Chapter III

Guerrilla warfare as a global concern

> *...despite the impressive technological innovations of the twentieth century, the principles of warfare are not modern but ancient; they were well established when Caesar marched out on his first campaign. And what is true of war in general is even more true, if possible, of guerrilla warfare in particular.* [1]

1. Introduction

As this study concerns itself primarily with the guerrilla warfare phase of the Anglo-Boer War, it is appropriate to make a close examination of what is meant by the term guerrilla warfare and how this form of warfare differs from the conventional concept of war. Guerrilla warfare has been described as a subject for the historian rather than the sociologist. It has countless features and the term *guerrilla* has become too liberally used. Walter Laqueur wrote in the introduction to his book *Guerrilla – a historical and critical study,* that the term is now not only used in connection with liberation struggles and insurrection, but is often applied indiscriminately to refer to the highjacking of aeroplanes, kidnappings and even to certain disturbances at theatres, universities and indeed kindergarten schools. [2] Although this chapter will deal briefly with some of the more closely related characteristics of guerrilla warfare, the emphasis will be on its nature as it transpired during the latter part of the Anglo-Boer War.

2. Guerrilla warfare and related concepts

The term *guerrilla* is derived from the Spanish, literally meaning *small war*. It originated in the early 19th century, after the defeat of Spain's inefficient regular forces by Napoleon, when small groups of irregular fighters emerged to take up the fray. It became necessary to differentiate between conventional warfare (or positional warfare, where large armies traditionally opposed one

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[1] R. Taber, *The war of the flea – guerrilla warfare theory and practice*, p. 131.

[2] W. Laqueur, *Guerrilla – a historical and critical study*, p. vi.

another) and conflicts in which hostilities were conducted by smaller groups of warriors. Napoleon is said to have called this unwanted continuation of the strife his "Spanish ulcer".[3] Clearly he preferred conventional warfare.

There are various definitions for guerrilla warfare. Both Arthur Campbell, in *Guerrillas – a history and analysis,* and Walter Laqueur quoted Professor Huntington who described guerrilla warfare particularly lucidly as being: "... the form of warfare adopted by the <u>strategically weaker</u> side to give it the capability of taking the <u>tactical offensive</u> at <u>chosen times</u> and in <u>certain places</u>."[4] (My underlining)

It is thus a David and Goliath style of warfare, usually fought to the rules of the weaker side, the David side.[5] Unlike the history of David and Goliath according to the Old Testament, it is clearly not always the David side that triumphs, but it is certainly a useful way to differentiate between the two sides involved in this type of warfare. It is widely accepted that because guerrilla warfare is initiated by the David side, strategy is invariably based on the following four principles:

    a. Harassment of the enemy
    b. Avoidance of any decisive battles
    c. Sabotage and destruction of enemy communications and supply lines
    d. Tactical use of surprise and confusion.

These four principles are of key significance to this entire study.

The more powerful army, the one against which the guerrilla movement is pitched, is strengthened by its arsenal of weapons and its material wealth but it may be weakened by social and political factors. The guerrilla movement on the other hand, finds its major strength in being free from territorial restrictions; it mostly enjoys greater mobility and relies on the good relations with the local population. Its weakness lies solely in its lack of military strength.[6] Not all guerrilla movements fit into exactly the same pattern[7] and it is necessary to note the other forms that this type of warfare may take on. Furthermore it is not always possible to categorize the conflict, as there are generally areas of overlap.

<u>Partisan struggle</u> appears to be the closest to what is understood by guerrilla warfare. The

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[3]   *Microsoft Encarta 98 Encyclopaedia*, keyword: Peninsular War.

[4]   A. Campbell, *Guerrillas - a history and analysis*, p. 3; W. Laqueur, *Guerrilla*, p. 392.

[5]   H. Binnevld, *From shellshock to battle stress*, p. 49.

[6]   R. Taber, *The war of the flea*, p. 28.

[7]   W. Laqueur, *Guerrilla*, p. viii.

label "partisan" referrers to a strong, notably unreasoning, biassed supporter of a particular party or cause or a person.[8] Partisan usually describes the nature of guerrilla warfare fairly closely although it does not necessarily mean warfare. Partisan behaviour allude to moral or political support for a cause. The term partisan can, however, also be used to describe distorted news reporting or also robust support for a sports team. It can safely be assumed that most guerrilla fighters are indeed partisans for their cause. But the possible presence of mercenaries among the guerrilla forces who do not share the partisan's commitment to the cause, should also be kept in mind.

Insurrection refers to the open, usually armed rising against an established authority or government and it is perhaps more often called rebellion. The crucial feature of insurrection is that it is aimed at a legitimately established government. It is clearly not the continuation of an as yet inconclusive war.

A revolution is similar to an insurrection and could well be the result of a successful insurrection. It refers to the rising designed to overthrow an existing government, of a ruling class or order. Revolutionaries – the instigators and their supporters – frequently use insurrection as their tool to achieve their goal.

It is clear, then, that these terms all refer to similar and often closely interacting forms of conflict. For example, during an *insurrection* the *partisans* for a particular cause, could probably be using *guerrilla* tactics in order to achieve the *revolution* that they desire. In the modern idiom those people would commonly be called *freedom fighters*.

In the works of modern theorists certain parallel terms such as *people's war*, *mobile war* and *protracted war* are often found, as well as the expressions *of terrorism* and *urban-terrorism*. In essence these may all be related to *guerrilla warfare,* yet there are fundamental differences which should be kept in mind. Laqueur warns in the preface of his book that terms such as *revolutionary war*, *people's war* or *liberation struggle* may be applicable to certain specific cases, yet can be misleading if used elsewhere. Furthermore the description *urban-guerrillas* is more accurately expressed as *urban-terrorists.*[9]

Mobile warfare needs further attention. It signifies a broader concept, based on three

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[8]   R.E. Allen (ed.), *The concise Oxford dictionary of current English,* p. 868.

