

Che Guevara: Fundamentals of Guerrilla Warfare

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ABSTRACT

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The combat strength and expeditionary nature of the Marine Air Ground Task Force make it one of the most responsive elements of U.S. power projection abroad, and the best military force suited for rapid insertion into a low-intensity conflict. In fact, many notable military and civilian authorities see this traditional role of the Corps developing into its primary mission as we approach the twenty-first century. As General A. M. Gray, the Corps' Commandant, commented in his October 1987 Marine Corps Gazette article "The Art of Command", the Corps must be ready and able to conduct low-intensity warfare. He wrote:

We need to be able to conduct revolutionary warfare and to defeat it. Sure we need to be prepared for NATO contingencies, but we must not lose sight of the kind of conflict that's most apt to confront us.

The ability of Marines to defeat insurgent and paramilitary forces in a low-intensity guerrilla warfare scenario will depend largely on their full understanding the nature of such conflicts and their familiarity with the battlefield strategies and tactics characteristically employed by guerrilla fighters. As the noted Chinese General Sun Tzu stated in his treatise The Art Of War, a leader who does not understand his enemy should never be confident in predicting victory before battle since his chances for winning can be no better than his chances for losing.

The purpose of this paper is to review the writings of Ernesto Che Guevara (1928-1967) on the subject of revolutionary guerrilla warfare. A veteran of the 1968 Cuban Revolution and one of the first Cuban advisors in the Congo, Guevara spent the last decade of his life participating in revolutionary struggles throughout the Third World. His book Guerrilla Warfare is considered by many to be a "cookbook" for insurgent fighters. The military tactics and strategies he presents therein are based on his extensive battlefield and political experiences as a guerrilla leader. As such, his writings provide an excellent foundation upon which contemporary military leaders can develop a sound understanding of

insurgent warfare.

This paper explores the underlying circumstances which stimulate populations to engage in revolutionary guerrilla warfare, and presents a brief biographical sketch of Guevara's development into a revolutionary leader.

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Chapter I. INTRODUCTION

Sigmund Freud in his book *Civilization and Its Discontents* asserts that the first requisite of civilization is justice: that is, assurance that laws designed to eliminate strife and competition from human activity once made will not be broken in order to give one individual an advantage over another. If this fundamental principle is violated, the desire for freedom, self-realization and happiness will cause the disadvantaged members of society to rebel and direct their aggressiveness against the institutions which seek to regulate their conduct.¹ Although speaking from an economic vice psychoanalytical perspective, Karl Marx, Friedrich Engels and V.I. Lenin utter a similar sentiment throughout their writings. They argue that societies characterized by human exploitation, corruption, economic inequality and social injustice cannot survive and are doomed to be overthrown by the masses they seek to oppress.² Indeed, this innate need for fairness and justice in regulating human interaction within the social context is also expressed in our own Declaration of Independence which contains the supposition that

when a government fails to secure for its citizens their unalienable right to life, liberty and the pursuit of happiness, or fails to observe the principle that all men are created equal and are to be treated justly, "it is the right of the people to alter or abolish it."

When a significant segment within a society desires to reform or replace its government in order to institute political, social, economic or ideological changes which are perceived as necessary to preserve or strengthen the body politic, it does so through either peaceful or violent means. In democratic societies such changes are routinely achieved through acts of non-violent disobedience, the electoral process or other peaceful methods used to pressure governments to adopt policies reflective of the public will and promotive of its welfare. In non-democratic societies where autocratic rulers and tyrannical oligarchies frequently flourish, and compassionate benevolent leaders are rare, massive violence is normally the only course of action available for altering the status quo. In many of the world's developing nations, the most prevalent form of violence used to alter or replace political regimes and the institutions of their perpetuation is revolutionary guerrilla warfare.

As a mechanism for reform and a principal tool of insurrectionist, guerrilla warfare has been with us throughout history. It has taken on its greatest significance, however, since World War II as disenfranchised segments within developing nations have struggled to free their societies from the dominating influence of the former colonial powers and the aristocratic elites that have succeeded them. Through guerrilla warfare numerous insurgent groups have sought to displace repressive regimes in order to establish the economic, political and social environments they profess are needed

to achieve social progress, economic development, internal peace and national solidarity.³

Guerrilla Warfare, like all forms of war, is governed by a set of principles which must be adhered to if it is to be successfully waged⁴. The purpose of this paper is to examine some of the common aspects of guerrilla warfare and its causes. The importance of this examination lies in the fact that for the foreseeable future, the most probable scenario in which U.S. Marines are likely to participate is that of the Low-Intensity Conflict where the opposition will consist of a militarily weak but well armed and tenacious insurgent force employing guerrilla and terrorist tactics in a war of no fronts, and be led by a disciplined ideologically committed cadre.⁵ This supposition is predicated on the fact that unlike nuclear and conventional warfare which require enormous resources to prepare for and wage, guerrilla warfare can produce dramatic results at comparatively low costs and is the warfare form of choice for most insurgent movements existing throughout the world today since it allows them to transform their major weakness --an inferiority in numbers-- into a significant strength.⁶ To effectively engage and defeat these insurgent forces, Marines must be thoroughly familiar with their warfighting strategies and battlefield tactics, as well as, develop an appreciation for the conditions which give rise to insurgent movements and perpetuate their existence. As the noted Chinese General Sun Tzu pointed out, if you do not know your enemy, you can never be confident of victory until the battle has been won.

