

**MAO TSE-TUNG ON
GUERRILLA WARFARE**



Mao Tse-Tung

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Mao Zedong , Samuel B. Griffith (Introduction)

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The Classic text on Communist Guerrilla warfare includes an excellent introduction by Brigadier General Samuel Griffith USMC who was also the translator.

“In 1937 Mao...wrote a succinct pamphlet that has become one of the most influential documents of our time....the first systematic analysis of guerilla warfare...The widespread applicability of Mao’s doctrine stems from his realization of the fundamental disparity between the agrarian, peasant-based society of China and that of pre-revolutionary Russia, or any urban society....he had to employ tactics and appeals appropriate to the peasant.”

Mao Tse-Tung On Guerrilla Warfare Details

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From Reader Review Mao Tse-Tung On Guerrilla Warfare for online ebook

Ev says

A quick read for a day you are wondering why the world is fighting guerilla-style now. As Mao Tse-Tung predicted in this seminal text, the style of combat borne in China to repel foreign invaders would soon become the world's violent modus operandi. Thus, it was essential to understand its proper utilization, as well as its limitations.

Samuel B. Griffith, USMC and translator of the text, puts it in a nutshell: "In the United States, we go to considerable trouble to keep soldiers out of politics, and even more to keep politics out of soldiers. Guerillas do exactly the opposite."

A note that I found particularly impressive was Mao's insistence that, "We further our mission of destroying the enemy by propagandizing his troops, by treating his captured soldiers with consideration, and by caring for those of his wounded who fall into our hands. If we fail in these respects, we strengthen the solidarity of our enemy." (p.93)

Roger Burk says

Mao wrote this in 1937, when he was just a leader of the Chinese Communist Party, allied with Chiang Kai-shek's Nationalists in a desperate war against the Japanese invaders. Mao had not yet become the ideological mass-murdering tyrant we know. The book originally appeared as a pamphlet for the instruction of troops. It is famous for its clear presentation of guerrilla methods, but I think its application is limited. Mao is concerned specifically with partisan warfare, i.e. guerrilla warfare by irregular units in support of a regular army. He provides suggested tables of organization and equipment that are completely conventional for light infantry, from squad to regiment. He lays out traditional guerrilla tactics: avoiding battle except when delaying, harassing, or attacking isolated units; keeping close relationships with the people among whom the guerrillas operate; centralized strategy but decentralized tactical operations; political indoctrination of the troops and of the people (printing presses are among the necessary equipment he identifies). He emphasizes that China is in a protracted war of attrition in which the enemy must be worn out before he can be ejected from the country. He discusses the importance of secure bases where guerrillas can rest, refit, and train, and the difficulty of defending them when guerrilla units are unsuited for tactical defense. Permanent guerrilla bases are easiest to establish in remote mountain areas; lowlands may only have temporary bases used only when the enemy is occupied elsewhere. I wonder what he would say about today's guerrillas, who usually operate on their own, without any regular armies, and some of whom rely on urban bases hidden under the nose of the regular government.

Anthony says

I believe armed struggles of the 21st century will be known more for asymmetric warfare dictated by insurgencies rather than the total war characterized by 20th century where the entire economic and military might of a nation was mobilized to win. These grassroots rebellions generally arise from the masses of

unfortunate, uneducated, and forgotten poor seeking to improve their position in life and react with violent revolutionary action. Mao knew and trusted the peasants and correctly gauged their revolutionary potential. The peasants provided him with superior information, which allowed his forces to engage the enemy at their choosing. Which ever side wins the support of the general population will be the ultimate victors.

Given the current situation in Iraq and Afghanistan, civilian leaders, military leaders, and even average citizens of western powers should read this short book written by the greatest leader of modern guerrilla warfare to better understand the logic and reasons behind insurgent movements. It compiles all of the lessons Mao learned fighting the Japanese during WWII, drawing on combat experience and his own deep thought about winning a protracted war while fighting from the position of weakness. Guerrilla warfare is primitive only in the technological sense. The author states, "Its basic element is man, and man is more complex than any of his machines."

A revolutionary war is never confined within the bounds of military action. This is a major thesis of Mao's and he stresses the need for an ideological alternative to current government and once that is solidified it must be logically and convincingly written, explained, repeated, and disseminated among the population in order to gain their support. Once the support is gained the guerrillas must be organized and continuously reminded the reason for the struggle. While looking at the guerrilla organizational charts it was interesting to see a propaganda officer at the top of the hierarchy.