[9]   W. Laqueur, *Guerrilla,* pp. vii, ix.

elements, namely strike warfare (refer to the German term *blitzkrieg*), night warfare and guerrilla warfare. It is often motivated by the desire for expansion of land for example Germany's occupation of Poland and the Six-Day-War between Israel and Egypt. Roland de Vries, a South African military theorist, defined mobile warfare as a violent war aimed at achieving a speedy victory.[10] Similarly, many elements which are components of guerrilla warfare form part of mobile warfare, such as the principles of surprise and confusion, secrecy, stealth and speed, terrain exploitation and the strategy of assemble, strike and thereafter disperse. However, harassment and disrupting of communications do not form essential ingredients of mobile warfare.

Another often misunderstood term which is frequently used by military commentators and the news media is *unconventional warfare*. According to De Vries this description could apply to guerrilla actions, operations by special forces (*commando-troops*), para-military actions, psychological warfare and even rumour spreading and disinformation activities.[11] It should therefore be regarded as a general term which often refers to the opposite of conventional warfare.

Notwithstanding the frequent misuse of the term guerrilla and the existence of the many related frictions and operations, the focus of this study will be on guerrilla warfare as a strategy used to influence the result of a current war. However, it should be remembered that it was only after the Anglo-Boer War, and more particularly after World War II, that the theory of guerrilla warfare was carefully unravelled and expounded.

According to military theorists there are several types of war. Campbell ventured to explain this issue by claiming that four types of war can be identified, namely

i. Total war: A violent struggle between governments, each aiming at the destruction of the other, even to the extent of using nuclear weapons.
ii. General war: Very similar to a total war, yet without the element of total destruction.
iii. Limited war: A war fought between governments within a restricted geographical area, for example the Korean war.
iv. Revolutionary war: A struggle between an existing government and an anti-government party, where the latter endeavours to overthrow the government.[12]

It becopmes clear then that guerrilla warfare is simply a particular form of warfare, which can in fact be a part of any one of the four types of war outlined above.[13] Guerrilla warfare is a

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10   R. de Vries, *Mobiele oorlogvoering; 'n perspektief vir Suider-Afrika* , pp. xxi, 37.

11   R. de Vries, *Mobiele oorlogvoering*, p. 118.

12   A. Campbell, *Guerrillas*, pp. 1-2.

13   A. Campbell, *Guerrillas*, pp. 1-2.

pattern or a model adopted as a combat strategy in specific circumstances.

3. Guerrilla warfare over the ages

Guerrilla warfare is by no means a new way of conducting a war. Moreover it was not discovered in a stroke of genius by Mao Zedong (Mao Tse Tung) in the middle of the 20th century.[14] Although the term *guerrilla* only originated less than two centuries ago, the concept of the *small war* actually goes back much further. In this section guerrilla warfare will firstly be discussed as it evolved from the earliest times, roughly up until the beginning of Christianity. Secondly it will be viewed from the advent of Christianity until the end of the 19th century, that is, until the Anglo-Boer War and finally some occurrences which can be considered as guerrilla warfare in the twentieth century will be considered

a. Before Christianity

Laqueur referred to Murilis, the king of the Hittites, who complained in the 15th century B.C. that he was being harassed by *irregulars* at *night time*. These guerrilla type raids probably formed part of traditional custom of the time of embarking on sorties against one's foes, hit and run tactics, wife stealing and similar tussles.[15]

But perhaps the best example of ancient guerrilla warfare is reported in the Old Testament of *The Bible*. In the book of Judges, chapter 7, it is revealed how Gideon after sifting out the Israelites who were *fearful* and *afraid,* and then also those who drank water from their hands, assembled only a small select band of three hundred men to go forth with him to meet the Midianites and their allies. They were greatly outnumbered. It is written that their foes were reportedly as "thick as locusts" and their camels "could no more be counted than the sand of the sea". Gideon applied the basic elements of guerrilla warfare. He divided his band into three smaller companies – one hundred men in each. He avoided a pitched battle and organized that each company covered one side of the camp, leaving the fourth side open as an escape route. Moreover, it was *night time*, "at the beginning of the middle watch". Then the light from three hundred lamps suddenly appeared as the pitchers when the broken and the unexpected blowing of three hundred trumpets broke the night's silence. The Israelites both *surprised* and *confused* their enemy, and:

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14   W. Laqueur, *Guerrilla*, p. vii.

15   W. Laqueur, *Guerrilla*, p. 3.

" ... while each man held his position around the camp, all the Midianites ran, crying out as they fled." [16]

Many more examples of this form of warfare can be uncovered in historical literature. The Roman armies were often confronted by guerrilla-type opposition. Julius Caesar frequently encountered *small war* in his endeavours to conquer the Gauls and the Celts. Later, towards the end of this era, fierce guerrilla operations against the Romans by the Jewish Zealot sect took place. Its climax in the Masada drama is well known.

b. Guerrilla warfare after the advent of Christianity

History books provide information on many battles and struggles that could be classified as *guerrilla* which took place in the period after the dawn of Christianity. Only a few can be discussed here.