To accomplish my objective, I have relied heavily on the writings of Ernesto 'Che' Guevara: A noted Latin American revolutionary and guerrilla leader. His work Guerrilla Warfare is considered a

classic on the subject and has served as a primer for numerous guerrilla and terrorist leaders. Central to understanding Guevara's impact on contemporary insurgent movements, particularly those in Latin America, one must possess an appreciation of him as an individual in order to get a sense of the magnitude of his charisma and egalitarian spirit, as well as, the alluring eloquence of his thoughts on revolutionary warfare. I have therefore devoted a significant portion of this paper to his development as a guerrilla leader.

Chapter II. The Making of A Revolutionary

Ernesto "Che" Guevara was born June 14, 1928, in Rosario Argentina. The oldest of five children, he could trace his family lineage back to the aristocratic Spanish viceroys of the River Plate: the Argentine equivalent of having an ancestor that landed at Plymouth Rock.¹ His father, Ernesto Rafael Guevara Lynch (maternal Irish extraction), was an enthusiastic entrepreneur who frequently shifted from one enterprise to another--finally settling in the building construction trade. Che's mother, Celia de la Serna Guevara, was an avid activist in Latin American leftist movements and a strong influence on Che's political orientation.² Both of Che's parents were staunch anti-fascist libertarians and held strong egalitarian sentiments which they inculcated in their son.³ Their home contained a library of over 3000 books and Che, who suffered from severe asthma attacks, frequently spent his recuperation periods reading Latin American history and discussing the social and political problems of Argentina with his father. In 1930, the Guevaras moved to the small university town of Cordoba after living for several years

in Buenos Aires where the elder Guevara had been unsuccessful at establishing a profitable shipbuilding business. Cardoba was a city full of students, soldiers, priests and nuns, and a center of seething but quiet discontent with the Bolivian government.⁴ As a consequence of the strong leftist associations Che made there during his early youth, his revolutionary path was all but predestined

In high school, Che joined the "Partido Union Democratica" and the "Comando Civico Revolucionario Monteagudo" nationalist youth groups. His membership in these organizations frequently obligated him to fight street battles against the teenage supporters of President Juan Peron.⁵

Under Peron's rule, the economic and social divisions within Argentine society were exacerbated by its faltering economy and intense political polarization into pro and anti-Peron camps. Although he alienated many of Argentina's business and religious leaders by imposing heavy taxes, instituting import controls, legalizing divorce and allowing wholesale immigration by former German Nazi leaders, Peron maintained power through his skillful use of patronage to control the Argentine labor movement, and masterfully manipulated the Argentinean populace by appealing to the popular sentiments of justice, sovereignty, harmony and progress. However, for many of his vocal critics in the country's business, labor and religious communities Peronism meant economic hardship, imprisonment, exile and torture. His opposition and much of the international community denounced him as an opportunistic dictator who governed by fraud, false propaganda, indoctrination and persecution. In 1955 he was

forced to resign and cede power to a military junta headed by Eduardo Lonardi, a retired military general who led the Cordoba Army Garrison in a revolt against Peron's leadership.⁶ Although Che had departed Cordoba some years earlier, the active anti-fascist libertarian sentiments existing there undoubtedly had a great impact on his political development.

Che was nineteen when he left Cordoba to pursue premedical studies at the University of Buenos Aires. He helped finance his way through school by working as a night watchman, a reporter for the nationalist newspaper Accion Argentina, and as a student employee at the Argentinian Institute for Allergy Research.⁷ During his summer vacations, he also worked as a nurse on commercial coastal ships. While attending university, Che's parents separated and his mother became his primary custodian. Partially as a result of his parents divorce, his sense of independence and restlessness heightened.

In 1952, Che left school for several months to tour Latin America on a motorbike with his childhood friend, Alberto Granados. Granados was a trained pharmacist and biochemist who worked at a leprosarium near Cordoba. A youthful leftist activist, Che had met Granados while attending high school and frequently visited him at the leprosarium. During their tour of Latin American, the two visited the countries of Chile, Peru, Ecuador, Columbia and Venezuela. They were struck by the massive poverty and social unrest present throughout the region and made many acquaintances among the many student dissidents they met. In Bogota the pair was briefly detained by the police as suspected foreign subversives because of their open leftist associations.⁸ Eventually the pair managed to make their way to

Venezuela where they parted company. Che continued on to Argentina by hitchhiking on a cargo plane transporting horses to the United States. The aircraft made a brief stop in Miami Florida where Che visited with a childhood friend attending the University of Miami. Unfortunately, Che missed the flight's continuation a couple of days later and was eventually deported to Argentina where he resumed his medical studies.⁹ Upon graduating from medical school in 1953 as an allergist, Guevara made plans to return to Venezuela where he intended to work with his friend Granados at the Cabo Blanco Leper Hospital.¹⁰

In route to Venezuela, Che met Ricardo Rojo, a friend of Granados, in La Paz, Bolivia. Rojo was a young Buenos Aires lawyer active in Bolivian socialist circles. He had earlier fled Argentina because of his anti-Peronist activities. Rojo convinced Che to cancel his plans to work in Venezuela and accompany him to Guatemala in order to participate in that country's heightening social revolution.¹¹

