 1986 civilian goods accounted for 40 per cent of total defence plant output. First, it should be pointed out that the blurring of distinctions between civilian and military industry in the Deng era is in keeping with the people’s war concept which incorporates the role of whole populations in a war effort, not just its professional military forces. Second, by creating an industrial capacity to cater for both civilian and military production, China may be in a constant state of war readiness, while maintaining the non-belligerent impression that it has converted its ‘swords’ into ‘ploughshares’. This is not identified by the Chinese as an aspect of defence policy, but rather as a means of promoting economic development. However, the joint civilian-military production scheme does resemble the Soviet method of allowing rapid expansion of military production in the event of war.

There are also benefits to be gained in complicating enemy targeting plans, especially if military factories are no longer discernible from traditionally civilian ones – a situation which would require the reciprocal conversion of civilian plants into military manufacturing capability if needed. When every motorcycle or refrigerator factory is also capable of producing weapons and munitions, for example, does the opponent then target every such factory? Apart from the considerable practical problem involved, there is also a moral one. How does one justify to international opinion, strikes against targets that are also civilian? With Ministry of Ordnance plants gearing up to the estimated two-thirds production output for civilian goods in 1990, even those factories once thought to be military can no longer be readily distinguished. As one anecdotal account puts it, ‘The change-over sometimes produces weird results. An American delegation was recently escorted through the Shenyang Aircraft Factory, home of the Chinese F-8 jet fighter project. It was bemused to see assembly lines producing rowing machines and rubbish compactors.’

Predispositional factors contribute to the complex of conditions deemed indigenously Chinese. Historically, as Gerald Segal points out, China’s military culture has tended toward ‘classical realist calculations’ and the preferred application of ‘psychological warfare’. Although it is not possible to ascertain the precise extent to which modern China has been influenced by its historical military culture, Mao is known to have familiarised himself thoroughly with classical literature such as The Romance of the Three Kingdoms and
Sun Tzu’s *The Art of War*. Certainly, Sun Tzu is still studied in Chinese military academies and included in the 1985 *Handbook of Military Knowledge for Commanders*. Societal predispositions may also be viewed as conducive to people’s war operations, particularly in the systemic context of conditions favourable to the organisation of base areas in the countryside. Hence it is of congruent interest that Eric Wolf notes, with reference to China and Vietnam, the politico-military utility of traditional village associations:

Under Communist control these came to serve as a template for welding army and peasantry into a common body. This common organisational grid – connecting the centralized army mainly recruited from the peasantry, the part-time guerrilla forces stationed in the villages, and the village population – both obviated the development of unco-ordinated peasant revolts and the autonomous entrenchment of the peasantry which had occurred in Russia.48

Rural China as a system of ‘associations’ has continued under CPC rule in the form of collective communes and, since 1979, within its more liberal development – the ‘responsibility system’. In this system farming is conducted by individual families which must meet the state quota, but can keep for profit any excess production. Collective production teams, however, still retain organisational responsibility. They are responsible for disposing of set production quotas to the state purchasing authorities, and allocating tracts of land to family units. So whatever the transformations, there is still a useful ‘grid’.

In view of the foregoing discussion, one may posit that China is in a strong position to invest people’s war with deterrence credibility. Because China’s distinctive set of conditions leads to the assessment that it is neither easily targetable by nuclear weapons nor readily occupied by invasion forces, people’s war viewed in the context of modern conditions needs to be understood as a general theory distinct from the model derived from China’s revolutionary past. The use of civilians (for moral and physical support), of sabotage and of methods of attrition, rather than main force engagements in the face of enemy superiority, are in accord with the underlying people’s war principles of fighting from a position of material weakness. *They are not the ends but the means of an indirect strategy*. Methods of deception incorporating the use of regular troops are also applicable. These underlying principles and their associated means were articulated by theoreticians, one of whom was Mao Zedong. Having enunciated a people’s war doctrine, Mao nevertheless did stress its flexibility in terms of applications suitable to local conditions of time and place. Classical European strategists also spoke of war strategy in these terms. So, in this investigation, they too have been found relevant to a general concept which transcends the limits of a revolutionary model. Such a model is not only historically restricted to early twentieth-century China, but it is also undemonstrative of theory.