The protracted rebellion of the Welsh peasants, armed with their longbows, after the conquest by the Normans and King Edward I in the 12th century, is an early example of a peasant uprising. The serfs, when expected to pay the same taxes as freemen, fought against the English officials, using their simple longbows. The success of this modest weapon, made out of one piece of pliable yew and a string, against the mail-clad knights was remarkable and subsequently changed the traditional pattern of warfare. Archers and infantry were soon introduced by the English in their battles against the Scots and the French. The same Welsh peasants were recruited by the English as archers and thus became even more accomplished with their longbows; the peasants were in the process of freeing themselves from serfdom. When the black plague of the mid 1300s caused a shortage of labourers, the archers were not prepared to be forced back into serfdom. This unrest eventually led to what became known as the peasant revolt, with Owen Glendower attempting to free his country from English rule. Despite the fact that his uprising was crushed by England in 1405, his rebels continued their guerrilla resistance until 1412.[17]

The 100 Year Wars in Europe (1337 − 1453) also had its share of *small war* when Bertrand Duguesdin fought what soon became known as the "unchivalrous war".[18] Attacks under darkness and ambushes could not be parried by conventional tactics. Yet most of the European peasant

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[16]   *Holy Bible* - New International Version*,* Judges 7: 17-21, p. 209.

[17]   http://www.red4.co.uk/ebooks/shorthistory/riseofthepeasant; *Encyclopaedia Britannica*, keyword: Glendower, Owen.

[18]   W. Laqueur, *Guerrilla*, p. 13.

revolts in that period were unsuccessful. Undisciplined and badly organised groups frequently turned to brigandry.[19]

It was only during the second half of the second millennium AD that many major guerrilla-type wars were fought. A handful can be dealt with. The American War of Independence (1775 - 1783) is a fitting example of a *people's war,* when the local people in an outlying colony fought by unconventional means against the armies of the colonial power, Britain, whose army had been trained to wage conventional warfare. This war could be termed as a partisan war, and although many of the American combatants were later depicted as a pack of vagrants, deserters and even thieves, the war also gave the opportunity for warriors like the elusive Francis Marrion – popularly known as the Swamp Fox – to emerge. His exploits in the war baffled the English,[20] just as Christiaan de Wet's were destined to do 120 years later. Laqueur declared that this war had more likely been lost by the inflexibility of the British rather than won by the courage of George Washington's forces. It was a war fought about the control and occupation of land. The local people believed that they were fighting for their independence as residents on American soil. Their continued resistance also made the war one of attrition until the point was reached where Britain preferred to make peace rather than to persist.

On the other hand, the peasant revolt in the Vendée in western France (1793-1796) against the revolutionist government was not fuelled by hunger for territory. It was a spontaneous uprising primarily based on the religious beliefs of the peasants. The government soon defeated the rebel army of 65 000 at Cholet. In this case the dilemma of an undisciplined mass army confronting a well-organized force was clearly illustrated. The following year remnants (guerrillas) of the Vendeans were provoked into rising and only to be defeated repeatedly. The execution of the resistance leader Francois-Altenase Charette finally ended the revolt.[21] Although historians often quote this strife as an early example of guerrilla warfare, it does not completely fit into the criteria of guerrilla warfare mentioned above.

A better example of what is meant by guerrilla warfare is found in the continuation of the conflict in Spain. This protracted strife, which lasted from 1808 to 1813 followed the Napoleonic invasion of Spain and the proclamation of Napoleon's brother, Joseph Bonaparte, as king. Small

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[19]   W. Laqueur, *Guerrilla*, p. 14.
[20]   W. Laqueur, *Guerrilla*, pp. 18-19.
[21]   W. Laqueur, *Guerrilla*, p. 19.

bands of Spanish citizens began to pin down the French garrisons, intercept their dispatches and destroy their convoys, thus giving rise to escalating demands by Napoleon's forces for money and men. The persistent small conflicts were supplemented by a few major battles including those at Salamanca (1812) and Vitoria (1813), until the stage was reached that France was so weakened that the outcome was Napoleon's eventual defeat in Europe.[22]

During the 19th century many conflicts and wars erupted worldwide, which today are classified as guerrilla warfare. Apart from the numerous colonial wars which imperial Europe had to contend with, there are several other examples. Worth mentioning are the conflicts in Latin America (1810-1821), the American Civil War (1861-1865) and the Franco-Prussian War (1870-1871). Although several of these wars were fought primarily in the conventional style, there was always evidence of elements of guerrilla warfare. In 1864 guerrilla tactics became significant in the American Civil War when Confederate Colonel John S. Mosby harassed Federate supply lines so effectively that substantial numbers of General William Sheridan's troops had to be deployed to protect the roads in his rear.[23]

When studying warfare in the 19th century it is necessary to keep in mind that this was the period when significant developments were made in the tools of warfare. The scientific and industrial evolution of the time made each war different from the previous one. Some of these developments are discussed below.

i. Fire power was boosted when the inaccurate and slow loading musket made way for the rear-loading rifle in the mid 1800s. Further improvement came when the French chemist Paul Vieille developed a smokeless powder and central firing cartridges came into use. Machine guns were a natural development in this period.[24]

ii. Artillery, always the main source of fire power, but with many innate disadvantages, became more sophisticated when breech-loading was introduced; more mobile guns were manufactured with increased traversing becoming more refined.[25]

iii. Although nitroglycerine was discovered in 1846, it only became useful as an

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[22]   *Microsoft Encarta 98 Encyclopedia,* keyword: Peninsular War.

[23]   B. Catton, *Short history of the Civil War*, pp. 85, 224-225.

[24]   *Microsoft Encarta 98 Encyclopedia,* keyword: Small arms.