Upon his arrival in Guatemala in January of 1954, Guevara quickly aligned himself with the communist supported regime of Jacobo Arbenz Guzman. Arbenz had come to power in 1951 as a social reformer.¹² Although he was a staunch anti-communist, Arbenz's socialist philosophy and incorporation of the communist led Guatemalan Labor Party into his government in 1952 earned him the nickname of "The Red Colonel".¹³ Some of Che's biographers state that he was employed by the Guzman regime as an inspector in its national land reform office; others that he held no official government position.¹⁴ Regardless, the Guzman regime, feared by its Latin American neighbors and the major Western

powers, was overthrown in June of 1954 by the conservative Colonel Carlos Castillo Armas who quickly purged labor party members from the government. Among those purged was Hilda Gadea Acosta, a minor government official who was also Guevara's paramour and future wife.¹⁵

Hilda Gadea Acosta married Guevara in Mexico after fleeing from Guatemala. She introduced Che to Raul Castro, who served as the best man at their wedding.¹⁶ While living in Mexico, Hilda served as a conduit between the Soviet military attache and pro-communist revolutionaries of the American Popular Revolutionary Alliance Rebeldia in Peru. As for Che, without gainful employment and disgusted by the repeated failure of revolutionary movements in Latin America (which he believed resulted from a lack of competent leadership and popular support), he eagerly joined Fidel Castro's revolutionaries because of their strong ideological beliefs, dedication to revolutionary action and willingness to use the force-of-arms to achieve their aims.¹⁷

On 26 July 1953, Fidel Castro led an attack on the Moncada Military Barracks at Santiago de Cuba in an attempt to topple the regime of President Fulgencio Batista. Overwhelmed and quickly defeated by government forces, who had advanced knowledge of his plans, Castro was sentenced to fifteen years imprisonment, but miraculously freed under a provision of general amnesty for political prisoners during 1955.¹⁸ After his release, Castro moved to Mexico where he plotted his return to Havana with Cuban opposition leaders and expatriates. During November 1956, he left Mexico by ship with a band of approximately 82 men for the Cuban province of Oriente where he had been born. Among his companions was his trusted friend Ernesto Guevara, who served as

one of the group's doctors.¹⁹ When the band arrived in Cuban waters near Cape Cruz on 2 December, it had to abandon much of its heavy equipment because its ship became stuck in the coastal marsh. Betrayed by one of its guides, Castro's band was intercepted by government troops two days later and decimated.²⁰ Only twelve men managed to escape: Among these were Fidel, his brother Raul and Che Guevara who was slightly wounded in the chest and throat. With this small group, Castro established his base of operation in the Sierra Maestra Mountains.²¹

From its sanctuary in the Sierra Maestra, Castro's force conducted limited skirmishes against Batista's army. It achieved its first major victory on 17 January, 1957, when it captured an army post at the mouth of the Plate River. Numbering about 17 men, the rebels began their attack on the post of 15 soldiers at 2:40 AM. Within an hour the battle was over. Without suffering any losses, the rebels had killed two government soldiers, wounded five and taken three prisoners, as well as a healthy cache of weapons, ammunition and supplies.²² The success of the battle provided the rebels with a great psychological boost. As Guevara later recalled: "The effect of our victory was electrifying. It was like a clarion call, proving the Rebel Army really existed and was ready to fight."²³ As word of its victory spread, Castro's force began to grow with new recruits. Employing classic guerrilla hit-and-run tactics, the insurgents harassed and defeated Batista's Army throughout Oriente Province; while in cities throughout the country an extensive underground carried out acts of terrorism and sabotage to derail the government. Sensing Castro's eventual victory, in July of 1958, the

leaders of Cuba's major opposition parties met in Caracas Venezuela and signed a declaration in support of the rebels. 24 Castro also received widespread support from the Cuban peasantry and urban middle-class, as well as substantial covert support from many in the Cuban Army, who resented Batista's dictatorial rule and corrupt administration.25

Much of the success enjoyed by Fidel's guerrillas has been attributed to Che Guevara, who was to become the groups primary media spokesman ideologist. Because of his courage, boldness and proven battlefield leadership, Castro appointed Che to the rank of Major and gave him command of a column of approximately one hundred and fifty men in March of 1957. As Richard Harris points out:

Che had that quality of personal magnetism that attracts and inspires the loyalty and devotion of others. In the Sierra Maestra, his boldness and determination invoked the enthusiasm of his comrades, and it soon became clear to Fidel that Che was a natural leader. Once having elevated him to a position of leadership, Fidel found that Che was an extremely capable and resourceful military commander. He gave Che increasingly greater responsibilities, and in the end entrusted him with the most important and crucial campaign of the Cuban revolutionary war. Fidel knew that he could count on Che's loyalty and unquestioning devotion to the goals of the revolution. Their relationship was close, largely because of the similarity of their thinking. 26

In August of 1958, Fidel directed Che's column to leave the sanctuary of the Sierra Maestra and seize the central province of Las Villas. Traveling through over 350 miles of government held territory, Che's column won several battles, the decisive one being fought in the provincial capital of Santa Clara during December.² Undaunted by limited government air and armor attacks, Che's force --reinforced by a second column led by Camilo Cienfuegos-- took the city and decimated Batista's forces in the area. Hearing of the defeat, President Batista fled the country on 1 January 1959. On 3 January Che's and Camilo's columns entered Havana and assumed control of the city with little government resistance. As Castro consolidated his power, Guevara was soon elevated to several powerful positions in the new revolutionary government.

