

Invisible Armies: An Epic History of Guerrilla Warfare from Ancient Times to the Present. By Max Boot, New York & London, Liveright Publishing Corporation, a Division of W.W. Norton & Company, 2013.

Millard E. Moon Ed.D., Colonel (ret)

Follow this and additional works at: <https://scholarcommons.usf.edu/jss>
pp. 80-81

Recommended Citation

Moon, Millard E. Ed.D., Colonel (ret). "Invisible Armies: An Epic History of Guerrilla Warfare from Ancient Times to the Present. By Max Boot, New York & London, Liveright Publishing Corporation, a Division of W.W. Norton & Company, 2013.." *Journal of Strategic Security* 6, no. 2 (2013) : 80-81.
DOI: <http://dx.doi.org/10.5038/1944-0472.6.2.7>
Available at: <https://scholarcommons.usf.edu/jss/vol6/iss2/7>

This Book Review is brought to you for free and open access by the Open Access Journals at Scholar Commons. It has been accepted for inclusion in Journal of Strategic Security by an authorized editor of Scholar Commons. For more information, please contact scholarcommons@usf.edu.

Invisible Armies: An Epic History of Guerrilla Warfare from Ancient Times to the Present. By Max Boot, New York & London, Liveright Publishing Corporation, a Division of W.W. Norton & Company, 2013.

***Invisible Armies: An Epic History of Guerrilla Warfare from Ancient Times to the Present.* By Max Boot, New York & London, Liveright Publishing Corporation, a Division of W.W. Norton & Company, 2013. ISBN 978-0-87140-424-4. Photos/Illustrations. Appendix. Notes. Bibliography. Index. Pp. 784, Hardcover. \$37.00.**

Invisible Armies is an outstanding study of unconventional warfare from Jewish uprisings against the Romans, to our modern conflicts in Afghanistan and Iraq. Max Boot will be known to many in the fields of Military and National Security studies due to his previous works, which include *The Savage Wars of Peace*, and *War Made New*. He is the Jeane J. Kirkpatrick Senior Fellow in National Security Studies at the Council on Foreign Relations. In addition to the works already cited, Max Boot is a regular contributor to the *Wall Street Journal* and many other publications.

The scope of this work is dazzling in the sheer enormity of the time frame the book addresses. Boot covers more than five thousand years in an exceptionally skillful blend of history, political science, and military strategy. The author has organized this study into eight major divisions, or books, all with outstanding historical examples to illustrate his points, and a final section on implications of the study of the history of unconventional warfare.

In his work Boot makes clear distinctions between different types of unconventional warfare. He covers the Origins of Guerrilla Warfare, the Rise of Liberal Revolutionaries, the Wars of Empire, the beginnings of International Terrorism by Anarchists, Guerrilla fighters in the World Wars, the follow-on Wars of National Liberation, Leftist Revolutionaries, and finally in today's world, God's Killers. Using historical examples to illustrate his points, Max Boot has done an outstanding job of supporting the divisions listed above and illustrating what is truly an evolution of unconventional warfare. His research completely supports two major lessons from this book.

First, the weaker side in unconventional warfare must have the support of the people, and in the modern era uses international media to influence public opinion around the globe in order to have the chance of success. Secondly, the unconventional forces must have outside help from some source. Boot makes a convincing case historically to show these common threads run through the centuries and without these two factors present, unconventional forces cannot succeed.

Three major examples of his study include the American Revolution where the colonial forces could never have withstood the might of the British Empire if not for help from the French and a general lack of will among the British citizens, as well as a number of highly placed politicians. A second example may be taken from the Wars of National Liberation following World War II. European colonial powers had armed local Nationalists to fight the Axis powers and after the end of World War II, when many of those people decided to form independent nations, they used the same weapons against former colonial masters. The terrible losses of a world at war had drained once powerful nations economically, and the awful loss of life had sapped the will of populations and governments to enter into more warfare simply to hold onto colonies. Of course, in the United States we need look no further than the Vietnam War to see how both these factors impacted our efforts. Clearly the communist powers provided the outside aid to North Vietnam and our country's commitment to the conflict was limited by political considerations and a lack

of understanding of the military tactics which should have been employed against unconventional forces.

General George Washington was inclined to fight a conventional war against the British forces in the American Revolution. Fortunately, as Boot illustrates in his book there were other commanders who had different approaches, especially in the Southern colonies. Although Yorktown was a conventional victory of major proportions, the battle was won with major support from the French. European empire builders tried conventional tactics to hold on to colonies after World War II, and General William Westmoreland's strategy in Vietnam did not achieve the military success which was represented to the American people during the conflict.

Max Boot points out, quite convincingly, that the myth of unconventional forces being almost impossible to defeat is totally false. The majority of the examples in history show these weaker forces can be overcome with the appropriate military strategy and the required considerations for political and cultural sensitivities. He records British General Sir Henry Clinton's comment on the need "to gain the hearts and subdue the minds of America." After Vietnam the phrase "hearts and minds" has become a cliché, but that does not make the need to achieve these goals less important.

Boot's discussions of some of the well known unconventional warfare figures are as interesting as the wars themselves. As illustrated in this work, the most successful unconventional warfare leaders on either side of a conflict have exceptional personalities and extremely strong wills. Boot illustrates this point with such examples as Mao Zedong, Fidel Castro, Che Guevara, T.E. Lawrence, Ord Wingate; and of course, our most successful commander in Iraq and Afghanistan, General David Petraeus. Many successful leaders in the fight against unconventional warriors are somewhat eccentric and all seem to offend the more conventional leadership in military hierarchies. There is a bit of lore often repeated in military circles, "we always prepare for the last war."

What does this mean for those who serve in national security positions in intelligence and counterintelligence? First, every military and national security professional should read Max Boot's book. It is also a cliché to state "those who do not learn from history are doomed to repeat it." Nonetheless, this is a true statement and for the sake of our nation we would all do well to examine these historical studies to pick up the threads and lessons we can apply in our changing world. Who is better equipped to help military commanders understand the culture, customs, and subtle shifts in perception, of civilians in a conflict than the specialists in these fields? Irregular warfare cannot succeed without the support of the larger population and understanding that population, winning the people over, and employing the proper military tactics, are the keys to defeating these unconventional forces.

Millard E. Moon, Ed.D., Colonel (ret), U.S. Air Force Office of Special Investigations