[25]   *Microsoft Encarta 98 Encyclopedia,* keyword: Artillery.

explosive when Alfred Nobel developed dynamite in 1864.[26] This explains why dynamite was not used for demolishing bridges and railways during the American Civil War (1861-1865) yet was used extensively during the Anglo-Boer War (1899-1902).

iv. The proliferation of railway networks helped the large armies to transport troops, munitions and equipment over longer distances, much faster than was previously possible and also in adverse weather. The advantages of this development were first exploited by the Confederate army during the American Civil War (1861). Later, during the Seven Weeks War (1866) in Europe, rail transport was again a major factor leading to Prussia's victories over Austria.[27]

v. The development of the telegraph in 1837 by Morse in the US and Wheatstone in Britain brought about radical changes in communications.[28]

These technological developments, which altered the strategies and tactics of conventional warfare, inevitably also affected guerrilla warfare. Although the horse remained an important means of mobility the guerrilla fighter soon had to cope with destroying new facilities such as railways and railway-bridges, telegraph lines, barbed-wire fences and small forts.

c. Guerrilla warfare during the 20th century

The first half of the 20th century was marked by a profusion of wars and conflicts which Laqueur classified as guerrilla warfare. These took place in many parts of the world, some such as in China lasting up to 18 years from 1927 to 1945. Several were aimed at emancipation from foreign rule, such as those in South America, while others hoped to revolutionize the existing order of the country as became evident in the Russian Revolution (1918-1921). Still others formed part of a greater war, for example the French resistance (1941-1944) during the Second World War. Four of these conflicts will be discussed briefly as case studies.

Mexico

The widespread unrest and strife in Mexico (1910-1917), although labelled guerrilla warfare by Laqueur, was in fact a period of turmoil between several groups who were attempting to

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[26]   *Microsoft Encarta 98 Encyclopedia,* keyword: Nitroglycerine.

[27]   L. Scholtz, *Waarom die Boere die oorlog verloor het*, pp. 36-37.

[28]   *Microsoft Encarta 98 Encyclopedia*, keyword: Telegraph.

establish their own dominance following the rule of the harsh Porfino Díaz. It is true that under Díaz Mexico had made tremendous advances in the economic and commercial spheres, but many of his undertakings were financed by foreigners. Díaz favoured the rich owners of large estates, awarding them with communal lands that rightly belonged to the native Americans. This caused serious discontent amongst most Mexicans. Several groups emerged, among them a group led by Pancho Villa, a former bandit, and another under Emiliano Zapata, a native American. Both were eventually brought to a fall by the major strategic blunder of attempting to occupy large cities. Both were guilty of pillaging and banditry and were, not surprisingly, both assassinated.

It was only after the appearance of Alvaro Obregon in 1920 and once the United States had recognized the Mexican government that the unrest ended. However political instability continued. Despite the fact that this was called a period of small wars, what happened in Mexico was not strictly speaking guerrilla war and the eventual outcome was not a direct result of militant strategies.[29]

China

China went through many years of upheaval after its inception as a republic in 1912. The Chinese people wanted to rid themselves once and for all of imperialism and to establish national unity. However the nationalist Kuomintong and the Communist Party embarked on a road of disagreement in 1928. The Nationalists, under the young general Chiang Kai-shek, soon encountered opposition from two communist factions, the one section concentrating on the urban areas and the other, under the leadership of Mao Zedong (Mao Tse Tung), on the countryside. Mao's tactics proved successful. He mobilized local support into forming peasant armies, thereby adhering to one of the basic principles of guerilla warfare. Japan entered the Chinese scene in 1937 and Chaing Kai-shek's Nationalist government forces had this additional element to cope with. While World War II continued the Communists under Mao Zedong capitalized on the opportunity and reinforced themselves in the rural areas behind the Japanese lines.

After the war, once the Japanese had been disposed of, the US attempted to bolster the Nationalists. However, after two decades of fighting the army of Chiang Kai-shek was spent. In addition to the disunity within the ruling party the country's inflation had, moreover, spiralled. During the 17 months of Mao's campaign (1946-1947) the Nationalists suffered 640 000 troops

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[29]   *Microsoft Encarta 98 Encyclopedia*, keyword: Mexico.

killed or wounded, while more than 1 000 000 were captured by the Communists. Soon the Communists took the initiative in the conflict, and when the government forces collapsed in 1949 the Peoples Republic of China, under chairman Mao Zedong, was formed. Over this long period Mao became the epitome of a guerrilla leader. Although the main objective of the Communists was to revolutionize China under the leadership of Mao, numerous principles of guerrilla warfare were shaped.[30]

Cuba

After the slave uprising of 1837 when the poet Gabriel Valdés was shot, Cuba experienced more than a 100 years of unrest, war, uprisings and political instability. When the former sergeant, later self proclaimed general, Fulgencio Batista, seized power in 1952, a period of decline and corruption set in. In December 1956 his former political prisoner Fidel Castro invaded Cuba with a mere 81 followers. They were soon to be reduced to a scant 12 during the first month, after which they retreated into the Sierra Maestra. However, Castro persevered and he implemented two important basics of guerrilla warfare, namely executing small raids and ambushes and consistently expanding his force. The small raids concentrated on seizing weapons and well-managed local and international propaganda actions were conducted. The mountains provided excellent shelter while Castro was engaged in recruiting a strong force. By April 1957 his followers numbered about 100 but still the numbers increased steadily. Batista's endeavours to flush them out of the Sierra Maestras failed; his task in the trackless wilderness was impossible, even for aerial bombing.

The *fidelistos* gradually took possession of the area and a *territoria libre* was established with its own code of law, schools and hospitals. It is significant that supplies were paid for and villagers treated as ordinary citizens, and most importantly banditry was not tolerated. All attempts by government troops to contain the rebels were thwarted and were eventually abandoned. The news that the US were aiding the *batistas* caused great embarrassment for both parties. Guerrilla action, sporadic and on a small scale, continued to be a thorn in the flesh of the government. Subsequently sabotage and terrorism were stepped up in the towns, armoured trains were derailed, troops captured and more weapons seized. The guerrillas became emboldened by their success and the government troops eventually retreated into their barracks. Finally Batista fled the country and

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[30]   *Microsoft Encarta 98 Encyclopedia*, keyword: China.