On 2 January 1959, Fidel Castro appointed Guevara as commander of the La Cabana Fortress overlooking Havana harbor. It was a purely military position which Che held for eight months. In November, after a rash of resignations by several key cabinet ministers, who were disenchanted with Castro's leftist orientation and communist ideology, Castro appointed Che as director of the Industrial Department of the National Institute of Agrarian Reform. Shortly thereafter Che was also appointed president of the National Bank of Cuba. In charge of Cuba's industrialization and agrarian reform programs, Che exercised enormous power within Castro's regime. He was responsible for overseeing the dismantling of Cuba's large land estates, establishing peasant collectives and formulating the country's economic policies. In 1960 he signed major trade agreements with the Soviet Union, China and

a number of Eastern-Bloc countries. Cuba's economy was being greatly strained by an economic boycott imposed by the United States in retaliation for Castro's expropriation of Anglo-American agricultural, manufacturing and petroleum refinery assets. Although Che was able to work with both the Soviets and the Chinese, he considered the Soviet Union to be imperialistic and lacking in revolutionary spirit. However, he had great respect for China which spawned his ideological mentor and actively supported revolutionary movements throughout the Third World. Unfortunately, Che's relationship with China caused major problems for Castro, who was relying upon the Soviet Union to supply most of the economic aid needed to keep Cuba's economy afloat and train the country's military. The Soviet Union and the legion of pro-Moscow communists who dominated the Castro regime saw Che as a radical Maoist who sought to stir revolutions throughout the world without benefit of party leadership.

Harris points out:

(Che) firmly believed that the Cuban experience demonstrated that socialist revolutions in the underdeveloped world could be successfully launched without the direction and control of an orthodox Communist party, and it was "heretical" views such as this which earned him the disfavor of the pro-Moscow Communist. 28

Caught in the midst of an ideological struggle between Moscow and Peking as to how the cause of World Socialism was to be

advanced, distrustful of the Soviets, held in contempt by the Chinese because of Cuba's intense courthip of Moscow, and disenchanted by the slow pace of Cuba's new bureaucracy to effect revolutionary changes, Guevara wrote his mother in the Spring of 1965 and informed her of his plans to leave the government and work in the sugar cane fields and factories of Cuba. His mother responded that if he did so he would not be a good servant of world socialism. After reaffirming her social-democratic convictions, she wrote:

If for some reason there are paths no longer open to you in Cuba, in Algeria there's a Mr. Ben Bella who would be grateful for your organizing the economy there and endorsing him, or a Mr. Nkrumah in Ghana who would feel the same way.²⁹

By the time he responded to his mother's letter, Che had convinced Fidel to permit him and a group of about 125 Cubans to go to the Congo and train leftist rebels fighting to overthrow the pro-Western regime of President Moise Tshombe. ³⁰ Shortly before departing for the Congo in July of 1965 he wrote his mother:

Once again I feel below my heels the ribs of Rosinante. I return to the road with my shield on my arm.

Nothing in essence has changed, except that I am more conscious, and my Marxism has taken root and become pure. I believe in the armed struggle as the only solution for those peoples who fight to free themselves,

and I am consistent with my beliefs. Many will call me an adventurer, and that I am; only one of a different kind -- one of those who risks his skin to prove his beliefs.³¹

Guevara's stay in the Congo lasted until March 1966 when he was forced to return to Cuba by Castro in response to the Soviet Union's displeasure with Che's adventurism and China's threat to withdraw its support from the Congolese rebels if they continued their Cuban association. The incessant ideological bickering between Peking and Moscow had divided Communists throughout the world. When Castro opted to maintain his association with the Soviet camp in order to protect his primary source of foreign aid, Cuba's military assistance to the Congolese rebels had to be terminated.

After his exploits in the Congo, Guevara returned to Cuba and lived largely in seclusion. He had resigned his government posts and Cuban citizenship during the Spring of 1965 in preparation for his Congo involvement. By October 1966, however, he found himself in Bolivia creating a guerrilla nucleus to carry out his dream of a transcontinental socialist revolution in Latin America. In Bolivia a year later, that dream would end for Guevara: his body riddled by a hail of automatic weapons fire. Che's defeat was the result of a combination of factors: too few men (his force never exceeded 42 men and averaged only 22); too little time to adequately prepare his force for combat (the force was assembled in December and saw its first combat during March). Too many spies among the few local recruits he was able to attract; the extreme isolation of his base camp which hampered

his logistics; his failing health; his underestimation of the quality of the Bolivian army which had received extensive counter-guerrilla training from U.S. Special Forces in Panama; and his gross failure to appreciate the history of Bolivia and the laissez-faire attitude of the Bolivian natives, who were more concerned with eking out their daily existence than pursuing revolutionary ideologies and riskng their lives. However, although Gevara's ideas did not stimulate the Bolivian people to revolutionary action, they did find a significant number of sympathizers in the United States where a youthful culture was questioning its national values and searching for something to bulieve in.