That Mao’s theory was simply that – a theory unrelated to what actually happened in China – does not detract from its usefulness as a deterrent or its relevance to what might happen in China in the event of war. We have observed that the genre to which people’s war belongs is independent of the need for large professional armies. *This characteristic may not be useful to the defence requirements of a modern nation state, but it may prove to be a vital survival quality if the specialised military functions of a victim society are effectively destroyed. In the hypothetical post-nuclear battlefield of the future, so long as there are surviving populations amenable to organised resistance, people’s war might prove an ideal, or perhaps the only possible, strategy against an occupation force*. Ironically, the grooming of people’s war for ‘modern conditions’ could entail recourse to its guerilla mode for a ‘primitive’ future battlefield.

Understandably, the prime concern of critics is the performance of the concept within the more immediate military phenomenon of the electronic battlefield. This is a real concern, and the issue will later be examined in greater detail. But rather than seriously exploring the modern possibilities of people’s war, the writings of a number of external analysts tend to be dismissive of the whole concept. It is not seen as a deliberate strategic plan which finds validation in its intrinsic value as a military doctrine, but as a mere circumstantial response which makes the best of a recognised inadequacy. June Dreyer, for example, states that ‘for the foreseeable future, China will remain militarily inferior [to the Soviet Union], and public espousal of the doctrine of people’s war, despite its deficiencies, can be construed as making a virtue of necessity’.49 Thomas Robinson’s reference to people’s war as ‘that overworked and by now sterile term’50 is indicative of the whole tendency of the dismissive school: it is prone to regarding people’s war as the antithesis to modernisation, as if this would explain the deeper dilemma of the Chinese in coming to terms with modernisation – a matter dealt with in the Chinese attitude to time (Introduction and Chapter 2). William Heaton, for example, selectively draws on the literature – including the modern-
Modern Chinese Defence Strategy

People's War: A Conceptual Odyssey

PEOPLE'S WAR UNDER MODERN CONDITIONS

The precise form of *people's war under modern conditions* must remain a matter of speculation for the Chinese as well as for external analysts. However, in general terms, the needs of modern warfare are addressed in a number of Chinese publications, two of which are: *National Defense Modernization*, a 'textbook' jointly edited and published by the CPLA Fighters Publishing House and the Science Popularisation Publishing House in 1983, with an accompanying introductory version; and *Handbook of Military Knowledge for Commanders*, written and approved by the Beijing Military Region in 1985. While both convey similar ideas, the first is a document for more general consumption, the second for practitioners. The former will be quoted here more frequently as its less specialised language is better suited for the purposes of this overview.

Among its recommendations for 'Chinese-style' national defence modernisation are the constant improvement of weapons and equipment, with a view to ensuring that the 'army's principal weapons . . . meet the needs of electronic warfare, guided missile warfare and nuclear warfare', and an accompanying improvement in the quality of soldiers so that 'weapons and equipment are closely integrated with men . . . [for the purpose of] real combat effectiveness'. This involves technical competence in the use of modern weapons and training in the method of combined arms operations. The *Handbook of Military Knowledge for Commanders* provides more detailed information on combined operations, such as methods of employment. Chapter 6, entitled 'Coordinated Movements', defines the method thus: 'movements in coordination together by all service arms, special arms, and special units (fendui) to perform a common operational mission in accordance with the combat objective, time, and place'.

The call for organisational reform toward a regularised, combined services system - a system long ago adopted by the world's modern armed forces - represents a major departure from the PLA's traditionally infantry-dependent force:

For a fairly long historical period, our army depended on a single service arm to fight a war, mainly the infantry. After the founding of the PRC, we took a second step and independently developed various technical service arms, organizing and setting up the Air Force, Navy, artillery, armored corps, engineering corps, as well as
strategic rocket force, but in systems and organization, training, and management we have not yet organically integrated them. With this situation it is very hard to meet the demands of modern warfare. Now we should take a third step, namely, to better enhance the combined arms nature of all branches and arms of the service.57

To this end, the Joint Tactical Training Centre had been established by Nanjing Military Region in east China. On its inauguration in April 1986, the Chinese news agency Xinhua described it as ‘the largest comprehensive training base with the most advanced equipment currently in our country’.58

Whilst efficiency-driven reform now dominates and has resulted in manpower cuts within the PLA (a reduction of one million personnel since 1985), human wave tactics have not been removed altogether from the modern scheme of Chinese warfare. ‘We must also put into practice . . . a system that combines the field army, local armed forces, and militia, and perfect the reserve system and mobilization system, so that once an enemy encroaches he will be engulfed in the boundless ocean of people’s war.’59 Thus China’s vast reserves of manpower are still deemed to be an important adjunct to the above, regularised, three-dimensional force concept. (Given the importance of social protection, Chinese civil defence will be discussed shortly.)