Castro declared himself prime minister of Cuba in February 1959.[31]

Castro's struggle in Cuba can be seen as an example of insurgency, which made use of guerrilla tactics to bring about the intended political change. However, the doctrine espoused by the rebel leaders and the eventual Marxist route that Cuba eventually followed did not correspond.[32]

Vietnam

A war that became the prime example of the inability of a major conventional military power to contain "a band of ragged guerrillas fighting with home-made weapons", as described by US senator George McGovern in September 1963,[33] started as a struggle between internal factions after the colonial authority, France, had been replaced. The South Vietnam republic under Ngo Dign Diem, supported by the US, refused to unify with its communist North Vietnamese brother. By the late 1950s many communist sympathizers from the south took up arms against the Diem government and became known as the Vietcong. The US increased its support for the Diem government, increasing the initial few thousand military advisors, to an astonishing 45 000 troops by May 1965 and finally to no less than 500 000 by the end of 1967.

Yet, as early as 1955 the Vietcong had been busy with isolated attacks on remote military and police posts while the Diem government played ostrich, pretending that nothing had happened – until it became too late to reverse the situation. When the US entered the fray and commenced their attacks on North Vietnam the struggle between the Vietcong and the South Vietnamese government continued. The Vietcong operated from a strong rear base where they, like Castro, maintained a rural economy. Government troops could not traverse or remain in these areas with a strong force, in other words, they were unable to enforce the *clear and hold* principle, as this would simply imply spreading themselves too thinly over the terrain to resist further guerrilla attacks. Meanwhile the Vietcong was able to employ guerrilla warfare principles at will, choosing its targets and accepting or rejecting combat.

The US people eventually questioned their government's involvement in somebody else's war, a war that moreover proved to be grinding into a stalemate. By March 1973 all the US troops had been withdrawn; the Communists then launched a major offensive (December 1974) and on

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[31]   R. Taber, *The war of the flea*, pp. 38-44.
[32]   W. Laqueur, *Guerrilla*, p. 337.
[33]   R. Taber, *The war of the flea*, p. 74.

30 April 1975 Saigon fell.[34]

This war does not only illustrates the power of the *small war* if the fundamentals are observed; it also shows how new generation anti-guerrilla tools such as the extensive use of helicopters (1 889 helicopters were lost by the Saigon command), napalm bombs and defoliants, were introduced to try to combat this type of warfare. Ironically, none of these new developments really changed the effectiveness of tried and tested guerrilla tactics or the eventual outcome of the Vietnam War.

4. The essence of guerrilla warfare

It becomes necessary to examine the nature of successful guerrilla warfare in terms of why it transpires, on what foundation it rests, what strategies should be employed and which tactics ought to be followed.

a. The reasons why guerrilla war occurs

It is generally agreed that there will always be a *political goal* for the launching of a *small war*. In recent times the accepted view is that there is a preconceived doctrine that provokes a guerrilla war. Yet Laqueur points out that this has not always been the case and that originally guerrilla warfare was often the instinctive choice due to circumstances. The guerrilla strives in Wales, in the Vendée and in Spain were spontaneous uprisings by the peasants (the people) against the suppression they had endured.[35] The guerrilla phase of the Anglo-Boer War developed out of dire necessity following a series of setbacks suffered during the initial conventional phase of the war.

It was because of this lack of formal doctrine that major powers in the second half of 1800s rejected guerrilla warfare as a "civilized" form of warfare. The British and the Germans in particular found it difficult to cope with irregular armies. To them guerrilla warfare was too erratic, too unprofessional and violated the established rules; it bordered on anarchy. It was derided as *ultima ratio,* the ultimate justification, in other words, to catch at a straw.[36] Captain

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[34]   R. Taber, *The war of the flea*, pp. 74-88; *Microsoft Encarta 98 Encyclopedia*, keyword: Vietnam War.

[35]   W. Laqueur, *Guerrilla*, p. 150.

[36]   W. Laqueur, *Guerrilla*, p. 51.

Caldwell, an ex-officer of the British army who served in South Africa during the Anglo-Boer War, warned in his book *Small wars* that regular armies should be wary of guerrilla warfare especially when it is directed by a genius with a talent for war.[37]

The political goal of the David side is often identifiable as a quest for independence, to desire to overthrow an existing order or in pursuit of religious freedom. Guerrilla warfare is seldom linked to imperial expansion or to land hunger (*lebensraum*), mineral riches or agricultural potential.

b. The fundamentals

> *The enemy advances, we retreat;*
> *the enemy camps, we harass;*
> *the enemy tires, we attack;*
> *the enemy retreats, we pursue.* [38]

These words by Mao Zedong capture the very essence of guerrilla warfare. But this description needs to be carefully analysed. Mao Zedong pointed out that three fundamental requirements for successful guerrilla warfare were needed. These are *time, space* and *will*.

The fundamental of time means that enough time is required for guerrilla warfare to be successful. The major power or existing government, the Goliath to use an earlier metaphor, will invariably aim to conclude the war as fast as possible. The cost of war in terms of money and human life should of course be kept as low as possible; to Goliath a protracted war can only be detrimental.

The guerrilla army, the David, on the other hand, should be in a position to exploit the Goliath's concerns about the cost of the war. David should not fight to secure ground, to occupy capitals or to run governments unless the war has been prolonged beyond the enemy's limit of resistance. The aim must *not* be to get the war over, as the Goliath so intensely wishes, but indeed to keep it going – to frustrate, irritate and bleed the opposition to the point where it is he who asks for peace.

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[37]   W. Laqueur, *Guerrilla*, p. 122.