Mao's principle of "unity of opposites" is interesting since it is an adaptation of the ancient Chinese philosophical concept of Yin-Yang. Summarized into a military viewpoint, the theory equates to "concealed within strength there is weakness, and within weakness, strength. The small, under armed peasants were no match for the Japanese, but quickness, surprise, and better information allowed for rapid, effective military strikes, eventually wearing down the invaders.

I found it interesting that Mao viewed guerrilla tactics as simply one phase of the revolutionary war and it was a means to sap the enemy strength until more confrontational conventional war could be waged. He stressed a protracted war so that invading forces would face international pressure, domestic pressure, continual guerrilla attacks and it would eventually be defeated. It appears many western armies do not think of conflicts in longer terms and seem to seek quick rapid military action to reach a political goal.

This book is a classic of military literature and the essential manual for understanding revolutionary warfare is not only of armed conflict but political in nature.

Damir Marusic says

It's not great writing, and it's not even particularly gripping stuff. The translation is perhaps not the greatest, or perhaps Mao was not a literary genius.

That said, it's an important read. I found it recommended in Petraeus' bibliography to his Counterinsurgency Field Manual as one of the classic texts on the subject. It's short and easy to get through in one brief sitting, and it positively informs one's understanding of all recent insurgency-fueled conflicts, including Algeria, Vietnam, and now Iraq.

Yogi Travelling says

In 1937, Mao Tse-tung wrote this manual on revolutionary guerrilla warfare during the Japanese invasion of China. Chairman Mao would later become the founding father of the People's Republic of China.

Mao writes, "Guerrilla warfare has qualities and objectives peculiar to itself. It is a weapon that a nation inferior in arms and military equipment may employ against a more powerful aggressor nation."

... He believed in the rights for the peasant people of China.

Mao was born in the late 1800's. Fathered by a strict disciplinarian, he was known to be in constant conflict with his father. In his youth he enjoyed reading Chinese philosophy, poetry, history, and political science. After finishing school he associated himself with a Marxist study group where he discovered Lenin and Trotsky, and where he would later become a convinced Communist.

In this manual Mao speaks on the basic strategy of guerrilla warfare, which is based on alertness, mobility, attack and deception.

"The enemy's rear is the guerrillas' front; they themselves have no rear. Their logistical problems are solved in a direct and elementary fashion. The enemy is the principal source of weapons, equipment and ammunition."

While Ho Chi Minh (Vietnam) and Che Guevara (Cuba) have associated revolutionary guerrilla warfare with Communism, it is important to remember guerrilla warfare existed long before Communism.

And while many books have been written on the strategy of warfare (Sun Tzu, Miyamoto Musashi etc), I believe it is important to read a 'modern' version to understand revolutions in recent history.

Jim says

Like the art of war, this is a fascinating book into the mind of Mao. On Guerrilla Warfare was written in the 1950's and describes most of the tactics used by the Viet Kong to defeat the US during the Vietnam conflict.

It has a lot of applicability in the business world and actually in any group dynamic.

It is also a study in strategy to execution.

Scott Holstad says

I can't believe I discovered this treasure in a Maryland antique store last week while visiting the Eastern Shore from Tennessee with my wife. As a long time student of the Vietnam conflicts and Ho Chi Minh, and to a lesser degree, Mao Tse-Tung, I had heard of this classic guerrilla primer for some time, but I've never been able to find it. Until now. In hardback. And it was pricey. But worth it.

Mao wrote this small book in 1937 while leading the Chinese Red Army guerrillas against the Japanese

invaders. The book was later translated and published by the US military in 1940. My edition was re-translated and published in 1961 by Brigadier General Samuel B. Griffith, who wrote a most excellent introduction to the book. In fact, while short, it's so excellent, that when combined with Mao's text, I couldn't help but wonder what would have happened if the French and US governments and military had read the original first, and for the US later, this edition. They could have learned some lessons, taken some advice, maybe taken some pointers, and perhaps saved countless lives in futile efforts to take over a people. It's beyond idiotic. It's actually something I've long thought, dating back to Edward Lansdale's CIA efforts in 1950s Indochina and the conclusions he drew about probable guerrilla warfare the US would be facing if we were drawn into conflict there. Simply stunning how no one in charge ever listened to the experts, the "real" experts.