While the authors of both National Defense Modernization and the Commanders’ Handbook clearly advance the need to develop strategic ideas and operational principles relevant to modern warfare, Mao Zedong’s military thought is affirmed, as is its stress on adjusting to ‘changes in historical conditions’ and, particularly, ‘changes in weapons and equipment’. This requires that ‘we absolutely must not copy indiscriminately the strategic ideas and operational principles of the past’.60

In adapting to current changes in the combat environment, it is proposed that ‘prelaid battlefields’ need to be built for ‘long-term hold-fast defense and independent operations’.61 Under this system, the PLA will be theoretically capable of holding positions – especially ‘strategic points, key cities, and fortress zones’ – rather than yielding them. Within these theatres of battle, ‘the capability for defending against atomic, chemical, and biological weapons will be improved in order to adapt operations to conditions of nuclear attack’.62 One may discern here a modification of Mao’s territory-yielding model in accordance with the changed circumstances of the PLA’s projected preparedness, and the increased importance of industrial and strategic areas.63 A strategy of ‘luring the enemy in deep’ is retained, but modern developments modify the way in which it is implemented. The point is well illustrated by a comparable source:

In coping with invaders, we must strike at the enemy after letting him in, and strategically we strike only after the enemy has struck. By luring the enemy in deep we do not mean letting enemy troops go wherever they like but we will force them to move as we want them to; at key places we will put up a strong defence, prevent them from penetrating inland unchecked and systematically lead them to battlefields of our own choice so as to wipe them out piecemeal.64

Because the ‘uninterrupted trial of strength between firepower’65 is observed to be a prominent characteristic of modern warfare, the authors of National Defense Modernization point out that weapons research capabilities and supply of material and ammunition must be assured at levels responsive to such warfare needs. Besides the firepower requirements of soldiers on the field, they also recognise the need for a ‘comprehensive and integrated system of command and control, communication and liaison, intelligence and reconnaissance’66 to improve command efficiency in high-technology battlefield conditions. In this respect it is worth noting that China’s growing aerospace industry, which is best known for its commercial satellite launch services, has obvious applications for improved PLA command, control, communications and intelligence (C3I). A 1988 Beijing Review article also spoke of the military applications of China’s expanding electronics industry. Among them was the electronic ground command system which has been used in ‘large-scale military exercises, to improve the co-ordination and responsiveness of army groups’.67

Finally, the maintenance of a strong civil defence system is recommended. Mao had long ago urged the Chinese to ‘dig tunnels deep’. Modern conditions reinforce this view. ‘For us, a future war will mainly be one in which we resist the enemy’s aggression on our own land, so, in order to fully display the power of people’s war, we should even more set up a strong civil defense system’.68 This statement, like others made by Chinese leaders and strategists over the decade since 1978, reveals the type of major war in which the Chinese expect to be involved. For instance, Ye Jianying’s 1978 civil defence speech at the Third National People’s Air Defence Conference was
based on the stated belief that the Soviet Union planned to subjugate China. An analysis along similar lines of Soviet military strategy, by Cheng Minqun and Yao Wenbin of the Institute of International Strategic Studies in Beijing, was reproduced in English under the title ‘Soviet Military Strategy for World Domination’ in Beijing Review (28 January 1980). General Wang Zhenxi, Deputy Director of Foreign Army Studies of Beijing’s Chinese Military Science Academy affirmed this view in 1988 when he said: ‘so far we’ve seen nothing to demonstrate that the Soviet Union has abandoned its strategic goal of hegemony’.69 His statement suggests that although by the late 1980s there was no expectation of near-term threat from the Soviets, the Chinese remain cautious about the Soviet Union’s long-term intentions. Not surprisingly, the Handbook of Military Knowledge for Commanders devotes considerable attention to the Soviet armed forces and to protection from nuclear, biological and chemical (NBC) weapons. The expectation of invasion, probably preceded by NBC attack, still forms an important basis of Chinese strategy.