[38]   Selected military writings of Mao Tse-tung (Zedong), quoted in R. Taber, *The war of the flea*, p. 27.

Space, the next fundamental requirement for successful guerrilla warfare, is closely related to the first fundamental of *time*. To be able to use the space he requires, the guerrilla fighter also needs time. To have space means freedom of movement; it gives the guerrilla army the choice of terrain, meaning that broken ground, marshes, forests or remote areas must be used to his advantage. To capitalize on space mobility is thus a primary prerequisite.

Will or motivation is the third fundamental of guerrilla warfare and is just as vital as the first two. The individual member and the guerrilla army has to be inspired; he has to share the will to achieve the ultimate goal. Without this measure of partisanship there is little chance of success. The question of *will* is discussed in more depth later.

Several writers on the subject discuss the theory of guerrilla warfare as espoused by Mao Zedong.[39] According to this theory guerrilla warfare is divided into three phases. The first and most crucial phase is of the period of strategic offensive. By this is meant to harass, concentrate and attack, circle and attack in the rear, disperse and give ground and to use the space to its utmost. Meanwhile the second phase, namely to actively involve and recruit the local population, gets under-way. Once this has been optimally accomplished, and the government forces realise that they cannot destroy the guerrillas, that they can, at best, merely contain them, only then phase three can be initiated. The guerrilla forces will then develop into mobile columns and ultimately seize the military initiative.

c. On strategy

 Per definition strategy is the *art of war.* In layman's terms this refers to the *what;* what should the policy (plan) of operations (actions) be in conducting the war? The strategy of the leader who is engaging in guerrilla warfare will revolve around the four principles discussed above**.**

i. The constant harassment of the enemy at any point where he is vulnerable and by carrying out many small bothering raids aimed at aggravating the enemy and keeping him on the alert. Goliath is thus worn down, his morale tapped and drained while David chips away his nerve. The enemy is compelled to use his forces in non-essential places and for non-essential reasons. Taber calls this "the war of the flea". The analogy is that the large army can no more rid itself of

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[39]   R. Taber, *The war of the flea*, pp. 52-54; R. de Vries, *Mobiele oorlogvoering*, p. 113; L. Scholtz, *Waarom die Boere die oorlog verloor het*, p. 137.

recurrent small irritations in unexpected places than a dog can rid itself of fleas. Eventually the fleas will wear the dog down to a "tail-between-the-legs mutt".[40]

ii. To avoid major or decisive battles, or becoming tied down in one place. The guerrilla movement has neither the men nor the weapons to prevail in long, drawn out battles. It should use a *hit and run* strategy, causing as much damage as possible without incurring losses it cannot afford. This principle was stressed by Mao Zedong, who explained that the guerrilla force always stands to lose more than he can gain.[41]

iii. To sabotage enemy installations, to destroy or disrupt enemy communications and to interfere with enemy supply lines. Although this is part of the harassment principle, it has the added value of supplying the smaller guerrilla force with much needed arms and provisions.

iv. To aspire to continually surprise the enemy and to confuse him. Darkness, broken ground and a sympathetic local population are some of the guerrilla's major allies. The enemy should never know where his foe is and when to expect him next. This soon evolves into psychological harassment. The guerrilla is perpetually wearing him down and once more playing the role of the flea on the dog.

Taber summed it all up succinctly in his statement: "...the grand strategic objective of the guerrilla: to create the 'climate of collapse'. It may be taken as the key to everything he does."[42] This principle was illustrated in the essays on *The Art of War* by the Chinese Sun Tzu, writings predating the Christian era by several centuries:

> *All warfare is based on deception –*
> *when capable, feign incapability; when active, inactivity;*
> *when near, make it appear that you are far away; when far away, that you are near;*
> *attack where he is unprepared; sally out when he does not expect you ;*
> *pretend inferiority and encourage his arrogance;*
> *anger his general and confuse him;*
> *keep him under strain and wear him down.[43]*

Mao Zedong acknowledged Sun's wisdom and used it in his own writings.

d. On tactics

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[40]   R. Taber, *The war of the flea*, p. 29.

[41]   R. Taber, *The war of the flea*, p. 56.

[42]   R. Taber, *The war of the flea*, p. 131.

[43]   Quoted by R. Taber, *The war of the flea*, p. 131.

Tactics are the *means* adopted in carrying out a plan or a policy. Simply phrased, it will be the *how*. How should the guerrilla leader proceed to implement the strategies as spelt out above? In determining his tactics the guerrilla leader will always keep the enemy's strengths – superiority in numbers, weaponry and wealth – in mind. Furthermore, he will aim to concentrate on the enemy's weaknesses – clumsiness, immobility and inflexibility, his commitment to territory and possibly his foe's deficient relations with the local community. If he can moreover compel the enemy (the ruling power) to impose curfews, suspend liberties and gatherings of the local people, he has gained significant ground.[44]

There are several practical details that are an integral part of the guerrilla's successful existence. In order to employ effectively a *hit and run* strategy, the guerrilla fighter needs to be mobile. To this end horses, camels and more recently jeeps play a major role in guerrilla warfare where speed of movement is vitally important. It follows therefore that the guerrilla force should not be tempted to try to hold ground that it has taken from the enemy.[45] In guerrilla warfare there is no war front. This implies that it is necessary for the guerrilla cadre to divide (scatter) as soon as pressure is encountered and only to regroup (concentrate) for the next operation. By dividing into small groups the guerrilla's enemy is forced to stretch its resources, thus themselves becoming more vulnerable. Moreover, movement should always be undertaken in small groups thereby making detection all the more difficult. Should the guerrilla unit be challenged from the front, it must attempt to circle around and strike the enemy in the soft rear. Conditions such as darkness, false light and adverse weather are the guerrilla fighter's allies and should be used to their full advantage. Likewise the terrain, whether be it bush, marsh, undulating savanna or desert dunes, are natural primary elements of the guerrillas' environment and should be integrated in their tactics. Hence it follows that outstanding knowledge of the terrain is of the utmost importance. Furthermore, good relations with the local population, developing their loyalty and activating them for the cause, is a critical part of the guerrilla's program. Lastly when targets are selected it should be remembered that the enemy is also a major provider of weapons and supplies.