Mao wrote this primer while allegedly on the "Long March," I believe it's called if I remember correctly, which would have put him under serious stress while doing so. It's quite comprehensive for such a small volume. It covers things such as what guerrilla warfare is, the history of guerrilla warfare, the relationship of guerrilla operations to regular army operations, the actual organization of guerrilla units and armies, political issues for guerrillas, and more. He writes quite convincingly of his firm belief that while the enemy may be technologically superior, they can't fight on all fronts at all times of day or night and eventually a long term war will wear them down and defeat them. Griffith, the translator, makes a point that both Ho Chi Minh and Castro used this primer and this strategy successfully and it's hard to argue against its success.

Mao writes of political goals for guerrillas. These include:

1. Arousing and organizing the people.
2. Achieving internal unification politically.
3. Establishing bases.
4. Equipping forces.
5. Recovering national strength.
6. Destroying enemy's national strength.
7. Regaining lost territories.

He also lists the essential requirements for all successful guerrilla operations:

1. Retention of the initiative; alertness; carefully planned tactical attacks in a war of strategical defense; tactical speed in a war strategically protracted; tactical operations on exterior lines in a war conducted strategically on interior lines.
2. Conduct of operations to complement those of the regular army.
3. The establishment of bases.
4. A clear understanding of the relationship that exists between the attack and the defense.
5. The development of mobile operations.
6. Correct command.

One thing Mao makes clear is guerrilla warfare is to be an offensive-only operation. Strike and strike quickly, move fast, run away if you have to, run away a lot, hit from behind, from the flanks, at night, strike supply lines, get arms and supplies from your enemies. His original guerrillas had perhaps three rifles and a few pistols per unit. The rest had swords and spears. They had to wait until they had successfully attacked and defeated Japanese units and taken their equipment before they could arm themselves.

Of course it's always important for guerrillas to win the hearts of the people, especially in China's case (and Vietnam's later), the peasants. Everyone -- even children -- can help out. Anyone can be militia, spy, courier,

cook, medic, soldier, etc. It's imperative to politically educate the population so everyone will know why you're fighting and why it's important to fight. And why it's important to find and eradicate traitors.

Griffith's introduction, as I mentioned, is short but excellent. He gives a brief overview of Mao himself, on the nature of revolutionary guerrilla war, on strategy, tactics, and logistics of such a war, and some conclusions. Among his conclusions are the notion that fighting such guerrillas is definitely a losing proposition for a conventional army and even counter-guerrilla tactics won't work! He even goes on to say that if any country or government were to try to aid a country or government fighting against a guerrilla army, it would be wise to ONLY offer advisers and equipment. Remember, he wrote this in 1961, about the time when America was starting to openly send advisers to South Vietnam. I guess he could foretell things. Pity no one in the US government read this or listened to him or took him or this book seriously. Cause he was right. We had no chance. And if you believe Mao -- and Griffith -- virtually any government or army fighting a conventional or counter-guerrilla protracted war against a "revolutionary" guerrilla army is pretty much destined to lose. Fact. Tragedy. Too much loss of life.

This book was everything I'd hoped it would be. It was superb. It was a history, a strategy, a tactic, a warning -- it was fascinating. And to read it with the benefit of history's hindsight made it especially amazing. Mao wasn't right about everything. He couldn't be. But it seems to me that Ho picked Mao's brains and used what he could and improved upon everything to totally destroy the US effort in the war we lost against North Vietnam, a war that could have been avoided if we had only looked at history. This is a book I'm keeping in my library and will undoubtedly be reading again. It's quite short and easy to read. And it's most highly recommended.

Hans says

I think I enjoyed the commentary on Chairman Mao's writing more than his own. Overall a very potent little book that has helped inspire Guerrilla Warfare across the globe as the only viable option when faced with a larger, stronger and better equipped opponent. The scary part is how effective it can be even against superior forces.