It should be stressed once again that this view does not find favour with external analysts who dismiss people’s war as an obsolete concept, one they believe the Chinese themselves have virtually abandoned. In his book The Chinese Army After Mao, published in 1987, Ellis Joffe argues that China appears to have shifted from a strategy of victory denial to one of nuclear retaliation because it now has a credible second-strike capability. This, in turn, is taken to imply a downgrading of civil defence: ‘[C]ivic defence measures, which had figured prominently in China’s preparations for war a decade earlier, have hardly received any attention in recent years.’70

What does this mean? The short answer is that China does not expect a mass attack scenario under the current conditions of improved superpower relations and improving Sino–Soviet relations. On this point there is no disagreement with Joffe and fellow analysts. Differences in interpretation set in when one considers that China is still in a position of relative weakness, it still needs a strategy to address that weakness and that this is precisely what the model of contemporary people’s war advanced in this chapter does. First, it is worth repeating that a modern people’s war strategy, unlike the traditional one, is not ‘human wave’ defence against armed aggression per se, but rather the strategy for psychological pre-emption of such aggression. From the first flows the second point: deterrence is psychological and denial is a question of choice combined with circumstance. Third, modern Chinese strategy is not so clearly defined, or narrowly based, as to negate the traditional importance of civil defence and the victory denial posture from which it derives. Fourth, if the ultimate coup of a modern people’s war strategy is to defuse Soviet enmity as the less costly and most effective means to assuring China’s security – in line with the very essence of Sun Tzu’s teachings – then of course there is no need to give the impression that the Chinese nation lives under the constant threat of war. Joffe rightly argues that China’s improved military capability bears relation to its ‘more relaxed stance towards the Soviet Union’.71 In other words, it is always easier to ‘reason’ with one’s enemies from a position of strength. The confidence gained from possession of an invulnerable second strike, however, does not go far enough. Deterrence implies a working relationship between enemies. It is still a negative condition premised on fear. Diplomacy, at its best, aspires to remove that fear by converting the enemy into a friend, and if that is too much to expect, at least neutralising the basis of enmity by appealing to a higher interest (such as economic prosperity through co-operation). Unless the Chinese have already succeeded in neutralising the Soviet threat through diplomacy, which they have not, giving up the capacity to survive war is an act of premature and unprecedented optimism for a nation whose very history is a lesson in survival.

A modern people’s war strategy simply suggests that should prevention of war fail, then protection is the next best policy. If the Chinese are neglecting this policy, then they are behaving in an uncharacteristically Western fashion. They would be playing the superpower game of retaliatory revenge as if this would be enough in itself to assure one’s protection. Who would dare strike first? China is not strong in superpower terms, and both superpowers are capable of striking in a ‘small’ way, with sub-strategic weapons. The strikes might even be chemical to reduce environmental damage and/or the degree of international censure that would be expected from nuclear usage. A ‘small’ demonstrative strike in China’s northeast, or a chemical attack, translates to a potential casualty figure of 90 million people. For this reason if no other, civil defence must continue to underpin Chinese military philosophy: if it was vital to the North Vietnamese against an adversary that refrained from employing weapons of mass destruction, how much more so for the Chinese under NBC conditions? So long as the threat of this type of warfare prevails, the whole issue of civil protection deserves closer inspection.
The magnitude of China's civil defence effort is apparent in its handbook, *Basic Military Knowledge*, which the authors describe as one of 'a set of books for young people to study'. Preparing for survival against NBC weapons is detailed, with practical advice on protective measures. The American translators remark, for example, that the manual 'gives more advice on practical means to assure adequate supplies of safe drinking water after an all-out attack than we have noted in any other civil defence handbook'. On the more well-known city system of underground shelters, they observe: 'a system of networks' would also serve to greatly reduce the effectiveness of tanks and other expensive machines of a mechanized invading army - as first proved by the Warsaw defenders' use of the sewers to attack Nazi tanks at close range and destroy them with cheap Molotov cocktails. Although this manual was published in 1975, ten years later the Commanders' *Handbook* also speaks of 'wartime mass defence organizations' with regard to NBC defences, and continues to recommend use of shelters and tunnel networks.