Although Guevara's participation in leftist liberation struggles did much to cement his revolutionary convictions, his basic political orientation had been inculcated in him by his family during his early childhood. His parents planted the dream: Hilda Gadea by exposing him to the writings of men such as Marx and Lenin helped him to understand it: and Fidel Castro showed him how to make it a reality.

Chapter III. Insurgent Guerrilla Warfare: A Strategy

Carl Von Clausewitz characterizes war as a violent activity which serves as an instrument of policy.¹ Mao Tse-Tung echoes that belief when he states, " war itself is a political action, since ancient times there has never been a war that did not have a political character."² Guerrilla warfare therefore, like nuclear and conventional war, must be conducted in furtherance of a political objective.

Throughout the Third World, guerrilla warfare has been employed by insurgent movements to achieve economic, political and cultural changes by militarily creating the conditions needed to obtain their objectives which frequently include the displacement of corrupt, tyrannical and repressive neo-colonial regimes and aristocratic elites. The economic exploitation and cultural repression practiced by many post-colonial governments entrenched and in many cases created abnormal social and economic divisions within Third World nations which have resulted in institutionalized inequities in the distribution of wealth and opportunity, and imposed alien value systems and beliefs on native populations. In almost all cases, the end result has been a situation in which the richer have become richer and the poor poorer, and native cultures have been violently repressed or eliminated. The majority of the population in these countries has also been denied any mechanism by which to exercise the right of self-determination. As a result, popular movements have sprung up in a number of developing countries, just as they did throughout European history, to redress perceived inequities within their societies. Devoid of economic and political power, the only strategy these movements have been able to effectively use to challenge and depose the institutions of their oppression has been that of guerrilla warfare. As the former President of Argentina, Juan Peron, has been quoted as saying, guerrilla warfare "is the natural escape of oppressed persons."³ It is the basis of a people's struggle to redeem and liberate themselves. It is a war of the people and draws its greatest force from the mass of the people themselves. It can only be won when

the institutions that shelter the existing regime and maintains its position of power have been abolished.⁴

The root cause of insurgent guerrilla warfare is the existence of real or perceived inequities within a society which a significant segment of the population believes negates the established order's legitimate right to govern. As Bard O'Neill points out in his work "The Analysis of Insurgency", insurgency is essentially a question of political legitimacy: that is, whether or not there is a perception within the general population that the ruling regime has lost its moral right to govern under the existing conditions.⁵

The first objective of an insurgency is the undermining of the established regime's legitimacy: the notion that it can rule and should rule.⁶ Insurgent movements, however, must be very careful not to lose their own legitimacy by a premature and indiscriminate use of violence to accomplish their political agenda. As Che Guevara pointed out, the employment of violence should only be resorted to in those instances where the illegitimacy of the government is clearly evident and the population believes that the injustices existing within the society cannot be redressed by civil means.⁷ Guevara cautioned:

Where a government has come into power through some form of popular vote, fraudulent or not, and maintains at least an appearance of constitutional legality, the guerrilla outbreak cannot be promoted since the possibilities of peaceful struggle have not yet been exhausted.⁷

Whether its aim is the liberation of its society from control by a foreign power, the deposition of a corrupt and tyrannical government, or the protection of existing institutions and values against forces advocating their transformation, or the demise of an insurgent movement pursuing revolutionary goals, must first exhaust all peaceful remedies to redress the inequities existing within its society before resorting to violence. Otherwise, it risks the danger of negating its own legitimacy: without which it cannot claim the moral ascendancy of its cause nor generate substantial support within the general population. As history has shown, popular support for war is essential for its success. According to Mao-Tse-Tung, "the richest source of power to wage war lies in the masses of people." Men will fight wars for causes they believe in but oppose those which they find morally repugnant.⁸

Insurgents must also be cautious of the fact that their association with a foreign power can also weaken their claim of legitimacy by projecting an impression that they are dominated and manipulated by that power, especially when the values and beliefs of that power are antithetical to those prevalent within the insurgent's own society.

Guerrilla warfare is the preferred warfare strategy of insurgent movements because it offers "quick, dramatic results at little cost."⁹ It is the strategy of the weak who uses surprise, maneuver, quickness and geography as force multipliers to counter the superior combat strength of the ruling regime's armed forces. Through numerous small military victories, insurgent movements establish that the ruling regime is not omnipotent but vulnerable

and capable of being defeated. Their armed struggle gives hope to the people that victory is possible, reinforces the morality of their cause, and strengthens the general population's determination to rid itself of the forces causing its misery and despair.

Chapter IV. The Nature of Guerrilla Warfare

Like Machiavelli's *The Prince* and Sun Tzu's *The Art of War*, Che Guevarra's book *La Guerra de Guerrilla* (*Guerrilla Warfare*) serves as a practical outline for carrying out the complex activities associated with war. It is a primer that seeks to impress upon its reader the need for common sense in planning and executing the violent activities of that particular form of armed conflict we call "Revolutionary Guerrilla Warfare."