The records reveal that the most effective guerrilla warfare is usually instigated in rural areas. Only after a substantial foundation has been established in the countryside, can guerrilla tactics be brought to bear on the towns and smaller garrisons. And only after this stage has been reached can larger towns and eventually capitals, be occupied. The support of the urban civilian

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[44]   R. Taber, *The war of the flea*, pp. 28-30.

[45]   R. de Vries, *Mobiele oorlogvoering*, p. 137.

population, the *resistencia civica*, can then be employed in non-violent action such as the raising of funds, circulating petitions, furnishing the press with information and joining demonstrations.[46]

e. The combatants

Because the size of a guerrilla army is invariably smaller than that of its opponent, it is clear that the quality of the combatants is of paramount importance. This consideration is an important element of the psychological perspective of this study.

The leader of a group – often called a cadre – or indeed of the entire movement, needs to be a particularly gifted person with a strong personality. Laqueur quoted General de Brack, the author of an early 19th century handbook who stated that: "... a detachment is partisan, when ... under the genius of a leader, who is not controlled except by orders given in a general manner ... The profession of a partisan is a hazardous one. It can only be carried out by a skilful, rapid and bold leader ..."[47] If by *partisan* De Brack included what we presently define as a *guerrilla*, then it becomes clear that he meant that the leader of guerrilla fighters must be able to operate independently, yet keep within the boundaries of the wider plan of the group.

In his summing up Laqueur pointed out that most successful guerrilla leaders are relatively young – in their late twenties to early forties – that their manners made them popular in the group, but that they enforced severe discipline and banished all vice from their camps.[48] Taber contended that a leader should not only inspire the spirit to sacrifice but should also possess a high degree of selfless dedication and a high sense of purpose.[49]

The guerrilla fighter himself should also possess special attributes. Primarily, he should believe in the cause and be prepared to fight for it; in other words, he must have inner (psychological) strength. He must be fearless and of hardy mettle. He cannot have the character of a saint as scruples may turn him from his purpose. According to Taber he should have a cheerful, stoical temperament, savour the guerrilla's rigorous life and possess a strong ideological armour. Moreover, he must be prepared to stand firm on solid moral footing.[50] The guerrilla fighter, in contrast with what is often true of the common soldier, should not be a brigand, a

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[46]   R. Taber, *The war of the flea*, p. 28.

[47]   W. Laqueur, *Guerrilla*, p. 148.

[48]   W. Laqueur, *Guerrilla*, pp. 397-398.

[49]   R. Taber, *The war of the flea*, p. 148.

[50]   W. Laqueur, *Guerrilla*, p. 129; R. Taber, *The war of the flea*, p. 147.

pillager or a rapist. However, this is not always the case and Laqueur stated that there is frequently no clear dividing line between guerrilla warfare, terror and brigandage.[51] There are often bandits and marauders operating under the colours of guerrillas but they are usually small groups lacking strong political incentive.

Physically the guerrilla fighter should be tough and strong with iron legs and sound lungs. In a guerrilla army there are usually specialists such as saboteurs, arms runners, explosive experts, and medical men apart from the regular warriors. Although this fighter will be prepared to lead a hard and dangerous life, he will not carelessly throw his life away. Major Karl von Clausewitz, the German military theorist at the turn of the 18th century, summed it up in his work *Kleiner Krieg* that the *small war* involved not only greater courage and temerity, but also called for the utmost caution.[52] This is logical as the guerrilla group is generally of limited size and lives are therefore particularly valuable.

f. The costs involved

The cost of any warfare can be measured in two dimensions – the financial expenditure and the cost in human lives. Normally the monetary cost of waging a guerrilla war is far less than that of a large defending force. The budget for the Algerian FLN came to about $40 million per annum in the early 1980s. In their efforts to contain them the French government spent roughly the same amount in less than two weeks.[53] This same principle applies throughout. It was the exorbitant cost of the Vietnam War that made the US politicians start asking questions. By the end of 1967 when the US had in excess of half a million men in Vietnam the annual rate of expenditure was close to $30 billion. When the cost of the 1 889 lost helicopters, is added to the financial outlay for the 2 226 high technology fixed wing aircraft which were likewise lost, the magnitude of the American dilemma becomes clear.[54] It certainly explains why US politicians talked about the *Vietnam fiasco*.[55]

The longer the conflict is kept alive by the guerrilla army the more the costs for the Goliath escalate.[56] The enemy's spiralling expenses are thus a vital reason for perpetuating the war.

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51   W. Laqueur, *Guerrilla*, p. 93.
52   W. Laqueur, *Guerrilla*, p. 110.
53   W. Laqueur, *Guerrilla*, p. 379.
54   R. Taber, *The war of the flea*, p. 78.
55   R. Taber, *The war of the flea*, p. 75.
56   R. Taber, *The war of the flea*, p. 14.

The cost to the successful guerrilla movement is contained by their seizure of enemy weaponry and supplies, by the support provided by the local people and in certain cases by external powers who have a direct interest in the particular doctrine the guerrilla group is promoting. The aid that the USSR and Communist China have given to insurgents world wide is well known.

The cost in lives follows the same pattern. It is generally accepted by military theorists that compared to the conventional wars of the last century (World War 1, World War 2 and Korea) military and civilian casualties in guerrilla warfare are low.