The seriousness and scale with which China, like the USSR, has pursued civil defence planning accords with its traditional victory denial posture. Such a posture is premised on the belief that the chances of Chinese society surviving a nuclear war, in order to defend against occupation forces, would be enhanced by careful preparation. The concept of damage limitation does fulfil a deterrent function by signalling Beijing's victory denial resolve. But because of its clear operational relevance, damage limitation is not a deterrence-dependent concept whose value is lost if war has not been deterred. Although it is obvious that operational survival must be a fundamental requirement for the ability to conduct a protracted war of resistance under the primitive conditions that can be expected in a post-nuclear environment, it is not always obvious that damage limitation plans explicitly serve this proposed function. Indeed, civil defence in Western literature continues to be subsumed under the category of passive defence. However, if considered from the perspective of 'guerilla nuclear warfare', elaborated in Chapter 3, civil defence is both passive in its provision of shelter from nuclear attack, and active in supplying the protected base area infrastructure, which is necessary for the post-nuclear phase of guerilla harassment. Command links, technical expertise, and the production and supply of nuclear artillery would mark the type of functions fulfilled by the nuclear guerilla base.

Alastair Johnston rightly draws attention to questions about the quality of Chinese shelters in withstanding nuclear attack, or whether they can be quickly converted to wartime needs given their present use as hospitals, storage depots and other day-to-day civilian enterprises. On the question of quality, it is worth remembering that the shelters are virtually underground cities, covering millions of square metres. Like other aspects of Chinese defence, casualties might be heavy but the scale of the operation means that survival rates are likely to be far from negligible. Indeed, descriptions of the types of uses to which Chinese 'shelters' are put, are indicative of such scale. The Chinese press has reported that these shelters accommodate a total of 1700 hotels, 1100 shops, 1800 recreation centres and 140 hospitals. That the shelters are being used for these purposes may not be such a disadvantage to wartime needs. Johnston's concern 'whether in time of crisis these shelters could be emptied quickly or converted to wartime use' may be unwarranted. Of what would they need to be emptied? Shoppers, cinema audiences, hospital patients? It would be far more desirable to have crowds of people in shelters at the time of attack, than above ground. The willingness to conduct normal urban life underground is, in fact, an invaluable aid to war preparedness. As for conversion, there is no reason to believe that China's dual-purpose (civilian-military) attitude to its technological and production resources does not extend to activities in the shelter cities. 'Apart from being able to serve society and contribute to the four modernizations' (their annual turnover was later reported to be about US$426 million), a Chinese radio broadcast commented in 1982, 'the people's air defence projects can also be properly maintained and managed by being used in peacetime, thus creating conditions for their use in wartime'. Urban defence warfare, according to the Commander's *Handbook*, requires the co-operation of the civilian population in such tasks as movement of ammunition to the soldiers, evacuation of the wounded, fire protection and, generally, the maintenance of social order. One would expect that wartime conversion would be a relatively simple task, especially for facilities which already cater to human requirements, such as food, sanitation, and medical supplies. Under proper planning, even storage depots would be limited to only foodstuffs, strategic materials and other items relevant to survival under wartime conditions.

Having examined the problems and possibilities of the shelter system, one is left with the objection that shelters are ultimately pointless in view of the superior protection afforded by China's
demographic characteristics. As Segal asserts: 'No amount of shelters could equal the demographic reality of a vast rural population engaged in agriculture or dispersed light industry'.82 This is true, but Segal fails to consider the effects of residual radiation or 'fallout'. One ground-burst nuclear weapon can lethally contaminate thousands of square kilometres. Such shelters protect against that effect. Moreover, Segal's statement overlooks the strategy of 'active defence' which the Chinese take to include the defence of cities (reservists and the city inhabitants will be needed in this task), as well as post-nuclear people's war which will require shelters as organised base areas.

CONCLUSION

That China's survival should be assured even under the most adverse conditions of future warfare is a clear indication that the nation's military requirements have grown considerably since the civil war years. Indeed the quest for change in response to global advances in military technology became apparent when the slogan people's war under modern conditions was first introduced during the Korean War. After Chinese participation in that war, Defence Minister Peng Dehuai insisted on the need to be assured of one's weapons supplies, standardised ordnance and adequate logistical support. Above all, he could not comprehend how China's military forces could operate without rank and regularisation, without a professional ethic, with which to conduct themselves effectively and coherently on the modern battlefield. That Soviet weapons supplies, along with subsequent assistance on the development of an indigenous weapons industry, should have been accepted, along with the Soviet military model, does not fault Peng's judgement. One way or another, China's defence establishment had to modernise if it was not to perish. But Soviet assistance did reveal the Chinese inability, and ultimately - in view of the Sino-Soviet split - unwillingness, to accept the implications of foreign dependence to meet domestic needs.