In its purest form, revolutionary guerrilla warfare is waged primarily by popular paramilitary forces to bring about a rapid redistribution of power within society from the haves to the have-nots by deposing established ruling elites and instituting some form of populist government through which the "voice of the people" can be heard and their will implemented. Although it was once almost exclusively associated with movements seeking the democratization of their societies, it has come to represent the principal strategy pursued by communists in their pursuit of world domination. As stated in Chapter III, it arises out of a question of political legitimacy and seeks to empower those elements perceived by the population as having the moral right to govern. For Che Guevarra, only a regime which enjoys the popular support of its people can claim the legitimacy it needs to govern.

The first prerequisite for waging an insurgent guerrilla warfare campaign, therefore, is the existence of a significant level of dissatisfaction with the status quo being perpetuated by the ruling regime. Concomitant with that requirement is a need for insurgent movements to have popular support. Through propaganda and indoctrination, insurgents attempt to point out the excesses and immoral acts of the ruling regime and convince the population that armed rebellion is the only way it can be removed from power. The insurgent movement further seeks to gain popular support by taking up the general causes of disenchantment existing within the general populace and serving as the armed vanguard of the people in their struggle to improve their daily existence.¹

Popular support for an insurgent guerrilla movement is of utmost importance because it is from the general population that the movement obtains its recruits and much of its material support. Initially, conceived in secrecy and consisting of a very small homogeneous group with little or no monetary support, the movement must rely upon the citizenry for food, shelter, manpower and military intelligence. To obtain this assistance it must not only openly embrace the cause of the people, but also treat the population with dignity and respect. As Guevara pointed out:

Conduct toward the civil population ought to be regulated by a large respect for all the rules and traditions of the people in order to demonstrate effectively, with deeds, the moral superiority of the guerrilla fighter over the oppressing soldier.²

The insurgent fighter "must have a moral conduct that shows him

to be a true priest of the reform to which he aspires." He must "be a sort of guiding angel who has fallen into the zone (of operations) helping the poor always..." Indiscriminate acts of terrorism and assaults should not be employed. Supplies that cannot be immediately paid for with cash should be paid for with "bonds of hope" that should be redeemed at the first opportunity. 3

One of the most important activities pursued by insurgent guerrilla movements in their attempt to engender popular support is the establishment of civil action programs. By establishing medical clinics, schools, judicial courts, civilian self-protection cadres, and local government councils, the guerrillas project a capacity to govern, demonstrate their solidarity with the plight of the average citizen and affirm their professed commitment to fairness and equality.

In regions that have few or no government services, the civil action programs instituted by guerrilla movements serve as a strong recruitment and propaganda tool, and develop within the local population a feeling of obligation and kinship. This "intimacy with the people" provides the guerrillas with a source of general supplies, information on enemy movements and dispositions, temporary hiding places among the local citizens and emergency manpower that can be used to expand the guerrilla numbers then needed to conduct decisive military engagements of opportunity.⁴ To establish the elaborate infrastructure needed to carry out such programs, however, guerrilla movements need secure bases from which to operate.

Unlike orthodox Marxist-Leninist who believe revolutionary

insurgents should base their movement in urban centers with their concentrations of people, industry, and governmental institutions, Guevara was an avid proponent of the Maoist belief that guerrilla movements should establish themselves in secure rural enclaves. He stated:

The struggles of the city masses of organized workers should not be underrated; but their real possibilities of engaging in armed struggle must be carefully analyzed where the guarantees which customarily adorn our constitutions are suspended or ignored. In these conditions the illegal worker's movements face enormous dangers. They must function secretly without arms. The situation in the open country is not so difficult. There, in places beyond the reach of the repressive forces, the inhabitants can be supported by the armed guerrillas.⁵

Because of their inaccessibility and isolation, rural areas offer guerrilla movements the security they need to mature and expand. The rough terrain and frequently canopied vegetation of the hinterland shield guerrilla forces from direct government observation and diminishes the effectiveness of the regime's heavy indirect fire weapons; e.g., attack airplanes, artillery and tanks. In its secure position, the guerrilla movement establishes defensive positions in depth; develops para-military training centers; constructs logistics facilities, small hospitals, schools and propaganda organs such as radio stations and printing shops; and if needed, endeavors to set up small industries to build and repair

weapons, and produce other military related items.⁶

From its secure bases in the countryside, the guerrilla movement strikes out at government forces operating in the surrounding area. Moving into attack positions during the night, it systematically conducts incessant attacks against small government army outposts and convoys to seize munitions and supplies with which it can sustain itself and outfit new recruits. These attacks are designed to weaken the morale and strength of the government soldiers, as well as supply the guerrilla band with the bulk of its armaments. They are supported by small ancillary guerrilla cadres operating in urban areas who employ sabotage to disrupt and destroy the enemy's communication, logistics, and command facilities. With each victory, the guerrilla movement weakens the power and control of the central government and incites the general population to ever expanding acts of civil disobedience. This process is accelerated by the movement's propaganda organs which makes radio broadcasts and distributes pamphlets detailing the "just" aims of the movement, its military successes, the corruption and repression of the ruling regime, and the right of the people to seek redress through armed struggle for their grievances. Guevara cautioned that such propaganda, however, must be truthful if a guerrilla movement is to gain the trust and confidence of the general population.⁷