My Favorite quotes:

"IN the United States, we go to considerable trouble to keep soldiers out of politics, and even more to keep politics out of soldiers. Guerrillas do exactly the opposite. They go to great lengths to make sure that their men are politically educated and thoroughly aware of the the issues at stake. A trained and disciplined guerrilla is much more more than a patriotic peasant, workman, or student armed with an antiquated fowling-piece and a home-made bomb. His indoctrination begins even beofre he is taught to shoot accurately, and it is unceasing. The end product is an intensely loyal and politically alert fighting man" - Samuel B Griffith

"Basically the conflict split the Chinese Communist Party wide open and alienated the traditionalists in Moscow revolved about this question: Was the Chinese revolution to be based on the industrial proletariat - as Marxist dogma prescribed- or was it to be based on the peasant? Mao, who knew and trusted the peasants, and had correctly gauged their revolutionary potential, was convinced that the Chinese urban proletariat were too few in number and too apathetic to make a revolution"

"Intelligence is the decisive factor in planning Guerrilla operations"

"In a guerrilla area, every person without exception must be considered an agent-old men, women, boys driving ox carts, girls tending goats, farm laborers, storekeepers, schoolteachers, priests, boatmen, scavengers"

"Guerrillas deny all information of themselves to their enemy, who is enveloped in an impenetrable fog"

"The mind of the enemy and the will of his leaders is a target of far more importance than the bodies of his troops"

"Guerrillas must be expert at running always since they do it so often. They avoid static dispositions; their effort is always to keep the situation as fluid as possible, to strike where and when the enemy least expects them"

"Decentralization has many advantages, particularly if local leaders are ingenious and bold. The enemy's rear is the guerrillas' front; they themselves have no rear. Their logistical problems are solved in a direct and elementary fashion: The enemy is the principal source of weapons, equipment, and ammunition"

Mao once said "We have a claim on the output of the arsenals of London as well as of Hanyang, and what is more, it is to be delivered to us by the enemy's own transport corps. This is the sober truth, not a joke" -Mao Zedong

"An important postulate of the Yin-Yang theory is that concealed within strength there is weakness, and withing weakness, strength"

Guerrilla tactical doctrine may be summarized in four Chinese characters pronounced "Sheng Tung, Chi HSi" which mean "uproar (in the) East; Strike (in the) West." Here we find expressed the all-important principles of distraction on the one hand and concentration on the other; to fix the enemy's attention and to strike where and when he least anticipates the blow"

"A resistance is characterized by the quality of spontaneity; it begins and then is organized, a revolutionary guerrilla movement is organized and then begins"

"The tactics of Guerrillas must be used against Guerrillas themselves"

"Imaginative, intelligent, and bold leadership is absolutely essential. Commanders, and leaders at every echelon must be selected with these specific qualities in mind. Officers and NCO's who are more than competent under normal conditions will frequently be hopelessly ineffective when confronted with the dynamic and totally different situations characteristic of guerrilla warfare"

Evelyn Waugh says

I suppose my background in studying strategy and tactics, and my enjoyment in such a subject, has determined a lot of what I gained from reading this. For example, my multiple readings of Art of War, which

Mao mentions multiple times in direct quote or allusion to, has enabled me to visualize a lot of what he says here. I also like the way his writing was translated, the way it functions as a basic manual. This book was short and educating, and my own writing on the subject of strategy and organization has evolved well because of reading this.

While I want to find a book which details specific strategy, such as placement of troops, interaction with specific territory and people, the actions of close-combat tactic, this book, like Art of War with general military movement, instead gives mostly abstract notions of what to do in successfully carrying out guerrilla operations. For example, he doesn't go into detail about what a guerrilla with a sword or lance is supposed to do in combat with heavily-armed imperialists. But perhaps such vagueries are exemplary of an adaptable combat mindset. Nonetheless, I often did get the feeling like more could have been said. I also have an ideological problem with the rigid hierarchies he suggests work best, when to me such hierarchal positions appear unnecessary. Nonetheless, his ideas and the way he suggests to carry them out, were interesting for historical and educational purposes.

Perhaps the most important thing Mao Tse-tung says in this book is something related to how guerrilla warfare cannot succeed without the voluntary will of the people. He repeatedly rules out any thievery (except of enemy supply) for guerrilla purposes, and I highly respect such sentiment. This, historically, has answered my questions as to why certain guerrilla movements fail or appear to fail. For example, think of Che Guevara's involvement in the guerrilla activity in Cuba. This activity spread rapidly because the will of the people erupted when just a few dozen guerrilla soldiers made it to shore and began their movement of revolutionary activity. Whereas later, Che's involvement in revolutionary guerrilla activity in his homeland of Bolivia did not succeed (and ended in his murder), because (for whatever reason I still don't know) the Bolivian people did not have the voluntary will to fight.

