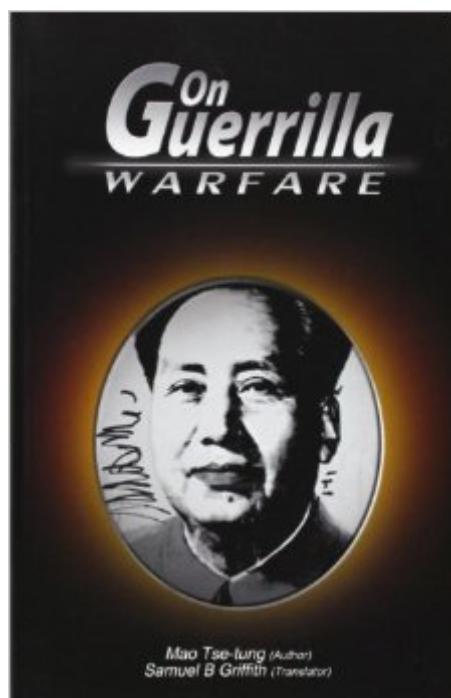


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On Guerrilla Warfare



Synopsis

The book is written in the context of China's guerrilla war against Japanese occupiers; this conflict is mentioned often by Mao. In this book Mao discusses the differences between guerrilla and "orthodox" military forces, as well as how such forces can work together for a common goal. Other topics covered include propaganda and political concerns, the formation of guerrilla units, the qualities of a good guerrilla officer, discipline in a guerrilla army, and guerrilla bases. Text: English (translation) Original Language: Chinese

Book Information

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Customer Reviews

I think Mao intended this essay to be another one of his theoretical Marxist works (Mao thought of himself as a first-class Marxist theoretician). But without question it also served as an instruction manual for his ragtag Red Army while fighting among the tortuous terrain in northwestern China, in part against Japan, in part against Chiang. Considering his success as a practitioner of guerrilla warfare, one would have to be insane to ignore this work. I'm struck how short that chapter is on guerrilla wars in history. Mao was widely read in Chinese and world history and it would have been his style to display this knowledge in a work like this had he chosen to do so. Perhaps Americans should not think of themselves as only at the receiving end of guerrillas. Washington learned this kind of fighting during the French and Indian Wars, and he put some of this experience to good use against a British army better armed, better trained, and greater in numbers than the Continentals. He exploited geography, made surprise raids, used mobility and patience to wear out the red coats - all hallmarks of guerrillas. The all-important Battle of Trenton was such kind of unconventional

warfare: an Indian raid, essentially. But it sure got results. Regular or conventional battles like Yorktown only came later, when British impatience was at the breaking point. As Franklin had predicted, the British could and did occupy all the towns - including Philadelphia, New York, and Charleston - up and down the eastern coast but they could not hold onto them. (The comparison with Iraq is irresistible. The redcoats never numbered more than 30,000 or so men, fighting among 2.5 million American civilians.

On Guerrilla Warfare was one of the books left by Chinese leader Mao-Tse Tung, but unlike his more famous Red Book, this one is dedicated entirely to military strategy. This was a difficult book to rate and review, because I liked reading the foreword by Samuel B. Griffith, who translated the book in the 40s, more than On Guerrilla Warfare itself. After atomic weapons came along, conventional warfare became a lot costlier to nuclear nations. This made guerrilla the kind of conflict that defined the 20th century, and promises to continue to shape the 21th. What the preface shows is how guerrilla it is a lot more powerful than one may think. It is often said that guerrilla warfare is primitive. This generalization is dangerously misleading and true only in the technological sense. If one considers the picture as a whole, a paradox is immediately apparent, and the primitive form is understood to be in fact more sophisticated than nuclear war or atomic war or war as it was waged by conventional armies, navies, and air forces. Guerrilla war is not dependent for success on the efficient operation of complex mechanical devices, highly organized logistical systems, or the accuracy of electronic computers. It can be conducted in any terrain, in any climate, in any weather; in swamps, in mountains, in farmed fields. Its basic element is man, and man is more complex than any of his machines. He is endowed with intelligence, emotions, and will. Guerrilla warfare is therefore suffused with, and reflects, man's admirable qualities as well as his less pleasant ones. While it is not always humane, it is human, which is more than can be said for the strategy of extinction.

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