Table III-1   The numbers of deaths due to military causes during World War I and World War II.[57]

Country	World War 1	World War 2
Russia	1 700 000	10 000 000
France	1 357 000	250 000
Britain	908 000	450 000*
Germany	1 773 000	3 500 000
Austria/Hungary	1 200 000	120 000

* Includes British colonies.

The losses in three years of war in Korea, a so called limited war, is reported as: South Korea, 1 313 000 (450 000 deaths); North Korea, approximately 2 000 000 (415 000 deaths); US, 157 530 (33 632 deaths)[58]. In the American Civil War (1861-1864) 620 000 men from a population of only 35 million lost their lives. Of those 360 000 were from the Federates (North) and 258 000 from the Confederacy (South). The fact that four out of every five deaths were as a result of disease and sickness,[59] makes the total impact of a conventional war even more frightening. Figures of the casualties in *small wars* are not easy to obtain as the element of propaganda plays a major role.

In recent times a third type of casualty, namely the psychologically-wounded soldier, as described by Hans Binneveld, is recognised.[60] This category of casualty is not measurable in

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[57]   *Microsoft Encarta 98 Encyclopedia*, keywords: World War I; World War II.

[58]   *Microsoft Encarta 98 Encyclopedia*, keyword: Korean War.

[59]   *Microsoft Encarta 98 Encyclopedia*, keyword: American Civil War.

[60]   H. Binneveld, *From shellshock to battle stress*, p. 25.

tangible numbers such as those of deaths and injuries, yet it affects both sides when guerrilla warfare is being waged. It can be argued that the soldier in the larger, defensive force is more susceptible because he is subject to constant uncertainty and the often barbaric methods used by the guerrilla force. Binneveld has shown that this was the case in Vietnam. After the war psychologists realized that a deviant condition had surfaced, one which was subsequently called *post traumatic stress disorder* (PTSD). Today this condition is recognized as a major factor influencing the lives of many war veterans. The manifestation of PTSD does not form an integral part of this study.

All these issues correspond with the teachings of Che Guevara, who stressed that the guerrilla force must make maximum use of snipers to intimidate the enemy, should use the night as its friend in order to surprise and confuse its foe and above all should rely on mobility.[61] By following Guevara's advice, the guerrilla force will not only inflict physical casualties but also cause psychological wounds, that will eventually ruin the effectiveness of the conventional soldier.

g. The ratios and size of guerrilla units

Guerrilla warfare is not based on the parity of numbers as in conventional warfare. Indeed the essence of guerrilla warfare lies in the huge difference in the numbers of the two opposing forces. Moreover, it is impossible to define a specific or ideal ratio, this will be dictated by circumstances. Taber asserted that the ideal would be a ratio of 10 to 1 but that special cases of 500 to 1 were not unknown.[62] He referred to the instance in 1961 when more than 60 000 Castro troops were used to put down 600 anti-Castro guerrillas (a ratio of 100 to 1). At the end of the the Anglo-Boer War there were 20 800 Boers opposing more than 400 000 British troops (a ratio of 20 to 1) but this is perhaps misleading. The number of the Boers was shrinking daily, and many of the 20 000 were no longer equipped for combat. Yet in broad terms this follows the typical pattern.

On the subject of ratios De Vries stated that the size of a guerrilla unit should be in relation to its objective. He warned that an unduly large force can be just as damaging as one too small.[63] Linked to this, is the question of commando or unit size. As mobility and the ability to be self-sufficient are crucial for the guerrilla force, it seems natural that large cumbersome columns are

[61]   R. Taber, *The war of the flea*, p. 141.

[62]   R. Taber, *The war of the flea*, p. 140.

[63]   R. de Vries, *Mobiele oorlogvoering*, p. 120.

to be avoided. The terrain and other local conditions will usually be the deciding factors. In the Sierra Maestra in Cuba, Castro operated with units of 100 to 120 while in the more densely populated rural regions smaller platoon-sized units of 30 to 40 were the norm. In suburban areas where concealment is crucial small units of three to eight are more effective.[64]

5. Guerrilla warfare: the road to success or failure

From the dawn of guerrilla warfare many centuries before Christianity until the present no clear answer has been found to the question of whether guerrilla warfare is the most effective way, for the Davids to settle disputes. The basic tenets of guerrilla warfare have remained the same and yet many *small wars* have ended in defeat for the guerrilla force. Laqueur pointed out that most guerrilla-type conflicts, especially those with a strong underlying partisan element, have failed, but he added that because circumstances differ the results have varied from country to country.[65] Studying the records, one could argue with some justification that in those cases where outright success was achieved, for example in China, Cuba and Vietnam, the basic principles, as spelt out by Mao Zedong in the 1950s, were indeed followed. On the other hand, in encounters where the Davids failed, the evidence frequently discloses that the principles were either ignored or were denied them by the opposing force. Both these factors were probably important in the failure of the Boer forces to succeed through guerrilla warfare.

At the beginning of the 21st century it appears that the small war, whether it is a guerrilla war in the true sense or a revolution, an insurrection or a limited partisan struggle, still plays a major role in the disputes between groups. In May 2001 *Time* magazine reported on the ongoing small war conflicts in 13 regions world wide.[66] There were no doubt many other conflicts in progress at the time which were not mentioned. This serves to illustrate that despite the sophisticated weaponry available in 2001, most conflicts still involve some measure of guerrilla techniques and are generally reasonably localized in nature.

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[64]   R. Taber, *The war of the flea*, p. 138.

[65]   W. Laqueur, *Guerrilla*, p. 52.

[66]   *Time International*; Worldwatch, 7, 14, 21 and 28 May 2001.