

Guerrilla Warfare

I INTRODUCTION

Guerrilla Warfare, military or paramilitary operations conducted in enemy-held territory by irregular forces, often groups indigenous to that territory.

II GUERRILLA TACTICS

Lacking the numerical strength and weapons to oppose a regular army in the field, guerrillas avoid pitched battles. Instead, they operate from bases established in remote and inaccessible terrain, such as forests, mountains, and jungles, and depend on the support of the local inhabitants for recruits, food, shelter, and information. The guerrillas may also receive assistance in the form of arms, medical supplies, and military advisers from their own or allied regular armies.

The tactics of guerrillas are those of harassment. Striking swiftly and unexpectedly, they raid enemy supply depots and installations, ambush patrols and supply convoys, and cut communication lines, hoping thereby to disrupt enemy activities and to capture equipment and supplies for their own use. Because of their mobility, the dispersal of their forces into small groups, and their ability to disappear among the civilian population, guerrillas are extremely difficult to capture.

III ORIGIN OF GUERRILLA WARFARE

The term *guerrilla* (Spanish, "little war") originated in the early 19th century during the Peninsular War when, after the defeat of Spain's regular forces, Spanish irregulars and civilians rose up against the French occupying forces. The practice of guerrilla warfare, however, dates from antiquity; for example, the Bible tells of the Israelite conquest of Canaan, led by Joshua, involving harassment and ambush of the enemy. Later Jewish resistance to foreign rule was expressed in the series of fierce guerrilla operations against the Romans in the 1st century AD; led by the Zealot sect, this revolt was climaxed by the seizure of Masada and the massacre of the Roman garrison there in AD 66.

IV GUERRILLA WARFARE IN THE WESTERN WORLD

Guerrilla-like warfare has figured in European history since the 12th century, when the Welsh, armed with longbows, fiercely defended their borders against Norman invaders. Through the centuries, peasant revolts against oppression were frequently characterized by guerrilla tactics. One of the bloodiest guerrilla actions was the peasant revolt of 1793-1796 in the Vendée, in western France, against the revolutionary government and in support of the Roman Catholic Church. Guerrilla actions played major roles in 19th-century nationalist uprisings, notably the Greek War of Independence (1821-1829) and the efforts of the patriots Giuseppe Mazzini and Giuseppe Garibaldi to unify Italy in the 1830s and 1840s.

Classic examples of guerrilla warfare include the attacks of more than 300 bands of French *francs-tireurs*, or snipers, on invading German troops during the Franco-Prussian War (1870-1871); the Boer raids against British troops that were occupying the Transvaal and the Orange Free State during the South African Wars (Boer Wars) (1899-1902); and, during World War II, the activities of the underground bands known as Maquis who fought German forces occupying France.

V THE NEW WORLD

Guerrilla warfare has figured prominently in the history of North and South America, from the slave revolts against the Portuguese and Dutch in Brazil in the 17th century to the ranger raids behind Union lines led by the Confederate soldier John Singleton Mosby during the American Civil War. In early 19th-century Latin America, guerrilla actions such as those led by the South American patriot Simón Bolívar and the Mexican revolutionary Miguel Hidalgo y Costilla were instrumental in throwing off the Spanish yoke.

VI THEORISTS AND PRACTITIONERS

The German soldier and military theorist Carl von Clausewitz, in his treatise *On War* (1832; trans. 1873), pointed out certain conditions that he considered necessary for the successful pursuit of a “people's war”. Such action must have popular support and must be carried on in the interior of a country, over a great extent of broken, inaccessible terrain. Clausewitz further argued that no single event will decide its outcome. Lenin made practical application of Clausewitz's thinking in the successful engineering of the Russian Revolution; and his own theories have had a major impact on modern guerrilla strategies.

As Lenin had applied Clausewitz's theories in the political area, T. E. Lawrence (Lawrence of Arabia) expanded them with respect to the desert skirmishes in which he led Arab bands against the Turks. In his book *The Seven Pillars of Wisdom* (1926) he emphasized the principles of mobility, speed, and surprise attack in guerrilla warfare.

VII MODERN GUERRILLA WARFARE

After World War II, the meaning of the word *guerrilla* was extended to include the guerrilla-like tactics of any insurgency, rebellion, or uprising against an established government. The Hukbalahaps, or Huks, a Communist force that fought in the Philippines for several years, are an example of such an underground group. The armies led by Mao Zedong (Mao Tse-tung) were not guerrilla forces in the traditional sense, but they used guerrilla-like tactics until they were strong enough to engage and defeat the Nationalist armies in pitched battles. In so-called wars of national liberation, stress is placed on armed insurgency, especially paramilitary and guerrilla tactics, sometimes at the expense of the political machinery.

This strategy was adopted by the Vietnamese leader Ho Chi Minh in his fight against the French government in Indochina. The scheme was also advocated by the Cuban leader

Fidel Castro, his military aide Che Guevara, and Jules Régis Debray, a French journalist and the author of *Strategy for Revolution* (1970), for the overthrow of existing governments in South and Central America. This strategy was initially followed in Vietnam by the pro-Communist Vietcong guerrillas fighting against the Vietnamese government in the south. Guerrilla tactics have also been used against colonial and white-minority governments in Africa; against the Soviet-backed regime in Afghanistan; and, during the 1980s, against the Sandinista government in Nicaragua.

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