Once the guerrilla group begins to grow with new recruits, training becomes a major organizational activity. The new rural and urban volunteers are assembled at secluded training sites where they receive basic commando training and political indoctrination. They are subjected to a rigorous physical training

regimen to build their endurance and agility, and improve their marksmanship skills. Guevara notes, however, that the guerrilla band does not have the time to conduct a methodical training program. A school for recruits should be established only when the bands base area is secure and sufficient personnel are on hand to supervise the training without degrading the combat force. During the early stages of the guerrilla movement, therefore, the fundamental training received by the guerrilla fighters will be the experience they receive in battle and the informal information they receive from their seasoned cohorts. When a formal training school is established, it must be capable of providing for its own support and dedicate a major portion of its curriculum to imbuing the recruits with a clear understanding of the aims of the insurgent movement, an elementary understanding of the history of their country, and the facts that motivate the movement's historic acts.⁸

According to Guevara, as the guerrilla force expands numerically, it eventually establishes new bases and zones of action. Employing classic guerrilla tactics, it seeks to engage government troops on the most favorable of terms. No attack is conducted unless victory is assured.⁹ With small squads of 8 to 12 men headed by a Lieutenant, the guerrillas whittle away at the army's stretched out formations attacking the vanguard units of patrols and transport columns. Guerrilla platoons consisting mainly of 30 to 40 men led by a Captain, concentrate their efforts on destroying army outposts and defeating enemy troops within the area surrounding the guerrilla base camp. The largest guerrilla formation, the column which consists of 100 to 150 men commanded by a Major, has the task of establishing new base camps and zones

of operations, along with attacking the enemy's main garrisons and destroying his communications and logistics infrastructures. As the guerrilla force grows, new columns are formed and branch out to bring more and more of the country under guerrilla control. The hit-and-run mobile warfare tactics employed by the guerrilla forces make them appear as "biting fleas" attacking here then there; engaging the enemy at its weak points and avoiding his force concentrations; fighting incessantly where victory is possible but rapidly disengaging when the enemy has a clear force superiority; feinting an attack on the enemy's left flank before striking on his right.¹⁰

With the creation of new columns, the guerrilla movement eventually begins to pursue a more conventional warfare strategy. It engages the enemy's army along defined fronts and employs encirclement techniques to capture army strongholds in built-up suburban areas. With each victory, the movement captures more and more enemy munitions that include small crew served weapons, heavy artillery pieces and even tanks. At some point, the confrontation becomes equal and the small isolated victories of the guerrilla movement are transformed into decisive large-scale battles as the government force "is brought to accept battle under conditions imposed by the guerrilla band."¹¹ Eventually the government, lacking public support and saddled with a demoralized and ineffective army, is forced to capitulate and relinquish control of the country to the leaders of the insurgent movement. The task of the insurgents then becomes one of consolidating their power, dismantling the institutions which perpetuated the old regime in power and establishing a new government responsive

to the needs of the general society.

Although guerrilla leaders often profess that their aim is to improve the conditions under which their people live, history has shown that more often than not these individuals are frequently more repressive and tyrannical than the regimes they depose. In most cases their idealistic rhetoric was simply a camouflage to win popular support in their struggle for power.

Chapter V. Conclusion

Since Che Guevara's death in 1967, the nature of guerrilla warfare has changed little. Whether one is a student of Sun-Tzu, Clausewitz, Napoleon, Mao-Tse-Tung or Che Guevara, it is obvious that the activity of war is conducted in accordance with a set of fundamental precepts which have remained constant throughout history. The only thing that has changed and which continues to evolve is how these principles are applied to meet the challenges posed by the different physical environments and situations in which wars are fought.

Marines deployed to conduct counter-guerrilla operations can expect to face a crafty well trained opponent equipped with many of the same lethal and sophisticated weapons available in the Corps' own inventory. Operating from secure bases in remote rural areas and hidden urban enclaves, the guerrilla fighter will have the distinct advantages of knowing the terrain upon which he operates, a total commitment to the cause for which he is fighting and the moral support from his fellow citizens. In such a situation, Marine Corps forces must be willing to fight a war of repeated limited engagements where maneuver, mass and security will be paramount. They must also be prepared to suffer the

manpower attrition associated with this kind of warfare.

It is important to note at this point that unlike Guevara, many contemporary insurgent leaders in Third World nations have adopted a primary strategy of urban revolutionary guerrilla warfare to depose ruling regimes. This is particularly true among opposition leftist leaders in Latin America where Guevara's Bolivian defeat is considered proof of the fallacy of rural based insurgent movements. Urban based guerrilla movements, however, have fared no better than their rural counterparts. As James Khol and John Litt point out:

Urban guerrilla warfare can contribute to the fall of a government (e.g., Levingston or, in a more subtle way, Lanusse, both in Argentina) and it can transform a conjuncture from crisis to breaking point (e.g., the Tupamaros in Uruguay), but urban guerrilla warfare has yet to win. Moreover, serious doubts have been expressed as to whether it can consummate the seizure of revolutionary power.