Since my early life growing up, Mao Tse-tung has been an anomaly. He essentially was my familial generation's Great Evil. If my grandfather's Great Evil was Josef Stalin, and my parents' Great Evil was Gorbachev, then my generation subsequently has Mao. Chronologically it doesn't make sense, and yet nothing about mccarthyism makes sense. Anyway, it was never explained rationally to me the what and why and how, simply that he's evil and there's nothing else to say (and asking questions or disagreeing is considered sedition in authoritarian societies, ironically placed adamantly here). All this did was heighten my interest. Now, reading this, I feel even more inclined and interested in reading more of his works.

Attack Salmon says

Wow I am shocked at myself. I can't believe I am actually reading this and enjoying it. I can't believe a simple minded basic girl like me who studied computers in uni and can be found reading trashy NA will end up reading On Guerrilla Warfare by Chairman Mao. All thanks to For Love of a Book. This kick ass book group has many many challenges that would help u shatter ur reading goals expectations and also open up a new reading horizon for you

On Guerrilla Warfare is a pamphlet written for citizens during Sino Japanese War. Its short and very straight to the point. Chairman Mao detailed all aspect of guerrilla warfare and strategy. You gotta be amazed by his insights and explanation. As a newbie like me, you will never see war as simple as strategize, charge and attack. You will never think of war as only something to be left to the soldiers. Because in a revolutionary war , everyone including the old, the woman and the children can play a part in the war.

Mao also put heavy emphasis on morales during wartime. We all know how ruthless the Japanese Imperial Army treated chinese during the war. So it was only natural the chinese wanted an eye for an eye. But Chairman Mao insisted that they have to treat the captured enemy with respect to further shaken the faith in the Japanese Army and gain international sympathy to China's cause.

:P I don't want to give too much detail about it. Its better to jump right in and be amazed. Say what you want about Chairman Mao being a Communist and killer, but I can't deny that this book is amazing

Frank Kelly says

US Marine General Samuel B. Griffith's translation and interpretation of Mao's slim little booklet on the strategy and use of guerrilla warfare is a true classic -- one that I would recommend anyone who is either interested in Chinese military history or -- ready for this one? -- doing business in China or finds themselves competing with Chinese businesses elsewhere in the world. I am still working through the use and implementation of Mao's strategies for business purposes but the deeper you get into the book, the more you see many of these strategies and tactics are being used to advance Chinese business interests. Brilliant.

Kbaker says

This is the short text based on Mao's experiences fighting the Chinese Nationalists as well as preparing to fight the Imperial Japanese Army as it invaded the Chinese mainland. Most people do think of Mao more in line as Chairman Mao. Take away what you think of him personally, he was a gifted military leaders with a keen mind. This is valuable to read, especially his treatment of protracted war, very different than most traditional Western military theory. It is also timely, as the United States fights protracted wars of its own, in Iraq and Afghanistan, not to mention the global war on terror.

Benjamin Eck says

Taking Place during the second Sino-Japanese War or more commonly know as WW2, Mao Tse-tung a brilliant general and future leader of China talks about the war efforts and what needs to be done concerning guerrilla warfare. This book is base on Sun Tzu's war manual "Art of War" and the author expands it by talking about guerrilla operations and why they are necessary. Over all this book is a great read in the right hands. Mao Tse-tung "On Guerrilla Warfare" is read almost like a manual, and takes a little studying to understand what the author is truly saying.

Thien Nguyen says

Mao's writing on guerilla warfare has become a guide on waging revolution in underdeveloped areas around the world. Mao recognizes the difference between rural and urban societies to create strategies that create advantages for the lower class.

In his writing, Mao highlights the signifigance of guerilla war as it creates areas for production, agriculture,

and exploits the strengths and weaknesses of large armies and help guide the lower class in fighting them. I agree with Mao Tse Tung on his views of why it's important because it not only helps the lower class and increase production, but it also unites the people and helps them become more aware so that they may help each other to meet needs.

Overall, I thought that this book was really interesting and teaches the significance of unity and how to use that unity to benefit the people. I would definitely recommend this book and other books in his series.

Michael Burnam-Fink says

Mao's book is a classic on guerrilla warfare, ably translated and contextualized by General Samuel B Griffith. This book mainly covers the theoretical and strategic aspects of guerrilla warfare, the need for complete political clarity at all levels, strict ethical codes and internal discipline for the men, and the proposed use of guerrillas against a qualitatively superior but numerically inferior force tasked with occupation and pacification. This book won't teach you about how to set an ambush and not starving to death in the woods, but it will cover the basic steps between an isolated and ineffective movement and the fall of a government.