For people's war, premised as it was on the goal of 'national liberation', the most important of modern conditions was the change in China's political authority: the Communist victory in 1949 meant that Mao's revolutionary forces became the defence establishment of the new nation. From challenging the prevailing authorities or competitors for authority, they became the defenders of the new incum-
the warrior ethos, as Western societies have also found to their cost. This would indicate less immediate willingness to engage in human wave sacrifices within the format of a prolonged people’s war, and that human power rather than firepower cannot remain the cornerstone of defence. (One must appreciate, however, that ‘war orientation’ is a fluid situation. The orientation of populations changes over a period of time. Thus the longer the war, the greater the willingness to engage in human wave tactics.) To preserve massive mobilisation as a credible deterrent, China must be able to convince the adversary of its ‘will’ to conduct a ‘total war’ campaign of victory denial. To achieve such credibility it is first necessary to convince one’s own soldiers and ordinary citizens – as well as to be seen to do so. The confidence inspired by the possession of formidable weapons cannot be overestimated as a morale-booster. China’s military parade of 1984, the first to be held in 25 years, may well have served such a domestic purpose. In an interview with People’s Daily (3 October 1984), Defence Minister Zhang Aiping said: ‘The people of the whole country and all the men and officers of the Army saw with their own eyes that the troops were much better equipped.’ Adversary propaganda designed to fuel resentment in the poorly equipped infantry soldier is also an admission that the possession or non-possesssion of protective weapons does affect morale.85 This is especially so in the case of cross-border incursions – such as during the Sino-Vietnamese clash of 1979 – which no longer resemble revolutionary defensive wars fought within China’s territory, but need to be understood by PLA fighters in the modern and somewhat less immediate terms of national foreign policy. Ideological fervour, though useful in mobilising national support, cannot be the appropriate nor the desirable long-term mechanism for motivating a state’s military force. It is not appropriate in the context of a limited war which needs to be executed in accordance with time and damage restraint, and it is not desirable as a political force to be unleashed in anything but a national emergency – lest it question (once again) the ideological credentials of the prevailing leadership. The Chinese leadership, one may conclude, has a new appreciation of the value of civil–military separation.

In summary, people’s war under modern conditions is a more deliberately psychological strategy than it was under revolutionary political conditions. ‘Political power’, which originally signified the power of the CPC, must now be viewed as the power of the CPC-led state, and can no longer be regarded as simplistically as that which ‘grows out of the barrel of a gun’, but rather from the calculations of deterrence. This raises the problem that even nuclear weapons and massive manpower under ‘primitive’ Chinese conditions may not be convincing as a deterrent. The weapons are known to be in many instances obsolete, and the people may fail to prove effective in defence if they are still capable of being roused on an ‘everyone a soldier’ basis. The military worth of the people’s militia has been questioned in the past and it is still subject to continuing review, evidenced in manpower reductions announced in 1986 (80 per cent in the People’s Militia and 88 per cent in militia trainees as a result of the militia being combined with the reserves). Nevertheless, sufficient uncertainty about its prowess remains, for adversaries to wish to avoid its test – especially in the absence of serious provocation. Under such circumstances it may be argued that it is not necessary for China to equip itself with significant numbers of expensive modern battlefield weapons. These could be updated slowly – at China’s own industrial modernisation pace – so long as its willingness to fight a people’s and a nuclear self-defensive war continues to be communicated. Both nuclear weapons and massive human mobilisations serve as useful symbols of power. They provide a deterrent which cannot be easily ignored; but a deterrent which is being constantly reassessed, nonetheless, in the light of changing standards in military technology.

In the long run, the PRC needs more than a convincing exhibition of will: it also needs the industrial–technological base to empower that will, for in the context of superpower relations, technical capability is increasingly the measure of military capability – be that wrong or right. As the next chapter will show, the PLA’s modernisation does call for technological improvements in weapons systems, but this is done out of tactical rather than strategic respect for the power of technology. It is the type of technical capability, not its degree of sophistication, that will matter most in China’s military preparedness. If the criteria for such capability are met – that is, if capability is sufficient for the purposes of modern people’s war – then all the indications are that, strategically, China may be especially qualified to prevail in the psychological and military climate of twenty-first-century warfare.