In the city, mass militance can be expressed through factory seizures, demonstrations, neighborhood organizations, and the revolutionary general strike. Characteristic of each of these, however, is the inability to deliver the crushing blow to the state.¹

With neither rural nor urban movements enjoying much success, guerrilla leaders have realized that they must strike a balance

between war in the hinterland and war in the cities. As a consequence, most insurgent movements now conduct operations on both fronts. In the cities reside the political organs which form shadow governments and control the strategic acts of sabotage carried out by small bands of militant supporters. In the rural areas operates the movements main military arm which seeks to galvanize support among the peasantry and destroy the government's armed forces through incessant small engagements. It is a classic merging of the strategies of Marx and Mao to meet the changing environment in which insurgents operate. The sophisticated weapons, excellent counter-insurgency tactics and heavy handed repressive measures employed by governments to quash insurgent movements in their infancy, however, makes the future of revolutionary guerrilla movements appear bleak unless they can enlist the total support of their societies.

ENDNOTES

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2. Emile Burns, *The Marxist Reader* (New York: Avenel Books, 1982), pp. 21-51; 196-234; 565-603.
3. Gerard Chaliand, *Guerrilla Strategies* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1982), pp 1-32. In those few cases since WWII where revolutionary insurgent movements have been victorious (e.g., Angola, Cuba and Nicaragua), it is clear that the stated aims of a movement are not always translated into reality once power is achieved. It should also be noted that prior to the end of the war, most guerrilla campaigns were waged by partisans seeking to eject a foreign power from their homeland vice overthrow their indiginous leaders.
4. Che Guevara, *Guerrilla Warfare*, Translated by J.P. Morray (New York: Vantage Books, 1961), p. 3.
5. Brian Jenkins, *New Modes of Conflict* (Santa Monica Calif: The Rand Corporation, 1983).

6. Harries-Clinchy Peterson, *Che Guevara on Guerrilla Warfare* (New York: Frederick A. Prager publisher, 1961), pp. vii-viii; Jenkins, p. 17.

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2. *Current Biography Yearbook* (New York: H.W. Wilson Company, 1963), p. 166.
3. Luis J. Gonzalez and Gustavo A. Sanchez Salazar, *The Great Rebel* (New York: Grove Press, 1969), p. 31; Richard Harris, *Death of A Revolutionary* (New York: Norton, 1970), pp. 19-20; Ebon, pp. 11-15.
4. Ebon, pp.12-13; *Current Biography* 1963, p 166.
5. Ebon, p.14; *Current Biography* 1963, pp. 166-167.
6. David Rock, *Argentina, 1516-1982* (Berkeley: University of California Press- 1985), pp. 262-319.
7. Ebon, pp. 15-17.
8. *Ibid.*, pp. 20-21; Harris, pp.21-22.
9. Harris, p. 22.
10. Ebon, pp. 21-23.
11. *Ibid.*
12. *Current Biography* 1953, pp. 26-28.
13. *Current Biography* 1971, p. 459; Ebon, pp. 29-30.
14. *Current Biography* 1963, p. 167; Ebon, p. 32.; Harris, p. 25 (Only Ebon states that Che was not employed by the regime).
15. Ebon, pp. 30-31.
16. Ebon, p. 33.
17. Harris, pp. 27-28; Ebon, p. 32.
18. Andrew Wheatcroft, *The World Atlas of Revolutions* (New York: Simon and Schuster, 1983), p. 154.
19. John Gerassi, *Venceremos!* (New York: MacMillan), p.33. (The group's other physican was Pati Fajardo.)
20. *Ibid.*, pp. 29-30. One of the band's local guides had informed the army of the group's landing after being granted leave by Castro to visit his family.

21. Harris, pp. 29-30.
22. Gerassi, p. 32.
23. Ibid., p. 30.
24. Harris, p. 31.
25. Wheatcroft, p. 156.; H.P. Willmott, "Castro's Revolution", in *War in Peace*, eds. Sir Robert Thompson et al. (New York: Harmony Books, 1981), p. 147.
26. Harris, p. 33.
27. Ibid., p. 31.
28. Harris, p. 36.
29. Gonzalez, pp. 38-39
30. Harris, p. 57; Ebon, p. 74
31. Harris, p. 37.
32. Ebon, pp. 74-77.

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1. Carl Von Clausewitz, *On War*, ed. Anatol Rapoport (New York: Penguin Books, 1983), pp. 109,119,401-414.
2. Mao Tse-Tung, *The Military Writings of Mao Tse-Tung* (Peking: Foreign Languages Press, 1967), p. 226.
3. James Kohl and John Litt, *Urban Guerrilla Warfare in Latin America* (Cambridge Mass: MIT Press, 1974), p. 313.
4. Guevara, p. 2.
5. Bard E. O'Neill, "The Analysis of Insurgency," in *The Art and Practice of Military Strategy*, ed. George Edward Thibault (Washington DC: National Defense University Press, 1984), p. 779.
6. Kohl, p. 18.
7. Guevara, p. 2.
8. Mao Tse-Tung, pp. 66,81,260.
9. Peterson, p. viii. Although combat engagements are normally frequent and quick producing dramatic results, insurgencies routinely last for several years before their outcome is decided.

Chapter IV

1. Guevara, pp. 4,33.
2. Ibid., p. 19.
3. Ibid., pp. 33,75,85.
4. Ibid., p. 18.
5. Ibid. pp 2-3.
6. Ibid., pp. 20,72.
7. Ibid., pp. 98-102.
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